MAINSTREAMING SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS:
TEACHERS’ INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES IN THE CLASSROOM

BY

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DISSEfATION

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Abstract

This study examines the way mainstream teachers interact with their immigrant students to identify the framework(s) within which the students develop perceptions about their cultural and linguistic capital. I am particularly interested in how instruction influences African children in the classroom. The U.S. immigration policies allowing citizens of foreign countries to migrate into the country, has favored the immigration of many Africans into the country either for educational purposes or in the hope of a better life. Many of those immigrants experience challenges ranging from language and economic issues to social and cultural integration. The challenges are more acute for children who have to juggle their cultural backgrounds reinforced at home and the values available in their new cultural and social environment. Although issues related to immigrant children and English language learners in American classrooms have been largely addressed in the literature, most of the research focuses on Spanish and Asian children while the case of African children has been unexplored.

In this study I explored how mainstream classroom teachers relate their teaching practices and content to African children and how classroom practices accommodate students and shape their learning processes. I worked with teachers whose students are African born children who have immigrated in the United States either because their parents are American permanent residents or international students pursuing their education at the University. Considering the multiplicity of languages in Africa, most of the children speak or have been exposed to at least one or two languages in their countries of origin before immigration. However, their fluency and the frequency of use of those languages might be reduced to a minimum in favor of the English language. In a previous study about the children of French speaking Africans at a tutorial program designed specifically for children of refugees and immigrants, I observed that although
the use of their first language was encouraged during their interaction, the children only used it whenever there was an authoritative figure reinforcing it. The children’s limited use of their first language reduced their fluency in the language as well as their perceptions of that language and how they shape their learning processes. To develop such an understanding, I explored the following questions: What are the linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges of the children of French speaking African Immigrants? How do teachers perceive the linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges presented by African immigrants in school? What is the nature of teachers’ instructional efforts in response to students’ needs and how are those efforts influenced by the presence of African immigrant students in the classroom? How do children participate in teachers’ planned lessons?
To Batamaka, Saanbé, and Baryen
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

You know, I was driving my eight-year-old son to school one morning when he told me: “you know Dad; I don’t like it when everybody talks about Africa as the place where everybody is poor.” I asked him where he heard that, and he responded with a choked voice and teary eyes that his teacher reported a discussion she had with her teenage children in which she told them that they were lucky to be Americans, because if they were in Africa or Haiti, they would not have any food. His teacher practically told them that everybody in Africa is poor. I was very shocked to hear that and told [my son] that it is not true and that just like in America, there are both poor people and rich people in Africa. Then my son said, “I know. I always see homeless people on TV.”

This is a statement made recently by an African parent who participated in a previous research project I conducted in 2008 on the impact of a tutorial program on immigrant children in their adaptation to the cultural, academic, and linguistic realities of the U.S. In this discussion between father and son, it appears that the comments made by his teacher affected the child. Although the teacher did not intend to hurt him, nor did she barely know he was hurt, Michel felt such a frustration that he expressed it to his father. His teacher made a statement that singled him out as a poor African boy. The normative and non-discrete socio-economic status assigned to people from his place of origin, Africa, became a marker of who he is, a scarlet letter positing him as inferior to his peers. The intentionally innocuous statement of the teacher could undermine the student’s self-esteem and affect his relationship with his peers, the teacher, and his learning process significantly. In fact, Colville-Hall, McDonald, and Smolen (1995) report that “what teachers say, perceive, believe, and think can disable or empower minority students’ (p. 295). This account and several others that were brought to my attention motivated my interest
in instructional strategies used in the classroom to accommodate students from diverse background.

My purpose here is to examine how mainstream teachers interact with their African students and provide a framework within which their students develop perceptions about their cultural and linguistic resources. The study is more specifically about the way classroom instruction influences African students. Africans’ visible immigration was facilitated by a number of U.S immigration policies, including the implementation of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which “made family ties the primary criterion for admitting new immigrants, and permitted Africans in the country to sponsor their spouses, children and parents’ (Konadu-Agyemang & Takyi, 2006, p. 5). Besides, the immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 allowed illegal immigrants to normalize their immigration status, which facilitated the regularization of the stay of 39,000 Africans (Konadu-Agyemang & Takyi, 2006). The largest flow of African immigrants however, came to the U.S. due to the extension of the diversity visa lottery to African countries.

The diversity visa lottery is a raffle organized every year by the U.S. Department of State that authorizes the immigration of the winners to the U.S. It also grants them permanent residency and allows naturalization if the immigrants decided to petition after five years of continued residency. Most of the African visa lottery immigrants in the United States migrate either for educational purposes or in hope for a better life. Many of those immigrants, especially those hailing from non-English speaking countries, experience cruel linguistic barriers. Those barriers subsequently weaken their immediate professional and economic ambitions and constrain their prospect for social and cultural integration. The challenges are more accrued for children who have to juggle their cultural backgrounds, reinforced at home, and the norms and
values of their new cultural and social spaces. The challenges of new immigrant children, however, have received lesser attention as they are lumped into the larger groups of minority children, English language learners (ELLs), and/or African Americans. Being lumped into either one of these two minority groups minimizes the challenges and needs of African immigrant students in the classrooms, which often remain unaddressed during classroom instruction. This study aims at uncovering the extent to which mainstream classroom teaching practices addresses the presence of the “invisible” groups of African immigrants in the classroom.

Theoretical Perspective

In this study, I take a critical and post colonial perspective to discuss cultural and linguistic issues faced by English language learners and more specifically African immigrants in U.S. classrooms. From a postcolonial perspective, the issues faced by ELLs symbolize the complex relationship between the Orient and the Occident, the East and the West. In an attempt to describe this relation, Said (1979) argues that it is a “relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony” (p. 5). As they originate from different cultural and linguistic settings, ELLs are expected to acquire the mainstream linguistic baggage that incorporates the cultural norms. Thus, they undergo the power and domination of American values over their own. According to Said, the relationship between the Orient and the Occident is an uneven exchange of political, intellectual, and cultural power between the two worlds. Bourdieu (1991) emphasizes the power imbalance in the process when he views the relationship between the Orient and the Occident as a symbolic production in which the dominant culture (the Occident), contributes to the real integration of the dominant class (by facilitating the communication between all its members and by distinguishing them form other classes); it also contributes
to the fictitious integration of society as a whole, and thus to the apathy (false consciousness) of the dominated classes; and finally, it contributes to the legitimating of the established order by establishing distinctions (hierarchies) and legitimating these distinctions. (p. 167)

In this mindset of cultural domination, the cultural and linguistic background of ELLs are sidelined and marginalized in school setting in order to facilitate the integration and the legitimating of the dominant and mainstream European culture. Bourdieu views the imposition of the dominant European culture and the exclusion of the students’ background as a symbolic violence in which one class dominates the other by “bringing their own distinctive power to bear on the relations of power which underlie them.”

Postcolonial scholars, however, view cultural difference as a “complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 3). The cultural capital that language learners bring to class is far from being authentic. Several historical settings including the cultural imperialism exercised by European countries during colonization influenced the cultural capital of ELLs. Another influence on their cultural background is their post-immigration experiences. The notion of hybridity was also an important argument developed in Collins and Blot’s (2003) discussion of literacy, power, and identity. The authors discussed the use of literacy as a mean of colonial subjugation on the one hand and its appropriation on the other hand by the colonized to recount his/her own histories. Similarly, Kachru (1986) discusses the connection of language and power in the colonial context and argues that English language “is a tool of power, domination, and elitist identity, and communication across continents” (p. 5).

The use of the colonizer’s language to recount colonized’s histories and experiences is viewed by Ngugi (1986) as a successful imposition of European languages over that of indigenous people. He calls for the decolonization of the mind that will allow indigenous people
to claim back their cultural and linguistic identity. The notion of cultural and linguistic identity is very significant here, as it posits the former colonized people within the context of their historical background. I argue that colonial imperialism has imposed a set of norms and values over the colonized that have contributed in shaping their identity and leading to the hybrid identity of the natives. In fact, Collins and Blot (2003) argued that,

Always and everywhere people have resisted and rebelled against the imposition of Western cultural forms, transforming them in ways congruent with their own culture. The process of creating through schooling a select class who would act to interpret dominant ways (religious, political, social) and bureaucratic directives of the colonizer also opened a space for the creation of a “counter-subject.” In such spaces those selected for schooling might construct an identity which incorporated native meanings into the colonial discourse in contra the colonial order.

The immigrant children have a hybrid identity constituted of their African identity (that is the appropriation of European norms or values within their own culture) and the newly acquired cultural and linguistic values available to them after immigration to the U.S. Following Bhabha’s argument, immigrant children are “in-between space.” He argues that in the “‘in-between space” space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (p. 2), the immigrant child can no longer identify himself or herself solely in relation to their cultural and linguistic background. He instead is part of a hybrid cultural space in which “the borderline work of culture demands an encounter with newness that is not part of past and present” (p. 10). His hybrid identity is often mediated by social factors such as gender (Butler, 1999), social class (Weis, 2008), and media (Giroux, 1994; Giroux & Simon, 1989).

Bhabha’s notion echoes Victor Turner’s (1967) categorization of the ritual stages in the rite of passage that include a stage of separation, a liminal stage (also known as the between-and-betwixt position), and a stage of reaggregation. One could speculate that the dynamics between
teachers and ELLs occur at the liminal stage where the neophyte’s, that is, the ELL’s identity is blurred. Therefore, if the transition is not negotiated with care, there might be little hope for a smooth reintegration, if any. In fact, the social structure of communities form in which hierarchy and inequality is believed to dissolve during the liminal stage does not apply to ELLs, granted that they operate within an ambiguous frame of mainstream and non-mainstream reality.

However, Erickson (2007) spotlights structures of inequality in schools and defines culture as a “product of human creativity in action” which enables us to extend our activity further. He writes that everybody is multicultural; identically all American students with no distinction of gender and race bring to school a cultural background that is sometimes different from school culture.

In fact, Erickson (2007) mainly views cultural diversity as boundaries and not borders. While borders are political, boundaries refer to cultural differences and do not necessarily lead to conflict. He challenges present school practices that marginalize immigrant and minority students and their knowledge from learning processes. Similarly, referring to the notion of border, Gonzales (2005) argues that,

> The ultimate border—the border between knowledge and power—can be crossed only when educational institutions no longer reify culture, when lived experiences become validated as a source of knowledge, and when the process of how knowledge is constructed and translated between groups located within nonsymmetrical relations of power is questioned. (p. 42)

Both Erickson and Gonzales advocate for the implementation of funds of knowledge more representative of students’ backgrounds. Gonzales holds that drawing on students’ lived experiences allows teachers to “build on the familiar knowledge bases that students can manipulate to enhance learning in mathematics, social studies, language arts, and other content areas” (p. 43). Erickson’s argument speaks directly to my research about the way mainstream teachers deal with the presence of African immigrant children in the classroom. Although some
of the African immigrant children may have been attending American classes for several years, and might be very fluent in the English language, they do bring to class a social, cultural, and linguistic background that is ignored, marginalized, or silenced in the school setting and in classroom practices in most cases. The marginalization of their background often creates significant challenges in their cultural and linguistic adaptations and often leaves them lagging behind their peers academically. Such a marginalization has however been challenged by proponents of multicultural education.

Sleeter (2005) suggests multicultural education, which leads to the inclusion of discriminated people, teaches academic and disciplinary knowledge from multiple perspectives and allows students to develop similarities across differences. Nieto (2000) also depicts that it is essential that school curricula shift from being exclusively Eurocentric to include knowledge from different parts of the world. A monocultural curriculum, she emphasizes, provides a narrowed view of knowledge to all students, even those who are European Americans. Erickson (2007) further views the purpose of multicultural education as challenging hegemonic relations of race, class, and gender. He argues that the focus of schools on mainstream White male ideology leads to the marginalization of students of color and female students.

Grant and Sleeter (2007), however, discuss that most multicultural curricula fail to treat historical injustices. They reflect that a failure to address issues related to race, class, and gender does not speak to historical injustices and does not result in equity education. Multicultural education, according to them, describes pluralism, eliminates prejudice and discrimination, and diversifies materials and sources. The teacher, in such a context, is familiar with students’ learning styles and builds on them during instruction. Multicultural education promotes group identity for students of color, reduces stereotypes, and eliminates prejudice and biases.
Besides, Nieto (2000) conceptualizes multicultural education as education for social justice. She argues for the necessity to address controversial issues in education, allowing teachers to reposition themselves in society and see what reality looks like, in order to help their students critically examine current realities. She posits teachers as central figures to the implementation of multicultural education and emphasizes the need for teacher education programs to prepare prospective teachers to confront discrimination and racism. Challenging discrimination and racism entails that teacher education programs address the connection between language and culture.

Language is a vehicle through which people express their cultural values. Nieto (1999) discusses the deep connection between language and culture as a symbol of power. She argues that language and culture work collaboratively to promote learning and writes that “maintaining their [immigrant children] language and culture is a far healthier response on the part of young people than adopting an oppositional identity that may effectively limit the possibility of academic achievement (p. 67). Corson (2001) also discusses the relationship between language and power and argues that schools disregard the cultural and linguistic capital that diverse students bring to class. The author attributes the marginalization of diverse students’ linguistic capital to the connection between schools and the market that creates a feeling of alienation. Cummins (2000) further discusses the relationship between language and power and identifies the coercive and the collaborative relation of power. The collaborative relation of power enables and empowers diverse students, and also amplifies their power of self-expression. Coercive relation of power, on the other hand, implies that a dominant group imposes its power to the detriment of the subordinate group who submits to the dominant one and adopts its values and norms.
In their discussion about the role of language in colonial imperialism, Collins and Blot also discuss language as a site of a power battle. They write that “language and literacy are not only the means by which the battle is fought; they are the site of the battle itself” (p. 131). Literacy was depicted as the tools of the elite.

Indigenous groups fighting for linguistic rights in the late twentieth or early twenty-first century may nonetheless look to these sources elite but indigenous resistance to language colonization in the colonial period as earlier manifestations of their continuing struggle. (p. 131)

Either the subordinate group resists the domination or submits to it, it still faces challenges that can affect their educational achievement and sense of belonging. The discussion about the relationship between language and power entails a discussion about second language acquisition. Krashen (2005) makes a distinction between language acquisition and language learning and argues that language acquisition occurs when used for communication purposes. Language learning on the other hand, implies knowledge of language through its grammatical rules and structures. He, however, noted that the best way to teach language to second language learners is through comprehensive input, and he views interaction as a rich source of input for L2 learners. Crawford (2005) also puts a strong emphasis on a communicative learning with a content focus. Through such an approach, oral errors are not directly corrected. Communication and comprehension are viewed as the focus of reading and writing and teachers develop strategies promoting them. Barrera (1983) also makes a similar comment and argues that English language learners learn English by reading in context. She calls teachers’ attention to the fact that children’s oral and written language is able to develop simultaneously and support each other.

In a nutshell, I take a postcolonial and critical perspective to discuss issues of power and identity in the classroom as they apply to my study. I discuss issues of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991), power relations (Said, 1979), hybridity and in-between spaces (Bhabha, 1994;
Collins & Blot, 2003), and funds of knowledge (Erickson, 2007; Gonzales, 2005). I also highlight issues of language and power as discussed by Nieto (2000), Corson (2001), and Cummins (2000) before referring to a communicative approach to second language literacy that emphasizes context and comprehensive input of language learning.

**Statement of the Problem**

This study explored how mainstream classroom teachers adapt their teaching practices and content to African children. I also examined how classroom practices negotiate students’ linguistic and cultural capital. The children I worked with were African born children who have immigrated to the United States because their parents are American permanent residents. Considering the multiplicity of languages and cultures in African countries, most of the children spoke at least two languages and/or cultures in their countries of origin before immigration. However, their fluency and the frequency of use of those languages were reduced to a minimum in favor of the mainstream language and culture while their first language and cultural background were invisible in school setting. Conversely, Nwadiaro (2007) argues that many African parents disregard the social and cultural context in which they reside when raising their children and expect to give them the same values transmitted to children who grow up in African countries. The difference of cultural approach in both school and home setting often results in a cultural clash, which affects the students in their interaction with their teachers, peers, and learning processes. In the following statement for instance, an ESL teacher discussed issues regarding the integration of her second grade African student in her classroom.

She has a social conflict. I don’t know what it is, but she has a hard time . . . she has frequent conflicts with people. And sometimes I think that she is not always the instigator. She is . . . easily fall in the victim like they are picking on me; this is happening to me, but she often . . . I don’t know where that comes from. I think she is
needy. I think she is desperate to get attention. She wants to be accepted and sometimes she doesn’t know how to get it in a positive way. She left the state for a while. She withdrew for two and three weeks. She sent all of her work home, and then she had to come back again, and I think that was hard. I don’t know, I feel badly.

This statement portrays two major issues, the first one being the challenges faced by the girl in question, and the second one the way it was perceived by the teacher. It does appear from the statement that the student was having a difficult time being accepted by her peers in classroom. Her feeling of not being accepted by her peers led her to develop strategies that were going to attract both her teachers and her peers’ attention. However, instead of inciting a positive form of attention that would be conducive to change, it provided the setting to viewing her under the lance of her behavior. Her challenges of social adaptation provided the setting in which her teacher perceived and categorized her. The teacher’s perception of her unfortunately reinforced her frustration as she constantly sought the former’s attention (Colville-Hall, McDonald, & Smolen, 1995, p. 295).

This particular student was not the only African student struggling for cultural and social adaptation. This dissertation explores how teachers perceive and attend to the linguistic, socio-cultural and academic challenges faced by their African students. I also explore how classroom teachers attempt to or not to reduce the alienation of their African students, considering that many of them are not familiar with the countries of origin of their students.

**Research Questions**

The study involved African immigrant children in a mid-Western community. The participants were two mainstream teachers, three ESL teachers and five African students. All the students were originally from French speaking African countries with the exception of Bintou, who was from Liberia. I observed both ESL and mainstream classrooms to understand the
socialization of my participants into classroom discourse and their interactions with peers, teachers, and course content as well as the influences of school curricula on students’ cultural and linguistic capital. To develop such an understanding, I explored the following questions:

1. What are the linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges of African immigrants?
2. How do teachers perceive the linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges presented by African immigrants in school?
3. What is the nature of teachers’ instructional efforts in response to students’ needs and how are those efforts influenced by the presence of African immigrant students in the classroom?
4. How do children participate in teachers’ planned lessons?
5. How do students understand their relationships to peers and to their teachers?

The questions mentioned above are all inter-related, as they are all conducive to understanding the processes of instruction and how students’ respond to it. It seemed important to understand ELLs and their challenges after immigration in order to understand issues related to instructing them. Exploring instructional material, content, and strategies, as well as teacher attitude was also fundamental to understand the decisions made during instruction, as these are elements that guide classroom interaction between teachers and students and between students and their peers. It is imperative to examine these elements and their inclusiveness of the African children and their experiences in order to understand the students’ responsiveness not only to instruction, but also to acquiring content knowledge.

**Definition of Terms**

I use the term African immigrant children to refer to children who were born and raised in the African continent and more specifically sub-Saharan African countries. Their parents immigrated to the United States either for educational and/or economic reasons. The children are
often referred to as ELLs (English language learners) because their native and/or first language is not English.

I also use the term mainstream teachers to refer to teachers of regular classes. Mainstream teachers are not specifically trained to attend to students with special needs. For instance, they do not necessarily specialize in teaching English language learners but they gather both ELLs and native born citizens in the same classroom for instruction.

Limitations of the study

Being a citizen of a foreign country, my only knowledge of American classrooms derives from my readings and to some extent my experience as a mother. My lack of practical knowledge about classroom practices was to some extent, an impediment to understanding the phenomenon. However, it was also an asset as it helped me gain a deeper insight as an outsider. Besides, being an immigrant mother, I brought to this research biases informed by my experience as an African women and mother of African children living in the United States. Although I have not experienced frustrations directly from teachers, I have had issues with a couple of policies implemented in my child’s school that I judged unfair. My goal in this research, however, was not to judge my participants, but to construct knowledge about U.S. teachers and their African students. I relied on my methods to go beyond my own biases (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Another limitation to the study was the number of participants. Despite the increasing number of African immigrants into town, they seemed to be more or less spread out, and the children did not always attend the same schools. That made it difficult to have a good number of children in the same classroom, and might be a handicap to the generalizability of the study.
Besides, my presence in the natural setting might have produced what Bogdan and Biklen refer to as the “observer effect.” As a qualitative researcher, I could not eliminate the effects of my presence in the classroom. I, however, attempted to limit the observer’s effect by understanding its influence on the participants “through an intimate knowledge of the settings and use this understanding to generate additional insights into the nature of social life” (p. 39).

**Significance of the Study**

The literature in teacher education has addressed issues related to the devastating effect of teacher’s beliefs and attitudes as well as his/her knowledge on the academic performance of their minority students in general (Au & Blake, 2003; Delpit, 1998; Valdes, 1998). Most of these studies, however, deal more specifically with issues related to African American children and children from Hispanic and Asian background, while the challenges related to African born immigrant children remain unexplored. Identically to all the other minority groups, African born immigrant children face cultural and linguistic irrelevance in the classroom and undergo the marginalization of their background. They, however, experience issues specifically related to them and not always shared by the larger group. Those issues are most of the time invisible due not only to the very small number of African born children as compared to other immigrant population, but also to their assimilation to African American children and/or to English language learners.

Examining how mainstream teachers interact with their French speaking African born children will have significant implications for both teachers and students. It will not only situate issues related to African born children in the literature, but also bring teachers to reflect on the needs of that specific population instead of approaching them just as African Americans and/or
English language learners where their specificity is lost. For instance, the French language is not the native language of the French speaking African children. Most of them were only introduced to the French language at school. They had already experienced the frustration of being educated in a non-native language in their countries of origin. Developing an awareness of the African born children as a specific minority group will be a motivation for teachers to pay closer attention to their needs and to develop instructional strategies that are inclusive of their cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic background. An inclusive instructional strategy will help the teacher have an affirmative view of his/her students, build on students cultural and linguistic resources as well as their interests (Lucas & Villegas, 2002), connect academic content to students background (Au & Blake, 1998), and consequently, lead to a positive outcome of their academic experiences.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation discusses a review of the literature. It is divided into three main sections. The first one unveils the literature on the challenges faced by English language learners. As for the second section, it highlights the literature on second language acquisition. The last section of this chapter also spotlights the literature on the preparation of teachers to teach English language learners. It is divided into two sections, which are teacher preparation for cultural and linguistic sensitivity and cultural and inclusive pedagogies.

In chapter 3, I discuss the methodology used for this study. I report that the study involved five teachers and five African students. I primarily used observations and interviews, and I examined students’ artifacts as methods of data collection. As for the data analysis, it was inductive and primarily used thematic units of analysis.

Chapter 4 displays the findings relevant to the challenges faced by the students in the classroom. The chapter argues that African students display challenges related to self-
confidence, attention, and resistance to classroom activities, classroom, and out-of-classroom interactions. The chapter also points to issues of motivation and interest, teacher expectations, and collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers as factors that hinder the students’ learning processes.

Chapter 5 is the second findings chapters, and it stresses the instructional strategies used in the classroom. It argues that teachers view language limitations as a deficit and often exclude the student from classroom instruction on the basis of their language limitation. Their exclusion was reflected through the lack of instructional strategies used in the classroom to accommodate them, and supported the display of attitudes deemed inappropriate by teachers.

As for the final chapter, it is a discussion of the findings. I use categories based on the theoretical perspective discussed in chapter 1 to argue that the challenges faced by immigrant children are motivated by the power relationships inherent to classroom settings. The power relationships create symbolic violence, stereotypes, discrimination, and exclusion/inclusion of students. I also use Bhabha’s discussion of cultural hybridity to unravel the notion of identity formation of the students. Finally, I focus on Krashen’s (2005) communicative approach on second language acquisition to discuss literacy development of the student participants.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the literature discussing issues relevant to immigrant children in U.S. schools, as well as preparation of teachers for diverse learners. I take a critical and postcolonial perspective to discuss the learning of language minority students. From a critical perspective, classroom instruction should draw from the knowledge students bring to school and reflect the concerns for diverse groups of students for a more equal and just society (Grant & Sleeter, 2007). The authors argue that education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist views democracy as an active practice in schools. It teaches students to analyze inequalities within their own lives and acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to become active citizens, and build bridges across oppressed groups. From a postcolonial perspective, the postmodern world has reinforced the stereotypes by which the non-Westerners (here immigrant children from non European background) are perceived (Said, 1979). Bhabha (1994, p. 95) views stereotypes as ambivalent and argues for the necessity to understand them through processes of subjectification. On the one hand, he refers to stereotypical ambivalence which,

under certain conditions of colonial domination and control is progressively reformable. On the other, however, it effectively displays the “separation,” makes it more visible. It is the visibility of this separation which, in denying the colonized the capacities of self-governing, independence, Western modes of civility, lends authority to the official version and mission of colonial power. (p. 118)

This stereotypical ambivalence renders possible the discrimination and marginalization of immigrant children in educational settings. Relying on both critical and postcolonial perspectives, I first discuss the social, cultural, and linguistic challenges faced by English language learners (ELLs). In the second section, I explore the literature on issues of second language acquisition. Then, I explore the literature on the preparation of teachers to deal with
ELLs as well as the cultural and inclusive pedagogies necessary to teach immigrant students. Finally, I briefly explain the need for research on ELLs where my research interest is situated.

**Social, Cultural, and Linguistic Challenges Faced by ELLs**

Valdes (2001) describes the increasing number of ELLs (English language learners) in U.S. classrooms and observes that “during the period of 1990-1991 to 1994-1995, 17 states reported increases in ELL enrollment of more than 10%. Seven states reported increases of more than 25%” (p. 13). Similarly, the National Center for Education Statistic, reports that in 2007, 20% of school age children spoke a language other than English at home while 5% of them spoke English with difficulty. Those ELLs face severe challenges that hurdle their academic achievement because the language of instruction is a second or third language for them, and also their cultural and linguistic capital excluded from school setting. In fact, Onchwari, Begum, and Onchwari (2008) argue that immigrant children bring to class a cultural worldview that is different from their country of residence. This difference in cultural worldview might be a source of poor academic achievement if it is not acknowledged during instruction. The authors also argue that immigrant families mostly raise their children according to values and norms relevant to their cultural background. Those norms, however, are sometimes at odd with school culture and confusing and stressful for the children who experience a dilemma between their home and school culture.

**Cultural adaptation.** Portes (1999) establishes a relationship between the culture of origin of immigrant children and their school performance and argues that they suffer differently from minority groups. They “may encounter language difficulties, and suffer discrimination” (p. 491). He however points up that they are more motivated for academic achievement. He
notes, “students from these groups [immigrants] tend to be more optimistic in succeeding in U.S. society and enjoy greater family support than involuntary group students” (p. 492). However, his findings did not establish a connection between the cultures of origin of immigrant students and their school performance, although he reports, that cultural membership affects achievement.

Cohen (1970) also looks at the marginalization of the immigrants’ culture and language in public schools. He reveals that the children of first generation immigrants did generally not do well in school and he attributes that low achievement to the parental status and to the values they accord to school as well as to the schools’ culture. He also emphasizes that “there is no evidence of any effort to employ the immigrants’ language and culture as educational vehicle” (p. 26). The failure to incorporate the immigrants’ culture might constitute a nuisance for the children as they suddenly lose control of their cultural identity. Admittedly, Portes (1999) points to the culture of origin and ethnicity as an explaining factor of the successful school performance of some immigrant students. He notes that “ethnocultural membership had significant effects on achievement even after social class, English proficiency, and other factors had been controlled.” The culture of origin then, becomes a compelling element to consider in the education of immigrant children.

Another element to think about in the education of immigrant children is the issue of identity. Portes and McLeod (1996) conducted a study of the identity formation of Hispanic people and several factors that guide the identification of immigrants. Those factors are mostly related to English language fluency and socio-economic status. They argue that the more Hispanic students are fluent in English, the more they identify to the American culture. Ibrahim (1999) argues that Francophone African immigrants in Canada face peer pressure and are denigrated when they are not fluently speaking English. They see English “as much as a source
of pride as it is a medium of Communication” (p. 359). They turn to popular culture as a way to acquire the English language and also to shape their lives and identities.

As Portes and McLeod (1996) discuss, Hispanic immigrants also tend to identify themselves as American if they own their home or if their parents are U.S. College educated. The issue of socio-economic status was also discussed by Rong and Fitchett in their discussion about the identity formation of black immigrant youth in the United States. They spotlight that middle class Black immigrants are more likely to live in the suburbs and to avoid traditional domestic Black residential concentrations such as the inner city. As a result, they are able to identify themselves with their ethnic identity and nationality. (p. 38)

As for African immigrants, they are more inclined to identify themselves to African Americans because of the similarity of the treatments they receive in the American society. The authors do however note the existence of tensions between African Americans and Black immigrants “due to different perceptions of race, racism, and opportunities” (p. 37).

Ogbu and Simons (1998) however, reveal that cultural, linguistic, and genetic differences cannot explicate the difference of academic achievement of minority students. Gonzales (2005) also argues that attributing the low performance of minority students to culture leads to their marginalization. In his distinction between voluntary and involuntary immigrants, Ogbu and Simmons argue that voluntary minorities “chose to move to U.S. society in the hope of a better future, and they do not interpret their presence in the United States as forced upon them by the U.S. government or by white Americans” (p. 164). As for involuntary immigrants, they are “people who have been conquered, colonized, or enslaved” (p. 164). He writes that,

It’s a group’s history—how and why a group became a minority and the role of the dominant group in society in their acquisition of minority status—that determines its voluntary or involuntary status rather than its race and ethnicity (p. 167)
Ogbu and Simmons adopt a cultural ecological theory to explain the difference in school performance of the two minority groups by their history. Cultural ecological theory, they argue, attributes the poor educational achievement of minority groups to the educational policies and practices towards minorities, the treatment of minorities in schools and classrooms, and the existence of rewards or no rewards for minority school credentials.

Although I do understand Ogbu’s argument of cultural ecological theory, I do not necessarily espouse his idea that the difference of academic achievement for voluntary and involuntary immigrants resides in the way they are treated differently by school systems and local politics. Such arguments are complicated at times. His argument seems to portray that voluntary immigrants are insensitive of racial marginalization and other forms of discrimination in schools. Although voluntary immigrants lack the historical context that connects them to structural inequities, they are still sensitive to the different forms of discrimination. The difference in achievement, according to Foster (2004) rather resides in the fact that “the success of voluntary minorities is in some cases linked to the ways in which they imagine, and interact with, involuntary minorities.”

**Language acquisition.** According to Verplaetse and Migliacci (2008) it takes about 1 or 2 years for children to develop oral language fluency and 5 to 10 years for academic language skills. Cummins (2000) attributes the length in developing academic language to the fact that it requires more knowledge of sophisticated vocabulary and grammar and involves less interpersonal communication. He argues for additive bilingualism and explains that bilingual development in L1 and L2 enhances students’ cognitive, linguistic, and academic growth. Similarly, Verplaetse and Migliacci (2008) discuss that students who have developed literacy
skills in L1 (language one) acquire literacy proficiency in L2 (language two) better, if L1 is used as a foundation for English language acquisition.

Furthermore, Shabaya (2006) researched issues relevant to the children of African immigrants and observes that they have to adapt into their new society, adjust to their new school, language, and culture. They also have some special educational needs and face an emotional stress. She finds that children from English speaking African countries adapt easier than those from non-English speaking countries who have to learn the language. Even those from English speaking countries, however, are confronted by issues related to their accent. She considers the multiplicity, the diversity, and the specificity of the African languages that these children know, as well as American teachers’ awareness of those languages, to view language as an essential factor to academic achievement. She suggests ESL as the most effective way to teach English to the children of African immigrants.

Alidou (2000) makes the same argument of diversity of English language when she attributes the poor achievement of immigrant children to “linguiscism” which she describes as “the ideology and structure that is used to legitimize, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power as well as resources between groups. It is based on the devaluation of one’s linguistic heritage” (p. 2). According to Alidou, “linguiscism” is reflected through the lack of consideration of the student’s academic and linguistic proficiency as well as his/her social background when enrolling him/her in the appropriate grade level. She also indicates that linguiscism is “reflected in the refusal of schools to acknowledge the varieties of English that exists in the U.S. and globally” (p. 2).

In addition, Espenshade and Fu (1997) identify several issues that explain the low proficiency of immigrant children. Those are the age at immigration, the language of country of
origin, the community of residence, and the pre and post immigration experiences. All these elements could explain the underachievement of immigrant children. The authors reject the assertion that immigrant new comers are unable to learn English successfully. Post-immigration experience appears to be significant factor to English language fluency. Espenshade and Fu argue,

For immigrants who originate in countries in which English in not so prevalent, much depends on their post-immigration experiences. Receiving part or all of one’s formal education in the United States is a significant advantage to English proficiency, as is migrating at a young age, spending many years in the United States, and having a long-term attachment to life in this country as evidenced by a series of investments in U.S. specific capital. (p. 301)

Post immigration experiences in particular could have a significant effect on the achievement of my participants who, although they might come from a higher socio-economic background in their countries of origin, mostly belong to a lower socio-economic status (SES) after immigration and receive free lunch at school. Beside their SES, they have the disadvantage of immigrating to a country where neither the language in use, nor the culture is familiar. All of these post immigration issues are factors that slow down their academic achievement.

As for Villas-Boas (1998), he looks at the role of immigrants’ involvement in their children’s homework in Portugal and Luxembourg. Although he is not specifically looking at African immigrants, his argument could be relevant to the African context. He observes that parental involvement in homework makes a difference in student learning because homework is more beneficial when supervised by parents. He also notes the limited time of interaction between parents and children, the low academic aspiration of parents, the unavailability of books, newspapers or magazines at home, and the limited home-school relationships as factors that affect immigrant children’s literacy. He goes further to explain the lack of relationships between home and school as an important factor to underachievement and writes that,
Some parents feel reticent about contacting schools because they have limited formal knowledge about the learning process, they are not used to being contacted by school for positive reasons and, consequently, they may have some difficulty in understanding their role in encouraging their children’s school work. They may lack confidence in their capacity to help their children. It takes time from school to enlist parents’ cooperation, to give them confidence and even to help supplement and strengthen teachers’ classroom efforts. (p. 370)

**Classroom practices.** Nieto (2002) discusses language, culture and teaching and argues that U.S. teachers are being prepared for monolingual students, disregarding the growing number of English language learners (ELLs) in classrooms. The disregard of their linguistic and cultural diversity creates a sense of isolation that results on poor academic achievement. As for Valdes (2001), she notes four instructional options in elementary schools for ELLs. Those are English only, English only with ESL, bilingual education (transitional) and bilingual education (maintenance). She argues that the most common one is English only where ELLs are placed in mainstream classrooms with no language assistance. English only instruction minimizes the needs and the challenges of immigrant children and results in low achievement of talented students, who otherwise might be performing well. Although English only is not implemented in the school where my research took place, English only with ESL is implemented and it does not guarantee the inclusion of cultural and linguistic diversity in the curriculum.

Similarly, Harklau (1994) researched ESL and mainstream classroom instruction and argues that mainstream teachers do not adjust instruction to make it comprehensible to L2 (language two) students. Teachers lead classroom discussions while students’ participation is limited to a single word or phrase. Limited classroom interaction reduces students’ opportunity to practice communicative strategies and their productivity is less likely to be elicited. Valdes (1998), however, observes an ESL (English as a Second Language) class and deplores that even
ESL teachers do not adjust instruction to new comers. The author uncovers that ESL teachers do not view language as located in social action. As she highlights,

school programs aimed at immigrants students—as we saw in the case of Elisa and Lilian—while they may make use of a rhetoric of equality and opportunity and claim to prepare students for academic success, and seldom based on and ethical understanding of how education is related to broader social and cultural relations. (p. 15)

Valdes (1998) also deplores that children in ESL classroom have little access to their English speaking peers. Nieto (2000) discusses the same issue and argues that bilingual education should be “taken out of the basement.” She highlights that both ELLs and their bilingual teacher are “physically and emotionally separated and do not develop a collegial relationships or opportunity to collaborate” (p. 227). I do have to note, however, that the issue of access to English speaking peers was not an issue for my participants, who were only pulled out of their mainstream classroom 40 minutes twice a day for ESL classes. The issue, however, was how confident and included they felt in their interactions with their peers.

Another challenge is Delpit’s (1998) discussion of African American students speaking Ebonics. She attributes the difficulty of children who speak Ebonics in reading to the lack of appropriate instructional methodologies. She also criticizes that teachers confuse teaching of reading with teaching of a new language and put a strong emphasis on correcting the students. Constant correction, she argues, causes students to resist reading, blocks their understanding of the reading materials, leads them to resent their teachers, and is less likely to be conducive to fluent reading. When discussing the case of Elena, an ELL from Hispanic background, Rivera Maulucci (2008) points out that,

Instead of celebrating and accomplishment, and contributing to a positive exchange, and more intense levels of satisfaction, the teacher critiqued Elena’s effort, contribution to a negative exchange, wherein Elena experienced feelings of shame again. (p. 36)
Nieto (2000) also discusses discrimination as another challenge faced by immigrant children. Discrimination, according to Nieto, is a “negative or destructive behavior that can result in denying some groups’ life’s necessities as well as privileges, rights, and opportunities enjoyed by other groups” (p. 34). It is the exclusion and the deprivation of people from the rights and opportunities available to all. She argues that discrimination is based on the attitudes and beliefs of some people over a group of people. In the context of classroom practices, she argues that discrimination may have negative impact on students’ performance.

Similarly, Sleeter (2005) reveals that “teachers who take responsibility for student learning recognize challenges students and their families face, but are convinced that those challenges do not prevent learning and that a strong education will serve students” (p. 128). As a matter of fact, she argues that teachers often make negative comments on minority students and consider their identity to be a fault. In fact, she reveals that students perform the way their teachers expect them to. She also highlights that ELLs’ native language is the foundation for their learning and deplores teachers and schools’ disregard for minority students’ native languages and cultures. Sleeter argues that,

Students who speak a language other than English are viewed as “handicapped” and they are urged, through both subtle and direct means, to abandon their native language. The schools ask parents to speak English to their children at home, they punish children for using their native language, or they simply withhold education until the children have mastered English, usually in the name of protecting students’ futures. (p. 193)

Nieto also argues against the use of categorization to identify students and reveals that it is based on the superiority of one group over the other and results in stereotypes. Wong and Grant (2007) also observe that the use of labels to identify students determines the way the students are perceived and their aptitudes. For instance she spotlights that the label LEP (Language Limited Proficiency),
not only stigmatizes students, marking them as different from and inferior to the majority, but also sets unfair expectations of rates of second language learning, which are not applied to the majority monolingual students. (p. 683)

A result, the marginalization of the cultural background of immigrant children in the classroom implicitly sustains and/or creates stereotypes leading to a feeling of alienation. The marginalization of immigrant students’ native language and cultural background, also entails a coercive relation of power in which, immigrant children abandon their values and submit to the mainstream ones (Cummins, 2000). In fact, Ogbu (1987) underlines that,

Generally, dominant group members, such as white Americans, ascribe to themselves the proper moral values, cultural norms, good manners, good and correct speech, and good and correct postures. They see in the minorities the opposite qualities. (p. 320)

Ladson-Billings (2004) discusses culture versus citizenship and reveals that “the establishment of White supremacy is a major feature of U.S. citizenship and is an ideological organizing principle of the nation” (p. 110). She views multicultural citizenship as an unequal power relation with White people in the dominant position. Ladson-Billings asserts that ethnic minorities in general and African American students in particular tend to primarily identify themselves through their racial and cultural identities. In fact, she writes that “ethnic groups have viewed cultural citizenship as an important form of self-determination and cultural preservation” (p. 114). In the same vein, Banks (2008) argues against mainstream citizenship education, which, reinforces the status quo and the dominant power relationships in society . . . does not challenge class, racial, or gender discrimination . . . and does not help students understand their multiple and complex identities. (p. 135)

Nieto (2002) further asserts that immigrant children are forced to choose between their American identity and their cultural background. She puts that,

The choices made by the young people were based on hard-learned lessons concerning the price of cultural assimilation. Forced to make a choice, they were generally making it in favor of their heritage. This decision can also be problematic because, although a
courageous stance in light of the negative message of ethnicity and culture that they hear and see daily, it may limit their possibilities (p. 110)

All of these challenges could be dealt with at different levels of society. However, it appears that the role of the teacher is fundamental in improving students’ achievement while including them in instruction. In fact, Hollins and Guzman (2005) highlight that “teaching quality is the single most important influence on school success and students’ achievement, surpassing socioeconomic, class size, family background, school context, and all other factors that influence achievement” (p. 478). In other words, teacher’s attitude towards students can positively or negatively affect the quality of student learning. For example, teacher’s rejection of the different dialects of English spoken by English language learners might result in a miscommunication that can alter immigrant children’s learning process. Similarly, Colville-Hall, McDonald, and Smolen (1995) report that “what teachers say, perceive, believe, and think can disable or empower minority students’ (p. 295). The role of teachers’ beliefs and perception on empowering or disempowering students is often very significant for the development of second language literacy. In the following section, I discuss issues related to the development of second language literacy.

**Issues Related to Second Language Literacy**

In a discussion about factors influencing second language development, Helman (2009b) discusses that learning to read involves psychological, linguistic, socio-cultural, and educational aspects. She argues that students learning English bring with them, an awareness of sounds and phonemes from the home language and are able to transfer that knowledge to the learning of English. She then puts a strong emphasis on the need to view that background knowledge as strength, and to empower L2 learners to be successful at school. She also discusses emergent
literacy development and views reading aloud to students, presenting vocabulary, setting up small group conversation, teaching content, and motivating student to read as key elements to literacy development.

Barrera (1983) also presents a similar argument through her critique of the use of grapheme-phoneme (letter-sound) in teaching reading to L2 students. Such a focus, she argues, ignores the learners’ language knowledge and background and fails to present language as “contextualized, holistic, and connected forms in which the young child is likely to first encounter written language naturally” (p. 167). Besides, Ellis et al. (2004) discussed orthographic depth in several languages and identified transparent orthographies in which “Sound-symbol correspondences are highly consistent” (p. 438) and opaque orthographies that “encourage[s] a reader to process words by accessing the lexicon and meaning via the word’s visual orthographic structure (p. 441). The authors refer to English as having opaque orthographies and argue that learning of English language was twice as slow as transparent orthographies due to the more ambiguous pronunciation.

Bear and Smith (2009) make a similar argument when they point out that emergent English learners use orthographic knowledge when they read and write. According to them, “to learn the 44 sounds of English, students who speak Spanish compare their sound system with that of English, and they make substitutions in reading and writing that are applications of what they know in Spanish” (p. 97). The authors proceed in their argument and describe different stages of literacy develop in English, including emergent reading, beginning reading and upper level reading.

Emergent literacy development is the focus of Helman’s (2009a) discussion where she argues that emergent learners imitate reading as they see others do it. She argues that “emergent
readers pretend to read a familiar story and write lists or notes using scribbles or letter-like figures” (p. 118). Middle to late emergent readers know letter correspondences, know the concept of words, acquire sight words, and play with the alphabet. Helman’s and Bear and Smith’s discussions are very significant in identifying the level of literacy of the students participating in this study and posit most of them as emergent learners at the exception of Carine. Carine’s literacy level allowed her to read silently, comprehend and think through text, and learn vocabulary through morphology and content area (Bear & Smith, 2009)

Barrera (1998) argues that reading is acquired in context through comprehension and is not conditioned by the level of oral fluency. She urges teachers to devote less time to pronunciation as it de-motivates L2 learners and puts that,

Teachers of ESL reading need to recognize that other characteristics of learners such as differences in the areas of conceptual schemata and cultural background, might present more formidable barriers in ESL reading that pronunciation patterns. (p. 177)

Reading comprehension was also discussed by Garcia (2003) who advocates for the use of content knowledge to teach ELLs. Content knowledge exposure allows them to develop “the necessary vocabulary and linguistic structures relevant to the domain.” (Garcia, 2003, p. 43).

Garcia & Godina (2004) also discuss that,

when adolescent English language learners are provided with content-area instruction in their native language, as they acquire English, they are provided with the opportunity to continue their learning at the same time that they are in the process of developing their oral and academic proficiencies in English.

Garcia (2003) and Garcia and Godina (2004) emphasize vocabulary as a handicap to reading comprehension and encourage teachers to help students increase their knowledge of English reading and vocabulary. Wallace (2008) also reports that “vocabulary knowledge has been identified as the most important indicator of oral language proficiency, which is particularly important for comprehension of both spoken and written language” (p. 192). Jimenez et al.
(1996) investigated the reading abilities of three students, two non-native speakers of English (one of whom was a successful reader and the other one a struggling one) and one native speaker. They discussed that the non-native speakers displayed awareness to vocabulary while the native speakers did not. They argued that for the successful reader, vocabulary was a bridge and a barrier, as she developed strategies to deal with them. Those strategies included the use of morphological knowledge to identify the meaning of unknown words. For the struggling reader however, vocabulary was “a barrier, never a bridge, to comprehension” (p. 89).

Iddings et al. (2009) also discuss reading comprehension and the case of Seth, a monolingual third grade teacher, as he teaches a reading comprehension class that depart from the view that ELLs are deficient learners. The authors discussed Seth’s goals for his students to understand “the text’s central concepts and supporting features, [and he] guided the students’ learning to meet these goals, but his guidance was responsive to the students’ co-constructions of story meaning” (p. 59). Similarly, Handsfield and Jimenez (2008) challenge cognitive strategy instruction to allow students to connect reading texts to selves and to the world.

Another discussion about second language literacy development is related to the role of students’ first language literacy level. Purcell-Gates (2002) emphasizes that,

If you are forbidden to use your language to learn to read and write, if you are forced to speak differently when reading and writing, then you are in effect being closed off, or at least seriously impeded from accessing the world of print. (p. 134)

Wallace (2008) defines cognates as “vocabulary items in two different languages that are similar both orthographically and semantically” (p. 190). In his argument, ELLs could take advantage of the existence of cognate pairs to transfer a large number of words from their first language to English. Templeton (2009) also uses cognates to discuss meaning relationships among different languages and argues that “as students read, talk about, and explore cognates,
they are learning much more than the meanings of particular words in a new language; they are learning processes of thinking about language in general and the discourses, large and small that scaffold meaning systems in the new language” (p. 200). It is important that teachers become aware of their students level of literacy in their first language as well as their cultural background for an effective development of literacy in the second language. In the next section, I discuss the preparation of teachers to be culturally and linguistically sensitive as well as cultural and inclusive pedagogies that could impact immigrant children’s performance positively.

**Preparation of Teachers to Teach ELLs**

In this section, I discuss the preparation of teachers to teach ELLs. I argue that the preparation of teachers should expose pre-service teachers to knowledge and skills necessary to develop cultural and linguistic inclusive teaching strategies. Although teachers are often very sensitive to the challenges faced by their immigrant students, they are not always equipped with the theoretical and practical knowledge necessary to help minimize the linguistic and academic challenges faced by that student population. I explore the literature on the preparation of teachers to teach ELLs before engaging with the literature on culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogies.

**Teacher preparation for cultural and linguistic sensitivity.** Preparing teachers for diverse learners in general and ELLs in particular, implies their exposure to culture and language related knowledge that will challenge pre-service teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about students of diverse background. Banks (2001) argues that most teacher education students are middle class White females who have little or no experience of ethnic, racial, and diverse social class groups. Similarly, Sleeter (2001) argues that most White pre-service teachers “are ambivalent about their
ability to teach African American children” (p. 95). She argues, on the other hand, that, teachers of color “generally are more committed to multicultural teaching, social justice, and providing children of color with an academically challenging curriculum” (p. 95).

As a matter of fact, Villegas and Davis (2008) argue that student teachers of color have higher expectation and are more prone to use students’ background to build bridges for learning. Au and Blake’s (2003) study on cultural identity also emphasizes that, teachers of color build on their students’ pride in cultural heritage. They write that “if teachers reside in the community and know the realities of students’ lives, they can draw connections between academic content and students’ prior knowledge, making this content more meaningful” (p. 193). For example, they observe that one of their participants, a Japanese American, “did not reflect on her students’ cultural identity as Hawaiians. She seemed uncomfortable even using the term Hawaiian, and she never described her students as being Hawaiians” (p. 201). Their findings, however, distinguishes between insider and outsider teachers and points up that “a pre-service teacher who is an outsider to the community, although sharing the students’ ethnicity, may still experience difficulty gaining insight into the students’ cultural identity” (p. 203). Based on this finding, and due to the diversity of immigrant population in the U.S., I argue that teacher education programs should prepare both White pre-service teachers and teachers of color for all children of diverse background. I do not find it realistic to diverse students to be taught by teachers of the same background. For instance, Buendia et al. (2003) researched the pedagogical skills of Mr. Doumbia, an African immigrant teacher, and found that “although he shared elements of culturally relevant pedagogies, his pedagogy also bore a strong resemblance to the assimilationist and efficiency model pedagogies that were prominent in the practices of other teachers at Kousanar [his school]” (p. 305). It is however essential for all teachers with no exception of race,
gender, and cultural and linguistic background to be exposed to diverse communities and develop a framework within which to address the challenges and needs of their students.

As a matter of fact, Goodwin (1994) studied pre-service teachers’ conception of multicultural education and found that they have limited visions of multicultural education. She suggests that teacher education programs challenge pre-service teachers’ beliefs about diverse learners. She argues that “teacher educators should explicitly and proactively attend to the entry beliefs of pre-service students if they are serious about changing how students think about teaching, knowledge, and learners within a culturally diverse and rapidly developing universe” (p. 129). In other words, Goodwin believes that an effective approach to teaching diverse students implies assisting pre-service teachers to develop a self-awareness of multicultural education. In fact, Colville-Hall, MacDonald, and Smolen (1995) assert that student teachers’ strong personal experiences limit their openness to cultural differences and to successfully teaching diverse students.

Several authors argue for the understanding of self as the way to challenge pre-service teachers’ beliefs. Admittedly, Hale, Snow-Gerono, and Morales (2008) argue that teachers who do not have a clear understanding of their own identity tend to devalue their students’ culture. They then, resorted to narratives and ethnography to help their participants (in-service teachers enrolled in master’s bilingual education programs) study their own teaching practices. They argue that “when teachers deconstruct their personal histories and stories, they may gain cultural awareness and insight into school systems and structures of power and privilege” (p. 1415). Hyland and Noffke (2005) also discuss the need for student teachers to develop an understanding of selves to be prepared for diverse learners. They assigned their students community inquiries and researched how the latter saw themselves in relation to the communities they researched.
Their respondents admitted that “prejudice had been exposed (to themselves) and subsequently erased” (p. 376). Their participants understood their privileged conditions as well as the structural inequalities faced by their communities of inquiry. Noffke and Hyland’s study revealed that pre-service students of color had a complex relationship with the community being investigated. They highlight that “they [pre-service students of color] were surprised to feel themselves on the other side of oppression but recognized that as heterosexuals, they gain privileges and power that homosexuals do not” (p. 374).

Community of inquiry is referred to in the literature as way for students to gain cultural knowledge about diverse communities. Sleeter (2001) perceives community people as a significant source of learning. Villegas and Lucas (2002a) also discuss that prospective teachers should investigate their students communities, interview parents, talk with people in the community to have a full understanding of their students’ family life. They also emphasize field experience as a way to prepare teachers. They argue that through field experiences student teachers reflect “on their expectation, development of a plan of activity, development of questions to ask different people in the community, and practice with ethnographic techniques” (p. 137).

Another argument is McDonald’s (2005) emphasis that social justice should be integrated in the preparation of student teachers. He studies the efforts of two teacher education programs in integrating social justice and observed that both programs provided student teachers with conceptual and limited practical tools about teaching ELLs. One course at the Mill (teacher education school), however, allowed prospective teachers to link conceptual tools with limited practical tools. As a result, one of the participants discussed that “I feel like this class gave us a
lot of different ways to present information to our kids, so he kind of gave us those concrete things” (p. 429).

Related to the integration of social justice is Cochran-Smith’s (2003) discussion of teachers as agents of social change. She views teaching as a political activity and urges teachers to embrace social change as a part of their profession. She suggests that to prepare preservice teachers to be agents of change, teachers, pre-service teachers, and teacher educators should rethink their assumptions, “understand the values and practices of families and cultures that are different from their own, and construct pedagogies that take these into account in locally appropriate and culturally sensitive ways” (p. 24).

The preparation of teachers to deal with ELLs also entails knowledge of second language acquisition (Goodwin, 2002; Lucas et al., 2008; Nieto, 2002; Verplaetse & Migliacci, 2008). Lucas et al. (2008) write that, “to be successful with ELLs, however, teachers need to draw on established principles of second language learning” (p. 362). They explain the necessity for teachers to acquire a body of knowledge on language acquisition through a connection between language and content. According to them,

To succeed in U.S. schools, students must be able to read academic texts in different subject areas, produce written documents in a language appropriate for school, and understand their teachers and peers, all in English. Therefore, language cannot be separated from what is taught and learned in school. (p. 362)

Goodwin (2002) further views second language instruction as a significant component of teacher education and underlines that “part of teacher preparation will have to be the content and methods of second language instruction as well as strategies for creating a language-rich-classroom environment and developing cooperative and community based learning” (p. 168). Teachers should not only teach curriculum content to immigrant children, they should also assist their students in their transition to American cultural and linguistic values.
Wong-Filmore and Snow (2002) discuss the role of the teacher as a communicator, an educator, an evaluator, and agent of socialization. As a communicator, he/she clarifies students’ language output, uses teaching strategies necessary for students, and knows that structures of students’ native language might differ from those of English language. As an educator, he/she is aware of language development and selects materials that help his/her students expand their language skills. As an evaluator he/she makes valid judgment about students and knows enough about language to address students’ needs; finally as an agent of socialization, the teacher understand how successfully the students make a transition from home to school. Implementing all of these roles implies that language diversity is made a part of teacher education curriculum (Delpit, 1998; Nieto, 2002). Nieto also argues that prospective teachers should be exposed to the history of immigration, the history and experiences of specific groups, as well as relevant pedagogical knowledge.

The integration of each of these strategies in teacher education programs prepares culturally responsive teacher to build on their students’ strengths, their interests, their linguistic resources, and help them examine the curriculum from multiple perspectives (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In the following section, I discuss the cultural and inclusive pedagogies teachers need to socialize immigrant students.

**Cultural and inclusive pedagogies necessary to facilitate student learning.** Inclusive pedagogies have taken different forms in the literature. They include culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogies (Gay, 2002; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b), culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 2007), and critical and/or transformative pedagogies (Cummins, 2000; Nieto, 1999). Villegas and Lucas (2002) discuss that culturally responsive teachers have affirmative views of their students. They address
students’ knowledge instead of suppressing it. In Nieto (1999), a teacher named Lizette Roman argues that culturally responsive teaching implies the establishment of,

a real and honest connection between the needs and cultural values of teachers and students. . . . Students cannot learn outside of their cultural context. Factors such as achievement, dropout rates, even students’ behavior and attendance are affected when schools as a whole do not take into consideration students’ cultures and learning styles. (p. 144)

Sleeter (2005) as well, emphasizes the case of Kathy, one of her participants, to urge teachers to build their instruction on students’ lives. Kathy built her math instruction on what was familiar to the students and reported that her students found her classroom activities easier.

Culturally responsive teachers also build on students’ interest. They use what they know about their students to create an environment where students are encouraged to use analogies from their lives to understand classroom content knowledge (Villegas & Lucas, 2002a). As a matter of fact, a teacher participant in Sleeter’s study discussed that,

What fascinated me though was the fact that when the students prepared some homework related to something they found interesting . . . they would regularly make every effort to present a result that was flawless not only in content but in vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and structure as well. (p. 109)

Culturally responsive pedagogies also build on students’ linguistic resources (Villegas & Lucas, 2002a). Lucas et al. (2008) argue that teachers encourage students to continue to develop their native language skills while acquiring English. They argue that any knowledge acquired in one language is easily transferable in the other and advice teachers build on students’ knowledge in first language to ease frustration and poor performance. They suggest that teachers should “learn about each student’s primary language and his or her language and academic background in English” (p. 366). Similarly, Verplaetse and Migliacci (2008) discuss inclusive pedagogy and argues that it views students’ language and culture as a resource. For instance, in their study of
an African critical pedagogue, Buendia, Gitlin, and Doumbia (2003) reported that Mr. Doumbia, their participant, allowed his students to use their native languages in class. In the following quote, they discuss how a Bosnian student was encouraged by Mr. Doumbia to express herself in her language:

In one ESL Natural Science class, a female Bosnian student walked up to the overhead projector and explained, in Bosnian, where a sentence needed to be reworded in order to define the word carbon correctly, and the rationale for the changes. As she did this, other Bosnian students who were watching yelled out responses in Bosnian that appeared to coach her in the process. A Bosnian male, meanwhile, translated the female student’s comments for the multinational group that was listening.

Inclusive pedagogy, according to Verplaetse and Migliacci (2008), also believes in parental involvement in children’s education; connect with children on personal and instructional level, and values students’ language outside school.

Au and Blake (2003) also draw the reader’s attention to the connection between academic content and student background. They view the teacher’s familiarity with the students’ background as a key to successful academic performance of diverse students. They argue that familiarizing with local communities allow pre-service teachers to be aware of issues of social justice as well as the hindrances faced by their students.

Another culturally responsive pedagogy discussed in the literature is that of instructional adaptation or scaffolding (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzales, 2008). Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzales (2008) discuss scaffolding as the simplification of learning materials to minimize the challenges of the English language learners. It implies the use of visual aids, study guides, rewriting texts to make language more accessible. Instructional adaptation, according to them, “takes into account the wide variation in students’ background knowledge, interest, abilities, and language evident in schools today” (p. 366). They also argue that teachers should
look “at language not through language” (p. 368) and claim that teacher educators should help student teachers understand that “academic learning is inseparable from language” (p. 369). Such an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness between language and content might develop the teacher’s awareness of the need to make language accessible to students for the purpose of content learning.

Scaffolding is also discussed by Gay (2002) when she reflects that,

Teachers need to know how to use cultural scaffolding in teaching these students [diverse students]—that is, using their own cultures and experiences to expand their intellectual horizons and academic achievement. This begins by demonstrating culturally sensitive caring and building culturally responsive learning communities. (p. 108)

Cultural scaffolding implies that teachers develop some awareness of their students’ cultures and knowledge. Gay refers to knowledge and pedagogical skills as the undeniable conditions to effective teaching. She observes that a culturally responsive teaching involves not only, multicultural instructional strategies, but also multicultural content. She argues that teaching should be “multiculturalized” and reports that teaching and textbooks should be far more representative of students’ background. She also highlights symbolic curriculum and mass media as instructional tools necessary for cultural sensitive teaching.

Siwatu (2007) further suggests that culturally responsive teachers learn how to pronounce the names of ELLs and “display welcome signs throughout the classroom using phrases from students’ native language” (p. 1095). He argues that such a display of interest in the language and cultural environment of the students makes them feel like members of the classroom and predisposes them to learning. Banks (2001) also suggests that teachers develop cultural and national identifications to help their students from diverse background construct their identity. Mr. Doubia” teaching practice also exemplifies his interest not only in his students’ language,
but also in their countries of origin. He builds up on their sense of identity by referring to them in relation to their *nation state identity*.

In addition, Gay (2002) discusses communication as a tool conducive to effective learning of diverse students and highlights that teachers should be aware of communication styles of different ethnic groups. According to her, different cultures display different classroom communication styles. For example, she reflects that,

> Whereas in mainstream schooling and culture a passive-receptive style of communication and participation predominates, many groups of color use an active-participatory one. In the first, communication is didactic, with the speaker playing the active role and the listener being passive. Students are expected to listen quietly while teachers talk and to talk only at prescribed times when granted permission by the teacher. (p. 111)

Ladson-Billings (2007) discusses culturally relevant pedagogy and argues that African American students’ academic success came at the expense of their cultural and psychological well-being. She suggests a culturally relevant pedagogy that includes concept of self and others, social relations, and concepts of knowledge. Concept of self and others implies that teachers believe in the abilities of their students to perform, consider themselves as members of a community, view their teaching practice as an art, and resist the isolation of students according to their social, economic, and cultural background. Social relations expect teachers to develop and maintain a relationship with their learners, develop community of learners, encourage students to learn collaboratively and give them the opportunity to act as teachers. Finally, the concept of knowledge allows students to view language critically and allow teachers to scaffold to facilitate learning. Ladson-Billings argues that all of these three criteria must be met to develop students’ academic knowledge while promoting their sense cultural belonging.

The last inclusive pedagogy discussed here is transformative pedagogy (Cummins, 2000). It focuses on “on social realities that relate to students’ experience” (p. 261). Instructional
practices provide them with academic and critical knowledge to be active participants in social justice. Cummins argues that transformative pedagogy is grounded in the lives of students. It is critical, multicultural, participatory, hopeful, activist, academically rigorous, and culturally sensitive. The author argues that it affirms and extends students’ identity, develops linguistic and intellectual tools for critical inquiry, and challenges issues of inequality and inequities in the broader society. It also encourages diverse students to develop their home language and culture and build on their prior experiences.

Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature relevant to the challenges faced by immigrant students, the issues regarding second language learning, and the preparation of teachers to teach diverse populations. The literature discussed here reveals that immigrant students bring to the U.S. a cultural perspective and linguistic knowledge that is different. Their cultural and linguistic background is, however, often excluded from school setting resulting in poor academic performance. The challenges faced by the students also depend on their post immigration experiences, their socio-economic status and the level of involvement of their parents with their academic activities. At the level of schools, however, the challenges are informed by the instructional options provided (those are English only, English only plus ESL, Bilingual education, etc). The literature also pointed to the role of teachers as instrumental in the challenges faced by immigrant students. Teachers can have devastating effects on students’ academic achievement through constant correction of students’ mistakes, discrimination, negative comments, labeling and disregard of students’ native culture.
The second set of literature reviewed is relevant to issues related to second language literacy. A successful literacy development takes into consideration students’ knowledge of their first language. The literature suggests that reading be developed in context and that students be exposed to content knowledge. Exposure to content knowledge facilitates vocabulary development, which is viewed as an indicator of English proficiency. The literature also suggests that students should be allowed to connect reading to selves and views the use of cognates as an important factor facilitating literacy development in English.

The last set of literature is relevant to the preparation of cultural and linguistically responsive teachers. I have examined several articles suggesting ways of preparing pre-service teachers that will challenge their beliefs and develop their self awareness of multicultural education. I have also, finally, reviewed the literature on cultural inclusive/responsive pedagogies. Those imply that teachers have an affirmative view of their students, build on their interests, and build on their linguistic resources.

It is, however, important to note that although issues regarding immigrant children and classroom practices was widely used in the literature discussed above, very little was said about the nature of interaction between mainstream classroom teachers and their English language learners. Besides, most of the studies involving English language learners (ELLs) and classroom instruction took place in ESL classrooms while the connection between mainstream instruction and ELLs remains underexplored. Another aspect is that although the literature unveils studies relevant to the preparation of teachers to deal with diverse learners, very few of them target ELLs. Finally, I was only able to find a couple of articles discussing African immigrant children, and neither one of them referred to them in relation of classroom practices. Purcell-Gates and
Perry have several articles published in Reading Research Quarterly and Research in the Teaching of English on African immigrants (I note you have not cited them.)

The little reference to the nature of mainstream classroom interaction in relation to immigrant students (more specifically African immigrant students) conceals their presence in U.S. classrooms and minimizes their challenges. It is then essential to put an emphasis on their interaction with classroom interaction in order to unveil how instructional strategies promote and/or hinder their learning processes.
Chapter 3

Methodology

As I discussed in chapter 1, this study seeks to examine the challenges faced by African immigrant students in U.S. classrooms, as well as the instructional strategies implemented in the classroom to help them overcome those challenges. To develop an understanding of those challenges and instructional strategies, I used qualitative methods of inquiry as discussed by Bogdan and Biklen (2007). In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the choice of a qualitative inquiry for my study. I then discuss the study methods that address the study site and participants, the researcher’s role, decision making, and data collection procedures. The last section of this chapter discusses data analysis.

Research Design and Rationale

This research is a qualitative study that involves the collection of data to achieve an “experiential understanding” of my phenomenon (Stake 1995). Schwandt (2000) discusses qualitative inquiry as,

a site or arena for social scientific criticism . . . . That site is a “home” for a wide variety of scholars who often are seriously at odds with one another but who share a general rejection of the blend of scientific, foundationalist’s epistemology, instrumental reasoning. (p. 190)

Qualitative inquiry, as discussed by Schwandt, views knowledge as “conjectural” and supported by the strongest warrant possible. It departs from positivists’ stance according to which, knowledge needs to have a secure foundation. Besides, Crotty (1988) argues that human sciences (advocated by post positivists) are idiomatic, that is to say concerned with understanding the object, while natural sciences (advocated by positivists) are nomothetic, concerned with
explaining it. Given my particular interest in understanding my phenomena, qualitative inquiry was most appropriate for this study.

Qualitative research, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), is a naturalistic study. It is concerned with descriptive data process rather than outcome, and with participant’s perspectives. My decision to conduct a qualitative study emanates from my interest in understanding the phenomenon of my study in its natural environment of occurrence. Observing classroom interactions as they occur in a regular basis was most fitted to understand the interactions between the different parties in the classroom as well as the challenges and opportunities offered to each party. The naturalistic aspect of this study allowed me to understand the actions observed in the historical context of the setting. Context, for Dyson and Genishi (2005), is not only the physical setting, but also “extrasituational.” The physical setting of the research, according to the authors, informs people’s actions and is viewed by researchers as “constituted by social activity” (p. 5). As for extrasituational context, it includes the historical, economic, and cultural forces that intersect with the phenomenon. To understand and gain a deeper understanding of the interaction between mainstream teachers and their African students required that I pay a close attention to the physical context and the extrasituational setting in which the interactions occurred.

Qualitative inquiry was suited to my research in that it provided the methods necessary to address the research questions. It provided me with the tools to conduct classroom observation, interviews, informal conversations, and analyze students’ artifacts. All those tools were necessary to understand the phenomenon of the study and situate it in its physical and extrasituational context for a more complex and trustworthy outcome based on the perspective of the participants.
Study Methods

Study site and participants. The study took place in a Midwestern elementary school that offered instruction from kindergarten to fifth grade. The school population was 41.3% White, 33.5% Black, 0.5% American Indian, 16.5% Asian, and finally, 8.3% was Hispanic. The Black population included African Americans and the new African immigrants. The school only counted 14 African students, 10 of whom were from French speaking countries. It offered special programs such as arts, PE (physical education), music, and library. It also included special education for children with diverse needs and ESL (English as a second language) for immigrant children. According to the administration, the theme of the school was “communication,” because their students ran a TV and a radio station and also because of the large number of their immigrant students who speak about 15 different languages. Due the large number of diverse learners in the school, the administration and the teachers meet once a month to discuss cultural responsiveness and get the teachers to think about their cultural identity and awareness.

The study took place in three classes, one kindergarten and two fifth grades. I observed the kindergarten class and one of the fifth grades in spring 2010 and the second fifth grade in fall 2010. Both fifth grade classrooms were taught by the same teacher and counted a new set of students, with the exception of Sally, who was repeating the class. The participants of the study were five female teachers (three of whom were ESL teachers and two mainstream teachers) and five African students. All the teachers reported having middle class socio-economic status.

The Kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Brian, was tenured and had been teaching for 10 years. Throughout her career, she worked with students from different parts of the world, including African children. As for the fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Parks, she was new to the teaching profession. After being a stay at home mom for some few years, she went back to college for her
teaching degree and had been teaching for 3 years at the time of this study. Throughout the 3 years, she taught diverse students. However, her first exposure to African students was in the spring, with her three African students. Mrs. Rogers was also a stay at home mom for a few years. When her children were grown enough, she decided to go back to work and served as an assistant teacher for a couple of years and finally decided to go back to college to get her teaching certificate. In the course of working for her certificate, she worked as an ESL instructor for adults, which prompted her to get an ESL endorsement. She had been practicing as an ESL teacher for 5 years. She reported not being exposed to many African students. Her students were most of the time from Asian and Hispanic backgrounds. As for Mrs. Clarks, she travelled a lot throughout her childhood and lived in Europe and Asia. She worked as a classroom teacher for several years, before moving to Japan where she taught English for a year. Her stay in Japan motivated her interest in ESL teaching. She then took college level courses for an ESL endorsement. Last but not least, Ms. Li had only been teaching two years. All the teachers were married with two to three children with the exception of Ms. Li, who was not married. Below is a chart of my teacher participants with the grades they taught during my study and their number of years of experience.
Table 1

*Chart of Teacher Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade being taught</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Brian</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Parks</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Rogers</td>
<td>ESL (5th grade)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Clarks</td>
<td>ESL (Kindergarten)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Li</td>
<td>ESL (5th grade)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The student participants were all new immigrants. In kindergarten, Yaya had been living in the U.S for two years and moved from the Republic of Congo. He reported being the last born of a family of three children (two girls and one boy). One of his sisters was in third grade in the same school. Yaya had attended one year of pre-school in a neighboring town and spoke conversational English. On the other hand, Rokie was new in the United States and in the classroom. She had only joined the class in January, soon after immigration from the Democratic Republic of Congo. She was also the last born of a family of three. I was unable to get significant information about her family; according to her teacher they did not speak any English. In fifth grade, Carine and Sally were both from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Carine had been living in the country for 3 years and was fluent in English. As for Sally, she entered the classroom in January, 2010. She had several siblings, including two older brothers who were in high school and an older sister. Just like Rokie, Sally was still learning English. Carine, Rokie, Sally, and Yaya all spoke French and Lingala. However, during my conversations with Rokie, I realized that she was not very fluent in French. Most of the time, she answered my questions by nodding or shaking her head. When she did use her words, it took her sometime to put her words together in French. Carine and Sally both experienced schooling in their home country in the
French language and reported that their parents mostly spoke French and Lingala to them. The last student was Bintou. She had spent 2 years in the U.S. She was born in Ghana and then moved to Liberia, where she was raised by her grandmother before joining her mother who had already immigrated to the United States. She went to school in Liberia and spoke a local Liberian language besides English. She had a sister who was in high school.

Table 2

*Chart of Student Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Languages spoken</th>
<th>Stay in U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yaya</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Republic of Congo</td>
<td>Lingala/French</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rokie</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
<td>Lingala / some French</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carine</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
<td>Lingala/French</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
<td>Lingala/French</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally2</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
<td>Lingala/French</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bintou</td>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Local Liberian language/English</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students were pulled out of their mainstream classrooms for ESL depending on their linguistic challenges. Bintou and Sally attended Mrs. Rogers’s ESL class, along with another ESL student from an Asian background twice a day and for 45 minutes each time. Yaya and Rokie also attended ESL twice a day for the same number of minutes, along with four other students from other kindergarten classes. Mrs. Clarks was their ESL teacher. Carine attended Ms. Li’s ESL classroom once a day from 1:15 p.m. to 1:50 p.m. with another fifth grader from a different mainstream class. As for Sally2, I did not observe her ESL classroom, but she was taught by Mrs. Clark, along with 2 Asian students from South Korea. Initially, she was supposed
to be pulled out twice a day. However, at her request, Mrs. Clarks and Mrs. Parks2, her mainstream teacher, decided that she would only attend ESL once a day.

Mrs. Parks was Sally, Bintou, and Carine’s fifth grade teacher. In her classroom, there were 19 students, nine of which were Black (six African Americans and the three African girls), seven were Caucasian, and three were Asian American. The classroom was a large rectangular room. At the entrance was a round small table used by the teacher. Next to it were computers followed by individual desks for students. Behind the students there were posters of volley ball, soccer, and football teams on the wall. Below the posters were artifacts of students’ work. The teacher’s desk was on the left hand side of the room with a laptop on top of it. Behind the teacher desk there were posters on Anne Frank and Holocaust information boards. Right in front of the students, there was a board that was not often used. Mrs. Parks often used an overhead for classroom instruction.

Mrs. Parks2’s classroom had a very similar setting to Mrs. Parks, with the exception of the posters in the back of the room. There were still posters in there, but they were made by the students about themselves. In addition, on the information board, all the posters about the Holocaust were not there anymore. Mrs. Parks 2 had 19 students, 10 Caucasians, six Blacks (including Sally2), and three Asians.

As for Mrs. Brian, her room was also large and rectangular. It was divided in several parts. At the entrance there was a round circular table. Right next to it, was the carpet area where the class often gathered for center time. In the front of the room there were three rectangular tables where the children sat in groups for some activities. In front of the tables and on the board are sight words and the schedule of the day. Right on top of the board was the alphabet letters and on top of those the colors. There were also three computers behind the tables. The teacher’s
desk was in the back of the room. Finally, right at the entrance, there was a small library with books classified into categories, such as Dinosaurs, Eric Carle, careers, Dr. Seuss, fairy tale, early math, etc. Mrs. Brian’s class counted 23 students, all Caucasians with the exception of four Black students (two African American plus Yaya and Rokie), five students from Asian background (mostly from South Korea and China) and one from Mexico background. Yaya, Rokie, and the Hispanic student attended the same ESL class.

**The researcher’s role.** My role in the research process was that of a participant/observer on a continuum (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). During the first few days of the research, I was strictly an observer. Those days were very important in establishing a relationship of trust between the participants and me. As I established a connection with the students and the teachers, I became a participant observer. I participated as an adult friend of the students. I believed acting as a friend to the students contributed to my understanding of the instructional interactions between the teacher and the students. It was also helpful in noticing the possible struggles faced by the children and their interaction with one another. Interacting with the students allowed them to be more comfortable with me instead of viewing me as an authoritative figure. However, as Bogdan and Biklen argue, “a certain amount of this type of participation can work, [the researcher] must be on [his/her] guard not to let it dominate [his/her] time” (p. 128). I was then attentive to the extent of my involvement in order to avoid overlooking some important aspects of the interactions.

Being a participant observer and acting as a friend of the students was however problematic because of my identity. On the one hand I was an insider because as a mother of African children, I got to experience some of the issues and frustrations favored by the cultural and social displacement of immigrant families in schools. On the other hand, I was an outsider to
my research because of my status in the U.S. as a “stranger” (Simmel, 2008). As a stranger, I was certainly not familiar (at least practically) either with classroom practices in the U.S. or with American cultural norms and values.

In a discussion about the role of the ethnographer in her study, Villenas (2010) discussed her complex position in her study as a colonizer and the colonized. She discussed that as a person of color, she was “the colonized in relation to the greater society, to the institution of higher learning, and to the dominant majority culture in the research setting” (p. 347). As such, I am myself the colonized struggling to understand and grasp my hybrid identity and that of my student participants in a context of power and hegemony. My hybrid identity (Bhabha, 1994) created through my historical colonial background and my post-immigration experiences doubled with my race and my continent of origin marked the presence of a strong historical, social, and cultural connection between the students and me. That connection made easier the establishment of a relationship between the student participants and me. For instance, although I did not know most of the students before engaging with this research, they felt very comfortable with my presence in their classroom. I represented the familiar in the midst of all their confusions. This was especially true for Sally and Yaya who always demonstrated joy and excitement whenever I stepped into their respective classrooms.

For instance, the first time I walked into Yaya’s classroom, he looked at me and said “bonjour.” I looked at him and respond “bonjour. Comment vas-tu” (morning. How are you) and he responded “je vais bien” (I am fine). Then he turned to his friends and told them “she is my auntie.” I smiled and did not respond. The following day, I went back to his classroom, and Mrs. Brian, his mainstream teacher, as well as Mrs. Clarks, his ESL teacher, asked me if I was really his auntie. I responded, “no,” before mentioning that I might have met him in a different context.
I later realized that I met him and his parents at an African gathering a few months earlier. Every time I walked into the classroom, he greeted me in French and asked me to sit by his side. A couple of times, I met him in the hallway of the school, and he asked me if I would be coming to his classroom. When I told him I would not make it to his class, he seemed disappointed, and I had to promise him to make it the following day. Sally also always made some space for me to sit next to her whenever she saw me walk in her class. During recess, she was often on her own when her peers were interacting with one another. However, whenever she saw me at the playground, she walked towards me. She even insisted at many instances that I meet her parents.

My relationship with Carine and Bintou was different. The two of them had already acquired conversational English skills and did not view me as a person of reference. Although she was struggling in class, Carine was comfortable with her position in the classroom and with her teacher and her peers. Bintou, on the other hand, seemed cautious. She was the only student who did not show any sign of interest or curiosity with my presence in her classroom. She actually distanced herself as much as she could.

Following Villena’s argument, I was also “the colonizer because I am the educated, “marginalized” researcher, recruited and sanctioned by privileged dominant institutions to write for and about Latino communities” (p. 347). As someone accredited by a dominant institution to investigate African students, I also represented the image of the oppressor. As an educated person invested with the privilege to investigate African students, I was often perceived as yet another teacher by the African students. As such, I was often requested by the teachers to translate information to the students. The information to be translated was often about events that the students were expected to communicate to their parents. Most often, Mrs. Rogers often looked at me for my approval whenever Sally said something in French. During her class, she
often asked Sally to name things in French when she did not know them in English, and after Sally named them in French, they both turned to me for approval before she asked the other students to name the same thing in English and she had Sally repeat the English translation. At one instance, I was asked to give a test to Sally and Bintou. Besides, Sally often asked me questions about what was going on in the classroom. Although I often encouraged her to talk to her teacher, she always turned to Carine for help.

It is also important to note that I often felt frustrated during my data collection. My frustrations were triggered by the apparent exclusion of the students in the classroom. One such example was the discrimination against Sally and Rokie on the basis of their language limitation. Another example was the promptness with which Mrs. Brian always noticed Yaya when he was misbehaving. My biggest frustration however, was when Mrs. Parks informed me that she did not know the level in mathematics of Bintou and Sally, and when Mrs. Clark related the behavioral issues of the children to wars in Africa. It was, at times, challenging to step outside of my identity as an African mother. However, I overcame that challenge by sticking to the methods of data collection. Every time I felt uncomfortable with a situation, I recorded both the data and my frustration on the side.

**Decision making.** The choice of the site was a convenient sampling. It was assigned to me by the Bureau of Educational Research office and was based on the presence of my target population, which motivated the choice of the school and even the classroom. However, I also made internal sampling to decide “whom to observe and talk to, what time of day to observe, and the number and type of document to review” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 68). When I first discussed my research with the principal, he suggested four potential classrooms. However, two of the classrooms only had one African student each. I then decided to spend more time in the
two classrooms that had at least two students. Besides, in the fall, I was hoping to also observe a third grade class that had two students. Unfortunately, I was not able to get the consent of the parents for the study.

After I started data collection in spring 2010, the teachers made it clear that I could attend the discussion any time. I then decided to spend full days in each classroom with the expectation for a deeper insight. As I discussed earlier, that was not possible in fall because of time limitations. After a few whole day observations in mainstream classrooms, I noted that I also needed to observe ESL classrooms if I was interested in examining the challenges faced by the children.

**Data collection procedures.** To conduct this research, I primarily used observation fieldnotes, audiotapes, interviews, and student artifacts. The data collection took place in three elementary school classrooms. They involved two mainstream classrooms. Mrs. Brian had two students, while Mrs. Parks had three. The first two classrooms were observed in the spring of 2010. However, after I was informed that one of the fifth grade students was going to repeat her class, I asked Mrs. Parks if she would be willing to allow me in her class in the fall of 2010. So, I observed two of Mrs. Parks’ classes and one of Mrs. Brian’s. Because of the very limited interaction between the African students and their teachers and instruction in mainstream classrooms, I also observed the students in their ESL classrooms to have a better sense of their challenges. I took turns observing the fifth grade and the kindergarten class in spring every day from 7:50 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. over a period of five weeks. Observing classroom discussions allowed me to be immersed in the lives of my participants and to have a deeper grasp of their experiences and their perspectives (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). It was certainly challenging to immerse myself in the lived experience of the students, the teachers and the administration, as
I combined my role as a participant observer and taking notes. I however, learned quite early to combine being a participant observer and taking notes as those two tasks were all necessary for the quality of my data collection.

After each observation, I wrote up my fieldnotes, which were “the written account of what [I heard, saw, experienced, and thoughts] in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 119). The observation fieldnotes gave me a description of the “site, space, participants, and activity” (Dyson & Geneshi 2005, p. 62). I wrote descriptive fieldnotes that were detailed description of events (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The fieldnotes also contained reflective notes in which I recorded more subjective views of my observation. They took the form of a two-column notebook with my descriptions on one side and my reflections on the other side (Dyson & Geneshi, 2005).

The observation data enlightened me on the challenges faced by African students in the classroom, the nature of teachers’ instructional efforts and how those were influenced by the presence of African immigrant students in the classroom. The data also displayed the degree to which the students participated in teachers’ planned lessons. Classroom observations were audio taped. Audiotaping the classroom interactions was instrumental in understanding the interactions between the different parties during instruction. It allowed me to spend less time writing down the conversations and devote more time to physical and contextual data. It provided me with accurate discussions, which were significant for data analysis. I used audio taping to capture the conversation between the teachers and their students. I did, however, rely on my scratch notes to make sense of the context of the communication.

The second method of data collection was interviews. I conducted both formal and informal interviews (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Interviews, according to Patton (1990) “permit
observer to go beyond the external behavior to explore the internal state of persons who have been observed” (p. 245). The interview deepened the events and activities observed and helped me make sense of my findings from the perspective of the participants. The informal interviews were based on short conversations between the participants of the study (both students and teachers) and me. Those conversations were follow ups of my observation. They were “queries about a just audio taped event in which a detail or an overall purpose was unclear to the researcher or a follow-up to something observed the day or week before” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 76). They were open-ended conversation and the questions emanated from the context. They helped me understand my participants’ reaction to a specific context and be “highly responsive to individual differences and situational changes” (Patton 1990, p. 282).

The formal interviews involved pre-established questions or topics to be discussed. The questions were open-ended and centered on emergent themes from observation field notes (Kvale, 1996). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) argue that open-ended interviews encourage participants to talk about their area of interest while the researcher probes on issues instigated by the interviewee. Probes were “used to deepen the response to a question, to increase the richness of the data being obtained, and to give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that is desired” (Patton, 1990, p. 324). In order to conduct a good interview, it was essential that I make my participants be at ease and talk freely about their views. I spent more time listening and less time talking remembering that my work was to gather the participants’ perspectives. I interviewed each teacher once, at the exception of Mrs. Parks and Mrs. Clarks, whom I interviewed a second time in the fall of 2010. Each interview lasted about 30 to 60 minutes. The questions used during the interview, aimed at describing the interviewee’s experience, behavior, actions, and activities, uncovering what they thought and how they felt, and describing what was
seen and heard. They also attempted to unearth the information the informant had about the phenomenon and address the present, the past, and the future (Dyson & Geneshi, 2005). Similarly to classroom discussions, the formal and informal interviews were audio taped. The interview was later transferred to a computer recording the day it was recorded, using two number digits to refer to the person interviewed. I then transcribed all my recordings to avoid overlooking data that might inform the analysis (Dyson & Geneshi, 2005).

The interviews enlightened me on the teachers’ perspectives of the linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges faced by their African students and their perspectives of the students’ participation in planned lessons. They addressed the efforts undertaken by the teachers to minimize the challenges faced by their students. Similarly, informal conversation with students highlighted their challenges, their perception of classroom instruction as well as their participation in classroom activities. Finally, the conversations addressed the students’ perception of their relationships with their peers and their teachers.

Besides the afore-mentioned methods, I also examined several classroom materials, and textbooks, as well as students’ produced written assignments and artifacts. Textbooks and classroom material laid a context for the study. They provided a background for understanding the inclusiveness of diverse knowledge in instruction. Examining those documents also revealed the extent to which teachers depended solely on their textbook or took into consideration the social and cultural background of their students in instruction. As for students’ written assignments, examining them enlightened my research about how the children responded to the knowledge they were learning as well as the effect of the instructional efforts to address their needs and challenges.
Table 3

**Data Collection Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview measures</th>
<th>Observation measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. What are the linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges of African Immigrants? | - What do you think about the African population in your classroom?  
- What do you know about the students’ cultural and linguistic background?  
- How would you describe each student? | How do they manifest their challenges                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 2. How do teachers perceive the linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges presented by African immigrants in school? | - What do you think are the problems undergone by the children?  
- Could you explain the origins of their difficulties?  
- How do you think these challenges could be minimized? | - How does teacher react to challenges  
- Does teacher attend to children’s challenges?  
How?  
- Do teacher’s efforts translate into better results? |
| 3. What is the nature of teachers’ instructional efforts in response to students’ needs and how are those efforts influenced by the presence of African immigrant students in the classroom? | - What are the general objectives of literacy and social studies classes?  
- Discuss the curriculum you are using. Who elaborated them? How do they meet your instructional needs? What are its weakness and strengths  
- Discuss the classroom material and their purpose.  
- How useful is the material to students’ need?  
- Does classroom material include knowledge about immigrant children?  
- How are African children coping with the material? | - What are the topics discussed in the classroom?  
- How are they introduced to the students?  
- What are the activities used to facilitate understanding?  
- Is any reference made to the students’ background? |
| 4. How do children participate in teachers’ planned lessons? |  
| 5. How do students understand their relationships to peers, teachers? |  
- How do the students connect to the topics?  
- How do students participate in classroom activities?  
- What difficulty do students have understanding classroom discussion? | - How do students interact with peers and teacher? |
To assure the validity of the data I gathered, I used multiple methods of data collection discussed above. My choice to rely on multiple sources emanated from the fact that each method has its strengths and limitations that might affect the quality of the data collected. For instance, my presence in the classroom could affect the way my participants act during classroom instruction. Besides, observation only allowed me to focus on external behavior while what the participants thought and felt remained unknown. Interviews and informal conversations gave me a more personal account of events and actions. However, the perspectives of the interviewees were influenced by their personal bias and anxiety. Finally, examining classroom documents and students’ produced assignments gave me a “behind the scene look at” (Patton, 1990) what is not directly observable. Combining these three methods minimized their limitation and increased the validity of the data collected.

I also utilized member checking as a significant mean of assuring the validity of the data collected. Member checking mainly occurred during the interviews when I reformulate my questions to make sure that my interpretation of their initial responses to my queries was accurate. Member checking also occurred when I submitted the transcripts of a couple interviews to the interviewees to check the legitimacy of their contents.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis procedure used to discuss the findings is inductive (Dyson & Geneshi, 2005). The analysis is grounded in the data gathered during the observation sessions, the interviews and the textual analysis. I started the analysis with a reading of my field notes and interview transcripts and making comments about them. A second round of reading allowed me to identify recurrent themes and topics and led to the organization of those themes into categories.
for coding purpose (Patton, 1990). I used thematic and sociolinguistic units of analysis for the findings section in chapter 4. Thematic units of analysis consisted of a cross-case analysis of the interviews “by grouping together answers from different people to common questions or analyzing different perspectives on central issues” (Patton, 376). It also involved the organization of the observation data around key issues and or themes. The thematic units of analysis were supported by “communicative acts” that occurred during classroom interactions (Dyson & Geneshi, 2005, p. 87). My decision to pay close attention to the communicative acts was based on Mehan’s (1992) view of social interaction as a tool for learning. According to him, people interact based on what they know and their own perception. He insists on the necessity of common grounds in social interaction and sees teaching and learning as socially interacted. Based on her argument, it was essential for me to pay close attention to the communicative events in the classroom to have a deeper insight of the interaction between the teachers and their African students.

The themes emerging from the data included self-confidence, interest and/or motivation in classroom activities, resistance, defiance, teachers’ beliefs, behavioral issues, inclusion/exclusion, socialization, and parental involvement. In chapter 4, I grouped those themes into three main sections which were language and academic challenges, challenges related to motivation and interest, teacher’s perception of the challenges, and the interaction between the African students and their peers.

Unlike chapter 4 that is organized around a thematic analysis, chapter 5 describes a typical day in kindergarten and in Mrs. Parks’ fifth grade in spring 2010. I believe that the description of typical days was useful in terms of unraveling the teaching strategies used in the classroom. It made it easier to see the different tendencies in the classroom, the subject and
content being taught, the teaching methods used, and the responses of the students to their learning. It was however not possible to describe a typical day in Mrs. Parks2’s classroom in the fall 2010, because of conflicting schedules. In fact, my schedule in the fall only allowed me to spend 2 to 3 hours on the research site and made it impossible for me to visit full days of instruction. The section on Sally2’s fifth grade was mostly based on the specific activities I observed. Describing a typical day was instrumental to understand the nature of the instructional strategies used by the different teachers and how those were inclusive or not of the African students in the classroom.

Table 4

Research Questions, Data Sources, and Methods of Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
<th>Methods of analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges of African Immigrants?</td>
<td>Classroom observation, Interview with teachers, Conversation with students</td>
<td>Thematic units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do teachers perceive the linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges presented by African immigrants in school?</td>
<td>Classroom observation, Interviews</td>
<td>Thematic units, Typical day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do children participate in teachers’ planned lessons?</td>
<td>Classroom observation, Interviews, Conversation with students</td>
<td>Thematic units, Typical day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What is the nature of teachers’ instructional efforts in response to students’ needs and how are those efforts influenced by the presence of African immigrant students in the classroom?</td>
<td>Classroom observation, Interviews</td>
<td>Thematic units, Typical day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How do students understand their relationships to peers, teachers</td>
<td>Classroom observation, Interviews, Conversation with students</td>
<td>Thematic units, Typical day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above table is a summary of both the data sources and the data analysis. It presents each research question with the source of its data and its method of analysis. For instance, the data collected during the classroom observations, the interviews, and the conversations with the students were instrumental in addressing the question on the challenges faced by the African students. The data collected used socio-linguistic and thematic units as well as typical days of activity as analytical tools.

In this chapter, I have discussed that I used observations, interviews, and informal conversations. Those methods were used to collect data in three mainstream classrooms and three ESL classrooms. The study involved three ESL teachers, two mainstream teachers, and African students. The most challenging aspect of the data collection certainly was my role as a researcher. As I discussed above, I was both a colonizer and a colonized in the process. The complexity of my identity in the field often led me to act as a friend of the students at some times and as a teacher at other times. The use of multiple data sources as well as member checking was very significant in insuring the validity of the data collected. The data analysis primarily used thematic units of analysis and described typical days.
Chapter 4

Immigrant Students and their Challenges

This chapter addresses the following questions of my inquiry: What are the linguistic and academic challenges of African Immigrants? How do teachers perceive the linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges presented by African immigrants in school? How do students understand their relationships to peers and teachers? As I discussed in chapter 3, all my student participants have in common their limited knowledge of the English language and of the U.S. culture. Their challenges emergent from the data collected involved both language limitations and cultural differences, and a range from self-confidence issues, interest and/or motivation in classroom activities, and limited parental involvement to teachers’ beliefs. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the linguistic and academic challenges faced by my participants. I reveal that English language fluency and first language of literacy play a significant role in the challenges faced by the students in the classroom. As for the second section, it addresses issues related to motivation and interest and shows that whenever instruction was geared towards the interests and needs of my participants, they were very motivated. However, they were resistant to classroom activities when their interests and needs were not taken into consideration. In the third section of this chapter, I highlight teachers’ perceptions of African children’s challenges which, according to them, are due to the lack involvement of their parents in schools, their linguistic background, and the social and political instability of the African continent. Finally, I discuss the interaction between the immigrant children and their peers and posit that it is determined by language fluency, gender specific activities, and common struggles.
As I discussed in chapter 3, I had five teacher participants and five student participants.

Below is a chart of the student participants (provided in the methodology) with their grades, countries of origin, and languages spoken.

Table 5

*Student Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names (pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Languages spoken</th>
<th>Stay in U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yaya</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Republic of Congo</td>
<td>Lingala / French</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rokie</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Democratic republic of Congo</td>
<td>Lingala / some French</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carine</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td>Democratic republic of Congo</td>
<td>Lingala / French</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td>Democratic republic of Congo</td>
<td>Lingala / French</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally2</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td>Democratic republic of Congo</td>
<td>Lingala / French</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bintou</td>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Local Liberian language / English</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Linguistic and Academic Challenges**

**Linguistic challenges.** All of my participants were familiar with the English language with the exception of Rokia and Sally who had both only been living in the U.S. for a few months. According to Mrs. Rogers, an ESL teacher,

The children have “social” English. They can put sentences together and communicate their needs. That is pretty easy for younger kids. But what they are missing are the building blocks, especially the content area stuff. That’s what they are not getting up when they are on the playground.
One such example is the case of Bintou, a fifth grader who was having difficulty catching up in the classroom. During my observation of her mainstream classroom, I never saw or heard Bintou interact with or show interest in classroom instruction. Most of the time, she had her elbow on her desk and her hand on her cheeks with a distant look. Her most common activity was writing down the answers of the exercise done by the class. Whenever the teacher gave an assignment in class, she always waited for the correction time and copied everything without ever asking any question. Sometimes, the activity went on fast, in which case, she copied the answers from her neighbor’s notes.

One example is that, after discussing the vocabulary and making of rice krispies treats with her students the previous day, Ms. Rogers (Bintou and Sally’s ESL teacher) reviewed the new words and their spelling with them and then requested that they write a “how to make rice krispies’ book.” While the two other students were writing down the title of the book, Bintou, with her elbow on the desk and her head resting on her hand, sighed heavily. The teacher asked her what was wrong, but she responded, “nothing.” I also attempted to have a conversation with Bintou on the reason she sighed, and she responded that it was difficult and added that her teacher made them do a lot of writing and it gets her tired. However, she had not started writing the book when it was time to go back to the mainstream classroom.

Although I have not observed any cases of frustration, my interviews with the teachers also revealed that Sally and Carine (fifth grade) also sometimes expressed some frustration in class. Mrs. Li (ESL teacher), for instance, articulated that,

One day she [Carine] didn’t want to do her work. I was trying to motivate her and she put her head on the table and started crying. I took her in the hallway asked her what was going on and she said she was sad because the rest of her class was going out to recess. She thinks it’s not fair that she didn’t get to go out with them. But I think there were some other emotions going on there.
Sally2’s math and reading tutor (from when she repeated her class) also articulated,

She is doing really well. Some times when she can’t figure it out, she gets frustrated. But she’s doing . . . she is a hard worker and she always gets it. I helped her last time they had their math test, she could do a lot of the things with just a little direction. I would just read her the problem and ask her, what do you know about this? Just a little direction and she could. Her challenge is just reading it and understanding what exactly they are asking, because she knows how to do most of the things, but some of the problems, she is just not sure what they are asking.

Mrs. Clark2, Sally2’s ESL teacher also articulated that,

Sally2 sometimes acts out in class. One day, I gave the students a writing assignment and explained it to them. During the assignment, Sally2 asked a question. I looked into her writing, and I explained the assignment to her once again and asked her to correct what she had wrong, before I turned to another student. She put her pencil down and put her head on the table. I asked her what was going on and she responded “nothing,” and she was tearing up.

In a conversation with Sally2, she reported that she did not like going to ESL. When I attempted to understand, she told me that she preferred her mainstream class because she had many friends there, and she learned a lot of different things. She added that in ESL, she had no friends and she always had to redo the same things several times. Mrs. Clark2, however thinks that Sally2 is constantly looking for attention; “when she does not get the attention she wants, she starts acting out.”

The frustration expressed seems to involve more than emotional issues (as the teachers discussed it); it unveiled a quest of the teacher’s attention. It seems to take a lot more effort from them to produce what the teacher might perceive as a simple, easy task. The difficulty in producing those tasks often became a barrier to their progress if not perceived and dealt with appropriately. Unfortunately treating these signs of frustration as behavior issues impeded their chances of being addressed.

As an example of the unaddressed signs of frustration, Bintou was always lagging behind her peers in her mainstream classroom and constantly copying the answers provided by others.
During a language arts class, Mrs. Parks (fifth grade mainstream teacher) asked her students to do an assignment on “using quotation marks or underlining to denote the title of a book, movie or magazine/newspaper article” at 9:00 a.m. Bintou did not do the assignment. She was seated with her elbow on the desk and her chin resting on her hand. When the teacher announced that they should correct their assignment together, Bintou put down all the answers given to her by her peers. Whenever she was not writing the answers, she was biting her fingernails. By 9:30, the class had finished working on their next assignment about punctuating “each title and capitalizing the important words” and were turning in their last assignment that was due individually to the teacher. Bintou, however, was still copying the answers to the two first assignments from her neighbor’s textbook, and did not get the graded assignment done. At 9:45, Mrs. Parks started having individual conservations with students about a math assignment that they had submitted to her the previous day. While some of the students were reading books, others were chatting; Bintou stopped copying her answers and laid her head down on her desk instead of doing the assignment to be turned in.

Ms. Rogers told me she did not know what to do with Bintou. She said that this was her second year in the U.S. and that she had not shown any progress since the beginning of the school year. The same concern was raised by Mrs. Parks, her mainstream classroom teacher. According to Mrs. Parks, Bintou had not made much progress. She started the school year with a kindergarten reading level 3 and was now at the kindergarten reading level 4 in May. Mrs. Parks attributes Bintou’s challenges to her African schooling. She reports that “Bintou did not have much schooling in Africa. She was inconsistent. She did not always go to school.” She also expressed that after she moved to the United States, Bintou was placed into fifth grade because of her age. However, after 2 months, they realized that she was way below grade level, and then
took her back into the fourth grade. However, after finishing the 4th grade and moving towards the end of her fifth grade, her teachers now think that she has a learning problem. Mrs. Parks said,

Now that we’ve had her long enough, we’ve observed her and we’ve got all the interventions in place to help her—like she’s been on one-on-one time three times a day and she still makes no progress in reading. It’s some kind of either learning disability or dyslexia.

Mrs. Rogers also made a similar point and argued,

I think she has a learning disability that hasn’t been identified yet. Because at ESL, we are waiting for her language to develop further and then test for a learning disability. . . . I know she is at Kindergarten level, but she has been here two years to continue making that, and I am not a special ed teacher, but it seems to me that she is making some sort of reversal in the brain.

Mrs. Parks also added,

Bintou was pretty good about turning things in, but the stuff she turns in, it means nothing to her. It’s not . . . she is not getting anything from it academically. I think . . . I wish I had more from her.

Bintou seemed to have given up on learning. Although I am not denying the possibility of learning disability, I argue that overlooking her obvious signs of frustration, has created issues of decreased self confidence. She seems to have convinced herself of her inability to be a successful learner. The low self-confidence was also noticeable with Carine who, unlike Bintou, had already acquired higher literacy skills in English.

Mrs. Parks, the fifth grade teacher, reported that although Carine made a lot of progress in reading (she started at the beginning of the school year with a second grade level of reading, and was finishing it with a beginning fourth grade level), “the language kind of slows her down a little bit, but she is trying way more than she did in fourth grade. When she is trying to read, her fluency slows her down, she stutters and that is slowing her down. I think it’s language.”
**Academic challenges.** In this subsection, I discuss the academic challenges related to language arts and those related to content knowledge (Math, social studies).

**Language arts.** I observed Carine’s academic challenges in social studies, language arts, and mathematics. Unlike Bintou, she was sometimes involved in classroom activities, doing assignments, asking and answering questions, and taking notes. It was, however, common to see her only write down the answers to an assignment done in class or rely on her friend to give her the correct answers. For instance, in a language arts class, the class discussed the prefixes “in-, im-, il-, ir-.” The teacher gave students words such as “incorrect, illegible, immobile, irresponsible,” and together, as a class, they classified the words under the right prefix. Then, Mrs. Parks asked her students to open their spelling books and work on an assignment requesting students to “make new words by adding prefix in-, im-, il-, ir-.” The students were given the following words for the exercise “literate, justice, rational, regular. Carine turned to her neighbor and asked her how she should do the exercise. Her neighbor explained to her that she should use the correct prefix with each of the words to find new words.

When she turned in her assignment sheet to the teacher, Carine had copied the words as they had been given to her without using the prefixes. Carine’s most challenging subject however, was mathematics. During math class, she was only writing answers given by peers or copying from her friends. She once mentioned to me that she hated math. When I asked her why, she said, “I am just not good at it. I don’t understand what they say.” Ms. Li, her ESL teacher, argued,

The level of content language in her classroom was above her language knowledge. I think now she is starting to close that gap. Math, I guess is really difficult because we just don’t have enough teacher time. But her motivation was kind of what worked for her.
Ms. Li reported motivating Carine by calling her parents at the beginning of the school year. She reported not giving her older students any form of reward. “She [Carine] did not bring her homework at the beginning of the year, and I called home and that was the end of that. Just one phone call to mom and dad and things changed.” As for Mrs. Parks she said, “I put my thumb on her. You come in, you are not being silly, you are not moving around. You are working. And . . . once she kind of got that, she started working.”

Being fluent in English worked in Carine’s favor, since both her teachers expected her to participate in classroom instruction. They not only had expectations for her but also compelled Carine to do so. The situation was, however, different for both Sally and Bintou, who still had to prove themselves linguistically. For instance, in her mainstream classroom, Sally was generally not participating in classroom instruction. One of the very few times I observed her interact with classroom activities was during a spelling lesson. The teacher dictated 17 spelling words, each followed by its meaning and the students wrote the words. Here are some of the words Sally was able to write: “expedijen” for expedition, “capten” for captain, “pediture” for pedicure, “decapeted” for decapitate, and “captivide” for captivity. (Bintou, on the other hand, did not write any of the spelling words. She was seated in an upright position, holding her pencil on her desk, but did not write anything.)

Sally always displayed a lot of zeal to learn and acquire English. She was not compelled to participate in this particular activity. Although she did not have the fluency of Bintou, she tried to participate. She misspelled all the words, but it appears that she transcribed the sounds she heard. Her knowledge of the letter sounds in French might have been significant in her spelling words (Ladson-Billings, 2007). She was aware that she was not writing in French and so, she used as much of the English sound as possible. In French, the word “expedition” is
spelled exactly the same but is read /ˈɛkspədɪsʃə/, the word “pedicure” is read /ˈpedɪkjʊə/. The word “captain” is spelled “capitaine” and read /ˈkæpitən/.

As for Bintou, she simply did not participate in any activity in her mainstream classroom. However, Bintou did participate in ESL classroom activities. In her ESL classroom, there were three students, Bintou, Sally, and an Asian student. During one of the sessions, their teacher, Mrs. Rogers showed them a white paper board with the following text,

I like to ride  
My bike all day long  
I like to ride  
While I sing a song  
When I see Mike  
We ride side by side  
We ride to the park.

The focus of the class was on the sound /ɪ/. Mrs. Rogers asked the students to write the words that include the /ɪ/ sound. Sally wrote “Mike, bike, slide,” and Bintou wrote “slide, ride, bike, sing.” Mrs. Rogers asked the students if they hear the sound /ɪ/ in sing and Sally said “no.” She explained to them that there was no /ɪ/ sound and that they only had to find the /ɪ/ sound. Then, she told the students that they were going to do spelling. In the spelling activity, Mrs. Rogers said the word followed by its meaning and the students wrote it down. The following words were used in the spelling activity.
At the end of the spelling lesson, Mrs. Rogers looked at Sally’s spelling words, pointed at her word /bake/ and told her she does not see the /i/ sound and then asked her if she wanted another try. She said yes and changed “bake, lake, rade” to “bike, like, ride.” I believe that Sally’s spelling is influenced by her knowledge of the French language. She used the /a/ sound in /laik/ to spell the word “like” as “lake.” She also drew from her French literacy in the spelling activity that took place in ESL. The phonetic transcription of the word “bake” would be /baik/. The /a/ sound is transcribed by “a” in French. So, she wrote “bike” replacing “i” with “a.” According to Bear and Smith (2009), Sally’s misspelling of the words “mirror[s] minimal phonetic contrasts between [her] primary language and English” (p. 102)

Another example is that during a discussion about the different seasons, Mrs. Rogers, the ESL teacher, asked them what the current season was. Bintou and Sally responded together. Bintou said “Spring” while Sally said “Fall.” The teacher told them it was spring and asked them the date at which summer starts. All three students in the classroom were quiet. Using her calendar, she showed them that the first day of summer was June 21st, before turning the calendar pages and showing them the months at which the different seasons occur. Then, she told them
that “summer is hot, just like in Africa,” before informing them that she likes to go on vacation in summer and asked them if they knew what vacation was. Sally said “no.” Then, the teacher asked Bintou to explain what vacation was. Bintou said “when people travel.” Mrs. Rogers asked Sally if she understood and she responded “no.” the teacher then used a map to discuss the word “travel” and told them that “in summer time, people travel from one point to another to take a vacation.” There is here a cultural understanding of the word “vacation” that was not perceived by Mrs. Rogers. For most French speaking African students, the word “vacation” translated “vaccances” in French means time away from school and does not necessarily imply traveling. This discussion about the meaning of the word “vacation” refers me to Erickson’s (2007) and Gonzales’ (2005) discussion of funds of knowledge in which the teacher needs to build on the knowledge the students bring to class.

Afterwards, the teacher asked them what they would like to do in summer and Sally quickly said “I want to go to the beach” and started writing “I ote . . . .” Ms. Rogers interrupted her and told her she should think about the /w/ sound. Sally kept repeating the sound /w/ but could not identify the letter that makes that sound. Then, the Asian student told her, it is “w.” Sally then, proceeded to write, “I want to go to the beach.” But she did not know how to write “beach.” Ms. Rogers helped her spell the word and Sally continued and wrote, “I want to reading and sleeping.” Then, she moved to the next assignment where she was expected to write why she would need a hat in summer and she wrote, “I need a hat because I want to corner my eyes” and “I like to corner my eyes because maybe I want to go to the doctor for my eyes.” While Sally and her Asian peer were finishing up the third assignment, Bintou was still working on the first one and she wrote, “I want to go to the pool” and “I want to brink lemonade.” Writing skills were taught through the use of letter-sound correspondence using simple words. According to Ellis et
al. (2004) the English language being based on “opaque orthographies,” the sound-symbol correspondence are inconsistent. It is then compelling for teachers to pay a careful attention to the nature of the word and its consistency with the letter sound correspondence.

ESL made a difference for the two girls who were explicitly expected to participate. Mrs. Rogers often called on them expecting them to answer her questions. The small number of students in her class made it easier for her to include all the students in the classroom. But I argue that the real motivation for Bintou to participate was related to her teacher’s expectations. Mrs. Rogers clearly welcomed her participation in the classroom.

**Content knowledge.** Another challenge was the low exposure of some of my participants to content knowledge, particularly the fifth graders. Although, they were all in mainstream classrooms, they did not always have the same level of exposure. For instance, Sally and Bintou were taken away from the classroom twice a day for 40 minutes. Most of the time, they left the classroom in the middle of a subject and got back in the middle of another. I have however, observed that Mrs. Parks did not expect much from Sally. According to her, Sally did not participate in math because she [Mrs. Parks] does not know her level in math. She said that Sally is “turning in her work in on time; she is trying hard to understand.” She [Mrs. Parks] is however, really “taking it easy with her [Sally] this year” because the school had a conversation with her parents about keeping her back in fifth grade from the following school year,

I think the . . . she is coming along with the reading. But her math is lacking and as an ESL teacher I could focus on. But my job is to focus on English. If we had more time. . . She is coming along in reading and with more one-on-one meetings, she would progress very quickly. But math, I am not sure. What saddens me is the sciences and social studies. She might be getting a little bit in her class, but I am not sure. I am not sure what she is doing even there. I do wish that there was a way that she could be doing like a 1st grade type of social studies without putting her in a 1st grade classroom. But that’s really what she needs, to put the language with what she is doing.
It seems to me that language fluency was a condition being used for exposure to content knowledge. Mrs. Parks has shown very little expectation for both Sally and Bintou because they had not displayed enough language fluency. As the teacher, she has shown very little confidence in her students’ abilities. She made use of her position of power as a teacher, to make decisions that could have a devastating effect on the students’ self-esteem, granting them the “permission to fail” (Ladson-Billings, 2002).

Mrs. Parks, however, was aware that Bintou’s abilities in math were very low. She also did not know if Bintou could do one digit addition and subtraction. At the opposite of Sally, Bintou was expected to do all the classroom assignments and tests, although she was sometimes out of the classroom when the subject content on the test was covered. For instance, on May 18th, the class, including Bintou and excluding Sally, took a test on finding ratios. On May 11th from 8:55 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., during my observation, the class worked on an assignment consisting of finding the ratio of “flute to harmonica players, drum to piano players, violin to saxophone players,” etc. The same assignment was given to the students for their test. However, Bintou and Sally were in their ESL classroom at the time the lesson was given to their class. During the test, Bintou was lying down on her arm on the desk. She only wrote her name on her sheet. She was the last person to turn in her exam which was blank. Being in and out of class disturbed Bintou’s learning abilities. Being taken out of the classroom between topics slowed down the students’ motivation for learning. It expresses the violence exercised on the students and depicts the power imbalance present in school settings (Bourdieu, 1991).

Carine, however, had more exposure to content knowledge because her more advanced language abilities allowed her to spend more time in the mainstream classroom. She only left her class once a day for ESL, and at 1:30 p.m. Besides being the classroom for most of the day, her
ESL curriculum focused more on content knowledge. According to her ESL teacher, her class modifies “the science and social studies units to make it more accessible to them [the students].” For instance, during one of her classroom sessions, Mrs. Li’s ESL class discussed “meteorites.” Mrs. Li first had the students take turns reading about rocks in a text. Then, the teacher asked the students to answer the comprehension questions on the next pages. The lesson continued with a discussion on adverbs. Mrs. Li asked her students what adverbs were. Carine responded that “they give more details.” Mrs. Li responded “ok. They modify.” She then gave them a sheet of paper with a list of adverbs and incomplete sentences on it. She told them that they were expected to fill in each blank with the correct adverb. Mrs. Li analyzes Carine’s work as,

> Spelling can be too difficult for her [Carine]. She didn’t understand short and long vowel sounds and that made it difficult for her. The nice thing is that she’s had a reading group that is at her level. Science and social studies are ok because they are hands on. The teacher has more time to break things down to her level. Math I guess, is really difficult because we just don’t have enough teacher time to help.

There was, however, a lack of collaboration between both mainstream and ESL teachers about what is being taught and when it should be taught. According to Mrs. Li, her content knowledge curriculum is supposed to prepare Carine for what is taught in class. However, there was never any instance where they discussed its implementation. As a result, Carine was often exposed to a given topic in the mainstream class a month or two before the topic is discussed in ESL. Mrs. Clark, Sally2’s ESL teacher made a similar comment about the lack of coordination of the topics being taught and attributed it to time. The lack of collaboration between the ESL and the mainstream teachers renders immigrant children’s learning process inconsistent. The inconsistency of their exposure to learning denies them the opportunity to learn and understand subject matter, not only causing them “to fall further behind but . . . also fail to make progress in second language acquisition” (Krashen, 2005, p. 50).
Even though Sally2 was often taken out of the classroom for ESL in the middle of a lesson, it was most of the time during math. She, however, had a tutor work with her in the hallway either on math or reading twice a week. They once worked on place values from the fifth grade textbook. The tutor read the assignment as follows, “Phoebe received these math test scores, 98, 96, 85, 100, 96, 100, 99, and 95. Find the maximum, the minimum and the range.” Then, she asked Sally2 if she knew what maximum meant and the latter responded “no.” She then explained to her that the maximum was the biggest number and minimum the smallest number. Then, Sally told her that 100 was the maximum and 85 the minimum. The tutor told her that she should subtract the minimum from the maximum to get the range. When she found the answer, they both did a “high-5” and then proceeded to find the medium. The tutor told her she needed to classify the numbers from the smallest to the biggest before she could identify the medium, which she did and found 97 as a medium. The tutor said “wonderful” and they did a “high-5” once more. The tutor said, “You are focused. You are ready to get this done.” Sally responded, “Yes. We have to get this done.” And then, they moved to the next assignment. Mrs. Clark2, her ESL teacher, however, noted that they did not work on content knowledge in her class. They spent most of the time working on her literacy development, which according to Crawford (2005), is faster and more significant when connected to content knowledge. Not connecting literacy development to content knowledge could slowed down the process of language acquisition.

The kindergarten participants also displayed academic challenges related to their language limitations. Ms. Brian (kindergarten teacher) discussed that both African students (Rokie and Yaya) had significant academic challenges. According to her, if Rokie did not have any English language skill, Yaya did speak very good English. She said,
It was difficult getting him on track but we have different interventionist literacy teachers come in for one-on-one. He didn’t know the alphabet, he didn’t know letter sounds. He couldn’t count, you know. But he is doing really well and he is going to summer school. So he might be ok by the end of the summer.

As for Mrs. Clark (Yaya and Rokie’s ESL teacher), she said that academically, Yaya is “doing pretty well. He started writing, he knows his sight words. I think he is little bit behind in class, but his progress has been consistent enough.” As for Rokie, both teachers argue that her progress has been slow mainly because of her language abilities and expect her to come back to school after the summer with more language. Besides teaching Rokie and other students in ESL, Mrs. Clark has a one-on-one meeting with her at the end of the day because “she did not have much schooling. We do . . . we talk about “this is a girl.” “The girl goes to school.”” She stressed that Rokie is “really not reading. She knows some letters and letter sounds.” For example, Mrs. Brian gave the class a worksheet with images on it. She asked her students to color the images that have the /i/ sound in it. When her classmates were finishing up their assignment, Rokie, who was just looking around, finally colored all the images and put the worksheet on her teacher’s desk.

Yaya and Rokie’s classroom activities were based on letter-sound instruction, minimizing the significance of context in second language development (Barrera, 1983). Besides, Mrs. Brian ignored the fact that she did not have the same level of literacy as her peers and that she needed a more responsive approach such as scaffolding to understand the activity being produced (Lucas et al., 2008).

**Challenges Related to Motivation and Interest**

All the afore-mentioned language related challenges faced by the students have motivated the emergence of issues related to interest/motivation, confidence, and behavior. The issue of interest and/or motivation was noticeable with all the children with no distinction of degree of
language fluency. At several instances, I observed Carine (fifth grade) lying down on her desk and not doing her assignment or even participating in the classroom discussions. During a session on public health, she was lying on the table and fixing her book while playing with her pencil when the teacher was having the class read a text aloud. After the reading activity, the class was asked to answer questions related to the text. Carine, who was still lying on her desk, did not do the assignment, nor did she participate in the classroom discussion on public health. She also displayed the same attitude during a math lesson on ratio. She walked away from her seat during class, whispered to her friend, went back to her seat for two minutes, stood up to get her calculator from a basket on counter top in the classroom, put it on her desk, went to her friend again and came back to her seat with French fries, sat down, laid her head on her desk, and did not do the assignment her peers were working on. However, when it was time to correct the assignment, she copied all the answers provided by her peers, and was given approval by the teacher. Her attitude changed when the teacher asked the students to come up with something they could measure. Carine quickly said, “my height.” She got her head up from her desk, sat in an upright position, gave her height to the class, and participated in doing the math exercise.

Sally was drawing during the same math activity. I asked her if she was not working on math. She responded “no.” I asked her why but did not get any answers. I then asked her if she understood what the class was doing and she told me she did not. Sally was always drawing and/or reading in her mainstream classroom. During a class on heart beats, the teacher asked the students to feel their heart beat, but Sally was writing instead. The teacher walked to her and asked her to take her pulse showing her how to do it. She stopped writing and put her thumb and pointer fingers on her wrist. Then the teacher told the class to put their finger behind their ear to take their pulse, which they all did, with the exception of Sally who went back to her writing.
The teacher called her name and asked if she had found her pulse. She nodded and kept writing. She later told me that she did not know what the class was doing. Sally was apparently resistant to the activity. Although Mrs. Parks did show Sally what to do, the purpose of the assignment was not made obvious to her with the level of language knowledge she had (Valdes, 1998). She did not understand what her teacher was expecting from the activity.

In ESL, however, she was active and always asking and answering questions. She often referred to her love for reading in her writings. When discussing what she would be doing in the summer, Sally said that she would be reading. Bintou, on the other hand, responded that she would never read in summer. And then, Sally responded that she likes to read. In the following conversation, Sally, Bintou, and their ESL teacher were reviewing their lesson on how to make rice crispy treats.

Teacher: What did we do first?

Bintou: We go and put butter in the pot.

Teacher: Yes. (The teacher showed them the picture of a pot and asked them what it was.)

Sally: Hmmm.

Teacher (to sally): Can you say it in French?

Sally: La casserole.

Teacher: Bintou.

Bintou: Pot. (The teacher said “ok” and then, asked them to spell “stove.”)

Sally: “S-T-E -.”

Bintou: (interrupting Sally’s spelling) Noooo!

Teacher: Then, let’s takes a vote. (Both Bintou and Sally said “o,” and they finished spelling the rest of the word together. Then the teacher asked them to spell the word “stir.”)
Sally: S-T-E

Teacher: Good guessing, but not right.

Bintou: S-T-I-R.

In the above conversation between Mrs. Rogers and her students, they recapitulate their lesson on making rice krispies. The teacher asked the questions while the students answered them and established a relationship in which the students learned from each other. She also displayed her view of the students’ first language as a resource (Verplaetse & Migliacci, 2008).

Sally’s enthusiasm for learning continued the following school year when she repeated her grade level. For instance, she was once having a math tutoring session on place value in the hallway. Her tutor, Nancy, explained the exercise to her and she got a calculator and divided 180 by 30. Then the teacher asked her, “25 plus what number would give 30?” Sally used her fingers to count in French and then told her 5. Right at that time, the secretary of the school announced that a high school musical band was outside to perform and that all the students should walk outside with their teachers to listen to the performance. All the students quietly walked out of their classrooms in line followed by their teachers, then headed outside. Sally’s tutor asked Mrs. Parks if they had to stop the tutoring and the teacher said it was all up to them. She then asked Sally if she wanted to continue her lesson. Sally wanted to finish her lesson. Very soon, Sally, her tutor, and I were the only people left inside the building. Whenever, she found the right answer to a math problem, she screamed “yaaaaaa!” And the tutor said “I love your determination.” They finished the assignment 8 minutes later, and joined the other students outside for the musical performance.

Sally’s favorite activity however, was writing. When I examined her writing notebook, I noticed that she wrote a lot about her family, particularly her father and her life in Congo, her
home country. Below are some of her writings. One of these writings discussed a family trip to Chicago; the second one talked about her mother, who goes to school, and her father, who reads, and finally, the last story reported that she did not like fish when she lived in Congo. In the first story, she wrote,

I Chicago
When my dad go do Chicago my dad talk to my mom if we can go to Chicago when we go to Chicago my sister say mom I what to go to the bathroom and am mon say stop lie and sleep you well when lie. No mom I am not lie mom I to go to the bataromme my dad say baby what to go to the bataromme lass stop in the storr.

Story 2: Family
My mom like to go to the school and my dad like to read the book anytime and go to school too with my mom read the book my sister come and look my mom said what you need I need food and my mom said this is not food if you when to eat food go ask your sister my reading my book and my dad ask my brother just go read your book okay

A reading of the two stories demonstrates that Sally2 was able to communicate in English. She did make several grammatical and orthographical mistakes, but her message is comprehensible. As a reader, I was able to follow her thoughts, although it was difficult at times because of the lack of punctuation. Sally2’s use of the language exemplifies Krashen’s (2005) discussion of language acquisition versus language learning. She was acquiring the language for communication purposes, as opposed to learning it through exposure to grammar and rules.

Another important point raised in Sally’s writing is the significance of education for her family. As writing 2 reveals, reading was an important tool for literacy development. Her parents set the example for them by reading themselves and then compelling them to read. As a matter of fact, Villas-Boas (1998) argues that when parents read at home, they expose their children to reading practices that affect their literacy development positively.

During the interview, Mrs. Parks2 noted being satisfied by the fact that Sally writes a lot. However, Mrs. Parks2 explained that their writing activities included two components, freelance
An important stimulator to the students’ participation in lessons seemed to be relating classroom instruction to their interests. Carine was only drawn towards the discussion on public health when she was asked to relate it to herself. Through her participation in the discussion about rice krispies, it was obvious that cooking was a familiar activity for Bintou. In fact, she later told me that it was her favorite thing to do, and she did it a lot at home. Finally, referring to Sally’s knowledge in the French language was a stimulating factor for her as she later told, “it makes me feel smarter.” In other words, the teachers have drawn from students’ lived experiences in order to enhance their learning abilities (Erickson, 2007; Gonzales, 2005).

The theme of interest and motivation was also noticeable with the kindergarten students. In his ESL classroom, Yaya has always shown a strong interest in activities. During one of the sessions, Mrs. Clark, his ESL teacher, informed them that they were going to read a book titled Why I Grow Up. She handed the book to each one of them and asked them to open it and read the word that starts with “m,” to which Yaya responded “my.” The teacher asked him to put his finger at the correct word, and he did. Then, Mrs. Clark said there were two words starting with “m” and added that Yaya found one, “my.” She said, “if your word says “M-Y,” you found the word [Yaya said it with her] “my.” If your word said “M-O-U-S-E,” what word is that?” and the students responded, “mouse.” Then, she invited the students to engage in “echo reading” before she asked them to read the book on their own by pointing their finger at the word they were reading. During the reading, whenever he could not read a word, Yaya asked his teacher, who
either used gestures to explain the word to him or asked him to look at the picture on the book to help him guess the word. Afterwards, Mrs. Clark asked her students to close their books and gave them pictures. She told them that they should think about the story. “We are going to use our brain. We [We’re going to] gonna use these pictures to remember the story. In the very beginning of our story, what happened?”

Students: Errrr.

Mrs. Clark: What happened in the beginning of our story? There is an animal. What is it?

Students: Errrr.

Mrs. Clark: a little /m/. . .

Yaya: mouse

Mrs. Clark: There was a little mouse. And the mouse saw a rabbit. And what does the mouse say?

Yaya: If I grow up, I will have the softest fur.

Mrs. Clark: That’s right. Good remembering. He said to Mr. Rabbit, I will have the softest fur. And what does the rabbit say.

(Before the teacher calls anybody’s name, Yaya responded, “no, I will have the softest fur.”)

Mrs. Clark: What’s next?

S1 (student 1): The monkey. (The student said what the rabbit said.)

(Yaya had his hand up. The teacher told him, “you did the rabbit, S1 did monkey. Who wants to do the next one?” Yaya put his hand down.)

S2: Tiger said . . . .

Before student 2 answered the question, Yaya said, “no . . . .” And then, the teacher touched him and placed her finger to her lips. He then, leaned towards his classmate and whispered the answer in his friend’s ear, and Mrs. Clark responded “No, Yaya, no.”
The conversation above demonstrates Yaya’s eagerness to participate. He showed a strong interest in the material and wanted to demonstrate it. His ESL teacher was able to give a voice to all the students. She asked the questions and the students answered them. By asking them questions about the text, she exposed them to a guided reading comprehension and gave them the opportunity to reconstitute the text on their own through the use of the images. The guided activity requested the communicative abilities of the students and stimulated their interests (Crawford, 2005).

Although Yaya has shown a lot of enthusiasm in reading in ESL, reading seems to be the least of his interest in his mainstream classroom. At workshop time, the students always took turns doing different activities. Those activities were drawing, reading, playing with blocks, and using the computer. Yaya always engaged in each of those activities with the exception of reading. The only time I saw him pick up a book, he put it back. He then picked up another one and put it back and before choosing a third book. He looked at the images and put it back. Finally, with one of his friends, they picked up *The Crunchy Lady Bug*, opened it and looked at the pictures. Then Yaya said, “This is boring.” And so, they put that book back where they got it and played with blocks instead. Left to himself, however, Yaya quickly realized that he could not read and that was frustrating. He did not have the stimulation provided in Mrs. Clark’s ESL classroom.

Yaya was rather interested in drawing and writing. He spent a lot of his workshop time and his time-out time working on his journal. In his journal, Yaya always wrote and drew about monsters, robots, B10, spider man, and Pokémon.
Being exposed to popular culture and using his interest in his writing facilitated Yaya’s acquisition of the English language and allowed him to create a collaborative relationship of power between his home environment and that of his school, in the sense that it empowered him and enhanced his self-confidence (Cummins, 2000).

Rokie, on the other hand, did not display as much enthusiasm in classroom activities as Yaya. She was always lying down on the table. Once, during an ESL class, Mrs. Clark asked her students to do a reading partnership. Yaya and Rokie were partners, but they were expected to read individually. Rokie closed the book put it on the table, and laid her head on it. Mrs. Clark told her that Yaya would like to read with her. She did not respond, lifted her head off the book, but kept the book closed. The teacher opened the book, but she did not read until her teacher asked her again to read.

Another such example was the reading of a book, “All Kinds of Animals.” Rokie laid her head on the table hidden by her arms when her peers were reading with the teacher. The teacher asked her to open her book and repeat after her, which she did. This was the first time I heard her voice after two weeks of daily observations. After the group readings, the teacher asked students...
to share a book again but this time to take turns and read in a loud voice for everybody. Rokie laid down and did not read. Mrs. Clark asked her if she wanted to read first, she shook her head. Mrs. Clark asked if she wanted her partner to read first and she nodded. After the partner read the book, Mrs. Clark asked Rokie then, to read it, which she did, pointing her finger at the words she was reading.

Mrs. Clark described Rokie as being defiant. I, however, wondered if her apparent defiance was not in fact an expression of frustration. Rokie was new both to the United States and to schooling. According to Mrs. Brian (her mainstream teacher), she did not attend any preschool in her home country, and as I attempted to have a conversation with her, I realized that she was not fluent in French either. The concept of being put into a classroom for hours with people who don’t understand you, became a frustration as she realized that she was not following their path.

In her mainstream classroom, however, she spent a lot of her workshop time looking at books on her own. Her reading of the books was always based on the pictures. For instance, she once read the book, *Shopping Mall* as follows: “I am try shoes. I want a puppet. I want eat ice cream. I am going to house.” She also read a book titled *Dancing* as, “I dance with my dad and my sister, and my brother. I like dance with my sister.” But, unlike Yaya, her drawings were mostly about home, flowers, and butterflies. When I asked her to read her writing in her journal, she read, “This is my picture. I am drawing for my birthday. Today is my birthday. This is for my mom’s birthday.” On another one of her drawings, she read, “This is my roller skate. I don’t roller skate. I go in my house to roller skate. Today is sunny.”
Figure 2. Rokie’s journal.

Literacy development for both Yaya and Rokie was based on reading and writing. Yaya’s reading activities were mostly teacher-guided. He usually did not spend time reading on his own and found it boring. Rokie, on the other hand, enjoyed reading a book on her own. Although she was not fluent in English, she was able to read books through her interpretations of the pictures inside. Rokie used oral and written language in support of each other in her literacy development (Barrera, 1983). As for Yaya, writing was the activity on which he spent a lot of time. His writing was always related to popular culture, displaying his quest for social and cultural adaptation and his hybrid identity (Bhabha, 1994). On the other hand, Rokie’s writing exposed her home as a comfort zone. She was not yet aspiring to Americanization and viewed home as the safest environment for her.
Teachers’ Perception of African Immigrant Students and Their Challenges

According to Mrs. Clark, Rokie, is defiant. She doesn’t want to do some things. When she has a conflict with someone, it escalates very quickly. I don’t see the aggressiveness and the quickness to anger at defending self with other kids.

Mrs. Brian, the kindergarten mainstream teacher, believed on the other hand that the issue with Rokie was language. She thought that Rokie was a self-motivated student and that she worked well all on her own. Besides, she added that unlike Yaya, Rokie always paid attention to what was going on in the classroom and repeated everything she was asked to repeat. According to Mrs. Brian, Rokie’s challenges in school were related to the lack of involvement of her parents in her schooling. She argued that the parents never attended any of the parent teacher conferences scheduled during the school year.

The involvement of the parents in the students’ schooling was mentioned by all the teachers as a challenge to their academic achievement. For instance, Mrs. Brian articulated about Rokie,

I send her home with papers every week with her folder. She comes back every week, her folder is full. I send the paper on Friday and they come back on Monday not signed. Finally, I take them out of her folder and I tell her “I don’t care what you do with them, I don’t wanna see them in the folder. I don’t know what is going on there. I got a lot of . . . about how she works, she doesn’t have time. You know, I hear that a lot and it’s over my head, because . . . I work, I have kids. You know . . . that doesn’t work with me.

I do concur with her that it is a very easy way out to accuse your work load. However, she overlooked that she was an American woman with a linguistic and cultural capital that allowed her to navigate her responsibilities as a teacher and a parent. These parents on the other hand were immigrants and sometimes lacked the minimum English language skills to communicate. As a matter of fact, Somé-Guiébré (2011) highlights that some of the French speaking African parents rely on their children for communication.
Both Mrs. Rogers (ESL teacher) and Mrs. Parks (mainstream fifth grade teacher) made a similar comment about Bintou’s parents. Mrs. Rogers reported not understanding Bintou, despite all the efforts to help her improve her pronunciation. She argued that Bintou was bringing back her reading charts signed by her classmates. She did draw Bintou’s attention to the fact that her friends should not be signing her reading charts; afterwards she brought it back signed by her older sister instead. She told her teacher that her sister (who was in high school) was helping her read because her mom did not have time to help her. During her interview, Mrs. Rogers conveyed,

When she [Bintou] is speaking, I am clueless. After I hear “Mom” speaking, maybe that’s the English that models her English, I thought. . . looking at this (the registration form Bintou’s mother filled before she started school), “Mom” is speaking the way she is writing, with a few grammar mistake.

Mrs. Rogers viewed her language skills as a deficiency. The fact that Bintou’s mother does not speak a grammatically correct English would surely portray that she is exposed to a social, cultural, and even economic context that is different from the one available to her at school. And according to Purcell-Gates (2002), language “plays a central role in this class related-denial of educational opportunity. This is undoubtedly because the language one speaks is the clearest and most stable marker of class membership” (p. 133).

As for Mrs. Parks, she declared not having any problem understanding Bintou’s expression. She however also conveyed that Bintou’s problem came from not turning in her assignments in time. For instance, during one of my visits in her classroom, Mrs. Parks told students that they were going to take turns reading their journals to the class. She sat down on a desk at the front of the room, and asked them to move their chairs forwards. Then, she called each student’s name and gave them 5 minutes to read their journal. When she called up Bintou’s name, Bintou sounded surprised. Mrs. Parks told her to read her journal, and Bintou asked,
“What journal?” Mrs. Parks said, “The one you were supposed to be writing for the past month.” Bintou did not respond, and then the teacher asked if she had been writing the journal to which Bintou said “No.” Mrs. Parks then requested that Bintou speak with her during recess. The following day, Bintou’s journal was ready and read by Carine because Bintou had to leave the class for ESL. Resistance seemed to be a big issue for Bintou. Her resistance to engage in classroom activities could be her way of reacting to the coercive relation of power, which was informed by the inconsistency of her exposure to content knowledge (Corson, 2001; Cummins, 2000).

Mrs. Parks also pointed out during the interview, that Bintou was signed up for summer school and that she hoped that Bintou would be able to attend because,

You know, “Mom” doesn’t wanna argue with her. I mean her mom is really good. But during the summer, I could see her mom going like “Yes, ok” and not make her go every day. I can see her going, like, “Summer school is not real school.”

The teachers’ comments about Sally’s (fifth grade) and Yaya’s (Kindergarten) parents were different. Mrs. Brian (kindergarten teacher) pointed out that Yaya’s parents always attended the parent teacher conferences. He always returned his folder with his homework done and his forms signed whenever necessary. She also added that his dad told her to call him whenever she had a problem with him. As for Sally, Mrs. Rogers noted that “I feel that she is catching on quickly. I think that people at home are helping, are making her sit and read.” Mrs. Parks also made the same comment and said that “her (Sally’s) strength is her family. She has older brothers who help her at home and make sure she returns her school work on time.” In fact, Sally2 expressed that her father expected her to read everyday before going to bed. Parental involvement did seem to make a significant difference in the progress made by the children.
During center time, Yaya often raised his hand to participate in class. But most of the time, he was either never called upon, or hesitant, or did not give any answer whenever his teacher called his name. According to both Yaya’s ESL and mainstream teachers, he had a behavioral problem. Mrs. Clark, his ESL teacher reported,

When he came, he was a handful. I had to get help from the principal. He was aggressive, kind of violent sometimes. He was very defiant. He used a lot of inappropriate language. We had to call a meeting with his parents. And it took maybe a month or two and he really . . . something changed and suddenly, he became very serious. He moves around a lot, but he does not have a behavior problem anymore.

She also discussed that,

I don’t know if he has attention deficit or something but he has a lot of problem focusing. He really missed the first couple months of school because of his behavior. There are some commonalities in my African students. I usually don’t have a lot of specific information about the children’s background, but my feeling has been that they are coming from countries that are in war, you know, what they have seen, what they have experienced—they lost family members. Sometimes I wonder if they have any post traumatic stress. I don’t know, but I think that they come from, kind of a chaotic world view. We just have to get them kind of settled down. . . . And it’s maybe my bias, but I read about the Congo and, oh, my god, what have they seen?

Mrs. Clark made the same comments about Sally2, whom she described as “emotionally insecure.” She argued that Sally2 (fifth grade) sobbed in her class a couple of times because she did not have the attention she wanted. She uttered having doubts about the kind of support Sally2 had at home. She discussed that,

You know, the only time I saw her dad was during parent teacher conference and he had a tough expression, not smiling or showing any emotion. I thought, it’s got to be hard in such an environment. . . . Beside, you know, I don’t know what she has seen growing up in Africa, with all the wars.

As for Mrs. Brian, she made a similar comment about Yaya when she said that,

My concern about him is behavior. He’s got behavioral issues. When he first came, it was a nightmare. We got “Mom” and “Dad” here, and he calmed down. Now, he is changing again. I don’t have any idea where the behavior problem came from. In the beginning of the year, my feeling was—neither one of them really had a school experience before or
maybe school systems are so different. So I don’t know if they hadn’t been in school or if the school system is so different.

She also added, “He has attention issues. He does not listen to what is being said. That’s why he has to be sitting right where I am—where I can reach him.” In fact, during my observations, Yaya was often put into time-out. For instance, I walked into the classroom one day at 7:50 a.m. and he was already in time-out. A few minutes after I got in, the teacher walked towards him, asked him if he was going to be quiet and he responded yes. Teacher then, sent him back to his seat and told him that was his last chance, before telling me, “He was wild at the beginning of the school year. He has changed but now, he is going back to being wild again. I am trying to get him under control.” The day after, the class was working on colors at 10:30 a.m. during center time. However, Yaya and his friend were seated right in front of the teacher, but they were looking in the opposite direction. The teacher put them in time-out for about 3 minutes before inviting them to join the rest of the class. The afore-mentioned discussion unveils that the students were categorized with behavioral issues. Such categorization, however, stigmatized them as inferior and defined the lens through which they are perceived by their teachers (Wong & Grant, 2007).

Interaction Between Immigrant Students and Peers

The relationship between the participants and their peers was different for each student. Yaya, the kindergartner, was identified by his teachers as a very social boy. He talked and played with everybody. According to Mrs. Clark, his ESL teacher,

It does seem like he is more with ESL kids, mostly with Asian kids. There is no other African boy. He also plays a lot with Carl [a Mexican American peer]. He plays with the ESL kids maybe because they come to ESL together, kind of a bonding. Also because when have small groups. That makes them feel closer.
During my observations of his mainstream classroom, I did notice that he was always interacting with different people at workshop time. Most of those peers, however, shared the same table with him. I asked Mrs. Brian (kindergarten teacher) if the students decided on which tables and seats to occupy, and she answered that she chose the seats and who would be the neighbors to them and changed their positions on a regular basis. His interaction with his peers at workshop time was most of the time related to popular culture. Yaya often drew cartoon figures like Ben 10, Scooby Doo, and Bakungan. One day he told me that he was drawing a Bakungan, he said he liked Bakungan and had got a Bakungan toy at McDonald over the weekend.

One of his peers (P1) said, “He likes going to McDonald.

Yaya: Yes! I like double burgers.


Yaya: No way! It’s my favorite toy. My friend had many toys. He has many Bakugan games and video games and everything. I like to play with him.

Me: Is your friend here in your classroom?

Yaya: No. he is my neighbor, but he is like them [pointing at his Caucasian peers].

P1: What? Why?
(But Yaya did not respond to his peer. I then asked him, “How is your friend?”)

Yaya: Like you speak.

Me: You mean English?

Yaya: Yes, he speaks English.

P1: But everybody speaks “English.”

Then, the teacher announced that it was time to change activities and Yaya’s group members moved to the carpet area where some (including Yaya) were playing with blocks and others reading books.

P1 (to Yaya): What are you drawing?
Yaya: What I am drawing?

P1: Yes, what are you drawing?

Yaya: Humongousor.

P2 (girl): Humongousor? What is that?

Yaya: It’s in B 10.

P1: He’s a B10 guy.

P3: (talking to me): He [Yaya] always talks about Ben 10 and Bakungan, too.

Yaya: Yes, I like Ben 10. It’s my favorite movie. It makes me like I want to be like B1O. He is a hero.

P2: Who is Humongousor?

Yaya: He is a person. He is a person in B10. Sometimes he turns into a B10 guy.

P1: He has an alien watch.

Yaya: He can turn into Humngousor and different aliens.

Me to P2: What do you like to watch?

Yaya: Barbie.

P2: No.

Me (to Yaya): Why did you say Barbie?

Yaya: I couldn’t help it.

P2: I do not like Barbie. I like Full House. There is this man who has three daughters, Stephanie, DJ, and Michelle. My mom, she says stop watching. But I just can’t help it.

Yaya: I know you can’t help it.

Important points of identity transpire from the above conversation between Yaya and his peers. The first one is related to the kind of popular culture watched by the students. Yaya and his male friends’ interest in TV shows revealed their interest in wrestling and/or war related shows. The kind of popular culture Yaya watched connected him to his male peers and created a
common sense of reference. Being exposed to it gave him opportunity to interact with his classroom peers and not only acquire the language necessary to discuss them, but also use them in developing his writing skills (Ibrahim, 1999). That sense of identification was, however, exclusive of his female peer (P2) who was more interested in a family oriented television show.

Besides, Yaya’s attribution of Barbie to his female peer refers me to Grant and Sleeter’s (1986) study in which their participants talked about characteristics of boys and girls. According to the authors, half their participants believed physical strength and skill in sports to be characteristics of male sex. Of course, my data did not refer to any physical characteristics, but it seemed that Pokemon, Ben 10 and others were viewed as inherent to the male identity while Barbie and Full House (another TV show) were attributed to female identity.

Another important point of identity was Yaya’s view of the English language. Talking about his neighborhood friend, he pointed at his peers saying “he is like them.” Although he was speaking English, he did not identify himself with the English language nor did he identify me with the language. Although he said “like you speak,” talking to me, he did not see me as one of “them.” He posited himself as different from his peers because of the English language.

Popular culture was also often the object of a conversation between Rokie’s group members. However, Rokie rarely participated in the conversation. She was always doing her own things (drawing or writing) at workshop time and did not get involved in any conversations. I once asked her what she was drawing, first in English and then in French, but I did not get any answer from her. After I asked her the question, one of her group members told me, “She doesn’t understand, you know. She doesn’t know anything.” The first time I observed her take part in a discussion, her peers were talking about Scooby Doo during snack time. One of them asked the others who liked Scooby Doo. They all raised their hand except Rokie. Another student said,
“We all like it, but not Rokie.” Then, Rokie said, “I like Spiderman. My baby likes it too.” One of them said, “ok,” and they all left the table, put their snack bags and juice boxes in the trash and walked to different activities. Rokie stayed alone at the table, still eating her snack, until one of her peers walked towards her and tried to take a sip of her juice. She pulled her juice box away and said, “Stop it,” and then finished her snack.

Rokie’s little interaction with her peers was triggered among other things by her little exposure to the kind of TV shows that fascinated her peers. She loved Spiderman, which did seem neither captivating nor up to date for her peers. Her inability to interact with her peers slowed down her literacy development (Nieto, 2000; Valdes, 1998) and perpetuated her peers’ belief that she did not know anything.

I have also rarely observed any interaction between the two African students in Kindergarten, Yaya and Rokie. They were never in the same workshop group in their mainstream classroom. Mrs. Brian claimed that she vainly attempted to have the two of them collaborate. She even sometimes asked Yaya to translate some things to Rokie in French, but Rokie was never compliant. In ESL, on the other hand, Mrs. Clark sometimes had them read together from the same book. Their interaction was then limited to reading and stopped as soon as they were finished with the reading. The lack of interaction between Yaya and Rokie could be understood in terms of gender identity. The few times I saw Yaya interact with the girls, he was expected to do so. Although she was an African and spoke the same languages he spoke (in Lingala and French), he rather asserted his gender identity by interacting with other boys who had the same interests in popular culture.

During recess, however, Rokie was always playing with the other children, running down and up the slide and/or going to the swings. I had an informal conversation with the teacher in
charge of the students during recess, and she told me that Rokie always played well with her peers at recess. She also added that when kindergarteners are playing and running everywhere, they don’t really use a lot of language, and that makes it easier for Rokie to participate.

The same argument was also made by Mrs. Parks, the fifth grade teacher, about Sally’s interaction with her peers. The only time I observed her interact with her peers (3 weeks after I started my research), the class had taken a trip to a neighborhood playground for “Fun Friday.”1 They were running up and down the slides laughing and trying to catch each other. The few sentences I heard were, “I’ll catch you,” “No, you won’t,” “Wait!” “What are you doing?” I told Mrs. Park that it was my first time observing Sally interact with other students and she responded that whenever they were at the playground, there was not a lot of conversation going on and Sally was often excluded from them. Language limitation seemed to be an impediment to Sally and Rokie’s interaction with their peers. As I discussed here, they only socialized with their peers on activities that did not request any use of the English language.

One day, during recess, the boys were playing soccer with the school principal, and the girls were spread out in groups spending time with one another talking. There was a group of five Black girls (African and African Americans) talking and laughing. Sally was the only black girl of the class missing from the groups. She was standing all by herself. When she saw me walking towards the playground, she ran to me and asked me where I came from. I told her I was watching them from the window of their classroom. I asked her in French whom she was playing with, and she responded, “No one.” I asked her if she was not interacting with her peers and she said no. I then asked her why and she told me that they call her names and make fun of her. I asked her why they made fun of her, and she said because she did not speak English. A few

1 Once a week, Mrs. Parks’ class had 20 minutes for Fun Friday. During that time, they either went to the neighborhood park or stayed in the classroom and played games.
minutes later, I started a conversation with Ms. Li, the teacher in charge of the class during recess, and she told me that Sally was indeed always by herself during recess. She added that the other girls were all aware of their femininity, and she did not think that Sally wanted to be involved with that. Our conversation was interrupted by Bintou, Carine, and an African American girl walking by us laughing. Ms. Li asked them what they were talking about, and the African American girl said they were talking about school. But Bintou said, “No,” and told the teacher that they were talking about boys.

Limited English fluency reduced Rokie and Sally’s ability to interact with their peers and pushed them to isolation. Sally was convinced that her peers did not like her or that they made fun of her. Their inability to communicate with their peers did enhance their low self confidence and pushed them to be emotionally and linguistically separated from the rest of the class, who were for the most part native English speakers (Nieto, 2000).

Another example was that on a rainy day when the students could not go outdoors for recess, they were all busy in their classroom doing different things. Some were chatting, some playing cards, but Sally was all by herself playing with blocks. I asked her what she was doing, and she said she was not sure. Then, I had the following conversation in French with her.

Me: Why are you not playing with the other students?

Sally: I told you, they don’t like to play with me.

Me: Why do you say that?

Sally: They insult me.

Me: What do they say?

Sally: I don’t know. Even those girls wearing yellow and blue (she pointed at two girls chatting), they are mean. When I look at them, they do like that . . . (she blinked her eyes).
Me: What does that mean?

Sally: I don’t know.

Me: How about Carine? Can you play with her?

Sally: She only talks to me on the bus in the morning. When we are at school, she does not want to talk to me.

Me: How about Bintou?

Sally: She is not smart.

Me: Really?

Sally: She always asks me to help her write things in ESL. But, when we come to class, she becomes mean.

The relationship between Bintou and Sally was mostly apparent in ESL. The two girls were often requested to work together in ESL. For instance, Mrs. Rogers once asked her ESL students to match pictures with the starting letters. She only had two students, since the third one had not made it to school. Sally and Bintou took turns placing the words they were given on small paper under the corresponding image. When there were only three words left, Bintou refused to take her turn. The teacher asked her what was going on but she did not respond. The teacher asked Sally if anything had happened during the exercise, and Sally turned to me and asked me if she could tell me in French. I looked at the teacher for her approval and then responded yes. I then, translated what Sally told me in French, which was that Bintou was trying to find a word she knew to match with the pictures. When she told her no, Bintou got upset. Mrs. Rogers asked Bintou if that was why she was upset, and Bintou nodded her head in agreement. Mrs. Parks explained to them that they should not look for the word they know. They were expected to pick the word on top and match it with the picture. She then, turned to me and said, “Always competing.”
According to Mrs. Rogers, Sally seems easily frustrated with Bintou. She sometimes wants to over-help and that sometimes irritates Bintou. She [Sally] is almost too quick to relax. In a way, it’s ok because, she is gaining the confidence. It’s my job to make sure that she is not over-powering. . . . There is usually no trouble during the girls during class. Bintou is not thinking, “I have been here two years, why am I not doing much to progress?”

Sally’s isolation from social interaction apparently led to her attempt to assert academic competencies over Bintou. She found out in her ESL classrooms that although she was not fluent in English, she was doing better than Bintou. That knowledge boosted her self-confidence, but also led her to engage in a constant struggle to prove that she was better. Even though Mrs. Rogers did not think that lagging behind Sally mattered to Bintou, I do believe that it did. The competition between the two girls was frustrating to Bintou who had reacted through a total lack of connection with Sally. It has impeded any form of social interaction between them.

My observations of the interaction between the three African girls were very brief. The only time I saw them together outside the classroom, they were walking together and talking to each other. Then, a third girl joined them they all walked away towards the playground, leaving Sally behind all by herself. In their classroom, they were all seated in the back of the classroom on the same line. If Sally and Carine were seated next to one another, Bintou on the other hand was on the next row. Although they were neighbors, Sally and Carine’s interaction was mostly based on the former asking the latter for her school supplies and also on Carine being the intermediary between Sally and the teacher through her translation services. Sally also often relied on Carine when she wanted to go to the restroom, when she wanted to get a pencil from her backpack, or when she wanted to understand something.

For instance, during a spelling class, Mrs. Parks dictated spelling words to the students and they spelled the words together orally as a whole group. Sally always tried spelling the
words with them until she was stuck with one letter. She turned to me and asked in French what she should do if her spelling was wrong. I told her she should ask her teacher. She then called Carine, who had moved from her seat, and asked her in Lingali. Carine came towards her, said something in Lingala and with her pencil, put check marks at her spelling words.

Another example was when Sally once showed a handout about “caves” to Carine during class, asking her what it was in Lingala. Carine responded to her and Sally asked another question, to which Carine said, “I don’t know.” According to Mrs. Parks, Carine did not always want to be the translator and that made Sally feel left out. She also added that Carine was often immature, forgot that Sally did not speak English, and always wanted to interact with the other girls. Ms. Li, on the other hand, argued that,

It’s been a difficult situation for Sally because we anticipated that because she (Carine) had to be the “teacher,” her teacher putting her in the role of what an adult interpreter would do, she is frustrated with that. She was very willing to help. I’ve had students who I asked to help; they said no they don’t wanna do it. They wanna speak English only. She [Carine] really . . . she wants to be a kindergarten teacher so she has a nurturing teacher’s side already. But I think that it becomes some sort of a burden. And they had some things—we’ve mediated at recess about things that are misinterpreted. Carine is frustrated having to translate everything to Sally and Sally is frustrated because she doesn’t understand. These are things we knew were going to happen but you know it’s better to have something especially for Sally.

As Ms. Li argued above, Sally’s dependence on Carine for interactions with her teachers and peers was a burden to the latter and frustrated the two of them. Although Carine was often willing to do the translation, it did create a gap between the two girls, as one of them was perceived as needy and/or inferior, and the other one as privileged, but resistant to the idea of sharing her privilege. Another point is Ms. Li’s discussion of Carine’s nurturing self. Ms. Li’s statement has genderized the teaching profession by making a connection between nurturing and

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2 Lingala is a language commonly spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
teaching, making Carine, a perfect candidate for it. As a matter fact, Grant & Sleeter (2005) discuss that school curricula and materials rarely showed men in a nurturing role.

As for Carine and Bintou, they displayed signs of friendship during my observation. The two of them were always together with two other African American girls. According to Mrs. Parks, the two girls got along very well. Ms. Li pointed out that, “Carine and Bintou have been pretty physical with each other, which is kind of interesting, but affectionate, laughing.” She then added,

She [Carine] loves to have friends around her; she chooses partner activities when given a choice. They [Carine and Bintou] have a good relationship. I don’t know what draws them together. I think she is friendly with different groups of people. At the beginning of the year, I had her working in a group with two boys. She was friendly with them, too. But she doesn’t prefer being with boys. She is pretty much a girly girl. She likes shopping you know, girly things.

Mrs. Parks also made a similar argument and noted,

She [Carine] and Jenn (an African American girl in the classroom) play a lot. Whenever there is partnership, they are partners. Jenn is quiet and Carine is loud. They ride the same bus. They both... Jenn goes to her special education services and Carine goes to her ESL. They got that kind of connection where they both leave the classroom. You know both Bintou and Jenn are very “no nonsense” and Carine is completely nonsense. Those two [Bintou and Jenn]... they are pretty serious and they have fun, but they are serious and they kind of help keep Carine rounded.

On the other hand, according to Mrs. Rogers, Sally is socially,

a little bit behind fifth grade, but academically... I attribute it to fifth grade. I think they are going through puberty, they are going to middle school. They are in a very different place right now. She [Sally] seems more like a second or third grader.

Mrs. Parks added that she,

is more socially immature than the other kids. The kids in our schools are... a lot of them, come from difficult home, challenging background. Most of this class are like, free or reduced lunch. There is like, 5 out of 23 who are not. They come from different backgrounds, they have more independence, they do what they want. I think Sally is sheltered. She has her older brothers, and they protect her a lot. So, she comes to school where most of the students are more sexually aware, physically more mature than she is. And so she kind of... like Babies and she is still more naïve than the other kids. Even
Carine, there is a difference between current Carine and . . . She’s been here longer and you can tell she is more aware of these things. [. . .] I think being the U.S. probably changed her in the fact that . . . and I am not sure . . . but even Bintou is different from when she came. I just feel that these children are more aware and more advanced but they are too immature to handle the knowledge they have.

The statements above were based on the teachers’ appreciation of their relationships with their peers. It refers to the students’ cultural identity. As Bintou and Carine had been living in the U.S. for 2 or 3 years, they developed awareness to their adolescent female identity that drew them together as friend and also informed their relationship with their peers. Sally, however, was “immature,” liked “Barbies,” which means that she was still at a stage of childhood and had not yet crossed the border that separates her from her awareness of her adolescent female identity.

Besides, Carine and Bintou’s association with African American girls was motivated not only by racial identification, but also by a similar struggle for empowerment. The two girls Carine and Bintou spent their recess time with were both in special education classes and often left mainstream class just like Bintou and Carine for other instructions. Besides, as Mrs. Parks pointed out, the majority of the students in the classroom received free or reduced lunch at school, including the Bintou, Carine, and their two friends. All of these commonalities create connections between the African girls and their African American friends (Rong & Flitchett, 2008).

The friendship between the two girls and the African American girls was also motivated by a “community of life style, media, and school related factors” (Grant & Sleeter, 1986, p. 195). Carine, Bintou, and their two friends loved to talk about similar things such as shopping and boys. As Ms. Li pointed out, Carine is a “girly girl. She likes shopping you know girly things.” Carine and Bintou have had the time to accommodate themselves to a certain lifestyle, that of American girls of their age. Their adaptation of the new lifestyle has reinforced their gender
identity giving them a pass towards an easier acceptance into their classroom. Sally on the other hand had a difficult time interacting with her peers. She had not yet adopted the lifestyle of her peers; according to Mrs. Parks, she was “sheltered,” she “kind of liked Barbie,” she was “naïve.” All of these characteristics put Sally “behind socially.” Her lack of awareness about her sexual and physical self limited her interaction with her peers and contributed to her marginalization in the classroom.

Sally2 was the only African student in her classroom. A significant difference between Sally and Sally2 was that the latter came back to school fluent in conversational English. She told me that she went to summer school and loved it. According to her, she had many friends and she thought summer school was a lot of fun. Mrs. Parks2 also noted that summer school had a positive effect on her language abilities, “She was in the same class with students who like her, were in the process of acquiring the English language and I think that made it easier for her to gain some confidence.”

During my visits, I often saw Sally2 interact with the other students of the class with no distinction of gender. When the high school band visited the school, for instance, all the students walked to the outdoor playground were the band played the music. Sally and two other girls were first of all standing next to each other and leaning on each other. Then, they started dancing and laughing out loud. Another example was given by Mrs. Li when the fifth grade students took a walk to the high school. Mrs. Li stated that,

For some reasons she was late for school and her parent dropped her off on our way to the high school. As soon as her friends saw her getting out of the car, they stopped and started calling up her name and clapping for her. When she joined the group, she gave a “high-5” to some of the students and we continued our walk to the high school.

Mrs. Parks2 argued that Sally2 had many more friends than the previous year, and she attributed this change not only to the higher level of her English language skills, but also to the fact that she
had matured. She argued that Sally was new and overwhelmed by everything the previous year.

She added that although Sally2 was doing better,

> It was not easy at first. You know, when they [the students] were in fourth grade, they saw her [Sally2] in fifth grade. And now that they moved to fifth grade, she was still there. They did not understand it at first, but they quickly accepted her.

Sally2 argued that the students in her class are different from the ones from the previous year.

> “They don’t make fun of me. They always want to talk with me and I like that.”

During my visits, I did observe that Sally2 participated in classroom activities more than she did the previous year. She was often paired up with her peers for reading and writing activities and during instruction; although I did not observe Mrs. Parks2 call upon her, she often raised her hand. Besides, I saw the two of them having a one-on-one conversation usually initiated by Sally2 whenever she had a question or sometimes when Mrs. Parks2 needed to give her feedback on her assignments. Besides, when I examined her writing notebook, I noticed that Sally2 and Mrs. Parks2 once interacted through her writing. Please find below the writing conversation between them.

**Figure 3.** Writing conversation between Sally2 and Mrs. Parks2.
The two writing samples reveal the interaction between Mrs. Parks2 and Sally2. By writing back to her, Mrs. Parks2 established a relationship with Sally2 and made herself accessible to her. The writing connection contributed to boost her self-confidence, which in turn could participate favorably to her literacy development. To be able to converse with Mrs. Parks2, Sally2 had to read the book and then write about it using her vocabulary and spelling knowledge. Sally2 had acquired communicative literacy skills that allowed her to converse with her teacher about her readings. By responding to her letter, Mrs. Parks2 enhanced her self confidence and unveiled her affirmative view of Sally2’s input (Nieto, 2002).

Mrs. Clark, Sally2’s ESL teacher expressed having a different situation in her class. She described Sally2 as being distant from everybody in her class including the three other students in her class who were Koreans. According to her, Sally2 mentioned at several instances, that her peers made fun of her. Mrs. Clark revealed that she thought that although the three Korean students had the Korean language in common and even often used it, she did not necessarily think that they were talking about her. She said “I think that she just feels isolated because there is nobody in the class she can identify herself to.” As for Sally2, she discussed that sometimes her ESL peers spoke in Korean and then laughed, looking at her. She also added that she did not like going to ESL because she did not have any friends there. In fact, Mrs. Clark2 expressed her desire to spend more time in her mainstream classroom. After a conversation with Mrs. Parks2, her mainstream teacher, they decided that she was fluent enough in English to understand the content knowledge being taught in class. As a result, Sally2 went to ESL once a day for 40 minutes instead of twice a day.
Summary

To sum up, this chapter addressed the challenges faced by African students in the classroom, their teachers’ perception of those challenges and the nature of the relationship between the students and their peers. The findings suggest the challenges include a constant search for attention, a low self-confidence expressed through their apparent resistance to classroom activities, and an exclusion from content learning due to language limitation. The challenges also include the low motivation and/or lack of interest of students with limited language fluency in classroom activities, the low expectation of their teachers, as well as the lack of collaboration between their ESL and their mainstream teachers. Those challenges were, however, understood by their teachers along the lines of language deficiency, behavioral issues, and lack of parental involvement. Finally, the interaction between the children and their peers was unveiled through popular culture, language fluency, and gender identity. The interaction also sometimes took the form of written communication as it was the case between Mrs. Parks2 and Sally2.
Chapter 5

Instructional Strategies

In this chapter, I discuss the instructional strategies used by mainstream teachers in their classrooms in response to their students’ needs and how those instructional efforts are inclusive or not of the presence of immigrant students in classrooms. The chapter addresses the following questions: What is the nature of teachers’ instructional efforts in response to students’ needs and how are those efforts influenced by the presence of African immigrant students in the classroom? How do children participate in teachers’ planned lessons? The data displayed was collected through the observation of mainstream classroom, individual interviews with teachers, and informal conversation with teachers and students. As I mentioned in the methodology section, I observed the kindergarten and the fifth grade classroom in the spring of 2010. However, since one of the immigrant students (Sally) repeated the fifth grade with the same teacher, I also observed Mrs. Parks’ (2010-2011 school year) fifth grade in the fall of 2010. To avoid any confusion, I will refer to Mrs. Parks and Sally in the fall of 2010 as Mrs. Parks 2 and Sally 2. In this section, I discuss the typical day of each of the three classes, kindergarten, fifth grade and fifth grade 2.

Typical Day in the Kindergarten Classroom

The school bell usually rang at 7:50. When I walked into the classroom at 7:55 everyday, the students were all seated on their chairs. There were three rectangular tables with eight chairs surrounding each one of them. One chair was never used because of the number of the students in the classroom (23). As mentioned in the methodology section, there were four black students (two of whom were African American girls and the other two, Yaya and Rokie). The schedule
for the day was written on the board right in front of the students as follows: reading, snack, calendar, PE, writing, lunch, silent reading, making meaning, words their way, choice time, social studies. Right on top of the board, were alphabet letters and on top of those were different colors. Besides the area occupied by the rectangular tables, the classroom was divided into several other sections, in the very back was the teacher’s desk, next to that was a circular table with five chairs surrounding it. At the entrance of the room was another circular table with the same number of chairs with a small library with books classified into categories behind it. Then, there was the carpet area separated from the rest of the room by book shelves and finally, the computer area that contained two computers.

When I walked in at 7:55 am, the students were all busy drawing. At 8:02, the teacher interrupted them and asked them to move to the carpet area where they discussed the jobs for the week which were: library, lunch, basket, snack, table captain, folder. Mrs. Brian called the students by their names and asked them to pick their job.

The ESL teacher walked into the room at 8:20 and both Yaya and Rokie, along with a boy from Mexico followed her right in the middle of the discussion on the carpet. They were back at 9:00 a.m. when their peers were at workshop time. During workshop time, the students were divided in small groups of four or five occupying the different sections of the room I discussed earlier. The three students joined their respective groups and kept themselves occupied. For instance, on Yaya’s table, the students were drawing. He got a sheet of paper from the table and started drawing a “bakungan.”

The teacher was seated at one of the rectangular tables, initially occupied by the students, having a one-on-one interaction with a student, who was reading a book. About 5 minutes after Yaya and Rokie walked in, she said, “will you please

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3 A character from a TV show called BEN 10
be quiet, I cannot hear Sam.” The students stopped talking momentarily. Then, at 9:15 am, she said “change of activity,” and all the students cleaned up the table they were using and moved to another table and activity. For example, Yaya moved to the carpet area where he selected a book for reading, while Rokie moved from using the computers to a circular desk where she drew a flower.

9:30 a.m. Mrs. Brian informed the class that it was center time. They all cleaned up their tables and moved to the carpet where they sat down on carpet facing their teacher seated on a chair. Then, the class discussed the calendar and the weather.

What is the name of the month that we are in now? We are in a new month.

S1(Student 1): May.

T (teacher): it’s May. And Saturday, was the very first day of May. So Saturday was the 1st. We call it a special day. Do you know what we call the 1st of May, Dylan?

Dylan: . . . err. May 1st.

T: You are answering another question. Listen to the one I asked. I want to know what we call the 1st of May, Yaya (Yaya had his hand up).

Yaya: Err . . . (But he does not answer).

T: (to Yaya) you know, I am being happy in calling you but you are being disrespectful right now. I am looking for the name we call May 1st, Neil.

Neil: Mother’s day

T: No but that was very close. That is coming up very soon. May 1st is called May Day. Have you ever heard that before?

Students: No.

T: Yea, every May 1st, we call that May Day. And lots of time, moms get nice flower for May Day. And sometimes kids make baskets. When it’s during school I normally make my students do that. But since it was the week end, we didn’t do that. So, it’s called May day. It was a special day. And Sunday was May the what, Ian?

Ian: Mmm . . . second.
T: 2nd. Yesterday was Sunday May the 2\textsuperscript{nd}, and today is what? Monday May the what, Ethan?

Ethan: Third.

T: Third, very good. And tomorrow will be Tuesday, May the what? Mindy.

Mindy: Fourth.

T: Fourth.

As I was listening to the conversation between Mrs. Brian and her students, I could not stop thinking about May Day. I had never heard about it before, and apparently neither did the students in the classroom. I was hoping Mrs. Brian would say more about May Day. What does it stand for? What is celebrated on that day? I started wondering if the students would remember May Day and asked a couple of them the following day about May 1\textsuperscript{st}. But my questions remained unanswered. I referred them to their conversation with Mrs. Brian about May Day the previous day. One of them said “oh that, I don’t know.” Not only did Mrs. Brian assume that all her students would know about it, it also denied the information to those of her students who were not familiar with it. Following Ladson-Billings’ (2007) argument, Mrs. Brian might not have believed in her students’ abilities or in the necessity for them to learn that information.

T: Right now, I need all boys to stand up today. All boys stand up.

The boys stood up and then, the teacher started counting one boy, two boys up to 13 boys and said “13 boys this morning. She then asked them “how many clips did we have for boys yesterday\textsuperscript{4}?" Together, they counted up to 15 clips from the previous day. She then asked them “how many are we taking off?” A student said two. And she removed the two clips; and they all counted the remaining clips together. Afterwards she asked the girls to stand up, and she counted

\textsuperscript{4} Every morning the teacher counted the number of students in the classroom and put clips on the board that represented the number of boys and girls. If there were 10 boys and 8 girls present, she had 10 clips under boys and 8 clips under girls
one girl, two girls up to seven girls. Then, she counted the clips for girls with students up to six and asked them, “what do I have to do to make it 7?”

The students raise their hands and she called one of them who said add “one.” The teacher responded, “You are doing a really good job today.” She added 1 clip and said “let’s check and see if she is right” and they all counted together 1, 2, 3, 7.

T: So we have more girls or boys today?

Students: (in chorus) More boys.

T: Thank you; we have more boys. How many more boys than girls do we have?

She called the name of a student, who said five. She said “good guessing. But let’s count.” They counted the difference from 1 to 6, and she said “you were very close.”

Yaya was moving and his head turned towards his back.

T: Yaya, you are not showing that you are listening. So if we have 13 boys and seven girls, how many children do we have today?

She called the name of a boy who said 14, another one said 16. The next one said 20 and so did all the other students in the classroom she named afterwards. They then counted all the clips together and found 20.

T: So everybody knows we are 23 and when we counted, we had 20. How many are we missing?

S2: Three.

T: Alright. Ok, look at your weather today, what is it like?

Students: (in chorus) Sunny

T: yes! And when you came in, it was probably cool, but it is going to be something else. What is it going to be?

Students: Hot.
T: Yes, it gonna be hot. I’m hoping that it’s gonna be hot outside but not inside. So what do we have the most of so far in May?

She called the name of a student who talked in a very low voice (but there is noise in the room). Then, she said to the class “you know what, I can’t hear him because you are talking.”

S: Sun.

T: You right. What do we have the least of so far in May? Look at the weather chart.

S1: Snowy, rainy and cloudy.

T: Thank you. Snowy, rainy and cloudy.

Yaya, that’s a warning. Turn around all the way. Why do you have to keep talking? That’s a warning for you. It’s not your turn to talk.

Counting the number of students and talking about the weather was a daily routine for the class. It not only gave the students the vocabulary to talk about the weather, but also allowed them to practice their mathematic skills. The language used was sometimes complex and not easily accessible to English language learners (Harklau, 1994; Valdes, 1998). Those were sentences like “How many more boys than girls do we have?” or “What do we have the least of so far in May?” Besides, the discussion was led by the teacher and requested short answers. That reduced the interaction and limited the students’ opportunity to practice their communication strategies (Harklau, 1994).

The class continued as follows

T: Ok, I am going to say a pair of words, and you are going to repeat them.

Every time she said the following pair of words, the students repeated after her: scrub/rub, night/flight, sprinkle/wrinkle, dream/scream.

T: What do you know about those words?

A few students had their hands up; she named one of them who said “rhymes.”

T: They rhyme.
During the whole time, Yaya was always moving his body or whispering into his friends’ ears. He also always had his hand up every time Mrs. Brian asked a question. As for Rokie, she was always seated with her legs crossed and her eyes directed towards Mrs. Brian. She did not volunteer to answer any of the questions the teacher asked. A conversation with the two students suggested that Yaya was familiar with the words scrub/rub, night/flight, and dream/scream but had no idea what sprinkle/wrinkle meant; most of those words were, however, new to Rokie. Unfortunately, the words were not explained. There was an assumption that all the students knew the words, and that minimized the significance of vocabulary in second language teaching (Garcia & Godina, 2004).

11:00 a.m. Still on the carpet, Mrs. Brian brought in a small mobile white board, called up a student, and asked him to say anything he wanted.

S: I went to Puerto Rico for the week end.

T: All right! I went to Puerto Rico for the week end and I will help you spell Puerto Rico. She spelled Puerto Rico for him, noting that he should put it in capital letter; then she said “thank you to those of you who are paying attention.”

T: Ok what did you do when you went to Puerto Rico?

S: Snorkeling.

T. We went snorkeling. All right, can you write the “we” first. Right! we . . . went . . .

(To Yaya) Yaya, hand to yourself.

She then took the marker and wrote snorkeling, gave it back to him, said don’t forget the punctuation, and the student put a period at the end.

T: I need someone to find all the capital letters. All right Mike.

The student went to the board and underlined I P R W

T: Did he find them all?

Students: Yea.
Together with their teacher, the students clapped their hands for their peer who just answered the question.

T: Now, I need someone to find the word that rhyme with “scent.”

A student took marker and circled “went.”

T. He circled “went” is that right?

Students: Yea!

And they all clapped their hands. They did the same thing for words that rhymed with “door” and “do.” Then, still using the same procedure, they circled the word that began like “violin” and the word that ends with /ing/. Mrs. Brian then, told the students that they should go to their seats and write about anything they wanted. She told them they could write about a vacation, about what they did the previous week, or about PE (Physical Education)

Neither Yaya nor Rokie participated in the writing activity. While Rokie was seated quietly with her legs crossed and her arms on them, Yaya had his head down and sometimes turning his head left/right. He finally raised his hand when Mrs. Brian asked for words starting with “v” and/or ending with the “ing,” but he was never asked to give his answer. The main issue in this assignment was the assumption that all the students knew the meaning of the word “snorkeling” or the geographical location of Puerto Rico.

So far, I have resisted a discussion about the African students in the classroom. But as the data suggests, the instruction was exclusive of their presence in the classroom. The class went on as if they had the same level of language fluency with the native students, neglecting to make the new vocabulary accessible to them or to provide them with information apparently known by most students such as Puerto Rico. It, however, appears that Yaya’s presence is mostly noted in the classroom through his attitude. Mrs. Brian was often drawing his attention back to the
classroom. It seems to me that he was negatively perceived by his teacher as a trouble maker (Sleeter, 2007)

During the individual writing assignment, Mrs. Brian, then walked around looking at what the students were doing. Then, she knelt down next to Yaya who just finished drawing and asked him what he was writing; Yaya responded that he wanted to write “avatar.” She used word sounds like /a/ /v/ /t/ to help him write the word, and she moved to another student. Yaya wrote “Avatr eils robots. Avatrs c monsts.”

Mrs. Brian also went towards Rokie and had a similar conversation with her.

T: What are you writing?
Rokie: Butterfly.

T: Ok butterfly, like /b/.
And then Rokie wrote b.

T: There you go. Now u, like umbrella, [ . . . ]. Now /t/ like in television. Remember?
Rokie: Yea (and she added a t).

T: Now /f/ /f/, like fish.
Rokie: /f/ and she wrote it f.

T: Good job! Now /l/ (and Rokie wrote l). /y/ like yoyo?
Rokie: Yes, y.

T: Very good! I like butterfly. Ok, you wanna write something else?
Rokie: Yes. I am playing with my friend.

T: Ok. I (Rokie wrote I) am /a/ like apple.

The exercise continued until Rokie wrote the whole sentence.
This conversation was one of the few times I observed Mrs. Brian interact with Rokie in particular. She often interacted with Yaya, but for the most part, through giving a warning or putting him in time out. In the above conversation, however, she not only encouraged the students to write about their interests, but also helped them spell the words. Mrs. Brian’s approach to the writing assignments was inclusive of the students’ interest, making writing enjoyable activity for her students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002a).

12:00 p.m. The students just got back from lunch. They went straight to the carpet area where Mrs. Brian led them. They sat down on the carpet and Mrs. Brian on her chair. Then, she told the students to stand up because she was going to read Eric Carl’s *Head to Toe* book. While she was reading the book, the class, including herself was moving their body and mimicking the
story. Right after the reading, the students sat down on the carpet, and one of them, an Asian boy, was moving a lot and touched the teacher’s feet several times. Mrs. Brian told him to move away because he was hurting her. But the boy stood up and went towards the teacher, who told him to sit down. The boy however did not sit down, and then Mrs. Brian yelled at him “sit down, sit down, sit down” before he finally sat down; Mrs. Brian responded by sighing. I later learned that that the boy was autistic.

Afterwards, Mrs. Brian read a chapter of Jenny B. for the students. She was seated on her chair, facing the students on the carpet. During her reading, she showed the pages containing pictures to her students and sometimes asked questions that they answered in chorus. Most of the students were responding to the reading through laughs, but others, like Yaya and Rokie were not responding to it. Rokie was always seated quietly and looking towards the teacher, and whenever Mrs. Brian showed a picture, she moved closer to see. Afterwards, I asked Rokie if she understood the story, and she responded “yes.” But, when I asked her to tell me about it, she could not answer. She finally told me that she liked the pictures.

As for Yaya, throughout the reading, he was whispering with his friend from Mexico, until Mrs. Brian called him up and sent him to his desk. He sat down at his desk by himself until the end of the reading. At the end of the reading, Mrs. Brian walked to him and asked him if he knew why he was on time out. He responded yes and said that he was talking during the reading. Mrs. Brian asked him if he understood that it was against the rule and he said, “yes,” before the teacher invited him to join his peers for the rest of class.

The reading was captivating to most of the students in the classroom. It was, however, out of reach for Yaya and Rokie, who reacted to it differently. For Rokie, it was enough to just enjoy the pictures, certainly because she realized that her literacy skills in English were very low.
But for Yaya, who was already using the language fluently, he needed to understand the story. Unfortunately, his limited vocabulary hurdles his comprehension of complex texts (Garcia, 2003). His inability to understand the text was a constant reminder of his difference as he was attempting to fit in the classroom.

12:20 p.m. Mrs. Brian asked the students to take their seats at the rectangular tables. She gave each table a different activity to do. Yaya and Rokie’s table were expected to work on the sound /i/. She gave each of the students on the desk a worksheet with drawings and asked them to color the drawing which name has the /i/ sound. Below is Rokie and Yaya’s worksheet. Rokie colored all the drawings, while Yaya was more selective in his colorings.

![Figure 5. Yaya and Rokie’s worksheets.](image)

During the assignment, Mrs. Brian walked around, looking at what the students were doing. When she got to Rokie’s assignment, she said “good job.” Rokie looked at her and smiled. Rokie’s language challenges transpired from her assignment. Either she did not understand the purpose of the assignment, or she did not know the name of any of the objects on the sheet in
order to identify the /i/ sound. Knowing that she had some challenges, it would have been helpful if her teacher made the message more explicit to her level of fluency. However, when she walked around and saw her work, she praised her instead of pointing out her weaknesses. In so doing, she created a “positive exchange” between them, remediating to possible feelings of anxiety and frustration (Rivera Maulucci, 2008).

Then, Mrs. Brian gave them another worksheet with drawings. She asked them to circle the drawings which have names that rhyme. On the first row, there were drawings of a hen, the number 10, and a person running; and on the second row, there were drawings of a cat, a bat, and a pan. Rokie, first circled, and later crossed all the drawings. Then, Mrs. Brian squatted next to her and showed her the picture of the hen and asked her what it was. She said “a hen.” Mrs. Brian said “right. How about this one (showing her the number 10)”? Rokie responded, “10.” Mrs. Brian repeated, “10. What is this one then?” Rokie said “run.” Mrs. Brian said “ok” and wrote each of these names below the drawing before telling her to circle the drawings that rhyme. She then, circled 10 and hen. They did the same exercise for cat, bat, pan. When Mrs. Brian finally checked on Yaya’s worksheet, he had already finished his assignment. She took a quick look at it and said “good job!” before moving to someone else.

In the above description, Mrs. Brian was aware of Rokie’s challenges. Unlike the previous assignment on the /i/ sound, Mrs. Brian implemented inclusive instructional strategies as she made the purpose of the assignment clear and accessible to her. Although Rokie knew the names of the drawings, working one on one with her teacher made the assignment accessible to her and gave her the confidence to do it (Lucas et al., 2008).

1:00 p.m. Mrs. Brian asked the students to assemble on the carpet. When they all sat down on the carpet, she had the following conversation with them.
T: Who knows what the name of the holiday it is today? There is a holiday today.

S1: Celebration something . . .

T: Hahaha! I wish I had a calendar prep for it but I don’t think I do. (to another student) What do you think?

S2: April fool day

T: No we are not even in April.

S3: Mother’s day?

T: No. Mother’s day was on the week end

She showed the students a picture from the book she was holding and said: This is a flag. It’s a flag from Mexico. It’s called Cinco de Mayo; Cinco de Mayo means . . . It’s a number. Who can tell me what number it is in English?

S: Five

T: It’s five. Cinco means 5 and de Mayo means all the month of . . . (with student) May. Cinco de Mayo is a holiday, particularly if you live in the south of the border of Mexico.

We talked about piñatas earlier. What is a piñata? She calls a student who did not react.

S: It is like a paper machine thing, you hit with a stick it explodes and there is lots of candy coming out of it.

T: So this is a victory of Mexico. Mexico won a war, and it ended on the fifth of May. So, it’s a big celebration in Mexico. So if you happen to drive around Champaign, particularly in Mexican restaurants, because a lot of those restaurants are packed on the 5th of May with people because a lot of them are celebrating Cinco de Mayo.

S: I been to a Texan place, hun, it’s a Texas restaurant, it’s called . . . and we had peanuts.

T: Ok. What’s that got to do with Cinco de Mayo?

S: Because it’s from Texas

T: No I think what you are confusing is Texas and Mexico. A lot of people living in Texas are from Mexico. And so a lot of people in Texas are celebrating Cinco de Mayo, but I am not sure the restaurant has much to do with it. But there are a lot of Spanish speaking people in Texas. So, that was a good thought.
Then, Mrs. Brian read a book about Cinco de Mayo to the students, showing them the pictures whenever there was any. Why is Cinco de Mayo celebrated? Where is Mexico? The confusion was even voiced by one of the students in the classroom. Unfortunately, it remained un-clarified. Similarly to the assignment on “I went snorkeling in Puerto Rico,” this one also assumed that all the students knew about Mexico and Cinco de Mayo.

1:30 p.m. Mrs. Brian told her students it was choice time. She told them they could stay on the carpet and play with blocks or read a book, or they could go to any of the circular tables to write or to draw anything they wanted. Rokie and Yaya both joined their groups on circular tables and were engaged in drawing. The picture on the left is Rokie’s drawing and the one on the right is Yaya’s drawing.

![Rokie's and Yaya's drawings](image)

I got to go play games

Flower is pink. She likes pink

*Figure 6. Rokie’s and Yaya’s drawings.*
Choice time lasted for twenty minutes before Mrs. Brian asked the students to clean up. They put the crayons and pencils back on the baskets, and put the baskets away on the shelves next to their tables. Then a female voice announced that the school busses had arrived for pick up. Mrs. Brian asked the students to get their backpacks and line up on the hallways while waiting for their turn to go to the bus. At 2:00 p.m. the hallway was full of students, and they all walked in line outside towards the school busses under the surveillance of their teachers.

From their writing artifacts, it appeared that Rokie and Yaya had different interests. They both displayed interest in popular culture; however, those interests revolved around gender specific activities. The games Yaya played were often related to television shows (like Pokemon, Ben 10, and Bakugan) very much appreciated by boys. While Rokie was locked up around the pink color and flowers often associated with the female gender. However, although the students often had the opportunity to express their interest through their writings, those interests remained unaddressed in the classroom.

**Typical Day in the Fifth Grade Classroom**

The fifth grade class was a large rectangular room with a round small table at the entrance (always used by the teacher), a set of four computers next to the small table, a big teacher’s desk and a computer on top of it in the back of the room, and finally twenty three student desks and chairs in the middle. There were two boards in the classroom, one facing the students, and the second one behind the small round table used by the teacher at the entrance of the room. On the board behind the teacher, there was the daily schedule of the class as well as the homework for the day. The board facing the students was sometimes used for writing during instruction. However, the teacher used an over head for instruction most of the time. Behind the
students and on top of the windows, there were posters of volley ball, soccer, and football team and below those were artifacts of students’ work. On the information board right behind the teacher’s desk and on the right hand side of the students’ desk were artifacts made by the students about the holocaust.

Identically to the previous section, I here discuss a typical day in Mrs. Parks’ fifth grade classroom in the spring of 2010. A typical day’s schedule was specials (P.E, music, or arts)— spelling, math, language arts, writing, lunch, science, read aloud, social studies, jobs. During specials, the students left the classroom for music or physical education, but stayed in for arts. Specials usually started at 7:55 and ended at 8:35.

I walked into the classroom at 8:00 a.m. The students had just left for P.E. (physical education) class. The teacher was seated at the small round table at the entrance of the room. I greeted her, and we had a small conversation before I walked to the back of the room where I got a chair, sat down, grabbed my notebook and a pen from my backpack. While I was doing that, Mrs. Parks, still seated at the entrance of the room sighed twice. Then, she walked away, came back, sighed again. I asked her if she was fine. She responded that she was sick and had to stay home the previous day. However, the school called her back to work because the students made fun of the substitute teacher who refused to teach the class again. According to her, the substitute teacher was an Asian lady who spoke English with an accent. Every time she talked to the class, the students laughed, and it made it difficult for her to work. Mrs. Parks also added that it was the second time they had such a behavior. She said that they once had a substitute teacher who had Tourette’s syndrome, and the students made fun of him throughout the day. Then, she added, “I really need to have a conversation with them about that. This kind of behavior is unacceptable.”
The students walked back to the classroom from specials. As soon as they got in, Sally and Bintou left for ESL class. Mrs. Parks then started the following conversation with the rest of the class.

Teacher (T): what did we learn? How did the holocaust all start?

S1: Hitler didn’t like the Jews.

T: Right. What is it that he didn’t like about them?

S2: Because they were different.

T: Right. They were different. They worshiped God differently, they believed differently. Ok, and so it was easy for him to pick on them right? They had different physical features, they looked different right? Think about civil right movement. What were the things that people were segregated for?

S3: Their skin color.

T: Yes! Their color, right? Can you do anything about the color of your skin?

Ss: No.

T: No you can’t. Can you do anything about your family history?

Ss: No.

T: No. Your parents are who your parents are. Your grand parents are who your grandparents are. There is nothing you can do to change that. It is what it is right?

Ss: Yes.

T: People were treated differently because of how they looked. When the Japanese attacked the United States during World War II, the government started persecuting Asians, anybody Asian, not just Japanese. Was it fair, even if they were born in America?

No response.

T: So I heard you were making fun of her [substitute teacher] because of her accent? I was so disappointed to hear that. It looks like little kids stuff, you know. If you can’t say something right, would you like anybody to make fun of you? If you can’t do anything right, should I make fun of you? I just felt so sad that you did that. That’s how the holocaust started. That’s how genocides happen. They always start with little things. Something little and nobody says anything about it, and they let it go. All it would have taken was for one of you to say “hey, it’s not right.”
In the conversation above, Mrs. Parks was disappointed in her students. It was obvious that the class discussed issues relevant to discrimination on a racial and cultural basis. Mrs. Parks referred to their common knowledge about the persecution of Asians, the holocaust, and even civil rights movements. The teacher controlled the conversation; she had a message to pass on the students, and she went straight to the point. She challenged her students’ prejudices about non-native speakers. Mrs. Parks related the students to historical accounts of persecution and segregations, putting an emphasis on difference (Sleeter & Grant, 2007). It could have been more beneficial, if she attempted to establish a conversation with the students about their understanding of difference and its implication. However, because she sounded angry and disappointed, she imposed a view on them. Such a view could have an effect on future encounters in the classroom. However, the extent to which it shapes the understanding of the students is yet to be addressed.

8:45 a.m. I stayed in the mainstream classroom because Carine was still in there. They had a class on spelling. The teacher asked the class to open their spelling books to 137-138. They took their spelling book from under their desk, opened it, and tore the needed pages from it. On the worksheet they tore were sentences with dots. The students were expected to fill the blank with the list of words mentioned. Carine was seated in the back of the room alone because her neighbors, Sally and Bintou were out for ESL, and her other neighbor (an African American boy) moved away to an empty table up front. During the assignment, one of the students had a conversation with the teacher about the use of this kind of assignment. Mrs. Parks responded that she was teaching them to fish and that will help them later. She also added that understanding the word will help them spell it right. Another student asked if that was what they would be doing in middle school, and she responded that they would probably not have to deal with words like they
do in fifth grade, but they would still have spelling in a different format. The conversation continued between Mrs. Parks and the class for about 2 to 3 minutes. She then, left the room briefly for 3 minutes without saying a word. As soon as she left the room, the class became noisy. A couple of students were up and moving around. Carine got a snack under her desk and started eating it while having a conversation with her neighbor, who just walked back to his seat. As soon as Mrs. Parks walked back to the room, the class became very quiet and the students went back to their assignment.

The spelling assignment was based on the correlation between words and their meaning. In their discussion about orthographic depth, Ellis et al. (2004) argued that the English language had opaque orthographies, which are not very consistent, as different letters may sound differently. Learners of such languages have to process words through their meaning. From the conversation between Mrs. Parks and her students, it appeared that the latter were not aware of the purpose of the activity. It took the students’ asking for Mrs. Parks to tell them that familiarity with the meaning could facilitate spelling. The conversation revealed the lack of communication between the two parties about classroom activities. While one party was in possession of the knowledge and made decisions about sharing it, the other showed resistance to an activity viewed as purposeless.

Afterwards, Mrs. Parks informed the class that they were going to have a spelling test. Sally and Bintou walked back into class when their peers were about to start the spelling test. One of the students distributed sheets for the spelling test. The test included 17 words. After pronouncing every spelling word, teacher gave students the meaning of the word and an example of a sentence in which the word is used. When students did not hear a word, they asked, and she
repeated it. Below are examples of the spelling words and how they were used in sentences during the spelling test.

**Incorporate:** In order for me to incorporate your writing into social studies, I have to read your writing.

**Pedicure:** I’m hoping to get a pedicure for mother’s day.

**Decapitate:** Decapitate someone is to take off their head. You can do that verbally and not physically.

**Captivity:** Animals kept in captivity cannot be released.

**Corporeal:** Corporeal punishment is when you are spanked.

**Captivate:** Dr. . . . was able to captivate your attention with her discussion.

**Capital:** In order to own your business, you must have capital, which means money.

At the end of the test, she wrote the following words on the projector and asked students for their meaning: cap, ped, corp. When she said “cap,” a few students said in chorus “seize.” Then she said “ped” and they responded “foot” and finally, “corp” and the students said “body.” Mrs. Parks then said the first word and asked the students how it was spelled. The students spelled the word orally and in chorus while writing them down. Sally and Carine were engaged in that activity, while Bintou, who had not done the spelling test, was quiet the whole time. Sally tried spelling the words with the class, but she got most of them wrong. When the class spelled “decapitate” she said “yes” while she had in fact spelled it “decapeted.” She turned to me and asked me whether or not she should cross the wrong spelling words. I told her I didn’t know, but that she had to ask her teacher. She then asked me to ask her teacher. And I responded that maybe she should try asking herself, and I would help her if she could not do it. She then turned to Carine and talked to her in Lingala. Carine talked back to her, took her pencil and put a check mark at all the words Sally had spelled. Sally was not confident about her communicative skills. She often relied on Carine to mediate her conversation with Mrs. Parks. Relying on Carine
rendered her dependent upon her peer and did not favor any form of agency. During the spelling activity however, she demonstrated her literacy knowledge in French by taking advantage of cognates between English and French to spell the word “decapitate” (Templaton, 2009).

An important point to note here was my role as a researcher. Although I was in the classroom as a researcher, I was a person of reference for Sally. She knew I spoke both English and French and did not hesitate to ask me questions in French. If I was able to answer her questions at some instances, I also tried to push her towards her teacher. However, any time I directed her towards her teacher, she rather talked to Carine. Sally was convinced that her language skills could not allow her to converse with Mrs. Parks. She, however, always used the same limited English language knowledge to converse with Mrs. Rogers, her ESL teacher. The difference between the two teachers was that while Mrs. Rogers always engaged her into conversations in English, Mrs. Park rarely spoke to her, and always relied on Carine’s translation the few times she talked to her. She then, failed to be a communicator, an educator, and an agent of socialization vis-à-vis Sally (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2002).

9:05 a.m. Mrs. Parks gave the students 2 minutes to finish correcting their spelling test. Then, she asked them to open their math textbook on page 439 and start working on the assignment. She then moved the projector forward and switched it on. While the students were working quietly on their math assignment, she left the room. And then the students started talking with one another, and when she came back to the room a minute later, the students stopped talking and went back to their work. Carine walked to the counter top in the back of the room, got a calculator from a basket full of calculators and walked back to the seat next to her friend. Five minutes after they started the assignment, Mrs. Parks walked around giving away the math assignments the students had submitted the previous day, and then she came back to her
projector and read what was written for the class. “Four million people in the U.S. play flute and 1.7 million play harmonica. What is ratio of flute to harmonica players?” A student raised her hand and responded 4:17. Then, Mrs. Parks wrote 4:17 on the projector. She proceeded and read the next one. “Drum players, 3 million and 21 million piano players.” Another student raised his hand and gave 3:21 or 1:7, and the teacher wrote it down again. They did the same thing for 3 million violin players and 3 million saxophone players and the answer was 3:3 or 1:1. During the assignment, Carine was constantly erasing what she had written on her math book and writing down what Mrs. Parks was putting down on the projector. The exercise continued with 10 saxophonists and 15 clarinets.

At this point, Carine was lying on her desk, erasing and writing down the answers given by her peers. During the math class, Sally took out a sheet of paper, folded it into two and wrote her ESL teacher’s name in the middle of the first page with the sign @ all over the page. Then, she turned to the second page and wrote happy birthday Mrs. Rogers, with question marks all over the page. She then turned to me and said she was making this for her ESL teacher because it was her birthday. When she finished working on her birthday card, she took out a book under her desk, looked at it and put it back. Then, she took out a handout on “caves.” She moved towards me and asked me, “What is this?” I looked at it and responded I was not sure, and I suggested that she asked her teacher after the class. She then went back to her seat, and asked Carine, who was writing down the answers being written by Mrs. Parks. The two girls had a short conversation in Lingala, and Sally put her handout back under her desk.

The discussion on ratio assumed that all the students knew and had understood the process. How do they get the results? Although it was apparent that the process had been covered in a previous lesson, it seemed to me that not all the students understood or remembered it. The
class had assumed that everybody was familiar with it and therefore, excluded the students who were struggling (both native and none native students) from instruction. A reminder would possibly have implied the use of instructional adaptations that would be more inclusive to all the students in the classroom (Lucas et al., 2008).

As for Bintou, she was very quiet during the class. She was often seated in an upright position with her left hand supporting her head and her eyes wandering around the class. Not only did she not do or participate in the assignment, but she also did not engage in anything else in the process, until Carine moved next to her, and the two girls had a short conversation before Carine moved back to her sit. After the class, I had a short conversation with the three students, and Carine said “I hate math.” When I asked her why, she responded “I don’t know. It’s too hard.” As for Sally, she told me in French, “J’aime les maths mais je ne sais ce qu’ils font. Je ne comprend rien”; translation “I love math but I don’t know what they are doing. I don’t understand anything.” I then asked her why she did not ask the teacher or anybody else in the class what they were doing, and she responded that she did not know how to ask in English. I, however, could not get any answer from Bintou, who responded “I don’t know” whenever I asked her a question.

Not adapting classroom instruction to Carine’s needs convinced her to “hate” math and downgraded her abilities to perform (Harklau, 1994). As for Sally, she was discriminated based on her language skills which according to Nieto (2000), denied her the “privileges, rights, and opportunities enjoyed by other groups” (p. 34). Denying her content knowledge education undermined her possibilities of significant language acquisition (Krashen, 2005).

Another math class had to do with distance between U.S. cities. Mrs. Parks asked the students to use the map of the U.S in their text book to estimate the distance between different
cities. A second teacher joined Mrs. Parks’ class for this activity. During the assignment, Bintou was still copying the answers of the previous class. The second teacher walked to her and told her to take her math book, which she did. Mrs. Parks hung a U.S map on the board and asked a student to circle both San Francisco and Salt Lake City. Then she asked them to measure the distance between the two cities in their textbook. A student said, “It’s 3 inches.” Mrs. Parks responded, “ok, so that’s how many miles?” Another student responded “600 miles.” Mrs. Parks asked “Why? Because one inch equals 200 miles remember?”

At this point, Bintou put away her math book and took out an ESL assignment. Whenever there was an answer written on the board, she put the answer down on her math book. As for Carine, she raised her hand several times and answered some of the questions her teacher asked. One such example is the distance between San Antonio and Buffalo. Carine said that it was 7.25 inches and 1450 miles. Mrs. Parks asked her if she had multiplied 7.25 by 200 and she responded, “Yes.” Then, Mrs. Parks wrote the answer on the overhead.

During the activity, the second teacher walked around and helped the students who were having difficulties doing it. She squatted next to Bintou and asked her where the Arkansas River was. Bintou showed her the river, and then the teacher explained to her that she needed to measure the distance between the beginning point and the ending point of the river. The teacher helped her measure the distance, and she found 6 inches. Then, the teacher moved away, and Bintou continued the activity with measuring Lake Missouri, then Brazos. None of the teachers however, approached Sally, who although she had her math book open, did not participate in the activity. She was mostly occupied going through the different books she had under desk.

**9:20 a.m.** Mrs. Parks informed the class that they will be taking a short walk to the park and come back for their math test. They all walked out and were back about five minutes later.
She asked one of the students to give away the calculators that were inside a basket on her desk. She told the students to make sure that they have their math books and journals ready. She told them that she cannot help them with the test and handed out the test sheets and booklets, and then pencil erasers before she walked to her seat and sat down. She handed the test to everybody in the class except Sally. When her peers were working on the math test, Sally had her head down on her arms crossed on the table and looking at her neighbor, Carine, write her test. From time to time, she took out a book from under her desk, opened it and put it back, or crayons with a sheet of paper, started drawing, and then put them back again. As for Bintou, although she was given the test sheet, she did not really do it. She held her calculator with her left hand and her pencil with the right one and spent the whole test time looking around in the room. Carine was the only one of the three girls who actually worked on her test.

9:30 a.m. Carine put her test sheet aside, took out another worksheet from under her desk, and wrote down a list of spelling words. A student raised his hand, and Mrs. Parks walked towards him. He handed his test sheet to her. Standing by his side, she checked his test, used his calculator, shook her head, put the calculator and the test sheet back on the table, and walked away. She then walked around looking at what the students were doing and apparently comparing their test to a sheet she was holding.

9:40 a.m. Mrs. Parks informed the students that they had 5 more minutes to finish their test. Carine went back to working on her math test, while Mrs. Parks was collecting the tests from those students who had finished. Carine and Bintou were the last students to turn in their tests at 9:48.

Afterwards, I asked Mrs. Parks why Sally did not do the test. She responded that she did not really know Sally’s level in math and did not think she could do it because of the language
barrier. Then she asked me if I would consider giving Sally a math test so that she could have an idea of her abilities. She added that she did not think Bintou knew any math either and requested that I give the math test to the two girls. After I agreed to it, she gave me four sheets of paper, one with one digit additions, one with one digit substraction, one with one digit multiplication, and the last one with one digit division and told me I could take the students out to the hallway for the assessment.

When I told the two girls I was taking them to the hallway for a math assessment, Bintou did not react. Sally, on the other hand, laughed, clapped her hands, and said “yay.” I asked her about her reaction. She responded that she loved math and then she added, looking at Bintou, that “elle va echouer” (’’she will fail’’). I asked her why she said that, and she responded that “elle ne connait rien. Moi je lui explique les choses tout le temps a ESL. Mais quand on est pas a ESL, elle ne veut meme pas me parler.” (’’She does not know anything. I always explain things to her in ESL. But, when we are out of ESL, she does not want to talk to me.’’). Together, we walked to the hallway, found a table with three chairs, and I gave them the sheets one at a time. After 30 minutes, Sally had finished her addition, subtraction, part of her multiplication and told me she did not understand the division. Bintou, on the other hand, had only done half of the addition and did not touch any of the other sheets.

Sally seemed bored in her mainstream classroom. She was longing for an opportunity to demonstrate her abilities and assert the superiority of her academic knowledge vis-à-vis Bintou. Her attitude towards her peer was a reflection of the interaction between her and her teacher. She was frustrated for not being included into instruction and was convinced that proving herself better than Bintou was a way for her to tell her teachers that she was not that limited after all.
**10:00 a.m.** Mrs. Parks asked the students to open their language art books on page 415. She asked Sally to go to the computers and told her to use the headphones to listen to books. Then, she moved the overhead up front and put it on. The assignment was about using quotation marks or underlining to mark the title. She asked the students to take a few minutes to do the assignment in their books. All the students were busy doing the assignment. Bintou, however, did not do it. She was just seated with her elbow on her desk and her hand on her chin. A few minutes later, Mrs. Parks and the students did the assignment together. Bintou wrote the answers down on her book as Mrs. Parks was putting them on the overhead.

The next assignment was “punctuate each title and capitalize the important words.” Again, Mrs. Parks gave the class a few minutes to do it on their own before the whole class worked on it together. Once again, Bintou did not do it and wrote the correct answers produced by her peers. Carine on the other hand participated throughout the assignment. For instance, she raised her hand and said that the following sentence, “someone should watch over me” should be in quotes. She also added that S, W, M should be capitalized in the quote. Her answer was acknowledged by the teacher, who wrote it on the overhead.

Mrs. Parks then gave the class another assignment to be done individually on worksheets that were going to be collected. While the students were working on the worksheet assignment, Sally was still listening to the books on the computer, and Mrs. Parks was back behind her desk handing away math assignments collected the previous day. She called each student’s name, discussed the mistakes they made, and asked them to go back to their seats and correct those mistakes if they were finished with the Language art assignment.

**10:35 a.m.** Sally was still listening to the books on the computer. Some of the stories she listened to were “Little Red Bat” and “Animals Are Sleeping.” She eventually stopped listening.
to the books at 10:45. She removed her headphones and stayed in front of the computer, looking at her peers work on their math assignment. Carine walked to her, they talked in “Lingali” and then, Carine walked to Mrs. Parks and asked if Sally could go back to her seat because she had listened to all the books. Mrs. Parks responded “humm! I guess so.” Carine then reported the answer to Sally, who came back to her seat at 10:53.

The reading activity given to Sally was not guided. She was simply expected to read and be busy. Not being given any specific guidance about the reading made the activity isolated and purposeless. Crawford (2005) discussed guided reading activities as conducive to communication. A communicative approach to reading comprehension would allow students to answer and ask questions about the text and then support the students’ journey towards literacy development (Iddings et al., 2009). The activity given to Sally, however seemed to have one and only one purpose: keep her occupied. The lack of guided activity unraveled once more the low expectation Mrs. Parks had for Sally, given her linguistic abilities in English.

11:00 a.m. The next agenda of the day was writing. Sally and Bintou are often gone for ESL after the writing assignments had started. But they were still in when this activity started. Mrs. Parks often told the rest of the class to write stories of their choice in their journals. During one of the writing class, she asked the students to continue the writing exercise they had started in previous days, in which they wrote about their experiences in first and second grade. Mrs. Parks informed them to continue with 3rd and 4th grade only if they were finished with first and second grade. She sat down on desk at the entrance of the room, and the students took turns presenting their writings to her. During the assignment, Carine asked me to help her spell the word “secretary.” She had already written s-e-c-r. I then gave her the letter e, then, she wrote t-e. I told her it was not “e”; she looked at me and said “a?” I said “yes,” and she finished spelling
the word with r-y. Then, Sally asked me “comment on dit intelligente en Anglais?” (“How do you say ‘intelligente’ in English?”) I responded, “smart.” Then she said “comment on ecrit?” (“How do you spell it?”), and I spelled the word “smart” for her. When she was finished writing her story, she went in line in front of the teacher where Carine was already lined up waiting for Mrs. Parks to read her story. As I discussed in chapter 3 in the role of the researcher, my role in the classroom was not just that of a researcher. As an African researcher who spoke French, the children often saw in me a reference, and a helper. As the discussion above reveals, my involvement with their academic activities only took place at their request.

When Mrs. Parks read Carine’s story, she read it out loud, underlined some misspelled words, asked her the meaning of sentences that she did not understand, and engaged in a conversation about what she discussed in the paper. She did the same thing with all the students who were lined up. But when it came to Sally’s turn, she read it quietly, did not do any correction and did not ask her any question and gave it back to her and said “very nice!” As for Bintou, she simply did not do the assignment. During the assignment, she was seated quietly at her desk and looking at children playing outside on the playground.

The writing assignment was an opportunity for Mrs. Parks and Carine to converse. The teacher read the assignment and demonstrated her interest in it through the establishment of a two-way conversation between her and her student. In the case of Sally, however, the conversation did not take place. Although Mrs. Parks encouraged Sally through her statement “very nice,” she also implied a lack of interest of her writing by not engaging her in a conversation. Such an approach revealed the discrimination against Sally that could frustrate and disempower her (McDonald & Smolen 1995).
And once in a while, Mrs. Parks had the students read their stories to the whole class. One such example is when she asked the students to move their chairs forward towards the board and then told them that they were going to take turn reading their stories. She started by calling Bintou’s name and asked her to read her story. But then, Bintou responded, “what story?” Mrs. Parks responded, “the stories you were supposed to be writing in your journals.” She did not respond, and Mrs. Parks told her to talk to her during lunch time. She then proceeded to call other students who read their stories when Sally and Bintou were leaving for ESL. While Carine read her story for the class, Sally never got to read hers.

Figure 7. Carine’s writing.
Although Mrs. Parks expected Bintou to do the assignment, she never really prompted her to do so. During all my observation sessions, Bintou never showed any sign of working on any of the activities in the classroom. She was, however, never compelled to do so. Mrs. Parks had decided that Bintou was unable to perform well and so found it unnecessary to encourage her participation. However, Bintou did not stay uninvolved with the decisions made by her teacher. She made the conscious decision to be a passive learner in the classroom by not participating in any way in classroom activities. Sally’s decision was a form of resistance discussed by Alpert (1991) as “resistance as conformity.” According to the author, resistance as conformity assumes a “certain degree of conformity to the schooling game” (p. 356).

By resisting through conformity, she took control, and she challenged the imbalance power relationship between her and her teacher (Corson, 2001).
11:45 a.m. Lunch time.

12:15 p.m. When they came back from lunch, Mrs. Parks informed them that they were going to have a conversation about the heart. She moved the overhead forward in front of the students and asked them to tell her what they knew about the heart

T: So tell me, what do you know about the heart? (She called student 1.)

S1: It is inside the body.

T: Yes!! who else? (She called the name of someone else who raised his hand).

S2: It is related to the blood.

T: Alright.

Then Mrs. Parks asked her students to open their book on page 426 where the information about “heart” was. Carine moved away from her desk and sat closer to the board. After sitting there a couple of minutes, she walked to the door and stopped the light. Mrs. Parks asked the students to take their pulse on the hand. She told them not to use their thumb because it has a pulse. She said they should use their index instead. Then, standing at the front of the class, she put her index on her wrist, showed it to the class, and told the students that’s how they should do it. Afterwards, she asked the class to take their pulse behind their ears and put her fingers behind her ears. During the class, Sally was writing a list of spelling words in her notebook. Mrs. Parks called her name and asked her if she had found her pulse. She raised her head, looked at her teacher, nodded her head and continued writing her spelling words. She wrote the same writing words four times.

Then, Mrs. Parks asked for volunteers to read the text on the heart. The students raised their hands (including Carine). She called a name, and the person read the first paragraph and then someone else read the second paragraph. Then, she asked them to find their pulse and count
their heart beats. Sally stopped writing her spelling words and was now reading a book titled Bugs, Bugs, Bugs. Mrs. Parks walked towards her and asked her to take her pulse, showing the position of her fingers. Sally did the same, and Mrs. Parks said “ok!” and walked away.

She asked them their heartbeat by minute, their heart beat in an hour. She asked students how they found out their heartbeat in an hour. One student responded they had to multiply the heartbeat per minute by 60. Mrs. Parks put the operation on the board using her own heartbeat as an example. Carine constantly looked at her neighbors’ textbook and then wrote the answers on hers and also often raised her hand to answer questions. During this lesson, Mrs. Parks tried to involve Sally, who was, however, resistant to the idea. One issue here might be that being involved in the classroom activities was new to her. She was usually left to herself and did not understand that she was being for once included into instruction. Another issue, however, was comprehension. Although Mrs. Parks showed her where to put her finger, the purpose was not obvious. There was no instance at which Mrs. Parks adapted the instruction at her linguistic level. Valdes (1998) made a similar argument and pointed out that teachers (both ESL and mainstream teachers) do not adjust the language of instruction to immigrant newcomers.

During another science class, the teacher asked the students to open their Health book on page 316. Then, she called up individual student’s names and asked them to read the text “Organizations That Protect Public Health.” Carine was lying on her left arm, lying on her desk, and holding her pencil in her right hand throughout the reading, with her eyes directed towards the text. Bintou also had her textbook open and was seated in an upright position with her eyes wandering across the room. As for Sally, she was holding another book that she was apparently reading quietly while the larger group of students was working on their Health book. As soon as the reading was done, the teacher read the questions one at a time, and the students answered
them. Only four of the students, all seated right in front of the students answered the questions asked by the teacher, while the rest of them were either whispering to one another, or engaged in another activity, or even seated quietly, but not participating in the activity.

In the reading about the heart, Mrs. Parks provided background information about the text, asking the students what they knew about the heart and then showing them how to take their pulse before showing them how to calculate their heartbeats by minutes. In accordance with Crawford’s argument she used pre-reading strategies to make the text accessible to the students, even though she did not provide them with either vocabulary or post reading activities. The reading about public health, however, was not guided. The difference of attitude displayed by the students during two activities mirrored the approaches taken by the teacher. When the activity was guided and related to the students, they participated; but when it was isolated, there was some resistance on the part of the students, both African and non-Africans.

12:45 p.m. Reading time was sometimes devoted to individual reading or group reading in which Mrs. Parks read a book for the class. During my class visits, Mrs. Parks often read the *Wizard of Oz* to the class. For that kind of activity, she asked the students to pull their chairs forward towards the board, where she was seated on a high chair. Once all the students were up front, she often read one or two chapters while the students were all quiet and apparently attentive to the reading. As soon as she finished the reading, the students pulled their chairs back to their desks.

Whenever it was individual reading though, the students stayed behind their seats and quietly read a book of their choice. Carine always had a Junny B. Jones’ book. I did ask her why she always read that series, and she responded that if was fun and that she loved solving mysteries. As for Sally, she was always reading different books that were given to her by her
ESL teacher. I, however, never saw Bintou read any book during that time. She was often not engaged in any activity during that time. She told me “I don’t like to read.” “Why do you not like to read?” I asked. She responded “I don’t know. I just don’t like it.”

1:00 p.m. Recess

1:15 p.m. Although social studies was often written on the schedule, I rarely had a chance to observe a social studies class. Mrs. Parks informed me that she had already completed her program of social studies. Most of the time, during that time period, the students engaged in individual reading, and that was also when Carine left for ESL. Unlike her two other African peers, Carine had the opportunity to participate in all the daily activities and was much more a part of the class.

Sally 2’s Fifth Grade

As I discussed it earlier in the methodology, Sally repeated her fifth grade class in the fall of 2010. To discuss the instructional strategies used in that classroom, I refer to Sally as Sally2 and to Mrs. Parks as Mrs. Parks2. As I also mentioned, one of my limitations during fall 2010 was time. Because of my academic obligations, I was unable to spend a full day in the classroom. Unlike the previous two sections that describe typical days in each class, this section was written based on specific activities that were observed. During my visits, I mostly observed three types of activities, reading, writing and mathematics.

Writing was an activity with which the students engaged very often. During one of my visit, at 9:00 a.m., Mrs. Parks 2 asked the class to take out their notebooks and either finish the story they had previously started or start a new story if they had completed the previous one. Then she asked them,
T: What kind of behavior should I see?

Ss (students): Quiet.

T: Yes. What else?

S1: Focus on writing.

T: Ok. You can do anything as long as you are quiet.

The students then took out their notebooks and started writing with a pencil. Sally tore two sheets of paper from her notebook and started writing on one of them. She opened her notebook, and copied a text that was already written on it. The class was very quiet. All the students were working on their writing. Mrs. Parks left the classroom for 5 minutes and then came back. By the time she walked back to the room, Sally had stopped copying from her notebook and started writing a new story that she titled, “When I am in Congo” and then another story, “In Congo with a dog.” Below are her two stories.

When I am in Congo

When I am 3 I do not eat fish and when we go in my grapa house they like to eat fish and I do not like to eat fish why because That scurse me and my mon say why you scurse fish because fish eye look like people and my brother say if you realy scurse fish Thank and I say why you say thank cause if you sleep you will see fish in your bed and go like mom! Mom! Mom! Hi just scurse me with fish . . .

In Congo with a dog

My name is Sally. I love dogs

So what is your farviot dog color my farviot dog color is black and browen. Okay

My brother says “Dad, we want a do.” My dad says “that is a good idea.” I think is cool dad, “hey Sally . . . go in my bedroom you will see $25. “ok Dad” and I gived to my dad money hi say thank you you welcome so my dad gived to my brother money they say thank Dad. They by ad dog they come home they play with a dog they gived dog a love like something is so beautiful! And when I see a dog: say mom look is a dog so I love dog and I tell my brother whant his name we do not yet can we call hi Daniel and my brother says no, no, no, not my name why because I do whet to
Sally2 has made a lot of progress in her writing compared to Sally. Sally’s writings were short with very limited vocabulary. Sally2 had a wider range of vocabulary words but was still struggling with spelling. Her spelling errors include grammatical mistakes such as “I gived my dad money.” Her grammatical mistakes, however, did not prevent the reader from understanding the message portrayed. According to Krashen (2005), a focus of grammar slows down language acquisition. A successful language acquisition lays emphasis on the communicative purpose of language learning. In her writings, she used situations that were familiar to her personal experiences to learn how to write. The use of situations familiar to her home settings not only motivated her but also facilitated her literacy development. Similar to Purcell-Gates’ (2002) argument that preventing students to use their first language impedes literacy development, encouraging the use of familiar settings in writing assignments motivated Sally2 and enhanced her learning process.

While the students were working on their writing, Mrs. Parks2 sat at the front of the room facing a circular table. She called different students’ names, gave them books with answer sheets, and asked them to prepare for reading. Then, she called the students individually and had a one-on-one session with them, working on their reading. She later told me that she was testing the students’ level of reading.

By 9.30 a.m., some of the students had finished writing their stories and started reading personal book. Sally2 had also stopped writing. She closed her notebook, pushed it to the corner of her desk and put her two elbows on the desk with her hands supporting her head. About 3 minutes later, she opened her notebook again and started writing. By that time, all the students in the class had received a book from Mrs. Parks2 and were reading. Sally2 then stopped writing, put her notebook back under her desk, and took out a book titled, *The Island Princess* that she
started reading. At 10:00 a.m., Sally2’s ESL teacher walked into the room and together they walked away to ESL. Sally’s reading was eventually tested a different day by Nancy, a volunteer tutor. Although she was more fluent than the previous school year, Sally2 was still discriminated against on the basis of her literacy level. The discrimination was apparent when her teacher tested all the students’ reading levels except for hers.

Nancy was a college student who volunteered in Mrs. Parks’ class twice a week for one hour. During her visits, she spent a lot of time with Sally working on her math and her reading. For her reading testing, Sally2 read a comic book titled “The Baby Sisters’ Club.” Throughout her reading, Nancy helped her pronounce many words. For instance, she read “neighbor” /nitbr/ and then Nancy repeated the word and read it /nɪbrə/. Then, Sally2 repeated after Nancy and continued her reading. The same thing happened when Sally2 read “curious” /krɪəs/. Nancy told her it was /ˈkɜəriəs/ and once again, Sally repeated the word and continued her reading. The reading activity with Nancy put a lot of emphasis on pronunciation and not enough on comprehension. The focus on correcting Sally2’s pronunciation could de-motivate her and slow down her language acquisition (Barrera, 1998; Delpit, 1998).

After the reading assignment, Nancy had the following conversation with Sally.

N (Nancy): how long is it going to take you to read the whole book?

S: 65 minutes.

N: Do you think you can read it all by next week?

S: Uhum. Maybe at home.

N: Do you read at home?

S: Yes. Yesterday, I read whole day. I sleep.

N: Do you read by yourself or to people?
S: Myself.

N: What is your favorite book?

S: I think this one.

T: What’s your least favorite book?

S: I like everything.

Reading was the most common activity during my visits. Most of the time, Mrs. Parks gave the students a quiet reading time. The students, then, decided on the book they wanted to read and engaged in a silent reading. Some other times, she paired them up, asking them to read to each other. One such example was that I once walked into the classroom at 9:08 a.m. when the students were reading silently, while Mrs. Parks, seated at the entrance was calling individual students and having conversations with them. Sally was seated in front of her desk, holding her book, *Zen and the Art of Faking*, and apparently reading it. At 9:25, the alarm of Mrs. Parks’ cell phone went off in the back of the room. She walked there, stopped the alarm and told the students it was now time to shift activities. She assigned each student a partner and asked them to take turn reading to each other. Sally and her partner, an African American boy moved their chairs next to each other, and her partner started reading his book while she was listening, her eyes looking into it. After reading a chapter of his book, he asked her if she wanted to read a book too. She responded, “yes,” and walked to her desk, took a pink book with the picture of a princess on it, titled *Princess Story Collection* from under her desk and showed it to her partner who put his thumbs down.

Then, Sally took another book, this time with the picture of a boy on the cover, titled *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, and her partner put his thumb up. She gave him the book, he opened it and asked her, “Can you read this book?” She responded “yes” and started reading. They took turns
reading the book. When it was Sally’s turn to read, whenever she mispronounced a word, her partner corrected her pronunciation and she repeated after him. After taking turns reading a few pages, her partners said, “Waooo! So pretty much the whole book is about letters.” Sally2 responded, “Yes.” He crossed his legs, read a few lines silently and then said “Waooo! This is a pretty good book” and gave it back to her. She took the book back to her desk, came back and told him she wanted to read his book. He asked her “are you sure?”

S: Yes.

Partner: It’s a pretty hard book.

S: Do you have another book?

P: Yes.

He gave her another book and asked her to read it and see if she could understand it. She said “ok” and was looking into the book when the alarm went off again, and Mrs. Parks told them it was time for math.

Sally2 and her reading partner seemed to have a positive working relationship. Pairing up with another student in the class allowed her to interact with the other students in her classroom, as it made her a part of the class. Besides, Sally2’s partner was aware of her reading difficulties and sensitive to the issue. He boosted her level of confidence by showing his interest in her book and that incited her interest in reading his book. Her interaction with her peer who was a native English speaker could be a facilitating factor towards English language acquisition (August, 1987).

During math time, the class was often divided into three groups. Mrs. Parks2 often taught one group at a time, while the other three groups worked on math assignments with volunteer tutors. For instance, she once asked Nancy to work on multiplication of decimals with her group.
that included Sally2. As soon as Nancy started her math session, Sally2’s ESL teacher walked in and she had to go for ESL. Sally2 was often away for ESL during math time. The only time I observed her group being taught by Mrs. Parks2, the class was being observed by the school principal. When the Principal walked into the classroom, the students were already seated in their groups. Mrs. Parks was teaching Sally2’s group that counted six students, while the tutors were working on the other two groups. She drew a circle on the board and asked the students: How many degrees are in a circle? The students said: “hun . . . hun . . .” and then a student raised his hand and said “360 degrees.” Mrs. Parks2 responded “Yes! And in a circle, I can draw” (and she started drawing a line in the circle. Just then, Sally2’s ESL teacher walked in, and Sally2, who was seated in upright position with her legs, crossed and looking at the board where her teacher was, had to leave the class.

Similarly to the spring semester, ESL pull out always took place in the middle of a lesson, and she joined her peers in the middle of another lesson. As a result, she often missed consistent exposure to subject matter, given especially that subject matter was not a part of her ESL class. Subject matter instruction, however constitutes a very important element for a successful literacy developments (Lucas et al., 2008; Krashen, 2005). It is, however, important to note that since Sally2 had math tutoring twice a week, she was still able to some extent to fill the gaps created by her missing her math classes.

Nancy often went over the mathematic activities that Sally2 missed when she had to go to ESL and that allowed her to catch up with what her peers did in her absence in a simpler language. In fact, Nancy was often in the classroom when they had a math test, explaining the questions to her. For instance during a math test, Mrs. Parks gave the test away to the class and asked Sally2 to move to the circular desk table at the entrance. That table was often used by Mrs.
Parks2 and was distant from the students’ desks. As soon as she sat there, Nancy joined her. Mrs. Parks2 closed the door of the classroom and started walking around in the class looking at what the students were doing. Whenever, Sally2 asked her a question about her test, Nancy helped her figure out the solution. For instance, Sally2 asked her a question that I did not hear, then Nancy asked her to count by 5 to find out if 5 can be a factor of 462. She did and said, “no.” Then Nancy said, “Now count by 10. Can 10 be a factor of 462?”

Sally2: Yes.

Nancy: Does it end by 0?

Sally2: No.

Nancy: then, how can it be a factor of 462?

Sally2: It must end with 0.

Nancy: Ok. Then, you have to figure out if it is either 6 or 9.

Then, Nancy moved away to assist another student in the class who had raised her hand. The next time Sally2 raised her hand, she told Nancy that she did not understand “the range.” Nancy asked her to follow her and the two of them walked to the back of the room where Nancy pointed to a white post on the wall with the following information:

STATISTICAL LANDMARKS

Minimum: the smallest value
Maximum: the largest value
Range: the difference between Min and Max
Mode: the value or values that occur most
Median: the middle value
Mean: Average

There were examples below each one of them. As soon as they got back to their seats, Nancy asked her what the range was and she responded “the difference between Min and Max.”

Nancy: How do you get that?
Sally: 100–85.

Nancy: Good!

Another aspect of Sally’s classroom instruction was the availability of a one-on-one tutoring. Working with Sally on a one-to-one basis allowed Nancy to get to know her better, to evaluate her difficulties and potentials, create an environment of trust, and to assist her in overcoming such difficulties more successfully while building on her potentials. The issue with Sally’s tutoring sessions, however, was the persistence of the lack of interaction between her and her teacher. Despite the improvement of her language abilities, she was still marginalized and isolated. During the math test, for instance, Mrs. Parks asked her to move to a table that was distant from her peers, isolating her further and marking her as different. In so doing, Mrs. Parks separated Sally from the rest of the class, which did not facilitated an opportunity for collaboration (Nieto, 2000).

During my visits, I also observed a language art class. The teacher informed the students that their discussion was going to be about simile and metaphor.

Mrs. Parks: Do you know what a simile is?

S1: It’s when you compare things.

Mrs. Parks: Yes, it is when you compare two things using “like” or “as.” A lot of people use simile to write better.

Then, using the overhead, she showed them an example before putting up a song titled “airplanes” with the following line, “Can we pretend that airplanes in the night sky are like shooting stars?” The students said, “It’s a simile.” Mrs. Parks: “Why?” A student answered, “Because it has like.” The class continued with more examples and opportunities for the students to identify similes or metaphors. Sally did not participate during the class. She was quietly seated in an upright position and listening to what was being said. Then, Mrs. Parks asked the students
to get into groups of two or three and to write down sentences using similes or metaphors.

Sally2’s group had three members. Sally2 did not participate. She only listened and looked at whichever partner was talking. Then Mrs. Parks2 interrupted the class and asked, “Is it always a simile when you use “like” or “as?”

S1: Yes.

Mrs. Parks2: If you say I like cake, is it a simile?

S2: No. It’s comparing.

Mrs. Parks2: You have to compare one thing with another.

And then the students went back to their assignment.

The class on simile and metaphor was another lesson exclusive of Sally2. The language of the class was not made accessible to her, especially as she was still at an emergent level of literacy development (Valdes, 1998). For instance, when the teacher said a simile is when you compare two things using “like” or “as,” she facilitated comprehension for students who were already fluent in English. A student like Sally2 at an emergent level of literature development would need more information sustained by examples using simple sentence structures. Not simplifying the instruction for her resulted in Sally2 not participating actively in the activity.

Summary

In this chapter, I have addressed the following two questions: What is the nature of teachers’ instructional efforts in response to students’ needs, and how are those efforts influenced by the presence of African immigrant students in the classroom? How do children participate in teachers’ planned lessons? The findings reveal that classroom instructions were often exclusive of students with limited fluency in English. While Yaya (kindergarten) and Carine (fifth grade)
had enough social language and were often expected to bring their input, Sally (fifth grade) and Rokie (kindergarten) were completely ignored. Their teachers treated their language limitations as deficits and that hindered their learning.

For a student like Carine, who had already spent a couple of years in U.S. classroom, instruction was often inclusive, and she often responded to the inclusive nature of the class by participating actively to the different activities. When, however, the instruction assumed that she already knew what was being discussed in class, it often alienated her as it was the case when she said that she “hate[s]” math. For Yaya, who missed teaching moments, it was assumed that he knew already about Mexico and/or Puerto Rico. In such case, he often responded to instruction through the display of behavioral issues deemed unacceptable by her teacher. The behavioral issues, however, were not apparent whenever he was given the opportunity to work on writing, in which case, he often wrote about what was of interest to him, popular culture. Besides, during writing Yaya and Rokie were often provided the opportunity to interact with their teachers on a one-on-one basis.

At the exception of the few one-on-one interaction with her teacher during time, instruction was often exclusive of Rokie as it was of Sally, Sally2, and Bintou. If Sally2 and Bintou were expected to participate in classroom activities, ESL pull outs in the middle of instruction made it difficult for consistent exposure to subject matter. Besides, reading activities for instance were often not guided, limiting effective literacy development. Finally, Rokie responded to the lack of involvement through silence and apparent submission; Sally and Bintou displayed resistance.

It is also very important to note the significance of writing as a way the children expressed themselves. Through their writing, the children unveiled their personal experiences,
their personal interests. Writing provided them with a voice. It gave them the opportunity to be a part of the classroom, it allowed them to state their identity. It is also important to note that if the children expressed themselves through writing, no mention was made of their interest, their sense of identification in classroom instruction. Those writings were merely treated as classroom assignments that most of the time did not even occasion any feedback.
Chapter 6
Discussion, Implications for Teacher Education, Summary

In chapters 4 and 5, I discussed the findings of the study based on the observations and interviews I conducted during data collection. The findings suggest that the challenges faced by African immigrant children not only include the effect of their linguistic and cultural displacement, but also their teachers’ perceptions of their home environments and their continent of origin. The findings also suggest that their teachers did not have any framework allowing them to work with that part of their student population and that facilitated the students’ limited exposure to content knowledge, their limited interaction with their teachers and their peers, and hence the low academic expectations from their teachers.

In this chapter, I attempt connect the findings to the literature and theoretical frameworks I have discussed in chapters 1 and 2. As I noted in chapter 1, I take a postcolonial and a critical perspective to discuss the findings. From a postcolonial perspective, the relationship between immigrant children and their teachers is a relationship of power in which one group imposes its cultural and linguistic domination over the other (Bourdieu, 1991; Said, 1979). The relationship of power is manifested through the exclusion of immigrant students’ cultural and linguistic background, perceived by Bourdieu as symbolic violence. As I discuss in the first section of this dissertation, the notion of symbolic violence was consistent with the findings through the display of low self-confidence, lack of motivation, and resistance to learning. It unveils how teachers and teaching practices reinforce the hegemonic relationships and contribute to the complexity of the challenges faced by African immigrant students.

It also favored the creation of stereotypes, and the discrimination against the students. Bhabha’s view of stereotype as a “fixated form of representation” informs the section on
stereotypes and discrimination. This form of representation denounces the power relationship between the teachers and their students, in which the immigrant students are posited as inferior, and leading to discrimination viewed by Nieto (2000) as a way of denying them “privileges, rights, and opportunities.” I argue that this form of representation of immigrant students was often initiated and reinforced through teaching practices, and it also often disempowered the students who ended up lagging behind their peers.

The power relationship was also conducive to the creation of a hybrid sense of identity which according to Bhabha (1994) is,

a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of colonialist disavowal, so that other “denied” knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition. (p. 115)

Hybridity empowers the dominated group (here immigrant children) who takes advantage of the dominant’s social, linguistic, and cultural values as a source of empowerment (Bhabha, 1994; Collins & Blot, 2003). As the section of identity formation unveils, the students who have developed a hybrid identity took advantage of their exposure to the American cultural and linguistic space to minimize the effect of the power relationship imposed on them.

From a critical perspective, cultural differences ought to be considered as boundaries and not borders (Erickson, 2007). Considering cultural differences as boundaries takes the form of a multicultural education that addresses historical injustices and aims at reducing discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudices (Grant & Sleeter, 2007; Nieto, 2000). The critical perspective also addresses the relationship between language and power. Nieto’s (1999) view of language as a symbol of power displays the significance of students’ linguistic abilities (both in English and other languages) and the strategies implemented during instruction to promote or hinder those abilities. The promotion or hindrance of students’ linguistic abilities is often conducive
respectively, either to collaborative or coercive relations of power as discussed by Cummins (2000) and Corson, (2001). Consistently with the findings, the relationship of power was collaborative when the teachers welcomed students’ input and encouraged their use of their first language of literacy. The extent to which it was collaborative or coercive depended on the teaching approaches adopted and determined the students’ level of literacy development. When teachers took communicative approaches in their teaching, they encouraged communication and comprehension which promotes second language acquisition (Krashen, 2005; Crawford, 2005; Barrera, 1983).

In this chapter, I use the theoretical perspectives summarized above, to discuss the findings of this study. The discussion was organized around the issues of power relationship, identity formation, and literacy development. Those issues are based on the findings discussed in chapters 4 and 5 and perceived through the lens of the theoretical summary discussed above.

**Power Relationship**

**Symbolic violence.** Power relationship, as discussed by Said (1979) is translated through an uneven relationship of domination and hegemony between the West and the East. It assumes the presence of a dominant group that imposes its norms and values on a dominated one. Such a discussion of power relationships is noticeable between the teachers and the students in the classroom; the teachers as authoritative figures are in possession of power that they exercise on the students through their acquisition of the knowledge displayed by the former. The relationship of power is, however, more significant and noticeable when it involves teachers and immigrant students. Coming from a different socio-cultural background, the immigrant students are posited as others and subjected to the “superiority” of the American cultural and linguistic setting. The
imposition of the American cultural and linguistic norms on immigrant children often entails the marginalization of their social, cultural and linguistic background which could result in Bourdieu’s discussion of symbolic violence. He argues that symbolic violence is an unconscious exertion of domination over conscious beings. It can only “be exerted on a person predisposed (in his habitus) to feel it, whereas others will ignore it” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 51).

Bourdieu’s discussion of symbolic violence is consistent with my findings. As I have discussed in chapter 4, the African students in the classrooms were subjected to a social, cultural, and linguistic norms that were different from their background. They were subjected to the domination of their school’s cultural and linguistic space, which led to lowering their self-confidence. The low self-confidence was especially true for Bintou, Sally, and Rokie, who were struggling linguistically and academically as discussed in chapter 4. Sally and Rokie’s low self-confidence was for instance triggered by their limited English language proficiencies. Sally and Rokie were isolated and marginalized on the basis of their language fluency and lacked the confidence to participate actively neither in classroom activities, nor in social interactions. As for Bintou, her low self-confidence came from her academic challenges, as she had already acquired a conversational language. Their inability to participate in classroom activities and/or social interactions was, however, triggered by the marginalization of their linguistic and cultural background from school settings (Gonzales, 2005).

Another issue of symbolic violence was also manifested through the students’ motivation. As discussed in chapter 4, low motivation was a recurrent theme in the data analysis. All the students displayed issues of motivation at one moment or another. Their low motivation was often the result of the lack of adaptation of classroom instruction to their level of fluency (Valdes, 1998). In chapter 5, I revealed that neither one of the mainstream teachers was attentive
to the needs of the African students in their instruction. For instance, Mrs. Brian disregarded the presence of her immigrant students when teaching about “snorkeling” or “Cinco de Mayo.” Her disregard unveils the assumption that they all knew what the word “snorkeling” meant or where Mexico or even Puerto Rico were located. Similarly, Mrs. Parks ignored the presence of Sally and Bintou in the classroom and did not react to their reluctance to participate. The disregard of their presence and their needs in the classroom and led to their exclusion from instruction and impacted their motivation to participate.

The students’ low self-confidence was also triggered by the teachers’ level of expectation for their immigrant students. I discussed in chapter 4 that Bintou and Sally did not participate in their mainstream classroom, but did in their ESL classroom as it was the case for Rokie and Yaya. In ESL, they were explicitly requested to participate. Their teachers called their names and asked them questions. In mainstream classrooms, however, they were passive learners. The passivity of their learning experiences was implicitly encouraged by their teachers and unraveled their low expectations about the students’ academic potential. Their teachers’ expectations have disempowered them convincing them of their limited potential of achieving in school (Colville-Hall, et al., 1995; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). The teachers’ low expectation has confined the students to Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence manifested through a frustration, a low self-confidence, and a low motivation to participate in classroom activities.

It is, however, to be noted that the students were not passive to the coercive relationship of power imposed by their marginalization during instruction. They often responded to instruction either through resistance (as did Sally and Bintou) or through a display of any behavior deemed inappropriate (as it was the case with Yaya). Their response was often an active resistance “to the operation of the societal power structure as it is manifested in educational
settings” (Cummins, 2000, p. 47). Such resistance and/or behavioral issues entail that the students have taken matters in their own hands to deal with the coercion imposed on them. Such response unfortunately, often leads to poor academic performances.

Another activator of the students’ low confidence is relevant to teachers’ perception of parents’ apparent lack of involvement in the African students’ academic life. As I discussed in chapter 4, Rokie always brought back her backpack full of the paper work sent home the previous day; Bintou brought back her reading charts signed by her classmates. The apparent lack of involvement of Rokie and Bintou’s parents was related to their socio-economic status. As I discussed in chapter I, most African immigrant parents belonged to the middle class status before immigration. However, after immigration, they found themselves in a working class status where they had to work long hours in factories to fend for their family alongside with attending classes at the local community college. The issue then becomes, how much time do they have to devote to their children, given their constant struggle for survival? Although I concur with Mrs. Brian’s argument that as a teacher and a parent, she was also very busy but also managed to fulfill all her parental responsibilities, I do believe that she overlooked that as an American woman with the linguistic and cultural capital, she was able to navigate her responsibilities as a teacher and a parent more easily than immigrant parents.

As immigrants, these parents sometimes lack the Basic English language skills to communicate. As a matter of fact, Somé-Guiébré (2011) highlights that some of the French speaking African parents rely on their children for communication. In fact, Li (2008) points out that,

Immigrant parents are often unaware of practices essential to helping their children develop academic skills and are confused about what the schools expect from their children, often feeling uncertain about how to help their children. (p. 154)
Li’s arguments certainly questions Mrs. Brian’s perception of Rokie’s mother’s attitude and leads me wonder if the latter understands the paper work sent home or even its purposes.

Mrs. Brian has transposed her privileged socio-economic and racial status to immigrant populations, failing to embrace the idea that all students bring to class a cultural background that is often at odd with school culture (Erickson, 2007). That transposition demonstrates that she is yet to develop an understanding of her own self-identity, and her privileges in order to challenge some of the prejudices she has about her students. Accordingly, Banks (2008) argues that teachers need to “to develop reflective cultural and national identifications if they are to function effectively in diverse classrooms.” In other words, Mrs. Brian’s awareness of her personal racial and cultural privileges would be important not just to understand the parents, but to develop strategies that would compel them to send back the paper work sent home for signature.

**Stereotypes and discrimination.** Bhabha (1994) discusses stereotypes as “a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (p. 95). It is a point of subjectification in colonial discourse. . . . It is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the place of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations. (p. 107)

Bhabha’s discussion of stereotypes stresses the notion of subjectification, a problem of representation of one party in relation to the other. A stereotype refers to the issues of power relationships as it assumes the misrepresentation of a dominated group by a dominant one. Bhabha’s view of stereotypes is consistent with the issues of labeling or categorizing the immigrant students on the basis of their behavior or their academic potentials. As I discussed in chapter 4, Yaya was identified as “a handful,” having behavioral issues; Rokie was “defiant”;
Sally2 was emotional; and Bintou had a learning disability. All the labeling of those students was based on what was known by the teachers as the norm while denying the possibility of a difference, or a quest for attention. For instance, Mrs. Brian and Mrs. Clark were so focused on noting Yaya’s behavioral issues that they overlooked the factors leading to his attitudes. Overlooking those motivation factors impacted the relationships between them and Yaya and was translated through their frustration. As a matter of fact, Grant and Sleeter (2007) argue that “When teachers are frustrated or irritated with students, students know it and react accordingly” (p. 16).

Labeling or categorizing the African students as such, unveils the teachers’ perceptions of their immigrant students as inferior to the other students (Wong & Grant, 2007). According to Nieto (2000), the categorization of the students as such, is based on the superiority of monolingual American born students over the immigrant population. As discussed in chapter 4, the labeling of Yaya led to Mrs. Clark’s generalization of his challenges to African students in general, homogenizing them as a group instead of considering each one of them as an individual. Africa here is shown as one; no matter which country the students come from, as long as it is in Africa, and assumed then they must have been traumatized through war. There was no attempt to understand the student as a person. They were all defined by war. Being fixated on such an idea, did not allow Mrs. Clark to go beyond her assumptions and misrepresentation of the challenges faced by her African students. Her comments not only revealed her bias towards African students, but also displayed her ignorant and under-nourished understanding of the needs of African immigrant students while considering their identity to be at fault (Sleeter, 2005).

Another issue raised by Mrs. Clark’s assertion is the role of media in the politics of representation of the African continent. The African continent is most often represented in the
media through war, hunger, and HIV, providing the public with a very distorted and/or limited view of it. That limited view of Africa is unfortunately consumed without any challenge of the power relationships that guide the politics of representation in the media. Mrs. Clark has failed to deconstruct the idea that the media always portrays reality and also to link the politics of representation to corporate controlled societies (Giroux, 1994, p. 48)

The labeling of African students was facilitated by the representation of the African continent in the media and the unawareness of the cultural and linguistic background brought by each student in the classroom. Such a labeling led to a view of the African population as inferior and provided a background for discrimination. Discrimination, according to Nieto (2000) is a “negative or destructive behavior that can result in denying some groups’ life’s necessities as well as privileges, rights, and opportunities enjoyed by other groups” (p. 34). The findings suggest that the African students were discriminated in the classroom on the basis of their language limitation.

**Inclusion/exclusion.** The inclusion and/or exclusion of the African immigrant students was based on discrimination on the basis of their linguistic and/or academic abilities. In the discussion on power relations in this section, I rely on the view of multicultural education as the inclusion of discriminated people (Sleeter, 2005). Multicultural education, according to Erickson, challenges hegemonic relations in schools dominated by white male ideology. It also challenges the marginalization of minority students’ linguistic and cultural background from their learning process. In this section, I attempt to discuss the extent to which classroom instructions were inclusive or exclusive of those characteristics of multicultural education.

As authoritative figures in the classroom, the teachers had the power to make decisions about meeting or not meeting the needs of their students in the classrooms. The decision was
unfortunately, often made to marginalize them during instruction, and perpetuate inequalities and prejudices. It was, for example, the case when Mrs. Parks discussed in chapter 4 not knowing the level of Sally and Bintou in mathematics based on her judgment of their linguistic and academic abilities. The marginalization of the students from instruction was based on the teachers’ prejudices towards their linguistic and academic and capabilities. The marginalization of Sally spotlights that her teacher did not view her linguistic and cultural background as a resource (Verplaetse & Migliacci, 2008) and did not find it necessary to develop instructional strategies that would be inclusive of her needs. In a discussion about culturally relevant pedagogies, Ladson-Billings (2007) stressed the need for teachers to believe in the abilities of their students to perform, consider themselves as members of a community, view their teaching practice as an art, and resist the isolation of students according to their social, economic, and cultural background. It does appear however, that Mrs. Parks had little or no belief in the abilities of Sally and Bintou and did not expect either one of them to be successful learners, hence granting them the permission to fail (Ladson-Billings, 2002).

On the other hand, Sally2 and Carine were compelled to participate in class. Their input was required and welcomed, and they were included in the learning process. By requiring Sally2 and Carine to participate in class, Mrs. Parks did not necessarily overrule prejudice and discrimination or even challenge inequalities discussed by Grant & Sleeter (2007) as important components of multicultural education. She, however, welcomed them in the classroom, laying a foundation for higher self-confidence and learning motivation for the two girls. The acquisition of higher self-confidence and learning motivation required the implementation of inclusive instructional strategies, which is conditioned by the exposure to content knowledge. Considering Lucas et al.’s (2008) argument that academic learning and language are all interconnected,
welcoming Sally2 and Carine’s participation in the learning process facilitated the development of their literacy abilities.

I identified two issues impeding the inclusion of Bintou and Sally into classroom instruction. One of them was language, as I discussed in the previous section on discrimination. As I mentioned in the finding chapters, Sally, Bintou, and Sally2 often left their mainstream classroom for ESL in the middle of one subject and came back in the middle of another, and their ESL instruction was mostly exclusive of content knowledge, focusing exclusively on literacy development. As a result, they had very few opportunities to be exposed to content knowledge. The little exposure to content was inconsistent and hindered their learning processes. For instance, Mrs. Parks expected Bintou to participate in classroom activities. However, it was unlikely for her to do so successfully without any consistent involvement in the classroom. The inconsistency of her involvement in the academic learning placed her at a disadvantage vis a vis her peers who had the opportunity to follow the full instructions. Denying her the opportunity to learn and understand subject matter not only caused Bintou “to fall further behind but . . . also fail to make progress in second language acquisition” (Krashen, 2005, p. 50). It was all the more frustrating and de-motivating for a student to take a test on a topic that she/he has not attended.

Besides, according to Purcell-Gates (2002),

Socially and politically marginalized people are held in disdain by those who hold the power. While they may be pitied and while many well-meaning middle-class people may volunteer clothes and money to help stave off the most devastating effects of poverty, there is always a generalized belief that they cannot learn as well as those in power. (p. 133)

Following that argument, there was an implicit assumption that neither one of the girls was capable of understanding content knowledge without a significant amount of English
language fluency. Their linguistic abilities were considered as deficits and denied them the possibility to develop their English language literacy in the context of content learning.

It is, however, important to note that although Mrs. Parks did not implement multicultural education, her social studies curriculum addressed historical injustices. As I mentioned in chapter 5, Mrs. Parks had already covered all her curriculum in social studies at the time of my data collection. However, when she was called to work from her sick day because the students made fun of the substitute teacher’s accent, she drew the students’ attention towards issues of race and social inequities, as well as their implications. In doing so, she challenged the hegemonic relationships of race (Erickson, 2007) and incited the students to make a connection between the incident and their own experiences. Mrs. Parks has made use of her position of power to challenge the students’ preconceived ideas and to remind them of the possible consequences of discriminating against people on the basis of their differences. In so doing, she also reminded them of the need for tolerance and acceptation of cultural, linguistic, and social difference.

The relationship of power was also perceived through the missing of teaching moments, most often in Mrs. Brian’s class. For instance, during a writing assignment in which a student gave her the sentence “I went to Puerto Rico for the week end. We went snorkeling,” Mrs. Brian assumed that all the students knew about “Puerto Rico” and “snorkeling.” She made the same assumption in the discussion about Cinco de Mayo by not discussing Mexico. The confusion about Mexico was even voiced by one of the students who confused it with Texas. Unfortunately, Mrs. Brian did not attempt to deal with the confusion and expand the scope of the students’ knowledge about both places. As an authoritative figure in position of power, she made the conscious/unconscious decision to limit her students’ exposure to the places outside the United States. Such an exclusive approach to teaching fails to address the view of citizenship.
which includes every member of the society with no differentiation of gender and race, but has maintained the hegemonic position of the White race (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

Identity Formation

Another point of discussion in the findings was related to identity formation. In a discussion about the stranger, Simmel (2008) discussed the issues of identification of immigrant populations and argued that they don’t belong either to their country of origin nor to that of immigration. They are according to Bhabha (1994) “in between spaces” and cannot identify solely nor completely to any of their markers of identity. Their immigration experiences have endowed my participants with a hybridity of linguistic and cultural identity. The formation of their hybrid identities was influenced by language, popular culture, race, and gender. I start this section with a discussion of popular culture before addressing race and gender.

Popular culture and language. As the data suggests, writing and drawing were used by the children as a way of expressing themselves. Their writings provided them with the opportunity to practice their literacy development skills, develop their social development skills with their peers, and unveil their sense of identity. In this section, I emphasize the children’s writing as a way of expressing their identity. In a discussion about popular culture, Dyson (1997) notes that the stories portrayed in popular culture,

contain the mythic element of powerful men—cowboys, pioneers, soldiers, policemen—triumphing against evil, armed with moral righteousness, as well as with human strength and technological tools. (p. 15)

Looking back at Yaya’s drawing, he often discussed super-hero stories such as Pokemon, Bakugan, and Spiderman. All those stories portrayed powerful heroes who are able to defeat any obstacle. Those super-heroes symbolize Yaya’s faith that he can defeat the forces against him in
his struggle against the cultural barriers displayed in the school system. The same argument holds for Sally’s writings in which she often discusses her father and her brothers. Those are her super-heroes. Although they are not cartoon characters, she sees in them powerful forces that provide her with the strength and energy to deal with their day to day challenges. Their faith in the super-heroes motivate them with the abilities (or at least the hope) to bridge their social, cultural, and linguistic barriers; the enactment of their powerful abilities involves a complex negotiation of their identities.

According to Aronowitz (1989), identity or collective identities are shaped by biological characteristics, social relations, family, and school, and popular culture. Popular culture “is appropriated by students and is a major source of knowledge for authorizing voices and experiences” (Giroux & Simmon, 1989, p. 221). Popular culture, as I discussed in the findings, was a major source of communication and socialization in Mrs. Brian’s kindergarten class. Yaya’s exposure to popular culture provided him with the opportunity to interact with his classroom peers. It was also an opportunity to develop his literacy skills through writing and conversation. Ibrahim (1999) argues that “popular culture, especially friendship, and peer pressure, all hasten the speed of learning. . . . Making friends, even learning English, is influenced by the popular imaginary, representation, and culture: television” (p. 359). Yaya’s exposure to popular culture allowed him to shape his hybrid identity through his interaction with his peers and his literacy development. His exposure to popular culture and his acquisition of the English language through it, create a collaborative relationship of power between his home environment and that of his school, in the sense that it empowers him and enhances his self-confidence (Cummins, 2000)
On the other hand, Rokie experienced a difficult time interacting with her peers. Similarly to Sally, one would say that her low interaction was motivation by her limited English proficiency. However, as Valdes (1998) and Nieto (2000) discuss, the interaction between immigrant children and their peers is a key to the development of language fluency. Rokie’s little interaction with her peers was also triggered by her little exposure to the kind of TV shows that fascinated her peers. She loved Spiderman, which did not seem either captivating or up to date for her peers. She was yet to adopt the cultural identity that would open up the doors of social interaction for her.

Rokie’s writings and drawings always portrayed her home environment. The same thing was true for Sally. Home was the one place that provided the security and the comfort they needed. It was a safe environment that accepted them as they were and where they did not have the pressure of assimilation or adaptation. Sally and Rokie’s refuge in the home was instigated by their low proficiency in the English language. Sally responded to her frustration by restraining from social and classroom interactions. She was convinced that her peers did not like her and even made fun of her. Following Nieto’s (2000) discussion about affirming diversity, English language learners are physically and emotionally separated from their native English speakers’ peers. Although in the case of this study, the students spent a lot of time in the mainstream classroom, they were emotionally and linguistically separated from them. It is, however, important to note that although Sally2 had reached a higher level of fluency and had a more positive relationship with her peers and classroom instruction, she still referred to home in her writings. Home provided her with a strong support group in her journey towards learning. Although her parents as well as her siblings were still learning English, there was a strong connection at home that valued and respected home culture and language while simultaneously
promoting learning. The apparent lack of conflict between the two settings, made it easier for her to conciliate both through her writing.

The issue with interaction and identity was also and mostly prompted by the nature of the instruction. As I discussed in the section about instructional strategies, instruction was most of the time designed to exclude those students who could not comprehend its content. As a result, it undermined their input and posited them as unfit for their grade level. It then prompted their low self-confidence and their frustration, convincing them of their inferiority vis-à-vis the rest of the class. The teachers have therefore contributed to disempowering Sally and Rokie through their perceptions, beliefs, and thinking (McDonald & Smolen 1995). As a matter of fact, Sally2 had a completely different relationship with her classmates. This group of students, she said, did not make fun of her; they liked her. Sure it was a different group of students and she was more fluent; but she was also very much a part of the classroom. She worked on the same assignments and she was included in group work with her peers. Her inclusion in the activities made her a part of the class, gave her the opportunity to create a common identity with her peers. Just like Carine and Bintou, the previous semester, her language fluency and her teacher’s expectations empowered her and allowed her to identify to the class. Sally2, Carine, and Yaya appropriated their knowledge of the English language and popular culture to recount their own stories (Collins & Blot, 2003). In so doing, they ceased to view English literacy as a means of subjugation, and used it as a means of empowerment.

**Gender and race.** Schools, according to Aronowitz (1989) are crucial sites of gender and racial differentiation. They play a major part in the formation of racial and gender identity. Dyson (1993) argues that,

> Children bring to school a repertoire of genres or familiar ways of constructing symbolic worlds. . . . They have learned these routine ways of using language—these genres—
from participating in situations in which people using language adopt certain roles towards each other and towards experience. (p. 11)

Looking back at my participants, although they are all African and most of them speak the same languages, they all bring different perspectives, different social and cultural aspects to school. Carine was identified as a “girly girl,” and Sally as socially younger than her peers; Rokie was always in her own world, not really socializing, while Yaya identified with popular culture. These differences informed the interaction between my participants and their peers. For instance, Yaya’s use of popular culture superheroes in his writing often facilitated spheres of conversation and interaction with his peers which, in turn, also supported his growth as a writer. Those television shows mostly portrayed male figures as heroes, creating more interest from the boys in Yaya’s classroom. The expression of Yaya’s interest in those popular cultures in writings, drawings, and social interactions facilitated his integration in a gender specific circle.

Gender as a performative act, that is to say “constituting the identity it is purported to be” (Butler, 1990, p. 33) was a significant determinant of the interactions between Yaya and Rokie in kindergarten. Most of Yaya’s interaction with his peers was with other boys. They often drew the same things, discussed the same topics related to popular culture and had often excluded the girls. One such example was when the boys decided that no girl was going to be invited to attend Yaya’s birthday party. Another such example is discussed in chapter 4 during another conversation in which a girl in Yaya’s group did not know what a Humngousor was, and Yaya suggested that she liked Barbie. Yaya’s attribution of Barbie to his female peer refers me to Grant and Sleeter’s (1986) study in which their participants talked about characteristics of boys and girls. According to the authors, half their participants believed physical strength and skills in sports to be characteristics of the male gender. Of course, my data did not any refer to any physical characteristics, but it seemed that Pokemon, Ben 10, and others were viewed as inherent
to the male identity, while Barbie and Full House (another TV show) were attributed to female identity. Yaya’s awareness of his male identity also informed his interactions with Rokie, the other African student in his class. Despite their linguistic and cultural connection, their interest in different gender specific activities reduced their interactions to classroom interactions.

Another feature of identification for Yaya was through ESL. As Mrs. Clarks discussed in chapter 4, ESL seemed a reference of identity for Yaya. His best friend (he told me) was Carl. Carl was from a Mexican background, and he was the only other boy in the classroom to attend Mrs. Clarks’ ESL class. As Mrs. Clarks suggested, the two boys had a common struggle, that of the acquisition of the English language and culture. In their mainstream classroom, the two boys always sat next each other and did the same workshop activities. Although they were both speaking English, they were still struggling with academic learning. The similarity of their struggle created a bond of friendship and identity between them.

ESL was the space where the students had a voice. They were both expected to participate and to ask and answer questions. For instance, during ESL class, the teacher often referred to French when talking to Sally. She did not speak French, and she knew a few words and sometimes made sure Sally understood some words by asking her to translate them into French. Sometimes, when Sally said the word in French, both Mrs. Rogers and Sally turned to me for my approval. Usually I just nodded to signify that the translation was correct, and the class continued. Every time she referred to the French language, Mrs. Rogers built on her sense of self identity (Buendia et al. 2003). Although French was not Sally’s native language, it was the language of instruction in her home country, the language in which she received her formal education before immigration.
Unlike Yaya’s case, ESL was not a setting where Sally and Bintou found a common sense of identity. Although they were both African girls and struggled for the acquisition of the English language, the interaction between them was more about a quiet competition. It was based on the degree of fluency and academic progress of the girls. Sally soon realized that although she was less fluent than Bintou, she performed better than the latter. Such a realization boosted her self-confidence and led her to engage in a constant struggle to prove that she was better. Her constant attempts to prove herself better than Bintou, has, however, created a wall between them and contributed to isolating her further.

Another aspect of identity formation in fifth grade was perceived through Carine and Bintou’s relationships with other black girls in the classroom. Although there were both African American and White girls in the classroom, their interaction during recess was always with the African American girls. Their association with African American girls was motivated not only by racial identification, but also by a similar struggle for empowerment. As I mentioned in chapter 4, a key connection between the two African girls and their African American friends was being pulled out of class for different instructional supports (ESL for Bintou and Carine and special education for the other two girls). Besides, as Mrs. Parks pointed out, all four girls received free to reduced lunch at school (which indicated their low socio-economic status). Class, according to Weis (2008), is “deeply nested with race and gender” (p. 292). They had in common their gender, racial, and SES identities which was triggered by the realization that, the treatment they receive is not different from that received by native-born Black students, and recognizing that schooling will not necessarily guarantee economic prosperity and social mobility, working class Black immigrant students identify themselves more quickly with domestic Black population than do middle class Black immigrants. (Rong & Flitchett, 2008, p. 38)
The friendships between the two girls and the African American girls were also motivated by a “community of life style, media, and school related factors” (Grant & Sleeter, 1986, p. 195). As I discussed in chapter 4, Carine, Bintou, and their two friends love to talk about similar things such as shopping and boys. As Mrs. Li pointed out, Carine is a “girly girl. She likes shopping, you know, girly things.” Carine and Bintou have had the time to accommodate themselves to a certain lifestyle, that of American girls of their age. Their adaptation to the new lifestyle has reinforced their gender identity giving them a pass towards an easier acceptance into their classroom. Sally, on the other hand had a difficult time interacting with her peers. She had not yet adopted the lifestyle of her peers; according to Mrs. Parks, she was “sheltered,” she “kind of liked Barbie,” she was “naïve.” All of these characteristics put Sally “behind socially.” Her unawareness of her sexual and physical self limited her interaction with her peers and contributed to her marginalization in the classroom.

The findings of this study suggest that the students are “in between” places. Being “in between” spaces provided them with the “terrain of elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate a new sign of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). The new sign of identity was mediated through their interests in activities that were shared by peers with the same sense of gender identity. Another motivational factor was the similarities of their struggles mediated through their socio-economic status, their level of fluency, and their treatment in their academic institutions. All these factors have contributed to the creation of their hybrid selves. Through the formation of their hybrid selves, they challenged the colonial authority that was “no longer immediately visible” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 163).
Literacy Development

Literacy development is another issue raised throughout the data collection. This discussion of literacy development is based on Krashen’s (2005) discussion of the communicative purpose of language acquisition. According to him, comprehensive input with a focus on content learning and context provide a rich source of input for English language learners (Barrera, 1983; Crawford, 2005; Krashen, 2005). In this section, I discuss the findings in relation to Krashen’s communicative purpose of language acquisition. Communicative approach focuses on language acquisition, not learning and on comprehensive input. In this section, I lay emphasis on those two categories to discuss the findings to the study.

Language acquisition. Language acquisition occurs when people pick up a language unconsciously (Crawford, 2005; Krashen, 2005). The language is then used for communicative purposes and does not focus on grammar and rules. In language acquisition, errors are not directly corrected and the use of the first language is welcome. Constant correction de-motivates the students and can affect their attitude towards learning as it leads to frustration, anxiety, and feelings of shame. Constant correction was not an issue in my findings. The only case was with Sally and her tutor, Nancy, in chapter 5. As I noted, Nancy, spent a lot of time correcting her pronunciation, and so did her partner during their reading activity. The issue to me, however, was the lack of any form of correction. In chapter 5, I discussed the /i/ sound activity in Mrs. Brian’s kindergarten class and the writing activity in Mrs. Parks’ fifth grade. Neither one of the two teachers attempted to rectify their students’ (respectively Rokie and Sally) issues. Obviously, Rokie had not understood the assignment or she did not know how to do it, so she colored everything. And Mrs. Parks read Sally’s writing and said “good job.” In so doing she failed to establish a communicative relationship with her student. With the other students in the class, she
asked them questions about what they wrote, and with Sally, she simply congratulated her. Although the lack of constant correction can lead to a positive feeling, the lack of any form of correction also reveals the teachers’ unconscious exclusion of their language limited students from classroom activities which could also be detrimental to language acquisition.

Another point of Krashen’s (2005) discussion is the use of the students’ first language. Although the teachers did not know much about the students’ first language, those were not excluded from school setting. In Chapter 4, I noted that Mrs. Rogers (fifth grade ESL teacher) often asked Sally to say the words in French. Mrs. Parks and Mrs. Brian often relied respectively on Carine and Yaya to translate some information to Sally and Rokie. In allowing their first languages, the teachers created instances that valued what they had to bring to the classroom and empowered them. They allowed the students to continue to develop their native language while acquiring the target one (Lucas et al., 2008). Mrs. Parks, for instance, worked in favor of an interaction between Carine and Sally as she created collaboration between the two girls (Buendia et al. 2003).

Besides, welcoming the first language in the school setting eased Sally’s task in transferring the knowledge acquired in French to English. As Barrera (1998) argued, “bilingual children do not appear to approach reading, or learning to read, in Spanish and in English as separate, distinct processes” (p. 170). Similarly, Sally’s English literacy was influenced by her knowledge of the French language. In the spelling activities in mainstream and ESL classroom discussed in chapter 4, although she did not get the words right, she used cognates between French and English to write her spelling words (Templeton, 2009). Her misspelling of the words “mirror[s] minimal phonetic contrasts between [her] primary language and English” (Bear & Smith, 2009, p. 102)
Bintou’s literacy development however, seemed slower than Sally’s. She had been in the U.S longer than Sally and was more fluent (although Mrs. Rogers had a difficult time understanding her). Bintou’s challenges could be interpreted differently by different people. A case study could be useful to closely examine her home and classroom environment with the hope of developing a deeper insight into her challenges. My insights into her issues are that she was confronted with Crawford (2005) and Krashen’s (2005) discussion of affective filter hypothesis. According to Krashen, affective filter relates to the “role of ‘affect,’ that is, the effect of personality, motivation, and other ‘affective variables’ on second language acquisition” (p. 43). He refers to anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence as affective factors. Although the data does not explicitly reveal any instances of anxiety, it does suggest that she displayed very little motivation or interest in classroom activities and low self-confidence. Her lack of motivation and self-confidence might allow her to “understand the input, but the input will not enter the ‘language acquisition device’” (Krashen, 2005, p. 44). Although the data also suggest that the other African students displayed low self-confidence, they displayed a strong motivation and interest in learning.

Another insight about Bintou’s literacy development challenges might be related to the connection between her home language and her literacy development. Baker (2002) expresses the need for teachers to respect students’ home language and then, “concentrate on how different forms of English are appropriate in different contexts instead of relying on the right/wrong dichotomy students usually face in school” (p. 52). Neither of the teachers knew where Bintou came from, let alone what her first language was. Their lack of awareness of her first language uncovers their lack of interest of the first language. Besides, referring to Mrs. Rogers’ discussion about her pronunciation, the form of English she brings into class was considered inappropriate,
hence devaluing her self-esteem. Furthermore, Bintou’s challenges of literacy development were considered as deficits, not culturally driven. Purcell-Gates (2002) expresses that whether we interpret differences among children—or adults—as deficit or difference depends primarily on our preconceptions, attitudes toward, and stereotypes we hold toward the individual children’s communities and cultures (p. 130).

Sally2 has made a lot of progress in her writing compared to Sally. Sally’s writings were short with very limited vocabulary. Sally2 had a wider range of vocabulary words but was still struggling with spelling. Her spelling errors include grammatical mistakes such as, “I gived my dad money.” Carine also made several grammatical mistakes that remained uncorrected by her teacher despite the fact that she was more fluent and had more content knowledge exposure. This assumes that they were being exposed to language acquisition which is “responsible for [their] fluency in a second language, [their] ability to use it easily and comfortably” (Krashen, 2005, p. 39). According to Krashen, a grammatical approach to language learning is ineffective and a view of comprehensive input in the second language is a key for second language literacy development. Comprehensive input was provided to Bintou, Sally2, Sally, and Carine’s language acquisition in ESL classroom through the different reading and writing activities. However, Bintou and Sally were denied that input in their mainstream classroom where they were “simply hearing a language [they] did not understand” (Krashen, 2005).

**Comprehensive input.** Comprehensive input, according to Krashen, is the best way to teach a language. He argues that neither repetitive drill nor grammar approaches are effective ways of teaching language. Interaction with language, however, provides a significant source of input. Unfortunately, as I discussed in chapter 4, the interaction between the mainstream teachers and their English language learners was very limited, particularly for Sally and Rokie. The
students’ limited fluency was interpreted as a handicap and the teachers expected them to acquire fluency in the language before any form of interaction. In the case of Sally the interaction was established indeed, when she came back to school after her summer break with a higher mastery of the English language. As a result, the teachers provided limited opportunities for Sally and Rokie to acquire English fluency with any comprehensive input.

Comprehensive input was, however, provided to Carine, Sally2, and Yaya through their interaction with their mainstream teachers and the classroom material. They were more fluent in English and were viewed by their teachers as more suitable for learning. For instance, as mentioned in chapter 5, Mrs. Brian assisted Yaya and sometimes Rokie in their writings. Similarly, Mrs. Parks conversed with Carine about her writing, and Mrs. Parks2 even had a written conversation with Sally2 about a book the latter read.

The acquisition of language through comprehensive input also involved the provision of context and content (Crawford, 2005; Jiminez et al., 1996). In Rokie and Yaya’s ESL classroom, for instance, their teacher often had them read a book through the pictures (chapter 4). The pictures provided contextual information for the students who used them to reconstruct the story of the book (Iddings et al., 2009). Besides, Mrs. Clarks provided guidance for the students and enhanced their motivation and interests. In mainstream classroom, Yaya and Rokie did not always benefit from such guidance, and Yaya often did not show any interest in reading.

Crawford (2005) points out different strategies to promote reading comprehension; those include pre-reading, guided reading and post reading strategies. Pre-reading strategies, for instance, involves background knowledge of the text, group discussion, and vocabulary development. Looking back at the data, reading was a very common activity in the classrooms. Mrs. Brian’s class had daily reading activities such the reading on Cinco de Mayo and that of
Jenny B. The reading on Cinco de Mayo did provide background information to the students, even though it was incomplete. It did, however, prepare the students for the content of the reading. The discussion of the context also required students’ input. Mrs. Brian asked the questions that incited a conversation between her and the students. In Mrs. Parks and Mrs. Parks2’s class, reading was more individual and personal. Mrs. Parks often had some collective reading activities such as the lesson on the heart discussed in chapter 5. She provided pre-reading strategies to make the text accessible to the students. However, there was not provision of vocabulary and post reading activities.

According to Jimenez et al. (1996), vocabulary can be a barrier and/or a bridge to comprehension. In the case of the participants of this study, it was mostly a barrier and rarely a bridge, since Carine was the only student who had acquired enough fluency to participate in classroom instruction. In kindergarten, Yaya’s physical instability during reading activities was an expression of his limitation in comprehending the reading. It was also the case for Sally, who showed little interest in what was being done in her fifth grade class, despite the attempts of her teacher to involve her in the activity about the heart. Crawford (2005) also discussed guided reading as conducive to communication and focus. In Mrs. Rogers and Mrs. Clarks’ ESL classrooms, reading was often guided and facilitated the communication and comprehension. In the mainstream classrooms, on the other hand, it was often isolated. During Mrs. Parks’ class on the heart, the students were expected to answer a series of questions relevant to the text. But, the lack of guided activities on the reading did not facilitate the communicative focus of reading comprehension. A communicative approach to reading comprehension would allow students to answer and ask questions about the text and then support the students’ journey towards literacy development (Iddings et al., 2009). However, neither Mrs. Parks’ reading of the *Wizard of Oz*
nor Mrs. Brian’s reading *Jenny B Jones* would be able to enhance the literacy development of students with limited fluency. Those readings involved neither any contextual information nor any vocabulary discussion or guided discussion.

Another unguided reading in Mrs. Parks’ class took place when she asked Sally to do a series of reading from the computer. Not being given any specific guidance about the reading made the activity isolated and purposeless. Although Mrs. Parks’ might have reached her objective in occupying Sally, she demonstrated once more the low expectation she had for Sally, at this stage of her English language fluency and her perception of Sally’s language limitations as a deficiency.

In summary, although the teachers seem to promote a communicative approach to literacy development, their attitudes towards the students depended on their English language fluency. The more fluent they were, the more their mainstream teachers interacted with them and provided context and content to their learning.

**Implications for Teacher Education**

**For educators.** This study has significant implications for teachers, teacher educators and school administrators. The first one is the need for teachers to be exposed to knowledge relevant to the African continent. Although exposure to media is very important for teachers, it also sometimes portrays information that is biased and/or narrowed at times. Teachers need to go beyond the information produced by media to develop a more relevant and encompassing knowledge that would be useful to develop teaching strategies inclusive of African students. Besides, teachers need to have basic information about their students’ country of origin, their
location, their political and social environments. This knowledge would reduce risks of stereotyping and allow them to better assess the challenges faced by their African students.

Teachers also need to be mindful of the power relationships in classrooms and their implications for all students in general and immigrant students in particular. An understanding of the power relations in classrooms would allow teachers to develop instructional strategies that would create a space for social adaptation and academic achievement. It would, for instance, create a collaborative relation of power and reduce or minimize any form of symbolic violence as discussed in the first section of this chapter.

Furthermore, teacher education should emphasize the necessity for teachers to understand the challenges faced by their immigrant students, not through their own privilege standpoint, but through the standpoint of the students and their socio-economic realities. Doing so, would minimize the creation of stereotypes and discrimination that can contribute to lowering students’ self confidence and leaving them lagging behind their parents.

Besides, teacher education should help student teachers develop an understanding of immigrant students’ sense of identity. Although teachers are aware of cultural and racial differences, they might have a full understanding of how hybridity comes into play in immigrant students’ learning practices.

Another implication of this study is related to the connection between ESL and mainstream classrooms. As the findings suggest, the students had an inconsistent exposure to content knowledge. That inconsistency was in part due to ESL pull out that took place in the middle of content knowledge and the almost exclusive focus of ESL on literacy (writing, reading, speaking, and listening). It is essential that mainstream and ESL teachers establish a collaborative relationship between the two instructional spaces and create a more positive
learning environment for immigrant students. Besides, it is also essential for ESL teachers to include subject matter knowledge in their literacy instructions.

Mainstream teachers need to be equipped with knowledge of second language literacy development. An awareness of second language literacy would provide them with the necessary tools to address the linguistic challenges of their immigrant student populations. For instance, it would allow them to view students’ first language of literacy as an asset and use it for an effective development of literacy in English. Identically, knowledge in second language literacy would allow teachers to develop strategies to include ELLs in instruction, even when the latter have not yet developed the English fluency skills deemed necessary for instruction.

Finally, teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge to research their own practice in order to understand the implications on students. Researching her own practice would have allowed Mrs. Brian (kindergarten teacher) to realize that Yaya’s behavioral issues were in part due to not being included in instruction and also being constantly expected to misbehave. It would also allow Mrs. Parks (fifth grade teacher) to make a connection between Sally’s exclusion from classroom activities and her exclusion from social interactions or to understand Bintou’s reluctance to participate in any classroom activity.

For immigrant populations. Given that this study did not include the parents of immigrant children, its implications for them are very limited. It does, however, compel immigrant parents to pay closer attention to the educational activities of their students (checking notes sent home by teachers, helping with homework, attending parent teacher conferences, etc.). Developing a connection with the school establishes a communicative relationship with the school and eases the frustration felt by their children. It would be very important for future
research to address the apparent disconnections between immigrant parents and the schooling experiences of their children.

Summary

In this study, I examined the nature of the interaction between mainstream classroom teachers and their immigrant students. I was more specifically interested in how teaching practices and content were adjusted to include African immigrant students. The study investigated the challenges faced by the students in classrooms, their teachers’ perception of those challenges, and the instructional strategies used to address the needs of the students. The study also examined the students’ participation in instruction, and finally their relationships with their peers and teachers. It involved the following qualitative data collection methods--observations, interviews, and informal conversations. It was conducted in three mainstream classrooms and three ESL classrooms and involved five teachers and five African students who were all from French speaking African countries with the exception of one who was from Liberia, an English speaking country.

The findings of the study suggest a lack of interest and motivation as well as a low self confidence for the students who were not yet very fluent in English. They also reveal the students’ resistance to classroom activities and display of frustrations. The issues of resistance, lack of motivation, and frustration were perceived by the teachers as defiance and/or behavioral issues. Those issues were attributed by some teachers to their limited English language proficiency and the lack of apparent parental involvement in classroom activities. Other teachers related them to possible social and political unrest in the students’ country/continent of origin.
As for the instructional strategies used in the classrooms, although the use of one on one interactions were inclusive of students with limited language proficiency, they were most of the time exclusive of students who were still struggling to acquire a conversational language. As a result, the students generally did not participate in classroom activities. In fifth grade, Sally was always involved with drawing or personal reading when her peers were working on content knowledge. Bintou, on the other hand, was always copying whatever her teacher and peers put on the overhead without ever showing any sign of interest. Carine and Sally2, however, were more involved in instruction. In kindergarten, Rokie was always quiet and never said anything while Yaya was always in trouble because of his behavior during instruction.

The last research question was relevant to the relationship between the students and their peers and the teachers. The relationship was conditioned by the students’ level of fluency in English and/or their involvement in classroom activities. The more they were fluent, the more they participated in classrooms and the more they connected with their peers and their teachers. The fluent students often connected with the peers with whom they had a common interest and struggle and/or a common sense of identity. The students with limited fluency, however, were isolated from the rest of the class and always referred to the comfort of their home environment in their writing assignments.

I argued that the relationship between the students and their teachers reflected a hegemonic relationship of power between the parties. The power relationship led to the creation of symbolic violence through which the students experienced lots of frustration, low self confidence, and lack of motivation in classroom activities. The power relationship was also mirrored through stereotypes and discrimination. Those were encouraged not only by the labeling of students with behavioral issues, but also with teachers’ exposure to the African
continent mostly mediated by media. Lastly, the power relationship in the classroom was visible through teaching practices that, most of the time, excluded students who had yet to develop fluency in the English language.

I also argued in this dissertation that the interaction between African immigrant children and their peers was based on common interests and common challenges. I discussed race, gender, popular culture, and classroom pull outs as factors that influence the identity formation of the students. However, it is to be noted that those factors were affected by the level of fluency of the students in English. The less fluent they were, the more they identified with home, and the more distant they were from their peers.

Finally, I used Krashen (2005) and Crawford’s (2005) discussion of the communicative purposes of language acquisition to discuss that the teachers sometimes created a “positive” learning environment through the lack of constant correction, the welcoming of students’ personal experiences through writing, and their use of their first language of literacy. However, they limited the students’ opportunities for interaction with their peers and learning by failing to provide them with conversational moments that could lead to a better understanding of the assignments or its improvement. The lack of interaction was also motivated by the students’ limited exposure to comprehensive input because of their limited fluency in English.

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to attract the reader’s attention towards the challenges faced by African students in the classroom. One of the most compelling arguments of my work was that classroom teachers do not have a clear framework within which to deal with African students. The lack of framework might be motivated by the limited presence of African students in U.S. classrooms as compared to other immigrant populations. Given their limited number in the classroom their issues are often invisible to teachers who are not prepared to deal
with them. This study could be very useful to teachers and teacher educators. It posits African immigrant students as an integral part of classrooms and compels teachers and teacher educators to develop strategies that would be more inclusive of African students. It also highlights the need for future research of the field of teacher education in order to understand the extent to which classroom teachers are prepared to teach immigrant populations.
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Appendix A

Interview with Teachers

1- Which part of the U.S. do you come from?
2- Number of years of experience?
3- Exposure to immigrant population before and during teaching practice?
4- How often do you have immigrant children in your class? How about African children?
5- How many African children do you have in your class? Countries of origin, gender.
6- What do you think about the African population in your classroom?
7- What do you know about the students’ cultural and linguistic background?
8- How would you describe each student?
9- What do you think are the problems undergone by the children?
10- Could you explain the origins of their difficulties?
11- Do you think they are having troubles adapting to their new environment?
12- If yes, what kind of troubles?
13- How would you describe your connection with them? How?
14- Do you think you participate in easing their challenges?
15- Describe a typical class session with them.
16- How often do you have literacy class?
17- How about social studies?
18- What are the general objectives of literacy and social studies classes?
19- Discuss the curriculum you are using. Who elaborated them? How do they meet your instructional needs? What are its weakness and strengths
20- Discuss the classroom material and their purpose.
21- How are African children coping with the material?
22- How useful is the material to students’ need?  
23- Does classroom material include knowledge about immigrant children?  
24- How do children relate to classroom material?  
25- Do they have a hard time connecting with classroom materials? Why?  
26- Is cultural diversity incorporated in the curriculum? Why?  
27- How are students’ diverse background handled in the classroom?  
28- Does instruction sometimes refer to student’s linguistic abilities? Why?  
29- What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of students’ multiple linguistic abilities?  
30- Does speaking other languages have an effect of students’ learning process? How?  
31- you often talk about the languages the students  
32- How often? How do students react to them?  
33- What are kind of instructional strategies do you use in class?  
34- How are they connected to the challenges faced by the African children?  
35- How do the children react to them?  
36- What kind of activities do you use during instruction?  
37- How engaging are they to the students? Why?  
38- Which activities are the most engaging for the children? Why?
Appendix B

Observation Measures

What are the topics discussed in the classroom?

How are they introduced to the students?

How do the students connect to the topics?

What are the activities used to facilitate understanding?

Is any reference made to the students’ background?

How do students participate in classroom activities?

Do students have difficulty understanding classroom discussion?

How do they manifest their challenges?

Does teacher attend to children’s challenges? How?

Do teacher’s efforts translate into better results?
Appendix C

Consent Forms

Teacher Consent Form

My name is Wen-Yam Esther Some, a Doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction and Dr. Susan Noffke and I are interested in your participation in a research project about instructional negotiation with French speaking African immigrants in American elementary literacy and social studies classrooms. For the study, I would like to observe your classroom interactions and anticipate that the total time involved will be one to two hours twice a week for a period of two months. I would also like to interview you about my research and anticipate that it will take about 45 to 60 minutes. Finally, I would like if possible to include lesson plans or other documents you may find useful for instruction as well as samples of children’s work.

I do not anticipate any risk to this study greater than normal life and the results may benefit our understanding of how children from this cultural context transition into American schools. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you are free not to answer particular questions, or to withdraw from the project, at any point. Your decision to participate in the research or not will not influence your employment. It will not impact your relationship with your school and/ or with the UIUC either. To ensure that I don’t miss any of what you have to say, I would prefer to tape record the classroom discussions and our interview. After I have transcribed the interview, I will give you a copy of it for member checking. If for any reason you are uncomfortable with my questions, you can decide to stop the interview. Your participation in this project will be kept confidential and data kept secure. You are welcome to choose a pseudonym as no real names will be used in any publication or dissemination of the data. I anticipate that the results will be included in a dissertation, journal article and other educational presentations.
If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please feel free to contact me at wsomegue2@illinois.edu; 365-9395 or Dr Susan Noffke at 333-1670 or s-noffke@Illinois.edu. I have read and understood the above and agree to participate in the research project described.

You are entitled to a copy of the consent document.

___ Yes the researcher may observe my classroom discussions. ___ No, the researcher may observe my classroom discussions.

___ Yes the researcher may audio tape my interview. ___ No, the researcher may not audio tape my interview.

___ Yes the researcher may have access to classroom material. ___ No, the researcher may not have access to classroom material.

Signature of teacher________________________________________ Date____________________

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the OSURR office at 217-333-3023 or arobrtsn@illinois.edu. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at 217-222-2670 or irb@illinois.edu.

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Non-focal Participant Parent Consent Form

My name is Wen-Yam Esther Some, a Doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction. Dr. Susan Noffke and I are interested in your participation in a research project about instructional negotiation with certain immigrants in American elementary literacy and social studies classrooms.

For the study, I would like to observe in your child’s classroom and anticipate that the total time involved will be one to two hours twice a week for a period of two months. I will take notes on instructional activities and ways children respond to those activities and may include copies of student work.

I do not anticipate any risk to this study greater than normal life and the results may benefit our understanding of how children from this cultural context transition into American schools. Your child’s participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you are free not to withdraw from the project at any point. Your decision to participate in the research or not will not influence your child’s grade or status at school. To ensure that I don’t miss any of what the child have to say during instructional time, I would prefer to tape record the classroom discussions.

Your child’s participation in this project will be kept confidential and data kept secure. No real names will be used in any publication or dissemination of the data. I anticipate that the results will be included in a dissertation, journal article and other educational presentations.

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please feel free to contact me at wsomigue2@illinois.edu; 365-9395 or Dr Susan Noffke at 333-1670 or s-noffke@Illinois.edu

I have read and understood the above and agree to participate in the research project described. You are entitled to a copy of the consent document.
___ Yes the researcher may observe my child’s classroom discussions. ___ No, the researcher may observe my child’s classroom discussions.

___ Yes the researcher may audio tape my child’s instructional discussions. ___ No, the researcher may not audio tape my child’s instructional discussion.

___ Yes the researcher may have access to student work. ___ No, the researcher may not have access to student work.

Child’s name: ________________________________________________________________

Parent/ Guardian Signature: ----------------------------------------------------------

Parent / Guardian Name (PRINT):--------------------------------------------------------

Date: --------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the OSURR office at 217-333-3023 or arobrtsn@illinois.edu. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at 217-222-2670 or irb@illinois.edu
Focal Participant Parent Consent Form

My name is Wen-Yam Esther Some, a Doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction. Dr. Susan Noffke and I are interested in your participation in a research project about instructional negotiation with certain immigrants in American elementary literacy and social studies classrooms.

For the study, I would like to observe in your child’s classroom and anticipate that the total time involved will be one to two hours twice a week for a period of two months. I will take notes on instructional activities and ways children respond to those activities and may include copies of student work. I may also conduct a short interview with your child 30-60 minutes about their perceptions of American schools.

I do not anticipate any risk to this study greater than normal life and the results may benefit our understanding of how children from this cultural context transition into American schools. Your child’s participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you are free not to withdraw from the project at any point. Your decision to participate in the research or not will not influence your child’s grade or status at school. To ensure that I don’t miss any of what the child have to say during instructional time, I would prefer to tape record the classroom discussions.

Your child’s participation in this project will be kept confidential and data kept secure. No real names will be used in any publication or dissemination of the data. I anticipate that the results will be included in a dissertation, journal article and other educational presentations.

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please feel free to contact me at wsomegue2@illinois.edu; 365-9395 or Dr Susan Noffke at 333-1670 or s-noffke@Illinois.edu

I have read and understood the above and agree to participate in the research project described.
You are entitled to a copy of the consent document.

___ Yes the researcher may observe my child’s classroom discussions.  ___No, the researcher may not observe my child’s classroom discussions.

___ Yes the researcher may audio tape my child’s instructional discussions and interview.  
___ No, the researcher may not audio tape my child’s instructional discussion and interview.

___ Yes the researcher may have access to student work.  ___No, the researcher may not have access to student work.

Child’s name: ________________________________________________________________

Parent/ Guardian Signature:  Adam

Parent / Guardian Name (PRINT):------------------------------------------

Date:  Adam

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the OSURR office at 217-333-3023 or arobrtsn@illinois.edu. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at 217-222-2670 or irb@illinois.edu
Children’s Oral Consent Form

My name is Wen-Yam Esther Some, a Doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction. I am conducting a qualitative study to satisfy the requirements of my dissertation. My research consists of understanding the instructional negotiation between mainstream teachers and English language learners in U.S elementary social studies classrooms. This study mostly involves teachers, while their African students are part of the context of the study. I work under the Supervision of Dr. Susan Noffke, Associate Professor in the department of Curriculum and Instruction. I would like to observe your classroom interactions. I anticipate that the total time involved will be one to two hours twice a week for a period of two months. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not participate in the research or not will not impact your relationship with your school or with the UIUC. Your participation will not influence your grade. To ensure that I don’t miss any of what you have to say, I would prefer to tape record your classroom interactions.

Your participation in this project will be kept confidential. I will not show anyone my field notes with your actual name appearing on them, or use the audio/visual material at conferences, in journal articles, etc without your formal consent. I will use a pseudonym (which you are welcome to choose) in referring to you when I analyze and write up this project. I will keep data materials locked in a safe, and destroy them after I do not need them anymore.