

PROMOTING CRITICAL LITERACY  
AMONG EMERGENT BILINGUALS:  
AN EXPLORATION OF THEIR IDENTITIES

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## **Abstract**

This study was an action research study that examined how second grade bilingual children defined “the word and their world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987) during literature discussions; that world is structured by societal, school, and classroom constructions of race, culture and languages when students discussed literature books that pertained to these topics. More specifically, I looked at how Latino students negotiated their understandings and enacted their multiple identities during literature discussions, how the identities the teacher held and the identities she placed on her students were negotiated through dialogue in order for students to start thinking about what it meant to be growing up bilingual in today’s political context, as well as how the books the students were discussing influenced the conversations. This study also captures an educator’s commitment towards nurturing critical consciousness among her emerging bilingual students.

Data collection consisted of audiotaping literature discussions over a five-month time period. Using inductive analysis, I, as both the research and educator, worked to understand how students used their voices to express their ideas in literature discussions as well as how they navigated aspects of their identity when reading and responding to literature chosen to reflect their cultural and lived experiences. Through this study, I investigated the dialogue of young students in relation to discussions on race, ethnicity and multilingualism around books read during literature discussions as well as their development of critical consciousness.

Keywords: literature discussions, identity, critical consciousness

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

I was sitting around a kidney-shaped table at the front of the classroom discussing the book *Esperando mi papá/ Waiting for Papá* with my Spanish bilingual second grade students who had chosen this book: Camila, Juliana, Lucia, Arcadia and Victor. Juliana brought up the fact that she spoke to her grandmother in dialect, “Yo hablo con mi abuela en dialecto.” I asked her if it was because her grandmother did not speak Spanish and she said yes. I then asked her, “Y nos puedes enseñar cómo decir algo en dialecto? [Can you teach us how to say something in dialect?] Camila immediately jumped into the discussion and said “Yo si!” [I can!]. I told her to teach us something easy, “Algo fácil.” She said, “Algo fácil es Cu-quis es ardilla.” [Something easy is Cu-quis which is squirrel.] We then went on to have me try pronouncing it correctly while she corrected me. Camila brought up how Cu-quis sounded a lot like the English word cookies and how people overhearing us might get confused. When I asked Camila how to say the complete sentence, “Allí hay un ardilla” [There is a squirrel], she referred to Juliana who she knew spoke more Q’anjob’al than her. She turned to Juliana and said, “Tu si sabes mucho más que yo. Mi papa no me enseñó como decir eso.” [You know much more than me. My dad did not teach me how to say that.]

The previous interaction illustrates the importance of knowing your students and allowing them a space to bring in their background knowledge to share with classmates (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005). *Esperando mi papá/ Waiting for Papá* was one of the books I had purposely chosen to include as a choice for literature discussions because I

had two students, Arcadia and Victor, who I knew were living separate from their fathers, like the main character in the story. I wanted to particularly give these two students a space to talk about how they felt being in this type of situation without making it overly personal. What I did not realize was how personally connected that students would be to particular stories. For example, Camila speaking about the dialectal language as shown in the opening passage. Camila was a student that had one Guatemalan parent and one Mexican parent. I never really thought of Camila as knowing a dialect because she was born in the states, did not look like my other Guatemalan students and most stories she shared were related to her Mexican background.

The vignette also showed the importance of recognizing a student's language and culture, specifically, allowing discussion in order to get insights into students' identities and knowledge of their world, in this case, Camila's Guatemalan heritage. If a teacher does not take a student's language and culture into consideration then she is ignoring something that makes the student who they are. Camila had multiple identities that were part of her, which included both her Mexican background and Guatemalan background. This interaction made me realize I was ignoring a part of Camila that made her who she was. A committed teacher must recognize and support the development of students' language in any way that she can. The only problem is that even when a teacher is committed to this charge it can be rather difficult to accomplish because of the current political climate that demands the use of scripted curriculum in which a teacher is told exactly what to teach, how to teach, and when to teach. This type of curriculum leaves little opportunity for engaging discussions like in the opening vignette because the

curriculum does not leave space for a teacher to bring in a student's own background knowledge. Therefore these high-stakes policies are problematic in many ways.

### **Statement of Problem**

High-stakes accountability policies being implemented across the United States are influencing literacy instruction and in many cases narrowing the type of literature children have access to in the curriculum (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Crosland & Gutiérrez, 2003; Valli & Buese, 2007). These type of policies have an autonomous view of literacy in which literacy is seen as “simply a technical and neutral skill” (Street, 1984, p.2). This view does not take into account the context or culture in which literacy is taking place. It also does not recognize that each individual comes to the literacy practice with a different knowledge base, identities, and backgrounds (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). In many cases, these types of policies have narrowed the curriculum and limited the amount of literature to which students are exposed. I am speaking of this based on my own experience in which my school has a specific literacy curriculum that must be followed, which leaves little time to bring in other authentic literature. I am using Bishop's (2003) definition of authenticity, which is “the success with which a writer is able to reflect the cultural perspectives of the people whom he or she is writing about, and make readers from the inside group believe that he or she ‘knows what's going on’ ” (p.29).

As a result of these accountability pressures, my school standardized their literacy instruction, meaning that they adopted a particular reading program to use school wide. This reading program followed the autonomous view of literacy (Street, 1984). Some district personnel felt that in order to meet the standards, every child needed to receive

the same instruction. This meant that each child got equal access to the same curriculum, but what was not considered was that every child was coming into the classroom with different literacy experiences. Through my own teaching practice, I have seen this in my classroom. Having one type of curriculum for students did not guarantee an equal access to learning because each student had individual literacy and language skills that would influence how they learned, especially when it came to bilingual students who were negotiating between two different languages.

Much of the core reading curriculum, including that of my classroom, that has been implemented is scripted. A scripted curriculum is a pre-packaged, corporate curriculum aimed specifically at teaching to the required test. These types of programs have resulted in teachers framing the classroom curriculum to match the test. Students learn to rote memorize information, therefore limiting the development of higher order thinking skills. Students' learning is fragmented because they only learn in the context of a specific text (Au, 2011). Many of these basal reader programs addressed a particular reading strategy in each particular story. The students learned these strategies in one particular situation but were not able to apply the knowledge gained to a wide range of literary experiences (Cummins, 2003).

Scripted curriculum requires “no creative input or decision-making on the part of the teachers, literally providing verbal scripts that define and limits what teachers can say as they teach” (Au, 2011, p.31-32). These types of programs disempower teachers because they tell them what to say and do, as if they would not know what to do on their own. What is not taken into consideration with a scripted curriculum is that a teacher must adapt her instruction in the classroom to meet the wide range of students' abilities.

These curricula adopted by the schools are usually written from a Eurocentric view, with little focus on other cultures (Foster, 2012). Specifically, in my classroom there were two anthologies with a total of twenty stories for second grade. When I looked closely at the stories I found that of the twenty stories there was only one, *El gran bigote* (by Gary Soto) that had a Latino looking character named Ricky. The problem I saw was that nowhere in the story did it talk about Ricky's cultural background. This little focus on culture results in the silencing of students' voices and the disempowerment of them (Bishop, 1992; Lehr, 2010; Nieto, 2010a). By power I am referring to students knowing how to use language as a tool. Students do not see aspects of their lives reflected in the stories; therefore, they did not make connections or engage in meaningful discussions. This curriculum was not one that enlisted discussion or critical thinking. These materials narrowed the curriculum because there was only one right way of doing things, so students did not have any real power to voice their ideas that might differ from the book.

This high accountability classroom context seemed to produce students in my class that no longer read for enjoyment (Worthy, Chamberlain, Peterson, Sharp & Shih, 2012), they read to find the answer and complete a worksheet. Just looking for the answer hindered my students' literacy development. It was important that students learned to enjoy reading because stories were the way they made sense of their world (Short, 1999). My students needed to be in a classroom where they were exposed to a wide range of literature. Without abandoning the school's policy and required reading curriculum I decided to shut my door and introduce students to more multicultural literature through discussion groups.

As a teacher I realized that there were particular skills that my students needed to learn, but I felt that they could learn and practice these skills while reading authentic literature, literature that reflected aspects of their lives. With all the added pressure from standards, many teachers do not feel like they have the time for a literature-rich curriculum because most books introduced in the classroom are read to teach a particular skill, not just for enjoyment (Short, 1999). This teaching of the skills is necessary, but not the only thing needed for long-term reading success because it does not take into consideration a student's unique language or schooling experiences (August & Hakuta, 1997; August & Shanahan, 2006; Pacheco, 2010; Ramirez, 2000). The context described above made me interested in what would happen when students are placed in a "dialogic classroom that encourages the shaping and negotiation of multiple perspectives, ideas, and ways of expressing" (Sperling, Appleman, Gilyard, & Freedman, 2011, p.76), particularly when a teacher and her students, each with multiple identities, challenge and negotiate their understandings.

Halliday (1980/1985) found that in any language event, children have the opportunity to learn language, learn about language, and learn through language. Children need to talk, listen to others, explore language uses, and make connections in order to make meaning. Halliday (1985) made clear that these aspects of language learning can only occur in a meaningful context. Literature discussions around books that relate to students' backgrounds and allow the use of their native language is the meaningful context in my study. I gave students the needed space to use and manipulate language in many ways. The scripted curriculum used in the classroom did expose children to various learning strategies that they needed to learn but it did not offer enough

opportunities for students to have their voices heard. When students read they are actually inquiring, thinking, and learning about the world and their lives (Short, 1999). The implementation of literature discussions in my classroom gave students a format to explore language. The use of a multicultural literature greatly enriched the literature discussion process.

I had felt the greatest pressure from the high-accountability policies during the year this study was implemented. At my school, the students designated as low-income in third grade had not been making AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) on the state ISAT (Illinois Standard Achievement Test) test the previous years. AYP is a measurement set by the No Child Left Behind Act; a school must meet this measurement to prove students are progressing academically based on standardized test results. I felt pressured to prepare my students to be successful in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and pass the ISAT test they would be taking. One way I was pressured to prepare my students was through the introduction of more English vocabulary than in the previous years. Through meetings and discussions with several members of my administrative staff I had been instructed to introduce more English to my students cross various subjects.

For example, it was decided that I would introduce math English vocabulary to my students throughout the Spanish math lesson on a daily basis. Also I would conduct a math review lesson all in English on Friday each week. On this day, math homework would be sent home in English. Another area where English sneaked in was in my literacy block. In my previous years of teaching, literacy instruction was done completely in Spanish, following the thought process that students should have a strong base in their native language in order to transfer skills learned into the learning of a

second language (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 2000; Proctor, August, Carlo & Barr, 2010; Samway & McKeon, 1997). But that particular year things had changed. Throughout the weeks, literacy centers changed between English and Spanish. The word work center had sight words in Spanish and in English. The listening center had books in Spanish one week and in English another week. I had a reading fluency center that was in English. Also I had introduced books to my highest guided reading groups that were in English on occasion. All of these changes were a direct result of the pressures my school and I had felt from these high-accountability policies, which were not allowing me to teach in the way I saw best for all my students. I decided to push against these pressures by implementing discussions around multicultural literature. Of course, I still had to follow the official school literacy curriculum, which included a basal reader program as well as guided reading groups.

The basal reader program was a scripted curriculum; therefore I did not feel I had much freedom to introduce my students to a wide range of literature. My students were expected to read the particular story in the anthology each week, as well as complete the worksheets that went with the stories. I also conducted guided reading groups. In this format, students are placed in small groups based on their ability, which was decided upon by a given test. The teacher then decides on the focus of the lesson and guides the students in teaching a particular reading strategy, such as making predictions or summarizing. I am the one in control during the guided reading discussion, making sure students understand how to use the designated strategy to aid in the comprehension of the story (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The stories we used in guided reading groups were usually short and lacked a complex story line. This is why I felt the need to also

implement literature discussions. The use of literature discussions, in which students actually dialogue about the books they have read, is no longer as widely used (Short, 1999; Swain, 2010). This could be a result of the lack of time a teacher has in the classroom and the pressures felt from accountability pressures.

In contrast to guided reading groups, literature discussion groups aim to promote the construction of a deeper understanding about the book through discussions with peers while forming a wide range of connections (Short, 1993). Especially with the use of multicultural literature, all students may see aspects of their identities reflected in the stories (Nieto, 2010a; Nieto, 2010b). Books used in literature discussions tend to be longer and have a more complex storyline. Literature discussions with multicultural literature have an added value for children learning across two languages because it promotes the use of language and offers a space for students to discuss issues they may have already be negotiating in the classroom (DeNicolo, 2010; Martínez-Roldán, 2000; Martínez-Roldán, 2003). This type of literacy practice of literature discussions follows the ideological view of literacy, which takes into account the social context (Street, 1984).

The reason I chose multicultural literature was that I wanted stories in which students could see aspects of their own lives reflected (Bishop, 1992). As in the vignette at the beginning of the chapter, I chose books based on what I knew of my students. I wanted to use books that could be used to talk about issues that students had come across in their lives, which related to them being bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural.

I looked for books that were bilingual, but not ones that were directly translated from English. I looked for books that were written by Latino authors, which dealt with

issues such as being bilingual, family life, and conflicts between home and school. I wanted to use quality literature to introduce students to “authentic representations of different racial and ethnic groups in our society” (Montgomery, 2000, p. 34). I wanted these types of books because I felt my students would be able to make more meaningful connections and engage in significant dialogue, if they could see themselves in the story.

I realized that all my students’ experiences were not going to be the same even if they came from a similar cultural background; that is why it was important to offer students a diversity of literature. Of course, there was no sure way to know all the aspects of a student’s life, so there was no guarantee students would be able to connect to each particular story. But through the selection of a wide range of literature there was more likely to be books that students could see a particular aspect of their life reflected. I wanted my classroom to be a place where “children are offered literature in varying cultural contexts that inform, clarify, explain, or educate them about the diversity of our remarkable human family” (Montgomery, 2000, p.34). The purpose of using multicultural books was to have students build upon the knowledge they already had (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005).

### **Purpose of Study**

This study was an action research study that examined how children defined “the word and their world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987) during literature discussions; their world is structured by societal, school, and classroom constructions of race, culture and languages when students discussed literature books that pertained to these topics. Particularly, I was interested in how students negotiated their understandings and enacted their multiple identities during literature discussions. I was interested as well in how the

identities the teacher held and the identities she placed on her students were negotiated through dialogue in order for students to start thinking about what it meant to be growing up bilingual in today's political context.

I wanted to understand how students used their voice to express their ideas in literature discussions as well as how they navigated aspects of their identity when reading and responding to literature chosen because it was believed to reflect their cultural and lived experience. In this study, I define voice as “a language performance-always social, mediated by experience, and culturally embedded” (Sperling, Appleman, Gilyard, & Freedman, 2011, p. 71). Through this study, I intended to investigate the dialogue of young students in relation to discussions on race, ethnicity and multilingualism around books read during literature discussions.

### **Research Questions**

The literature discussions that I analyzed were situated in a political climate of high stake accountability policies. I looked at what happened when a literacy practice that combated the standardization of the reading curriculum (i.e. literature discussions groups) was implemented in a bilingual classroom setting. Specifically looking at how the students, teachers, and the books used constructed a space for voicing ideas and thoughts about families' histories and bilingualism.

#### **The research questions guiding this study are the following:**

What are the ways that Spanish-speaking bilingual second graders participate orally in literature discussions using literature that reflect aspects of their lives and understandings?

A. How do Spanish-speaking bilingual second graders enact voice in literature

discussions?

- B. Who is doing the talking during the literature discussions?
- 
- 1. How do Spanish-speaking bilingual second graders discuss their own identity in literature discussions?
    - A. What are the ways that student talk reflects their identities?
    - B. How do students take up different identities in discussion groups?
    - C. What kind of identities does the teacher place on students and how do they negotiate them?
  
  - 3. What roles are taken on by the teacher and the students during literature discussions?
    - A. How does the teacher's role change over time?
    - B. How do teacher/students position themselves in the discussions?
    - C. What measures does the teacher take to give up her power/leadership in the discussion?
  
  - 4. How do the students engage with the selected multicultural books?
    - A. What books seem to get students more engaged?
    - B. To what extent do the storyline and characters correspond to the educational and demographic trends in today's U.S. society, specifically those of my students?

### **Significance of Study**

This study warranted scholarly consideration because my own situation, while unique, reflects situations many teachers and children find themselves in. The high stakes accountability policies being implemented were not taking into account my students' cultural background, languages, or multiple identities, which all affected the education they received. Therefore, I decided to add literature discussions as one aspect of my reading curriculum in order to look at what happened when students' backgrounds as well as the social context were taken into consideration.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I frame my study using two different theories: sociocultural theory and critical literacy. I chose sociocultural theory because it discusses the importance of interaction and dialogue in the classroom, which are two key components of my study of literature discussions. In addition, this study is greatly informed by Freire's critical literacy to look at how students develop "conscientization" and how the relationship between a teacher and student changes when the teacher moves beyond the banking model of teaching (Freire, 1970). The definition of "conscientization" that I use is one of critical consciousness, in which students begin to understand their world, specifically looking at the social and political oppressions in their lives and taking action against them (Freire, 1974). These two theories together offer an insightful framework through which I examine the dialogue throughout the literature discussions. Specifically looking at how together teacher, students and the books construct space for voicing ideas and thoughts about aspects of their families' history and of their own bilingualism.

## Overview of Chapters

In this chapter, I introduced the current study. I stated the problem of the accountability policies narrowing of the literacy curriculum used in today's classroom and purpose of the study, noting that my goal was to examine, during literature discussions, how children defined "the word and their world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987) structured by societal, school, and classroom constructions of race, culture and languages. I also noted the sociocultural and critical literacy theoretical frameworks whose reference I make in the data analysis and in the discussion of the findings. I also introduced the research questions that guided the study and spoke of the significance of this study.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant research including an overview of the sociocultural view of literacy studies. This is followed by an explanation of how identity is infused in literacy practices and critical literacy. I discuss bilingual literacy, specifically native language instruction, as well as Latino children's literature, literature discussions, and the teacher's role. Chapter 3 is a discussion of research method used to conduct this study, which is an action research qualitative study.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present the major findings of the study. Specifically Chapter 4 relates to the student perspectives. As I will argue, the key to students' "conscientization" was students' use of personal narratives in response to books they connected with. "Conscientization" is defined as the process of developing critical awareness of one's reality by questioning and taking action (Freire, 1974). That "conscientization" happened for my students through critical discussion about diverse topics, such as race, ethnicity and multilingualism. Chapter 5 is the teacher's journey and shows how her role changed in order to allow the space for students to reach critical

consciousness. Through the teacher's own reflections, based on the students' narratives, she build upon her own "conscientization" (Freire, 1974). The teacher's role and positionality had to be problematized. In Chapter 6 I discuss how the multicultural books influenced the discussion.

Chapter 7 is the final chapter that gives a summary, discussion, and implications of findings in research and teaching. This study has three educational implications which are: providing access to students' background knowledge, specifically their personal narratives, allowing access to a student's native language, and discussion of texts that address critical issues within heterogeneous groups. The findings of this study also have implications for literacy development and research, specifically for that of bilingual students. This study builds on the existing literature that advocates for multicultural texts in the classroom, creating a space for student voice and collaboration and shows how advantageous it is to consider both languages when it comes to bilingual students. This will be illustrated throughout the following chapters of this study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

In this literature review, I first provide an overview of the main theoretical perspective that informs this study, which is the sociocultural view of literacy studies. Second, this is followed by an explanation of how identity is infused in literacy practices and, third, the opportunity for critical literacy, which is one of focal points of this study. Fourth, since one of the premises of the sociocultural perspective is that literacy cannot be removed from its context, I must speak to the particular context of this study, which was a bilingual setting. I focus on studies based on Latino children's literature, as well as literature discussions, taking into account the teacher's role.

#### **Sociocultural Literacy Studies**

In the 1980s, the sociocultural conception of literacy and literacy studies emerged in opposition to the traditional view of literacy. The traditional view saw literacy existing independent of "trends and struggles in everyday life" (Lankshear, 1999, p. 205). In this perspective, literacy was seen as autonomous (Street, 1984), as if literacy could be removed from its social context.

From a sociocultural literacy point of view, Lankshear (1999) argues that literacy can be "understood in the context of the social, cultural, political, economic, historical practices to which they are integral" (p. 210). Therefore, the sociocultural view of literacy sees people as enacting reading and writing in the context of "particular relations and structures of power, values, beliefs, goals and purposes, interests, economic and political conditions, and so on" (Lankshear, 1999, p. 205).

Two classic pieces in sociocultural literacy studies are Hymes' (1974) ethnography of communication and Heath's (1983) ethnographic study of language patterns across school and home settings. Hymes (1974) argued that a machine could learn the grammatical structures of a language and even how to pronounce it perfectly, but in order to communicate effectively a person has to know what, when, where, how, and why to speak, patterns that are rooted in each speaker's culture. This was the idea behind the ethnography of communication.

Children learn to speak a variety of discourses and use different registers according to the situation. Thus, it is necessary to understand that the process of acquiring language is the process of integrating code knowledge with sociocultural knowledge (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989). Children's language is "constructed in socially appropriate and culturally meaningful ways" (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989, p.289). The culture a child comes from will greatly influence the way a child is socialized.

The ability to adapt language to a variety of situations is communicative competence. Communicative competence is a term developed by Dell Hymes (1974) in the ethnography of communication, which refers to the rules of speaking. It involves linguistic competence as well as social knowledge. Hymes (1974) stressed that knowledge of the rules for conduct and interpretation of speech were more crucial than grammatical competence. It is the flexibility to adapt language to different situations. This ties back to language socialization in which a child through language learns that what is appropriate behavior and speech in different contexts is more important than the grammar.

Hymes' (1974) work encourages researchers to focus on the context of the interaction between people. It is the exchange between speakers, which is important. Language cannot be separated from the context. The only way the use of language could be understood is by looking at it within the particular context in which it is situated.

Heath's (1983) seminal work, *Ways with Words*, documented the way in which the community's way of talking affected a child's academic success, when it differed from the school's expectations. Heath looked at children learning to use language at home and at school in two communities (i.e., Roadville--a white working-class community and Trackton--a black working-class community). By looking into the children's language development, Heath showed the deep cultural differences between the two communities and how they were strikingly different from the townspeople, who had the speech pattern that was expected at school. In part of Heath's study, teachers examined their own habits at home and learned to recognize that they carried these home habits into the classroom just as their students did from other communities. Everyone in the classroom was bringing what they knew and the classroom should have been a community where everyone's knowledge was respected and valued. Heath also showed how educators' learning about how their students had been socialized obtained information that reduced the potential conflicts between the schools' ways of teaching and learning.

González, Moll and Amanti's (2005) study took the idea that each individual brings in his or her own knowledge into the classroom and that it should be respected and valued one-step further. They concentrated on having educators bring in students' "funds of knowledge" into the classroom. Funds of knowledge is defined "to refer to the

historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133). The educator, therefore, sees students as coming to school with rich cultural tools that can be leveraged as resources rather than viewed as deficits. Putting funds of knowledge into practice involves considering the fact that “what Latina/o children bring to school is who they are, what they believe, how they feel, and how they behave in a culture” (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004, p. 10). “Funds of knowledge” is one aspect of literacy as a social practice that needs to be taken into consideration.

Literacy is a social practice. Therefore, all students come into the classroom with exposure to different literacy practices. It is important that a student’s communicative practices are taken into account in order to see how a teacher can respond to them and incorporate them into the classroom (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). This will bring more equity into the classroom, instead of expecting all students to be socialized into traditional school expectations. When taking into account that students have been socialized in different ways, it also needs to be taken into account that students’ identities are infused in their literacy practices.

### **Identity**

All students come into the classroom with different identities. Freire (2005) conceptualizes the dynamic relationship between identities we inherit and ones we acquire through different social contexts. It is important to recognize the different identities that a teacher or student have acquired with mutual respect in order for change to occur. It is important that teachers know the world of the children with whom they work. It is important to understand and encourage the identities a student brings from

home. Of course, it is impossible to know everything, but an educator must have some background of her students in order to help them implement social action in their worlds, which is the ultimate goal of critical literacy.

Students also come into the classroom being exposed to different literacy practices. It must be recognized that school is not the only place where a student interacts with literacy on a daily basis. Therefore all students will come into the classroom with different experiences. Teachers need to move past a one-size-fits all model and recognize that students come in with differing levels of understanding of the language of school. So it is important to acknowledge the literacy practices a student brings, as a way to support and sustain their engagement in the classroom (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). When recognition is given to a student's non-school literacy practices, then teachers are letting in students' identities. Literacy practices are infused with how the child has been socialized and their sense of identities. As stated before, identities cannot be removed from the social, cultural, and political context, which makes up a student's world.

Students express their identities partly through the use of language. Therefore, they must be given a space to express themselves. When students read and write they infuse these practices into their identities (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). Their identities are a part of everything that they do. Students bring their identities into their meaning making process. So no one student will make the same meaning of a text they are reading, since the identities they have instilled in themselves are different.

To understand how students revert to their own identities in order to develop a shared identity, I draw on Kroskrity's (2001) definition of identity. Kroskrity's (2001) definition of identity is the "linguistic construction of membership in one or more social

groups or categories” (p.106). I specifically looked at how students used language to support their identities as members of their literature discussion groups.

Language and communication are two aspects by which members defined their group and are defined by others. Identities in these groups were formed in the following ways. An identity can be imposed on a person, such as race, but most identities are actively produced. A person uses language as social action and has agency in their negotiation of different identities (Kroskrity, 2001). Identity is related to the sociocultural view of language learning in which identity is constructed through interactions. Through interactions, a person comes to see himself in relation to the social world as well as all the kinds of ways that society categorizes people.

A child establishes a sense of who he or she is in relation to the world. There can sometimes be tensions between different identities. For my own students, one such tension was their identity as a Spanish speaker and their identity as an English speaker. Another tension I saw was the identity placed on some of my students by the school as low readers and the identity they portrayed in literature discussions.

Vygotsky’s ideas also connect to identity, the sociocultural notion of membership, and socialization into becoming a member of a community, which is the definition of identity here. Vygotsky (1978) held that learning occurred when humans internalized their social interactional processes, focusing on the connections between people and the cultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences. According to Vygotsky, language is the most important symbolic tool in society; thus it is through sign systems read and interpreted through social interactions with others that people develop literacy learning. This is why language is linked with identity.

Learning occurs through interaction. As individuals engage in a cultural practice, they become members of the community that engage in that practice. Hymes (1974) states that each person has linguistic repertoires. By repertoire Hymes refers to a set of means that are available to them. A person's repertoire can be looked at in the context of the individual, social group or larger community. Individuals use these repertoires to become a member of multiple communities; each community socializes them in a different way. These identities may or may not work well together, but it is something that is always open to change by the individual.

When it comes to the context of bilingual learners, these students are often blamed for their academic failure, which is justified based on the deficit-thinking notion. Valencia (2010) elaborates on the discourse of deficit thinking. He writes, "deficit thinking is intellectual discourse that blames them, their cultures, and their families for diminished academic success" (Valencia, 2010, p. xiv). Valencia broadens the discourse of academic failure to include larger structural elements that perpetuate disparities in academic achievement especially for Latino students. Some of the various schooling conditions that play a role in reproducing school failure are school segregation, inferior schooling, language/cultural exclusion, school financing, teacher-student interactions, teacher certification, and curriculum differentiation (Valencia, 2010). This is especially true in the current high accountability context because each student is treated as if they were exactly the same without taking into consideration their different experiences, especially when it comes to literacy practices.

The reason I look at identity is because the multiple identities students have help shape how humans make sense of the world and their experiences. I specifically looked

at how my students brought in their personal experiences as they made meaning of different texts.

There is a relationship between literacy and identity that is often overlooked. Different literacy practices call to mind certain identities for each individual reader (Bartlett, 2007; McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Medina, 2006). All students come into the classroom with a wealth of stories that are based on their culture. Students read stories as a way to view the world, experience life, transform their understanding of themselves, and inquire outside their own boundaries (Kaser & Short, 1998; Kauffman & Short, 2001; Short, 1993). There is a closely tied relationship between literacy, identity and culture. Identities, literacies, and cultural practices are “all constructed and practiced within relationships of race, gender, class and space” (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 228).

### **Critical Literacy**

Taking the sociocultural framework on literacy one step further is critical literacy, the most notable work being that of Paulo Freire (1970). Freire (1970) asserts that literacy could not operate outside of social practice and therefore social worlds.

Vasquez (2004) defines critical literacy in this way:

A critical literacy curriculum needs to be lived. It arises from the social and political conditions that unfold in communities in which we live. As such it cannot be traditionally taught. In other words, as teachers we need to incorporate a critical perspective into our everyday lives with our students in order to find ways to help children understand the social and political issues around them. (p.1)

Vasquez’s definition enhanced my own engagement with students. For example, I provided books based on my students’ background and stories I knew my students would

be able to connect to in order to aid students in their understanding of how their personal experiences fit into the bigger political and social picture.

In order to accomplish this goal, I deliberately moved away from the banking model of teaching. The banking model is the belief that the teacher holds all the knowledge that is to be consumed by the students (Freire, 1970). In this model, students are seen as empty vessels, needing the teacher to fill them with knowledge. This banking model considers students as passive recipients of knowledge and uncritically exposed to ideas. In this banking model, learners' lives and cultures were taken as irrelevant. Freire (1970) believed there needed to be a move towards a liberating form of pedagogy that promoted a dialectical relationship between the teacher and student. The teacher established parameters, but encouraged a pedagogy that is collaborative, dialogical, and responsive.

Once the teacher had promoted this dialectical relationship in their classroom then students' had the ability to think critically about their context and educational situation. "Reading the word," then entailed "reading the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Flores-Dueñas (2005) unpacks this by saying "that educators must stand up and say that it is no longer acceptable to adopt materials for minority schools that require teachers to spend most of their reading instruction time having students 'sound out' while forgoing meaningful interactions" (p.239). Students "read the word" in order to rethink, re-create and problematize a previous reading of the world. Through dialogue students re-create their current knowledge.

This way of thinking allows students to recognize connections between their individual experiences and the social contexts in which they are embedded (Freire, 1970).

It needed to be taken into account that each individual student had different background knowledge; based on the various resources they brought to school. Through the use of multicultural literature and a dialogic exchange, my students were given the opportunity to critique what is and who benefits from certain contexts as well as to begin to think of what if. “Texts” are socially constructed and they are constructed from particular perspectives, beliefs, and ideologies, my students problematized this during their discussions (Vasquez, 2010).

In order for students to begin to think critically, education must be problem-posing, instead of just problem-solving. What is currently emphasized by high accountability policies and standards is a problem-solving view in which students are given a situation they need to find the answer to. In a problem-posing education students look critically at their world and come to see it as transformable instead of static (Freire, 1970). Students begin to be critical of their social world and take steps to make changes in practices they do not agree with. The only way this can be done is through dialogue.

Freire (1970) talked about dialogue as the process in which the world is transformed and humanized. Freire (1970) goes on to say that true education is not carried on by teachers *for* students or by teachers *about* students but rather by teachers *with* students. Many educational plans have failed because of the lack of realization that it is not a teacher’s role to speak and impose their own view of the world but rather to dialogue with the student about both views. As the teacher, I worked to create an environment that was conducive to the learning of all its members. Through the literature discussions, students were given the space to dialogue about their ideas that pertain to the story. Examples of topics dealt with in the literature were issues of equity and justice.

Using this theoretical pedagogy of critical literacy encouraged my readers to critically analyze and question the text. Students worked towards identifying and challenging inequitable social structures and policies reflected in the literature (Cummins, 2009). Critical literacy did not necessarily involve taking a negative stance; rather, it meant looking at an issue or topic in different ways, analyzing it, and hopefully being able to suggest possibilities for change or improvement (Vasquez, 2004).

In recent years, there has been more research related to teachers implementing critical literacy practices in their classrooms (Aukerman, 2012; Fain, 2008; Flores-Dueñas, 2005; Labadie, Wetzel & Rogers, 2012; Lewison, Flint & Sluys, 2002; Rogers, 2002; Vazquez, 2007). All these studies have found that students, even at a young age, can engage with literature in a critical way. Students engaged with texts in which they assumed ownership of discussions, asked their own questions, had agency in choosing books, participated in discussions that highlighted personal connections, moved past the surface level of comprehension and had increased engagement.

Vasquez (2007) found, in her work with preschoolers, that even these young children “are in fact very capable and willing to participate in hard conversations that are meaningful to them and that impact their lives” (p.6). She pushed the idea that students must learn to be “critical analysts” of their world with which they engage in order to make informed decisions. She had these preschoolers deconstruct and redesign the packaging of a familiar snack product. Students were able to see that this text was not neutral, but came from a particular perspective with a specific purpose.

Fain (2008) examined the type of issues of language diversity and culture first and second graders discussed in literature circles. She found that their topics included

literacy, identity, positionality within society, oppression and resistance to structural inequality. So even at a young age, students were dialoguing about issues that affected their daily lives. One key finding of this study was the need for authentic and safe spaces where children could learn to be and begin to discuss these tensions connected to social justice issues.

A study done in a bilingual context also had similar findings. Flores-Dueñas (2005) observed a first grade bilingual classroom and found that the teacher formed collaborative participation structures. She made a space for her voice to be heard as well as those of her students, in order to show that she could learn from them. The teacher also moved away from the IRE classroom discourse model (Mehan, 1982), by not answering students' questions and instead encouraging students to interact with each other and answer their own questions. She built a sense of community and shared identities by sharing personal experiences and encouraging the students to do the same. One critique I do have of this study was that the books used were around the African American experience around slavery. Since the students were Spanish bilingual students it would have been more meaningful for them to read books based on the Latino history. This is one of the ways my study goes further because I chose books that were specifically written by Latino authors for Latino children in order to have a clear connection to my students' backgrounds.

For my study, I use Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys' (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy--disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice. Disrupting the common place "challenges learners to closely examine the familiar through new lenses

and includes considering new ways of looking at old ideas” (Fain, 2008, p.201).

Interrogating multiple viewpoints is when you take your own perspective and those of others into account concurrently. Focusing on sociopolitical issues explores how sociopolitical systems, power relationships, and language are all intertwined. Finally taking action and promoting social action means taking an “informed” stand against oppression. Later on in the findings chapter I will share how my students and I disrupted the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, and focused on sociopolitical issues. Although we did not reach the fourth dimension of taking action and promoting social justice, we did take the first steps towards accomplishing this goal.

### **Conceptualizing Literacy Actions**

#### **Early Reader Response Theory**

In the past, the most common way of looking at students’ discussions was through the reader response theory. Reader response is grounded on the work of Louise Rosenblatt. Reader response supported examining personal connections a student makes to the text. Reader response asserts the power of personal experience in shaping readers’ literary experience (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994, p. 998).

There are three main components to reader response, which are the readers, the literature and the context for response. Response to literature is affected by who the reader is, the books that are selected to read, and the contexts that surround the reading event (Rosenblatt, 1978). The response to literature theory “considers the personal, social, and cultural contexts of the reading act while showcasing the dynamics of the individual reader and the individual text as unique forces in the personal response to literature” (Hancock, 2000, p. 25).

Reader response is very complex because there are a variety of factors that go into it. For example, there are many influences on the reader. Every reader is different. They each bring their own background knowledge, past literary experiences, their age affects their cognitive development, the literacy skills they possess, the attitude they have towards the task, and the personal values they hold. All these variables affect how someone responds to a text (Rosenblatt, 1978).

There are also a lot of textual characteristics that impact the reader's response to literature. Some of these include the genre of the story, the text structure, the literary elements such as the author's writing style and the content or topic of the story. These elements will all affect how a reader responds to the literature.

The context or setting of the literature also affects the response. The sociocultural context of a child's life forms the foundation for the response. A child's family's socioeconomic status, cultural background, or beliefs all affect the type of responses a child makes to literature. A child's response is also affected by the context of the class in which the philosophy of the teacher and the value given to individual responses in the classroom influence what kind of connections the child makes (Rosenblatt, 1995).

There are two major assumptions in a response-based view of children's literature. The first one is that the reader moves between a continuum of aesthetic and efferent stance; meaning that they move between making personal connections and reading to get information. The readers changes purposes for reading depending on the text and themselves. Second, the meaning an individual makes is personally constructed from an engaged, reflective encounter with the literature (Rosenblatt, 1995).

A drawback to the reader's response theory is its focus on the individual. In early studies research looked at the reader without taking into consideration how they developed through participation in various communities. The research on text mostly looked at the content and literary analyses with specific attention given to the author, and context was never taken into consideration. Instead, the text was seen as having a specific meaning that a careful reader would discover (Galda & Beach, 2001). Now we know that "texts, readers, and contexts, each inseparable from the other, are also inseparable from the larger contexts in which they are enacted" (Galda & Beach, 2001, p. 66). The meaning making process is socially enacted, so each reading of a text will result in a unique construction of meaning for that particular group of students. This meaning making process will be different each time it occurs.

### **Literacy as a Social Practice**

Theories of literacy research have "shifted the focus from models based in psychology to models based in sociology, linguistics and anthropology that focus on the social and cultural contexts of literacy" (Lewis, 2001, p.10). Two main principles that go along with this view are (1) Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships (2) Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices (Lewis, 2001).

To better understand the social position from which particular students speak and act and the power relations represented by those social positions, I look at student talk. Students take up positions in relation to the expectations of others and the discourses available within the given context of literature discussions (Lewis, 1997). "The individual or group identities are defined through repeated performances (i.e. ways of talking,

listening, writing or using one's body)" (Lewis, 2001, p.13). I specifically looked at the way the teacher and students talked and listened to gain an understanding of the nature of social interaction during literature discussions. This goes against the view of classrooms as unified learning or speaking communities. The classroom cannot be seen as unified because not everyone in that context is linguistically or socially the same, even when they come from similar backgrounds.

This view sees language use as a way to critique and produce social relations. The focus is on how competing discourses shape social practice rather than achieving a consensus, which is what my students and I did during the literature discussions. I looked at how my students positioned themselves in the literature discussion, enacted voice, and negotiated their ideas. I use "negotiated" because students were able to express their ideas and support them, while at the same time listening to differing viewpoints. It needs to be considered that classrooms are a place of everyday tension because students share certain norms and standards of the classroom culture, but they themselves are participants of communities outside the classroom (Lewis, 2001). Past reader-oriented approaches to literacy viewed literature as a reflection of life, whereas this more cultural and critical perspective that I am taking holds that "texts promote interested versions of reality" (Patterson, Mellor, & O'Neill, 1994, p.67). Students problematized what realities are being represented in the stories and how that relates to their own lived experience.

Medina (2006), who looked at children's literature themed on immigration, found two implications that relate to my study: (1) "the connection between multiple and critical literacies to current biliteracy research, highlighting the potential of children speaking, writing, and performing, as spaces to reflect and talk back to the political,

social and literate lives of people” (p.191) (2) creation of spaces to look at past and future, which in bilingual classrooms would allow space for “the exploration and creation of political and social transformation (p.192). In my study I represent both of these things.

### **Latino Children’s Literature**

Latinos represent the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States. About 22 percent of all children under the age of eighteen are identified as Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This growth means that there is an increasing importance of including more authentic Latino literature in the classrooms so Latino children can see positive reflections of their culture and non-Latinos can learn about and celebrate their peer’s culture. This can be difficult to do because of the limitation of books available containing Latino themes. According to the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (2009) approximately 5,000 books published in the United States in 2008, an estimated 79 books contained Latino themes/topics and roughly 48 books were created specifically by Latino authors/illustrators. Very few of the children’s books published each year authentically represent Latino cultures (Naidoo, 2010). Students need authentic literature in which they can see their own and others’ cultures.

Multicultural literature includes “books about specific cultural groups, either people of color or people who are members of groups that are considered to be outside of the dominant sociopolitical culture” (Fox & Short, 2003, p. 8) But when talking about multicultural curriculum or literature it has more to do with the purpose. I used multicultural literature in order for my students to be able to discuss issues that they have come across in their lives, related to their bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural identities. I

wanted my students' culture and heritage to be validated as well to provide them with a positive representation of others like themselves. Since all my students were native Spanish speakers I wanted to specifically look at Latino literature. The definition of Latino that I am using is "to refer to the Spanish-speaking population (and their descendants) of the United States" (Morales, 2011, p. xi). I looked for literature written by Latino authors that my students could relate to.

Instead of just looking at personal responses to literature it is important to critically analyze the author's stance as well as look at the social, political, and cultural ideologies represented in the texts (Medina, 2006). Medina (2006) did this in her study of three texts around the theme of immigration. She found that authors recreate their own personal experiences with resistance and struggles in the books they write. These stories speak to the past as well as the present reality of many of the students that read the texts. In order to understand Latino literature, it must be looked at across a range of representations in order to understand "the complex gender, social and racial identities of Latino/a immigrants in the United States" (p.73).

What was of more importance than choosing the book was the discussion around the story. Sipe (1996) argued that the context in which the book is read is the most important influence on the child. Students need to be given a space to discuss and share their ideas in order to develop an understanding of the book. Since each student is coming to the group with their own set of identities, each discussion around a particular text will be different.

## **Native Language Instruction**

Native language instruction was one important aspect of the literacy instruction I gave in my classroom. Research has found that programs that encourage development of literacy and academic learning in the native language are more effective not only in developing English, but in improving overall student achievement (August & Hakuta, 1997; Cummins, 2000; Fitzgerald, 1995; Lucas & Katz, 1994). This is the philosophy I followed in my classroom. I knew the ultimate goal of the bilingual program at my school was the student's acquisition of English, but I did not feel they had to give up their native language of Spanish in order to acquire it. Cummins (2000) explained the importance that biliteracy be an essential part of the curriculum for Latino/a second language learners. He argued that the goal should be to move student beyond the functional level and more into both cultural and critical literacies.

The difficulty in doing this is that some states have passed restrictive language policies based on the misguided assumption that it would help accelerate the learning process for English language learners. Gandara and Hopkins (2010) write, "If these students are denied instruction in their native language, they will be forced to abandon 'the crutch' of native language, and learn English more rapidly" (p. 11). In reality what this does is it makes students feel unwelcomed or not part of the community, when it could be the only one they have ever known. As a result of these restrictive policies, students begin to see their native language as a problem and try to become someone they are not by doing things, such as, refusing to speak their native language (Cummins, 2000).

Through the implementation of literature discussions, my hope is to expose my students to some of the various aspects of being bilingual and bicultural in order to help them consider the importance of speaking their native language. There have not been many studies concentrating on bilingual students use of the native language in literature discussions (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Martínez-Roldán, 2005; Martinez-Roldán & López-Robertson, 1999/2000). This is not surprising considering the current political climate in the United States in which several states have passed restrictive language policies in schools.

One revealing study by Moll, Diaz, Estrada, and Lopes (1992) compared bilingual students' participation across English and Spanish classroom contexts, specially looking at reading groups. In the Spanish language group, the students participated in richer discussions, improved their deep meaning making through the use of higher order questions. This was believed to have resulted from the high expectations the bilingual teacher held for her students. In contrast, English-language reading group lessons were one of low organization because the monolingual English teacher's belief that students had low proficiency in English and could not handle more advanced tasks. This resulted in oversimplified discussions.

My study differed from Moll et al. (1992) because I was the bilingual teacher in both the Spanish and English literature discussions. I had high expectations for my students, no matter what language they were using. In the discussion groups students were able to use whichever language they feel most comfortable using, which resulted in mostly the use of their native language of Spanish.

Even when the discussion is not held in Spanish, the use of culturally relevant literature for Latino students increases engagement. Lohfink and Loya (2010) found that their third graders were able to connect personally to the books chosen because it related to their culture. Students were more open to sharing stories because the literature reflected some of their real life events. Their literature discussion groups facilitated oral language development because students were encouraged to speak either Spanish or English, similarly to my study. Students can therefore “build upon this rich oral narrative background and facilitate their meaning-making process” (Martínez-Roldán & López-Robertson, 1999/2000, p. 278).

I am a strong believer in seeing a student’s native language as a resource. In 1998, the National Research Council issued a report entitled “Preventing Reading Difficulties.” In this report, the authors concluded that the “initial literacy instruction should be provided in a child’s native language whenever possible” (p. 238). My study shows how native language was used to aide in the literacy development of bilingual students. By allowing students to bring in their multiple identities into the classroom, they are able to show the wide range of knowledge they hold.

### **Bilingual Literature Discussions**

Literature discussions are one type of sociocultural literacy practice. In a literature discussion, students read the same book or books on a similar topic and then come together in a small group to discuss their understandings. Literature discussions can aid students in their literacy development.

Research has shown that “teachers who create invitations for children to identify, reflect on, interrogate, and resolve dilemmas they face in their daily classroom lives

enhance academic growth and build strong classroom communities” (Mills & Jennings, 2011, p. 590). Literature discussions give students the space to bring in their personal experience and prior knowledge into a conversation where it is valued (Jewell & Pratt, 1999; Mills & Jennings, 2011). Students can work through their ideas by listening to multiple viewpoints. Literature discussions offer students the opportunity to bring in their various discourses (Pearson, 2010).

There have been similar findings when it comes to literature discussions used with bilingual students (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Martinez-Roldán, 2005; Martinez-Roldán & López-Robertson, 1999/2000; Medina, 2010). Through the use of literature discussions, students are able to explore their understanding of social and cultural tensions. Students use the literature to help them make sense of their world by reflecting on their lived experience, making connections, telling stories, listening to multiple perspectives and enacting their multiple identities.

This is why it is important that the literature used in the classroom and literature discussions reflect students’ lives. The use of multicultural literature displays different cultures, which reflect various aspects of my students’ lives. Harlin and Dixson-Krauss (2001) found that reading multicultural literature “encourages children to reaffirm the values of their own culture and come to appreciate those of others” (p.80). This was one of the goals for my students, for them to learn to appreciate their home culture more.

### **Teacher Role**

When it comes to the teacher’s role in literature discussions, it is important that it changes from the norm of teacher- directed classroom practices. The most common classroom discourse model is IRE: teacher initiate, student respond, and teacher evaluate

(IRE) (Mehan, 1982). “The IRE model focuses students on listening and responding to the teacher, this does not help students to realize that they are rich resources of information for each other” (Cazden, 2001, p. 64). I made a conscious effort to move away from that.

As teachers we are encouraged to keep our opinions to ourselves in order not to use our position of power to influence students, but many times by doing this we end up excluding important issues from the curriculum (Heffernan & Lewison, 2000). It is important that teachers learn to find a balance in which they can share their ideas without making it into the only idea that can be shared.

In order to allow student voice into the classroom, teachers must relinquish control of the classroom activities, such as literature discussions. They must trust students to ask meaningful questions and have a profound discussion. Authentic inquiry can begin only when teachers grant themselves and their students freedom to think and learn together (Fain, 2008).

### **Summary**

In this chapter I provided an overview of the sociocultural view of literacy studies, which is the main theoretical perspective of this study. I explained how identity is infused in literacy practices and how these identities must be taken into account in order to have students discuss literacy critically. Since the sociocultural perspective shows how literacy cannot be removed from context I shared studies that took place in a bilingual setting, similar to my study. In the following chapters, I will share how together teacher, students and the books construct space for voicing ideas and thoughts about aspects of their families’ history and of their own bilingualism. Particularly, how students used

their own personal narratives to reach critical consciousness, how this could only be accomplished by the teacher changing her positionality, and how the literature chosen influenced the dialogue.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

This study was a qualitative action research study. My research questions were best suited for qualitative research because this approach attempts to understand the meaning of events and interactions for people in particular situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For the current study, I investigated how together a teacher, students and the books constructed space for voicing ideas and thoughts in relation to discussions of race, ethnicity and multilingualism with multicultural texts during literature discussions.

Qualitative researchers stress the social aspects of people's activities and performances. They attempt to understand how and what meaning they construct around various events in their daily lives. In addition, qualitative researchers suggest that there are multiple ways and realities of interpreting experiences and activities for each person. People create different realities through interacting with one another (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Therefore, reality is socially constructed. The data in this study were, therefore, an outcome of a qualitative approach. The data manifested different realities that were socially constructed and interpreted by each individual child and teacher.

I decided to use an action research model because of the action-reflection cycle that it contained. The cyclical process is: planning, acting, observation, and reflection. This process is then repeated several times, while transforming the context and practices that are being implemented (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). Since these were general practices I implemented in my current teaching practices, I felt that using them strategically in order to implement this research study would be most beneficial. I was

drawn to this method because of the numerous components it entailed which included the development of critical consciousness among the co-researchers (i.e. the students and myself), the improvement in the lives involved, and the transformation of the fundamental relationships involved (Brennan & Noffke, 1997; Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009; Zeni, 1998). These were the goals I had for this study; I wanted my students and me to be more critically conscious and I knew in order for that to happen that teacher-student relationship had to dramatically change.

Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2009) argue “all knowledge generation is a political endeavor; that is, all knowledge creation processes and products have implications for the distribution of power and resources in society” (p. 83). I used literature discussions in order for my students to become more critically conscious. The goal was for them to begin to dialogue about their world and

## **Research Site**

### **School**

This study was conducted at Lincoln Elementary School. It is located in the Midwestern United States. It is an Illinois town of about 41,000 people with 60% of them identifying as Anglo and 5% as of Latino or Hispanic origin (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/17000.html>). The elementary school is a neighborhood school in which all the students attending that school live in the surrounding area except for the majority of the students from the bilingual program. These students were segregated in the community because most of them lived in trailer parks located on a far end of town. Students were bused to the school because it was not their neighborhood school, but it was where the bilingual program was housed.

**Demographics.** That particular year the school contained 443 students, where 62% of the students obtained a subsidized lunch and 37% of the students were Latinos ([http://www.isbe.net/assessment/report\\_card.htm](http://www.isbe.net/assessment/report_card.htm)). The Latino population had been steadily increasing since the bilingual program had moved into the building in 2003 (Appendix A). At the time of the study I was working as a bilingual teacher in this particular school. This research study was conducted in my own Spanish-bilingual second grade classroom.

**History of bilingual program.** In 2003, the Spanish bilingual program moved into Lincoln Elementary School. The previous years to this study the set-up of the bilingual program had changed from year to year based on the number of students in the program and the school budget. The school had tried different models throughout the years beginning with a pullout program in 2003, where students would only get forty-five minutes of native language instruction, to having students get half a day of native language instruction to the set up that particular year of a self-contained bilingual program at the kindergarten through second grade level. This self-contained bilingual model for the lower grades had been in place for the past five years.

By self-contained, it meant that the students just had one teacher that instructed them in Spanish and English. There was one bilingual classroom at kindergarten, first, and second grade. In kindergarten the students were expected to get 90% of their instruction in Spanish, so the classroom teacher did not do formal instruction in English. In first and second grade, the students were expected to receive one to two hours of English as a Second language (ESL) instruction through the social studies and science curriculum (Appendix B). The program model as a whole was a transitional bilingual

program, which meant students in kindergarten are mostly instructed in Spanish, but by fifth grade they were expected to be transitioning out of Spanish and receiving most of their instruction in English (Appendix C).

**Set-up of classroom community.** As I stated before, this was the second year I was in a classroom with these group of students, but getting to the point where we could have the type of conversations we had during literature discussions took a lot of work to set up. From the beginning of working with this group I was a dialogic teacher. By this I meant, that I build upon what students said. As part of my teaching practices, I allowed students a space to talk even if it went against what I was saying. I positioned myself as someone who was not perfect and did not know everything. I worked hard to set up a welcoming environment in my classroom in which I made clear that we all make mistakes and we are here to learn from each other. In order for everyone in the classroom to follow the same set of rules, the students and I made a list and posted them in Spanish throughout the room as a reminder. The sign read:

Nuestra comunidad es un lugar dónde. . .(*Our community is a place where. . .*)

1. nos sentimos seguros (*we feel safe*)
2. podemos cometer errores y nuestros compañeros ayudarnos a corregir (*we can make mistakes and our classmates will help us correct them*)
3. todos tenemos el derecho a aprender (*we have the right to learn*)
4. decimos cosas positivas y apropiadas (*we say things that are positive and appropriate*)
5. respetamos y escuchamos a todos (*we respect and listen to others*)

The students and I referred to the list of our community rules when anyone was having a problem with another student and felt that one or more of the rules were not being followed. These community rules were put in place in first grade and carried over to second grade. Of course, our classroom was not perfect, but having our set of community rules and knowing each other for an extended period of time allowed us to build

relationships that therefore allowed us to have the conversations that we did during literature discussions.

### **Classroom**

**Population.** My classroom was made up of 20 native Spanish-speaking students, eleven boys and nine girls. All of the students were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Latina/o students, meaning they were all born in the United States. All but six of the students were born in the area where the school was located. Sixteen of the students were of Mexican descent, one student was of Mexican and Guatemalan descent and three were of Guatemalan descent (Appendix D).

My students could be identified as colonized due to their relationship to the larger society (Villenas, 1996). By colonized I meant that they were part of the minority group of students in the school, which represented 25% of the total school population and spoke a language that was not seen as important by some in society at large. In the transitional bilingual (TBE) program set up during this project, many students were losing their native language by fifth grade, as reported by the teacher at that grade level. All of my students, that particular year, came from a lower socio-economic background, based on the school's free and reduced lunch reports.

Ten of the students had been in the TBE program since preschool, with a minimum of four years in the program. Six other students started the bilingual program in kindergarten and were in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year in the program. Three students started the program in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and one student was new to the program that particular year. All the students had varying proficiencies in both Spanish and English. All the students had not begun to receive formal English as the language of instruction until entering first grade of

the TBE program. This, of course, did not mean that they did not have any English proficiency. Many had a high proficiency in social English, but the academic English was introduced to them officially the previous year. In appendix E, I have included a table that contains students' scores on last year's English proficiency and Spanish assessment, in order to show how the school administrators saw them. I do not believe that looking at the test scores gave an accurate portrayal of my student's abilities. (Appendix E). I also included the MIDE (Medidas Incrementales de Destrezas Esenciales) [Incremental Steps to Essential Skills] benchmark test scores for my four focal students (See Appendix F). This is a Spanish fluency exam that was given to all students three times a year and this exam was the one that determines who would receive additional support from the reading specialist. At the second grade level this test entailed students reading three different passages for a one minute each. The total number of words read correctly in that minute were counted and the middle score from all three passages was recorded as the student's score on the test for that particular testing benchmark period. Students that do not meet the set benchmark score during that benchmark period were then pulled out by the reading specialist for thirty minutes a day to work on particular skills.

**Literacy instruction.** Literacy instruction in my classroom was all in Spanish. The philosophy behind this was to have students develop a strong base in their native language so that it can be used to facilitate literacy development in English (August & Hakuta, 1997; August & Shanahan, 2006; Ramírez, 2000).

The school had implemented a scripted basal reader program to be used across the school regardless of grade level or language spoken. The basal reader for second grade included two different anthologies with the stories to be read as well as workbook pages

that went along with each story. Each particular story had a skill that it focused on, such as asking questions, verifying that the reader is understanding the text and evaluating the author's use of words and pictures to tell the story. Between both anthologies there were a total of twenty stories for second grade. When I looked closely at the stories I found that of the twenty stories there was only one that had a Latino looking character named Ricky. This story *El gran bigote* was written by Gary Soto, a Latino children's author (Soto, 2008). Nowhere in the story did it talk about Ricky speaking another language such as Spanish or any of the complexities of being bilingual or bicultural. I saw this as a major problem since all of the students were native Spanish speakers that dealt with issues related to being bilingual and bicultural on a daily basis. Thus, I became interested in the literature discussion groups centered on identified Latino books for children.

## **Participants**

### **Focal Students**

All the students participated in the literature discussions so as to not exclude anyone. The students whose parents did not give consent still participated in the literature discussion, since it was a regular classroom literacy practice, but no data either written or audio data were collected. Focal students were selected once all the data had been collected through purposeful sampling. In order to select focal students I looked for both males and females, students who talked a lot and students that did not, as well as students that were identified by the school benchmark reading test as low readers. This resulted in four focal students: Carlos, Alejandra, José, and Camila (all pseudonyms).

José was one of the most talkative and active boys in the classroom. He was sometimes seen as a problem child by other teachers because if his activeness was not

channeled into school tasks, he could become unfocused and bothered other children. For me, he behaved rather well, except that sometimes he would talk over me in the classroom. He was one of the male leaders in the classroom, everyone wanted to be in his group or on his team when outside for recess. On the school reading benchmark test José was considered a high reader because he had achieved high fluency on the test. He was also in one of the higher guided reading books when working with the teacher.

Camila was the most talkative girl in the classroom. She was very respectful in the classroom, never speaking over me. She was a very artistic child who always liked to draw. She was an only child, so she spent a lot of time outside of school with her parents instead of with other children her age. I would not consider her one of the most popular girls in the class, although she did have friends. She would sometimes get into conflicts with other popular girls from our classroom during recess over various things, such as, who could play with whom or what particular game to play that day. On the school reading benchmark test, she had scored the second highest score in the class and she was in the highest guided reading group.

Carlos is an academically average student in class. He met expectations, performing adequately in his academic subject matters. He did have the lowest score when it came to the school reading benchmark test because he could not read fluently and fast. Even though, he was my lowest reader, he was a popular boy in the classroom. All the boys and girls always wanted to be with him, even if it was to read. He was not extremely talkative, but would talk and answer questions during classroom activities.

Alejandra was a low student when it came to most subject areas. She tried very hard but reading and especially math were hard for her. She did have an average score on

the school reading benchmark test, so she was not the lowest, but also not anywhere near the high scorers. She was one of the more popular girls in class in that the other girls wanted to be in her group or play with her at recess. When there was a conflict within the girls, she was usually one of the leaders running the situation. She was not very talkative in whole group activities. In first grade, her mother had decided to put her in an all-English classroom in the same school. This had resulted in Alejandra spending the first two weeks of first grade crying everyday because she did not understand anything. After two weeks, the decision was made to place her back into the bilingual program and she has continued there. Her mother did place a high importance in English because Alejandra spoke of how her mother made her do homework and read each night in English along with her Spanish assignments. Alejandra had a large family network in the particular town we were located.

Having these four different focal students allowed me to look at the wide range of dialogue throughout the literature discussions and problematize what occurrences influenced the talk.

### **Teacher Background**

My research interest developed from my own personal narrative. As a child, I attended a bilingual preschool in the city of Chicago. When I entered a monolingual kindergarten, my parents were told by my teachers to stop speaking Spanish to me because, in their view, it was causing me confusion. Luckily for me, my parents ignored their suggestion and continued using our native language, Spanish, at home, which allowed me to have a continued connection to my cultural background. I believe my parents were told to stop speaking Spanish because of the thick accent they had at that

time, since I had not even entered the classroom yet. Upon viewing me in the classroom context, teachers realized that my bilingual education had prepared me enough to skip a grade. I strongly believe that my teachers misjudged my ability to be successful in school based on the fact that I was a minority and my parents had an accent. Throughout the rest of my schooling, I continued to struggle against the deficit-based identity placed upon me because of my linguistic difference from the assumed “mainstream.”

One of the things that aided my struggle was growing up in a household where the importance of higher education was extremely emphasized. My parents did not attend an institution of higher education, but they instilled in me that education was the one thing that could never be taken away from me by anyone. I wanted to cultivate the same passion for education in my own Latino students. This is what fueled my passion for working with Latinos as a bilingual teacher.

I became a bilingual teacher because I felt that bilingual students were not being held to high expectations or having their needs met by their classroom teachers. I also felt that there was a lack of Latino representation in teachers. When I entered the teacher preparation program I was one of a few Latinas present and the only one pursuing an interest in working with bilinguals. Latino students were not seeing others that looked like them or that valued their cultural experiences. Sadly, the situation of schooling for Latino children had not changed much since I had come up in the school system. Many educators still see bilingualism as a problem not a resource.

**Teaching experience.** I have worked as a bilingual teacher in a transitional Spanish bilingual program for 7 years; teaching kindergarten, first and second graders. Working as a bilingual teacher, I have made sure to allow into the classroom all the

different resources my students have. I also made sure my students' culture and language were recognized throughout the curriculum and integrated into the classroom whenever possible. For example, during this research study, I had two maps up in my classroom. One map was of Mexico and Central America and it included a pushpin with the name of each child's mom and dad. The pushpin was placed on the location each parent was from. I also had another map of the world in which I had labeled all the countries that had Spanish as an official language or had a large Spanish speaking community. It was interesting to note to my students that the United States had no official language. I developed this pedagogical philosophy through my master's education program that dealt specially with teaching emerging bilinguals. I also took every opportunity possible to talk and visit classrooms of experienced bilingual teachers.

I always reflected back on my own childhood and thought about which classrooms I felt most comfortable in. They were always the classrooms in which my teacher recognized and respected my culture and bilingualism as a resource. I still remember my own second grade teacher who invited my mother into the classroom to talk about Colombia. It made me feel proud and special to have my mother talking to my classmates about our culture, even in her "broken" English.

In this particular study, I had different goals when it came to my teacher role and that of researcher. As the teacher, I wanted my students to experience literature discussions in order to become critical thinkers. As a researcher, I wanted to have an in-depth understanding of my students' participation in literature discussions. I could only get this in-depth understanding if I knew my students. The development of critical consciousness (Freire, 1974) was one of the main goals for my students in the

implementation of these literature discussions. My goal was for students to be able to verbalize some of the ways they self-identified, as well as to become aware of the identities that were placed upon them. I wanted my students to see strengths in their bilingual identity, even if it was something that could not truly be measured. I wanted there to be a transformation of the relationship between teacher-student, because I actively challenged the notion of the teacher being the sole holder of knowledge. I saw all my students as having knowledge that could be brought in to be shared and built upon during literature discussions (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005).

**Complexities of researcher-as-teacher role.** There were both benefits and challenges to my dual role as teacher and researcher. As teacher, I facilitated the literature discussions. Students were discussing topics that they had not before in a formal context, and they needed guidance in this new discussion format. Being the classroom teacher of this group of students for two consecutive years allowed me the time to get to know them. This personal knowledge and connection to my students helped me gain access to a wider range of information that another researcher might have missed. I had personal knowledge of how the classroom was set up and the philosophy behind the different aspects in the class. I also knew the pressures that were being placed on my students and myself during this high stakes accountability period.

A drawback to being the classroom teacher was that I worried that students might aim to please me, in which they would try to find the answer they thought I was looking for. I had worked diligently in my classroom to set up a context in which it was clear that I was not the sole provider of knowledge. I believe I had set up a welcoming environment for learning in which I made clear that we all make mistakes and were here

to learn from each other. In my classroom, students would point out each other's mistakes in a respectful manner, including mistakes I made.

Another possible complication to being the classroom teacher was that I was from a different culture and socioeconomic class than my students. The majority of my students are Mexican-American, while I was Colombian-American, which made me part of the colonized identity group. By colonized group I meant my students and I were seen as a minority because we spoke Spanish as our first language and were growing up in a bicultural context, negotiating both our home culture and the American culture we currently lived in. Most of my students also come from a lower socioeconomic class, based on the school's free and reduced lunch report, while I had grown up in a middle class household in a south suburb of Chicago. I felt that over the previous two years, my students and I had come to respect and enjoyed learning about our differences and similarities. For example, I provided space for students to share particular vocabulary words from their culture, while at the same time I provided them with examples from mine. We might have had different ways of saying things, but I made clear that neither one was better than the other.

Another drawback, to being the classroom teacher was that I might not see particular situations that were right in front of me. In order to combat this, I enlisted a critical friend who would periodically look at my coded data in order to assess if there were particular themes I was blind to. A critical friend is a person that is not involved in the project, but helps the researcher focus by getting an outsider perspective on what they are seeing occur in their context (Foulger, 2010).

Finally, since I was researcher and observer, I could be seen as a colonizer because I had the power and privilege that comes with that role. I was part of a white university institution and because of this other teachers might be more willing to listen to my ideas. As researcher I was more conscious of the actions I took and more critical of the responses I got from students. Through this reflective pedagogical process I considered what students were doing and if any changes needed to be made in this particular discussion format.

**Teacher's conscientization.** Through the process of dialogue during the literature discussions with my students I also developed more critical consciousness as well as learned how to have these critical conversations with my young students. I first chose the books I used on purpose to get students to talk about topics related to their bilingual identity, but I never realized how much of students' lives would be shared in our conversations. During the literature discussions with my students I also realized that I had to put myself in a vulnerable position and share personal narratives of my whole life in order to be a true conversation partner. My students' stories stimulated my own reflections on my past life experiences and how it influenced me to become the person I am today. This conscientization will be visible and audible in chapters four and five.

### **Literature Discussion Groups**

Literature discussion groups were conducted in the Spring Semester 2012, from January to May. It was the second year in a row that I had these particular students. Students were introduced to this format of literature discussions during our previous year together in the 2010-2011 school year. The focus of the literature discussion groups this year had changed, so students were reintroduced to this format through whole class

literature discussions. Once I had modeled and I felt that students had enough practice I then placed them in small literature discussion groups. Each group of literature discussions was five days long, including two of preparation for the literature discussion and three days of group discussion that I facilitated. It took about ten days to complete one rotation. A rotation was complete when each student had been seen in one literature discussion group (Appendix G).

### **Discussion Format**

Students were given a choice among all of the book titles for each rotation. At the beginning of each rotation, I gave a book talk and shared selective passages of each of the four book choices. Students were then given time to browse the books and fill out a ballot in which they ranked their top book choices. Students were to write a number one next to the book they most wanted to read and a two next to their second choice on the ballot. I used this information to put students in groups. Students were placed in their first choice whenever possible, but if not then they were definitely placed in their second choice of book.

Students prepared for discussions by reading the story and marking the book with sticky notes. On each sticky note students were expected to write things, so they would remember what they wanted to say in the discussion group. They were taught to use a sheet given to them with sentence starters, such as “I’m thinking. . .”, “What I am noticing in the story is. . .” (See Appendix H). These sentence starters were used as a reminder for them to start the conversation when in discussion groups.

When they were in literature discussions groups they were given two days to prepare for discussions. This preparation could be done on their own, with a partner or

with a tutor if the book was above their reading level. Students would then meet with me for three consecutive days for a half hour each. Each day I would see two groups. On Day One we would discuss what the story was about and students would share some of the parts they sticky noted. At the end of Day 1, based on the student discussion, I would chose a section for students to reread for the next day because it would be the focus of our second day of discussion. On Day 2, the discussion would be started with the section that had been chosen the previous day. Afterwards, the students shared any other sticky notes they wanted. On Day 3, students shared the rest of the sticky notes marked pages. On this day, students would be given a written response, by the teacher, to complete that was related to the story (Appendix I).

### **Literature Books**

The books for literature discussion groups were selected by myself, the teacher, using criteria similar to Martinez-Roldán and López-Robertson (1999/2000): (a) stories I felt were interesting and would appeal to my students, (b) stories that seemed to allow students to see aspects of their lives reflected positively, and (c) books that I felt my students would be able to connect to. The majority of the books that I selected were bilingual, written in both English and Spanish. Specifically, all the books in the first two rotations (Family & Cultural Stories), except for one, were bilingual. My students were expected to read in Spanish whenever that was an option, but ultimately could also read it in English if they so chose. In the third rotation (Language) three of the five book titles were available in English or Spanish. On the ballot in which students choose their books they were to also select whether they wanted that particular book in English or in Spanish. In the last rotation (English) the book titles were only available in English.

During these discussions students were allowed to use either one of their languages to share their meaning making process.

The literature books used were organized by theme: family, cultural stories, language, speaking English (Appendix J, K, L, M). The books I selected came from different recommended reading book lists as well as from searches for known Latino authors. Each theme had about four to five book titles. Each theme had a mostly bilingual selection, except the English theme, in which the books were only available in English. This theme was left for last, so students would have enough English proficiency by then to read the story.

**Focal students' books.** My four focal students chose a total of fourteen different books among the four rotations (Book summaries contained in Appendix N, O & P). For the first rotation (Family), my focal students were in four different discussion groups around the books *Trencitas/ Braids* (José and Alejandra), *Superniña de Cilantro/ Super Cilantro Girl* (Carlos) and *Esperando mi papá/ Waiting for Papá* (Camilia). Since a total of eight students from the classroom chose the title *Trencitas/Braids*, the students were broken up into two groups by gender, in order to see if there would be any difference in discussion, which resulted in José and Alejandra being in different groups.

In the second rotation (Cultural Stories), the focal students each chose a different book, so they were in four different discussion groups. The books they chose were *La Llorona/The Crying Woman* (Alejandra), *La Llorona/ The Weeping Woman* (José), *The Tale of La Llorona* (Carlos) and *Prietita y la Llorana/ Prietita and the Crying Woman* (Camila).

For the third rotation (Language), the focal students were again in four different discussion groups around the books, *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South* (Alejandra), *Gorrion del Metro* (Camila), *Gabi esta aqui: Un dia loco de palabras mezcladas* (José), *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice* (Carlos).

In rotation four (Speaking English), with only third options for books all focal students chose one of the following two book titles, *I hate English* (José/Camila) and *No English* (Carlos/Alejandra).

**Content analysis of books.** In order to get a better understanding of the content of the literature book I had chosen to use in my literature discussion books, I decided to conduct a content analysis of each. A content analysis is a strategy for collecting and analyzing qualitative data through the use of an objective coding scheme (Berg, 2001). It specially seeks to analyze the content of the text, which can refer to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated (Neuman, 2003). The themes I decided to look at in the literature books were: main character gender and positioning, language use, social class, and ethnicity. This analysis used the inductive approach as the researcher read the books multiple times and developed the coding frame after several readings.

So after conducting the literature discussions with my students, I decided to take a closer look at the particular books I had chosen by conducting a content analysis of the eight literature discussion books chosen by my focal students. I specifically wanted to answer the question: To what extent do the storyline and characters mirror the educational and demographic trends in today's U.S. society, specifically those of my students?

The eight books were: *La Supernina del Cilantro* por Juan Felipe Herrera, *Trencitas* por Kathleen Contreras, *Esperando a Papá* por Rene Colato Lainez, *La Llorona: the crying woman* por Rudolfo Anaya, *Prietita y La Llorona* por Gloria Anzaldua, *Del Norte al Sur* por Rene Colato Lainez, *René tiene dos apellidos* por Rene Colato Lainez and *Pepita habla dos veces* por Ofelia Dumas Lachtan.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection included observations, field notes, and audio recordings of all the literature discussions conducted in the classroom. I also collected performance data on the students, such as their scores on the reading benchmark test.

### **Observations**

Each literature discussion was audio recorded. Since I participated in all the literature discussions, I also wrote important notes or ideas I wanted to remember in a notebook I had next to me. After each day of discussion I would write up field notes which were “the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 119). In total I audiorecorded forty literature discussions that included my four focal students in the five months of data collection.

### **Performance Data**

As the teacher, I collected all student scores on the MIDE reading benchmark test given three times per year, as well as their results from the previous year on the ACCESS English proficiency exam and the LOGRAMOS Spanish proficiency exam. The reason for looking at these scores was to see how the school district labeled each one of my

students; it did not necessarily mean that I agreed with the label placed on a particular student.

### **Data Analysis**

I started data analysis while I was in the process of collecting my data. I engaged in analysis and interpretation concurrently while collecting data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This allowed me to observe emerging themes from the very beginning, and helped me reexamine specific issues across the different rotations. I did this while always keeping my research questions in mind. This initial level of analysis allowed me to see emerging themes, many of which later developed into findings. This level of analysis was aided by my constant recording of my thoughts and observational notes in my researcher's journal, an activity that all by itself engaged me in deeper analysis and self-reflection process. When in the process of composing and revising these notes, I constantly referred back to various data sources in order to confirm or disconfirm emerging ideas.

All discussions that included my four focal students were submitted into full transcription. This ended up being over seven hundred minutes of audio recordings and over four hundred pages of transcriptions. During this early stage, all the data was transcribed and organized by focal student and literature discussion group. Transcripts and accompanying field notes were examined through inductive data analysis and used to look for themes or categories, which seem to be recurrent (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). I used the field notes to contextualize the transcriptions.

### **Open Coding**

The first layer of analysis consisted of an overall open coding of themes to examine the students' and teacher's responses (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The analysis was grounded in the data gathered during the literature discussions, the field notes and the content analysis of the literature books. The analysis began by reading through my field notes, discussion transcripts and making comments about each of them. Examples of codes that emerged from this analysis included "teacher role", "building off each other" and "asking for clarification," when it came to the student. Some of the teacher codes that emerged were "reiterates", "knows student" and "pushes student's thinking."

### **Generating Assertions**

When all the data was transcribed, I conducted a more systematic level of analysis using a constant comparative method. I did a more focused coding where I looked for salient categories and wrote initial memos (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). I developed separate analytical charts for each literature discussion. In each chart I included questions asked by the students, questions asked by the teacher as well as who was answering the question. I also included sections on personal connections, student taking on teacher role, student thinking there was a right answer, building off each other, teacher showing she does not always know the answer, how teacher shows she knows her students as well as roles taken on by the student or teacher. Upon reviewing data for each individual literature discussion, I looked for connections within and across all literature discussions.

I then wrote analytic narratives based on the charts. All the while referring back to my research questions and theoretical framework to guide me in constructing thematic categories. I then used the information in these initial memos to make some integrative assertions.

An example of an assertion recorded in my research journal was “the teacher feels pressure to move conversation along and make sure that certain skills are covered in each literature discussion.” This assertion reflected the internal conflict that I had in allowing students the space and time to discuss topics related to their lives while still knowing I had particular standards I had to meet and time restraints.

Another assertion was that “students discuss sensitive topics that are normally reserved for older students when they are given the space to do so.” This became the most prevalent in the data based on my rereading of my initial assertions from my field notes, so it resulted in being a big part of my student participation findings chapter.

By repeatedly reviewing the data, I was able to test my assertions for validity (Erickson, 1986). In order to test for validity confirming and disconfirming evidence was originated from the data.

## **Findings**

Once the charts and analytical notes on each focal child’s participation in each literature discussion were finished, I engaged in producing some initial findings about the children as a whole. I did this by synthesizing the analytical information on the charts and narratives in the form of examples for each child. I wrote each assertion in a document with references to data samples that supported it. As I visited and revisited the different data sources for coding and synthesizing the data in charts, deeper characteristics or properties of significant data came to the surface (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). When the assertion contained several data samples supporting the statement, it indicated an important finding, which I incorporated into the developing finding section.

## **Validity**

I used two strategies to enhance the validity of my findings. I used triangulation to confirm emergent findings by looking for consistencies and inconsistencies in the findings across multiple data sources. When the findings were consistent across data sources, they were confirmed and included under one of the categories presented in the findings.

The second strategy I used was peer examination, a strategy in which colleagues commented on the findings as they emerge. In the process of writing this study, I would have peers review my assertions and supporting data in order to provide me with feedback. These discussions enabled the revision of interpretations that may have been different if peer examination had not been included.

As an end product, I present the findings of this study in three chapters centered on the students' participation in literature discussion, the teacher's journey, and the multicultural books. As a result of the literacy practice of literature discussions being implemented in the classroom, students were able to share personal narratives that enabled them to reach a level of critical consciousness. This was made possible by the teacher changing the basic teacher-student relationship. In the discussion section I will further discuss the findings as related to Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys' (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy--disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice.

## Chapter 4

### Students Reading the Word and the World

This is a story about four Spanish bilingual second grade students and their experience in literature discussions moving towards reading “the word and their world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987). This chapter shows how together teacher, students and the books construct space for voicing ideas and thoughts about aspects of their families’ history and of their own bilingualism, which they sometimes struggle to understand; sometimes their struggles were directly connected to societal discourse about “the illegals.” In the process of these struggles we see Freire’s notion of kids not as places for deposit but as kids struggling to read their place in the world. In this chapter I will present data that address three of my research questions:

- 1.) What are the ways that Spanish-speaking bilingual second graders participate orally in literature discussions using literature that reflect aspects of their lives and understandings?
- 2.) How do Spanish-speaking bilingual second graders discuss their own identities in literature discussions?
- 3.) What roles are taken on by the students during literature discussions?

Students made personal connections throughout the discussions in relation to their identity and language use. I broke the identity piece into two parts because I saw students speaking of their cultural identity as well as their identity as a student in the classroom. When referring to their cultural identity, students spoke of the border, of societal discourse about “illegal immigrants,” and about being separated from their

families. When students made personal connections referring to language, they spoke of their language choice as well as differences among languages. As they talked, students took on various roles in the literature discussions. They asked questions, answered each others' questions, shared personal narratives, took on leadership roles and the role of expert. I decided to concentrate on students taking on leadership and expert roles because my ultimate goal was to get my students to think critically and in order to do so students had to be positioned as experts and take leadership of the group.

### **Personal Connections**

#### **Identity**

##### **Cultural Identity as Children of Latino Immigrants.**

**Border.** When it came to discussions about identity or students sharing parts of their personal lives, the rotation on families provided a context in which most students shared personal stories related somehow to the border, even though not all the literacy stories spoke of the border. For example, Camila, during the second day of discussion of the book, *Waiting for Papá/ Esperando mi papá*, shared the story of how both her parents crossed over or at least what she knew about the situation. This book did not specifically name a border, but talked about the boy, Beto, being separated from his dad who was in El Salvador.

Table 1

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Camila:</b> A lo mejor podemos [inaudible], como mi papá y mi mamá, ellos fueron a la frontera de a lo mejor. Como -- Es -- De digo la [Crista], como ellos podían ir a allá. Ellos se salvaron mucho. Porque primero, Dios, se salvaron. No se cuando. Creo cuando era un poco mayorcitos. No</p>	<p><b>Camilia:</b> Maybe we can [inaudible] like my dad and mom, they went to the border. How do I say [inaudible], they could go there. They were saved a lot. Because first god saved them. I don't know when. I think when they were a like older. They didn't have any of that on the card, I don't</p>

<p>tuvieron nada de eso de los que tienen en las tarjetas, no sé qué. Ellos no más cruzaron solitos. ¿No se si mis papás sabían o no? Nada más, cruzaron, y cruzaron y se escondieron, entonces así como, como en camuflaje y eso, porque si la policía dicen que la policía los encuentra, los lleva otra vez.</p>	<p>know what. They just crossed by themselves. I don't know if my parents knew or not. They just, crossed, and crossed and hide, and they hide in camouflage because they said if the police found them, they would take them back again.</p>
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During the *Esperando mi papá/ Waiting for Papá* discussion, students did not see crossing the border illegally as breaking the law. This shows students' complex understanding about the difficult situation their parents had to go through to get to the United States so they could have a better life. Crossing the border illegally is a complex political issue, which some people are for and others are against. During this book discussion, young students discussed their thoughts and ideas as related to their own personal experience and that of their families. This was a topic that was very personal to my students since most of their families had some experience crossing the border. This topic about the border was only discussed because it was brought up by the students in my group. I asked questions related to the topic in order to get them to think more critically.

Table 2

Transcription	Translation
<p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Entonces usted cree que de vez en cuando está bien no seguir la ley?  <b>Camila:</b> No, porque pueden haber muchos problemas y accidentes.  <b>Maestra:</b> Pero tus papás no siguieron las reglas cuando cruzaron la frontera sin permiso, mis papás no siguieron la ley cuando cruzaron la frontera sin permiso. Sus papás tampoco, ¿verdad?  <b>Lucia:</b> Pero mi mamá sí, mi mamá sí. Pero mi papá no.  <b>Victor:</b> Mi mamá siempre dice que, que en</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> So you think once in a while, it's ok to not follow the law?  <b>Camila:</b> No, because there can be lots of problems and accidents.  <b>Teacher:</b> But your parents didn't follow the law when they crossed the border without permission, my parents didn't follow the law when they crossed the border without permission. Your parents, either, right?  <b>Lucia:</b> But my mom did, my mom did.  <b>Victor:</b> But my dad no.</p>

<p>México siempre se pasaba la frontera sin el permiso y siempre venían los policías a agarrarlo.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Y usted cree que está bien que uno no siga las leyes?</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> Yo creo que, yo más o menos, porque a veces si tiene que hacer algo, lo tiene que hacer no más no puedes regresar, como decir, si vas a un lugar y te quedas ahí, pues ya no puedes regresarte, si, ya no puedes regresar pa' trás. Y también a veces si haces algo malo como, bueno, mi mamá y mi papá no más cruzan, porque querían a lo mejor ver lo que estaba allí o así, a lo mejor porque querían hacer aventuras y algo, eso es bueno para aprender, pero si tú haces, como si tú matas a alguien y te vas entonces eso es como no seguir la ley.</p>	<p><b>Victor:</b> My mom always says that, that in Mexico she always crossed the border without permission and always the police would come and get her.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Do you think its ok to not follow the law?</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> I think that, so so because you have to do something, you have to do it but you just can't return, like if you go somewhere and stay there, then you can't return, you can't go back. And also sometimes, if you do something bad, well, my mom and dad just crossed, because maybe they wanted to see what it was like here, or maybe they wanted to have an adventure or something, that's good for learning, but if you like kill someone or you leave then that's is not following the law.</p>
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In the previous discussion, we see the dualistic discourse of “right” and “wrong.” By Camila making the point that it was not like her parents had killed someone she is talking back to the dominant discourse that says it is “wrong” to cross the border illegally and becoming more conscious of social discourse therefore developing “conscientization” (Freire, 1974).

During the first day of discussion on *Superniña del Cilantro/ Super Cilantro girl*, Liliana shared the story about her girl cousin having to cut her hair like a boy in order to cross the border. Carlos, at first, could not believe this and did not understand why a girl would shave her head, but after some discussion he understood the reasoning:

Table 3

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Liliana:</b> Ah ha, porque a veces ummm los tiene que matar para que aprendan la lección. (<b>Carlos:</b> pero ya van estar muertos) Y a mi prima le tuvieron que</p>	<p><b>Liliana:</b> Ah-ha, because sometimes you have to kill them for them to learn a lesson. (<b>Carlos:</b> but they are going to be dead) And my girl cousin have to cut her hair to</p>

<p>cortar el pelo para pasar la frontera.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Mucha gente; por qué cruza la gente; por qué ud cree que hay gente aquí cruzando a los estados unidos?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Para trabajar.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Qué me estabas diciendo? (fue interrumpido por otro grupo de estudiantes que estaba en estaciones que tenían un argumento y pidieron que la maestra lo resolviera)</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Por qué le tenían que cortar el pelo?</p> <p><b>Liliana:</b> Ummm, no sé por qué era mi Tia Norma y realmente no sé, porque yo no estaba ahí.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Entonces, por qué? (un observador entró al salón y distrajo la maestra)</p> <p><b>Liliana:</b> No se por qué, mi Tia Norma si sabe porque ya son grandes mis primos; ellos si saben pero yo no se por qué, no más sé que le cortaron el pelo. Yo creo que se le paraba el pelo</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> todo, todo, se lo cortaron todo?</p> <p><b>Liliana:</b> No como niño</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Como niño. A lo mejor era para que no se viera como mujer.</p> <p><b>Liliana:</b> Ah- ha [afirmativo]</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Porque creo que es más difícil que la mujer cruce que el hombre.</p>	<p>cross the border</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Lots of people, why do people cross, why do you like that people here are crossing the border?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> To work</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> what were you saying? (was interrupted by another group of students at centers that were having an argument and asked the teacher to settle)</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Why did they have to cut her hair?</p> <p><b>Liliana:</b> Ummm, I not sure why, it was my Aunt Norma and really I don't know why because I wasn't there</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Then why? (a student observer walked into room and distracted the teacher)</p> <p><b>Liliana:</b> I don't know why my aunt Norma, the ones that do know are my big cousins, they knew why, she just cut her hair. I think she stood it up.</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> all, all, she cut it all?</p> <p><b>Liliana:</b> No like a boy</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Like a boy. Maybe it was so she wouldn't look like a woman.</p> <p><b>Liliana:</b> Ah- ha [affirmative]</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Because I think it is harder to cross as a woman than as a man.</p>
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In the above example, we see the reality of Liliana's world, her family has struggled in order to come over to the United States. By Liliana sharing this personal narrative she is dialoguing with the group to help her make sense of it all. She struggles with the fact that sometimes illegal immigrants are killed for crossing the border illegally, but in order to have this conversation she must position herself with her definitions of what it means to cross the border and what is an illegal immigrant. Through this dialogue

all the students in the group are building their critical consciousness because they are sharing their own personal knowledge and taking a position of where they stand.

*Societal discourse about “illegal immigrants”.* The discussion of border was not the only aspect of their cultural experience that was discussed during literature discussions. During the second day of discussion when the topic of borders came up again, Carlos shared how his uncle and himself, even though they were Mexican, were afraid of Mexicans. The following discussion arose from the conversation the group was having on whether there should be borders or not. This conversation was started by Liliana when she shared how she had seen a movie about a Mexican family trying to cross the border. The discussion included the positive and negative aspects of having a border. For example, Liliana shared that people from Mexico City could come and steal a lot and then Carlos shared the following related to his family.

Table 4

Transcription	Translation
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Ok, entonces a lo mejor llega la gente que es mala, ¿qué más? Abriendo fronteras, qué puede ser otro problema que tenemos?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Mi tío le tiene miedo a los mexicanos y él es mexi, el nació aquí, sus papás son de México.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Quién?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Mi tío.</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Ok, maybe people who are bad arrive, what else? Opening the borders, what can be another problem that we have?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> My uncle, he is afraid of Mexicans and he is mexi, he was born here, his parents are from Mexico.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Who?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> My uncle</p>

In this example, we see how Carlos is aware of the tension that exists between being Mexican and having a fear of Mexicans. There is a clear conflict here between personal identity and national heritage identity. Carlos then goes on to express the fact that he too has a fear of “some of them.” He qualifies it, making sure it is known that it is not all of them. Carlos sharing such a personal feeling and fear suggests the safety of the

discussion group; that is, Carlos did not seem to feel he would be judged or made fun of. He was able to share these feelings and ideas that he was still in the process of problematizing.

Table 5

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Si?  <b>Carlos:</b> Le tiene miedo porque porque les... no sé por qué.  <b>Maestra:</b>¿Y usted por qué nunca le ha preguntado por qué le tiene miedo a los mexicanos?  <b>Carlos:</b> Yo también por qué algunos son muy malos o algo.  <b>Maestra:</b>¿Usted le tiene miedo a los mexicanos?  <b>Carlos:</b> Ah- ha [afirmativo]  <b>Maestra:</b>¿Por qué?  <b>Carlos:</b> Ellos son muy malos.  <b>Maestra:</b> ¿Usted cree que todos los mexicanos son malos?  <b>Carlos:</b> No  <b>Maestra:</b> Porque si lo tengo correcto, su papá y su mamá son mexicanos. Y usted es mexico-americano, nació acá. ¿Entonces usted me está diciendo que usted le tiene miedo a su mamá y su papá, y a usted mismo?</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Really?  <b>Carlos:</b> He is afraid of them because because they. . .I don't know why  <b>Teacher:</b> And you have never asked him why he is afraid of Mexicans?  <b>Carlos:</b> I am too but some of them are real bad and something  <b>Teacher:</b> You are afraid of Mexicans?  <b>Carlos:</b> Ah- ha [affirmative]  <b>Teacher:</b> Why?  <b>Carlos:</b> They are bad.  <b>Teacher:</b> You think all Mexicans are bad?  <b>Carlos:</b> No  <b>Teacher:</b> Because if I'm right, your dad and mom are Mexican. And you are Mexican-American, born here. Then you are telling me that you are afraid of your mom and dad and yourself?</p>

In the following example, we see when I challenge his fear and ask him whether he is afraid of his own parents who are Mexican, he expresses that there is a clear distinction because parental fear and fear of people. He has a fear of a certain idea of a Mexican that he has in mind, even though he was not able to clearly express it. We also see that Carlos's story has made me reflect on my own experiences being Colombian and I build my "conscientization" (Freire, 1974).

Table 6

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Carlos:</b> No, a ellos no.  <b>Maestra:</b> A ellos no, Ok. ¿Y ustedes cómo sienten eso? ¿Ustedes le tienen miedo a los mexicanos?  <b>Liliana:</b> No.  <b>Jesus:</b> Yo sí.  <b>Maestra:</b> ¿Pero su mamá y su papá es de México, no?  <b>Jesus:</b> Sí.  <b>Maestra:</b> Entonces le tiene miedo a su mamá y su papá, y a su familia que está aquí?  <b>Carlos:</b> A mi papá yo sí, a mi mamá es [inaudible].  <b>Jesus:</b> Yo a mi mamá y a mi papá.  <b>Liliana:</b> Yo no tengo miedo porque ya a fui México como tres veces.  <b>Maestra:</b> Es que lo que yo creo es que necesitamos darnos cuenta que cada país hay gente mala y (<b>Liliana:</b> y buena) hay gente buena. Aquí en los Estados Unidos hay gente que uno le tiene que tener miedo, porque son malos, pero hay otras personas que no debemos tener miedo porque son buenos. En Colombia también, porque yo digo que soy de Colombia, siempre lo que la gente piensa es en dos cosas: en la droga, porque se hace mucha droga en Colombia, y en el café.</p>	<p><b>Carlos:</b> No, of them no  <b>Teacher:</b> Them no, ok. What do the rest of you think of this? Are you afraid of Mexicans?  <b>Liliana:</b> No  <b>Jesus:</b> I am  <b>Teacher:</b> But your mom and dad are from Mexico, right?  <b>Jesus:</b> yes  <b>Teacher:</b> So you are afraid of your mom and dad, and your family that is here?  <b>Carlos:</b> My dad yes, my mom is [inaudible]  <b>Jesus:</b> I am of my mom and dad  <b>Liliana:</b> I'm not afraid because I have gone to Mexico three times  <b>Teacher:</b> It's that I think we have to realize that every country has bad people (<b>Liliana:</b> and good) and good people. Here in the United States are people we should be afraid of, because they are bad, but there are other people that we don't need to be afraid of because they are good. In Colombia too, because when I say I am from Colombia, people always think of two things: drugs and coffee, because they make a lot of drugs in Colombia and coffee.</p>

This example shows the complexity of a student's identity as a child who is surrounded by the discourse of the law-breaking Mexican. Carlos is not just Mexican but also American, since he was born in the United States and it is the place he has known most of his life. Both of these identities that he takes on are not stagnant, but fluid and sometimes come into conflict with one another. As we see from Liliana, she has a different positionality because she has crossed the borders on several occasions and has

experiences from both sides of the borders. Both Carlos’s peers and I as the teacher complicate his ideas, although clearly these are struggles that all my students will continue to go through as they negotiate their place in the classroom, school and wider community.

**Familial separation.** During the boys’ discussion of the book *Trencitas/ Braids* there was not any talk about the border or even about grandparents, but this was very different from the girls discussion of the same book. In the girls’ discussion group, there was not a specific discussion about the border, but it was related to the fact that they talked about being separated from grandparents. Alejandra shared that she had never met her grandmother on her father’s side because she had died in Mexico. She also shared how her mom sometimes got sad when talking to family in Mexico.

Table 7

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Alejandra:</b> Creo que un día mi mamá habló con su papá en México y entonces creo que la hizo llorar, y fue a nuestro cuarto, y nosotras estábamos bien espantadas porque desde afuera, hasta adentro, hasta nuestro cuarto, se escuchaba que estaba llorando, entonces le dijimos qué te pasó, le dije y ella no dijo nada.</p>	<p><b>Alejandra:</b> I think that one day my mom was talking to her dad and he made her cry and she went to our room and we were scared because from outside to inside, to our room, we could hear her crying, then we asked her what happened and she said nothing.</p>

Camila also shared during the third day of discussion how she cannot go back to Guatemala because her dad would not be able to return. This is a reality of her world, Camila does not have the option of visiting family in Guatemala and feels the sadness of the separation.

Table 8

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Camila:</b> Yo también, como yo y Juliana nos vamos a quedar allí pero como no he ido a Guatemala yo no me voy a quedar. Yo sé por qué me voy a quedar porque mi papá ya no puede regresar allá porque si va allá ya no puede regresar, si se regresa ya no va poder salir por eso lo mejor nos vamos a quedar allí y otra cosa igual como Juliana que me voy a quedar allí porque hace mucho que no hemos ido alla.</p>	<p><b>Camilia:</b> Me too, like I and Juliana, we are going to stay there but we have not gone to Guatemala, I am going to stay. I know why I am going to stay because my dad can't return here, if he goes there, he can't return, if he returns, he is not going to be able to leave that's why maybe we are going to stay there and another thing the same like Juliana that we are going to stay because its been a long time since we have been there.</p>

During the second rotation discussion of the book *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South*, Alejandra shared how her mother does not like the United States after Lucia had shared how she would prefer to live in Mexico than in the United States. The discussion then continued on Mexicans not being wanted here in the United States. Alejandra then shared some of the fears she feels of having her family separated. Alejandra was born in the United States, so she knows she can stay in the United States. Her parents and older sister were not, so she lives with the fear that someday they might be taken away from her. My students talked about their opinions and facts about how they came to those opinions, including things they had seen on television shows, such as, *Primer Impacto*, a Spanish news series. In the following transcript, my students talk about how some of them feel that Mexicans are not wanted here in the United States. This is complicated issue for my students since the majority of them are Mexican Americans. This shows the complex lives of my students at even a young age, when they are dealing with issues that have been reserved for adults.

Table 9

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Lucia:</b> Sí, en las noticias están pasando mucho de todo eso en <i>Primer Impacto</i>, que traten de no salir los mexicanos,</p> <p><b>Alejandra:</b> Uh hun los Mexicanos</p> <p><b>Lucia:</b> porque los policías están tratando de parar a todos los mexicanos y van a tratar de mandarlos.</p> <p><b>Alejandra:</b> a su estado</p> <p><b>Lucia:</b> están tratando de mandar a México porque no quieren a los mexicanos, quieren puros americanos acá.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Y cómo se sienten ustedes con eso, ustedes siendo mexicanos y americanos?</p> <p><b>Alejandra:</b> Yo me siento mal porque mi mamá dice que si van a deportar, bueno que si la llegan a llevar a México que no sabe a quién llevarse, si nosotras, porque se lleva a Perla y a nosotras dos nos deja. Y sí, dice mi mamá que si llegan a parar como a Juliana, como Juliana es de Guatemala, la llegan a parar a sus padres, puede que ya nunca los vea porque ellos se van y puede que los dejen a sus hijos con otra familia.</p>	<p><b>Lucia:</b> Yes, in the news they are showing lots of that on <i>First Impact</i>, that they try to take out the Mexicans</p> <p><b>Alejandra:</b> Uh hun the Mexicans</p> <p><b>Lucia:</b> because police are trying to stop all Mexicans and are going to send them,</p> <p><b>Alejandra:</b> to their state</p> <p><b>Lucia:</b> they are trying to send them to Mexico because they don't like Mexicans, they want just Americans here.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> And how do you feel about this, you being both Mexican and American?</p> <p><b>Alejandra:</b> I feel bad because my mom says that if they deport her, well if they take her to Mexico, that she doesn't know who to take. If us, because if she take Perla and leaves us. And if, my mom says if they stop her like Juliana, like Juliana is from Guatemala, if they stop her parents, it can be that she never sees them because they will leave and they can leave their children with another family.</p>

Alejandra also shared the example of her father being stopped by police while driving to Chicago. Her mother had her not listen to what the officer was saying. Afterwards, they were allowed to leave, but followed to the house by the officer. Her father was then questioned again when at home. Alejandra might not be of illegal status, but her family situation affects her day-to-day activities, including the fear she feels everyday.

Students in my classroom all have this sort of separation among their family members that live in another country. This is a difficult reality of their lives. Their

participation in literature discussions, however, gave them a way to express some of these feeling and realize many of their classmates had similar experiences.

**Student Identity.** Students showed their student identity across the literature discussions groups. They were sometimes confused and worked to understand the layers of meaning in literature. When they were working to understand, those were the things that were categorized as student identities. Alejandra during the first day of discussion of the book, *La Llorona/The Crying Woman*, shared one of her limitations when she said “Es una pregunta muy dificil.” [That’s a very hard question] when another student had asked a question she did not know how to answer. She also shared where she had some confusion and gave an argument for her misunderstanding. For example, when the group was discussing how Maya believed Father Time, who was a complete stranger, Alejandra shared how she did not understand how Maya had believed him, especially since he was wearing a mask that was a different color than his actual green skin.

Table 10

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Alejandra:</b> Pero maestra yo no entiendo cómo Maya pudo confiar en este hombre que tiene la cara piel y luego los brazos verdes.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Ah hun, es como muy confiada, no está observando o nada.</p>	<p><b>Alejandra:</b> But teacher I don’t understand how Maya can trust this man that has his face skin color and then his arms green.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Uh-hun (affirmative), she is too trusting and not observant or nothing.</p>

During this particular book discussion, Alejandra referred often to the text in the book. She used the book to support her answers, but she always built off the text she shared from the book. For example she shared, “Aquí dice: ‘yo soy el padre del tiempo y esta nina nunca morirá’ ” [Here it says: “I am father time and this girl will never die”]

when the group was discussing Father Time’s role in the story. After other students had taken some turns, Alejandra shared her thoughts by saying, “A lo mejor el quiere que ella se muera” [Maybe it’s that he wants her to die], which actually was what was occurring in the story.

Carlos also shared when he was unclear on certain points. For example, during *The Tale of La Llorana* when discussing what was happening with Maria and the man in the story he said, “No pero aquí creo que dijo que el hecho una broma o algo.” [No, but here, I think, that it says that he tricked her or something.] This was not at all what the story was saying, so there was a disconnect between what he was reading and his understanding of it. He also had some confusion with the meanings of particular words, such as *bowl*. At first, he was not even pronouncing it right, so that might have been part of the problem.

Table 11

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Carlos:</b> ¿Qué es bow-l? Oh algo, no se que es?  <b>Maestra:</b> ¿Que es bowl?  <b>Sergio:</b> Es un plato.  <b>Maestra:</b> bowl, b-o-w-l (spells in Spanish)  <b>Sergio:</b> Es un plato.  <b>Maestra:</b> Si es un plato de sopa ese que es hondo, es un bowl, es en el que uno come cereal, sopa es un bowl es en inglés.</p>	<p><b>Carlos:</b> What’s a bow-l? Or something, I don’t know what it is.  <b>Teacher:</b> What’s a bowl?  <b>Sergio:</b> It’s a plate.  <b>Teacher:</b> Bowl, b-o-w-l (spells word in Spanish)  <b>Sergio:</b> It’s a plate.  <b>Teacher:</b> Yes, it’s a soup plate, that is deep, it’s a plate, it’s like the one you use to eat cereal or soup, it’s a bowl in English.</p>

Some of the story might have been unclear for Carlos, since the book was written in English only, so he did not have the option of reading it in Spanish. He was reflective of this at the end of the discussion when asked by me, “¿Se les hizo difícil leer en inglés?”

Entendieron todo, no había nada que no entendieron?” [Was it hard to read in English? Did you understand everything? There was nothing you didn't understand?]. Carlos responded that it was hard, but that there were parts that he did not clearly understand.

Carlos also had some difficulty in the other book he read in English entitled, *No, English*. The first word he had difficulty with was because he did not know how to pronounce it, but once the teacher said, “bothered, qué es bothered?” [bothered, what is bothered?] he was able to give the Spanish equivalent of the word which was “molestar.” When the same technique was used for the word “herself,” which Carlos was unsure of how to pronounce, he still did not know what it meant. Eduardo jumped in and gave the Spanish translation, “herself, ella misma.” Carlos then responded, “Oh yo estaba mirando otra palabra.” [Oh, I was looking at another word.] Carlos did not like the fact that another student knew a word that he did not, so apparently he made an excuse for not knowing the word. Here we see again that when the book was in English, Carlos was limited because he had difficulty getting the basic understanding of the story. Since Carlos had some difficulty reading in Spanish, which was his native language, it was to be expected that reading in English would be much harder for him.

During the language rotation when Alejandra discussed the book *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South* and Carlos discussed *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, I did not see either student take on this student identity. They both were very engaged in the discussions and shared lots of personal narratives about their family that related to the story. So here we see how their positionality changed. When they understood and connected to the story in a more meaningful way then they were able to share the wealth of knowledge that they had and build their “conscientization” (Freire,

1974). When it was hard for them just to get what the story was talking about then they could not move past the surface level of questioning; they adopted the student identity and worked toward understanding.

### Language

When it came to language, the discussions students had showed the complexity of being bilingual or trilingual for some of my students. They chose different languages for different situations and recognized particular language differences. They recognized particular language differences specifically when it caused confusion in their understanding, given the English that dominated life outside their family. The classroom’s valuing of multiple languages helped create a critical space for claiming Spanish. The first choice they had to make in each book discussion was whether to read the book in Spanish or English, since all the books were bilingual, except for *The Tale of La Llorona* and the books in the last rotation on English. They also made language choices in their social lives.

**Language choice.** For example, during the second day of discussion about the book *Trencitas/ Braids*, I wanted to reread a section we were discussing about a dream and asked in what language they wanted to read it.

Table 12

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Entonces, por qué no nos leemos esta página juntos para hablar del sueño y a ver qué creemos que significa el cuento. ¿Lo vamos a leer en inglés o español?  <b>Alejandra:</b> Español.  <b>Mercedes:</b> En inglés.  <b>Maestra:</b> Votacion. Adriana?  <b>Adriana:</b> Español</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Then, why don’t we read this page together to talk about the dream and see what we think the story means. Are we going to read it in English or Spanish?  <b>Alejandra:</b> Spanish  <b>Mercedes:</b> English  <b>Teacher:</b> Let’s vote, Adriana?  <b>Adriana:</b> Spanish</p>

<b>Maestra:</b> Entonces estamos tres a uno a español. Vamos a español.	<b>Teacher:</b> So we are three to one for Spanish. We are going to read it in Spanish.
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As you can see Alejandra chose to read that particular section in Spanish, but later on that day, when told to reread the book, she read it in Spanish and then once finished said, “Ahora lo voy a leer en inglés.” [Now I’m going to read it in English.] Alejandra is fully bilingual, but is sometimes reluctant to show her English proficiency in whole group settings or when mixed together with English dominant students, so it does not surprise me that she chooses to read in English when she is reading to herself instead of out loud with the group.

The same thing occurred during the second day of the book *La Llorona/ The Crying Woman*, when I wanted to reread a section of the book together as a group and asked “¿Vamos en ingles o español?” [Are we going to read it in English or Spanish?]. The majority of the group, including Alejandra, said “En Español” [In Spanish].

During the first day of discussion of the book *I hate English!*, I had started off the discussion in English, since the book had been read in English, by asking how they wanted to begin, Camilia answered “Yo lo quiero hacer esta primera, lo hice en español y ingles para estar segura.” [I want to do this one first, I did it in English and Spanish to be sure.] She had written her sticky note in both languages because she was not sure in which language the discussion would be in. I then asked in which language students wanted the discussion and they all responded Spanish, so we continued in Spanish. Throughout the discussion, I would make some of my questions or comments in English because that came naturally to me, but the students would always stay in Spanish.

José during the discussion of the book *I Hate English!* shared that he hated English. He said, “I hate English” when asked why he did not want to have the discussion of the book in English. Later on in the discussion, when the teacher asked him to explain why he felt that way, he said, “No me gusta el ingles” [I don’t like English] and other group members laughed. He did not explain his reasoning in any further detail. I mostly think he was trying to be funny since this is a role he commonly took in class. He is one of the students that on many occasions I heard using English with other classmates, so I know he sometimes did prefer English over Spanish.

During the discussion of *Trencitas/ Braids*, Camila shared a personal narrative of a conflict Lucia and her had during recess with English speaking students from another class and how she choose to speak Spanish in order to not be understood by them. She told the group that Lucia and her were both playing in the little house on top of the play structure, when two girls started bothering them. The two little girls were pushing them and saying things to them. Camila said she told them “that’s not right,” but they continued. Camila shared, “yo le dije a Lucia en español que mejor nos vayamos de ahí y nos fuimos de ahí.” [I told Lucia, in Spanish, that it was better if we left and we did.] This showed how Camila had the two languages at her disposal and picked which one was needed for each particular situation. Bilingual students are able to switch between languages without any sort of problem or confusion.

During the discussion of *The Tale of La Llorona*, since the book was written in English some of the questions I posed to the students were in English. Carlos would respond in the same language as the question was asked in. When the group was discussing the fact that Maria was not marrying for love in the story, I asked “Shouldn’t

you marry for love? Like, when you get older, you know what marry for love is?” Carlos started to answer in English, but since no body else spoke, I decided to make the question more personal to student’s lives and switched into Spanish. I said, “Como cuando sus papás se casaron, ¿uds creen que se casaron por dinero o se casaron porque se amaban? [Like when your parents were married, do you think they married for money or because they loved each other?]. So as teacher, I also chose what language to speak. Carlos goes on to respond in Spanish that his parents married because they loved each other. The discussion around this book was mostly done in Spanish, even though the actual book was written in English. This could have been a result of the fact that the story topic was one connected to students’ Mexican heritage and therefore their native language of Spanish.

The contrary situation was seen in the discussion of the book, *No English*. The group including Carlos spoke more English. Carlos continued to follow my lead and if I ever switched into Spanish then Carlos would too, but as most questions were made in English, he responded in English. One example of him switching languages was when he asked the question “Why does she look mad?” in English. His classmate Alejandra responded, “Yo no entiende que dijo.” [I didn’t understand what he said.] Carlos then realized that he must translate the question in order for Alejandra to understand, so he said, “No se, ¿Por qué se mira enojada?” [I don’t know why she looks mad?]. He used his bilingualism to make sure that everyone in his group understood him.

During the discussion of the book *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, when responding to my question, “¿Ustedes les gusta hablar en ingles o español o les gusta uno más que el otro?” [Do you like to speak in English or Spanish, do you like one

more than the other?], Carlos responded that he liked English a little bit more, but when pushed by the teacher of his reasoning why, he was unable to support his answer. Even after the teacher pointed out how she had heard him speaking English while reading with a classmate in the tent the previous day.

Table 13

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Carlos:</b> Oh como, yo creo que poquito más en inglés, porqueeee, no sé.  <b>Maestra:</b> ¿Por qué?  <b>Carlos:</b> No sé.  <b>Maestra:</b> ¿No sabes por qué te gusta más inglés, yo te estoy oyendo mucho en inglés aquí en el salón, también yo ayer cuando usted estaba leyendo era puro en inglés que usted está hablando, ¿quién estaba en la casita, con usted ayer?  <b>Sofia:</b> ¿Enrique?  <b>Carlos:</b> Demetrio  <b>Maestra:</b> ¿Demetrio? Ustedes estaba hablando puro inglés, usted estaba hablando puro inglés. ¿Estabas leyendo en inglés o estabas leyendo en español?  <b>Carlos:</b> Estaba leyendo en inglés.</p>	<p><b>Carlos:</b> Like, I think a little more in English, because, I don't know.  <b>Teacher:</b> Why?  <b>Carlos:</b> I don't know.  <b>Teacher:</b> You don't know why you like English more because I'm hearing you use a lot of English here in the classroom. Yesterday, when you were reading I hear you speaking all English, who was in the tent with you yesterday?  <b>Sofia:</b> Enrique?  <b>Carlos:</b> Demetrio  <b>Teacher:</b> Demetrio? You were speaking English only, were you reading in English or in Spanish?  <b>Carlos:</b> I was reading in English.</p>

Carlos in the classroom did demonstrate a preference for English by choosing books to read in English and choosing to speak with various classmates in English. Also earlier in the discussion he had stated how he knew more English than his dad and seemed proud of that fact. He also spoke of his friendships out of school and said, “Este yo, casi todos mis amigos son como morenitos, pero a veces otros no, otros son blancos y otros así, pero hablan puro inglés y le tengo que hablar en inglés.” [I, almost all my friends are black, but sometimes they are not, others are white, and other like this, but they speak all English and I have to speak English.] So in his social world, Carlos mostly

spoke in English. He clearly had a conflict between choosing English or Spanish because this was all contradicted during the second day of discussion when he said he preferred a little more Spanish because “porqué sí lo sé más” [because I know it more]. This was also reiterated by the fact that he stated that he read the book in Spanish and then in English. The bilingual students in my class felt this language choice conflict on a daily basis because they had to choose which language to speak, when both were options. They realized that most others around them used English and so sometimes felt pressured to do so as well.

**Language differences.** During the first day of discussion in *Esperando mi papá/ Waiting for papá* while Camila was teaching the group how to say squirrel in Q’anjob’al, she referred to the fact that an English speaker might get confused.

Table 14

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Cu-quis. ¿Entonces, cuando yo digo cu-quis, usted entiende que es estoy apuntando a una ardilla?</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> Uh-ha. [afirmativo]</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> Si, pero, si le dicen a una persona en inglés, va pensar, "Cookies." You want cookies." Y se va confundir. No, iba a decir, "Cu-quis." Y después, "What?"</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Cu-quis Then when I am saying cu-quis, you understand that I am pointing to a squirrel?</p> <p><b>Camilia:</b> Uh-ha. [affirmative]</p> <p><b>Camilia:</b> Yes, but, if you say it to an English-speaking person, they are going to think “cookies”. You want cookies. They are going to be confused. No, I was saying cu-quis and they will say What?</p>

I also built off this idea of confusion when another student taught me how to say *meat* in Q’anjob’al. Both of these examples demonstrate how aware students were of language differences and possible mishaps in communication. Students had experienced miscommunications when using their languages, so they were conscious of seeing where confusion might arise.

Table 15

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Chiveh es carne? Entonces, yo digo, "quiero chiveh" es quiero carne?  <b>Juliana:</b> Uh-ha. [affirmative].  <b>Maestra:</b> Si me entiende, va decir, "Hoy vamos a comer chiveh." Van a creer que estoy diciendo, "chivo." [risas]</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Chiveh is mean? Then if I say, "I want chiveh" it's I want meat?  <b>Juliana:</b> Uh-ha. [affirmative].  <b>Teacher:</b> If they understand me, "Today we are going to eat chiveh" They are going to think that I'm saying goat. [laughter]</p>

In the discussion of the book *I hate English!*, Camila shared that she sometimes hated English when I asked "Entonces yo puse, have you ever hated English?" [Then I put, have you ever hated English?] She explained why, assuming her identity as a learner.

Table 16

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Camila:</b> Porque a veces cuando yo leo, a veces cuando yo quiero hablar en inglés, yo pienso que es como no sé, a la mejor es normal, pero es que cada vez que pienso la palabra y quiero decirla, no la puedo decir como cuando pienso en algo que es en inglés y la quiero decir, no la puedo decir porque no sé si es la correcta o no es la correcta y me confundo, y cuando yo a veces lo leo en inglés, cuando leo libros en inglés, a veces cuando quiero decir una palabra no puedo porque a veces estoy leyendo un libro y no entiendo la palabra.</p>	<p><b>Camila:</b> Because sometimes when I read, sometimes when I want to speak in English, I think of how to say it since I don't know, maybe that's normal, but it's every time I think of the word and I want to say it, I can't say it because I don't know if it's correct and I get confused, and when I read in English, when I read English books, sometimes, I want to say a word but I can't because I am reading a book and don't understand the word.</p>

In this example Camila was expressing some of the difficulties that she had with her bilingualism, especially when it came to her English language. This showed that her biggest fear was making a mistake; not the fact that she did not have the knowledge to express herself in English. She shared another example later on in the discussion when she said, "Casi los que hablan ingles me da miedo, no más las niñas que hablan que las

conzco y hablan español sí me gustan”[Also all the ones that speak English scare me, just the girls that I know and speak Spanish I like], when we had been discussing who they sat with in the lunchroom and why. This showed her fear of being judged by a dominant English-speaker.

In the same discussion, Camila shared a part of the story where she did not understand; she said, “Como aquí no use papel, pero yo me pregunto por qué aquí dice ‘the next day Meme was mad she started at the teacher,’ pero no sé qué es esto? [Like here, I didn’t use a paper, but I ask because here it says, ‘the next day Meme was mad she started at the teacher,’ but what is that?]. After some discussion I realized the confusion was in the fact that Camila thought it said *started* when it fact the book said *stared*. I was then able to explain to Camila what was happening in this part of the story in Spanish.

In the book discussion of *La Llorona/ The Weeping Woman*, José shared some confusion he had on the meaning of a Spanish word when he said, “¿Que es guapismo?” [What is handsome?]. I put the questions onto the other members of the group, but after discussing the meaning, it seemed that José had known the meaning of the word, but did not understand how they could call that man handsome. He stated, “Si, pero aquí no se ve tan guapo.” [Yes, but here he doesn’t look so handsome.] So it was not a confusion on the meaning of the word, but of how it was being used in context, since he did not agree. I went on to point out how we each have different personal opinions on certain things.

In the *Tale of La Llorona*, Carlos had difficulty with meanings of different words, since the book was in English only. One of the words he did not know was *carriages*, but once another member of the group translated the word into Spanish he was finally clear what it meant.

Table 17

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Dice María draw castles and carriages. (Leyendo del libro)</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> ¿Qué es carriages?</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Que su amiga hizo burros y flores y casas. Ella hizo castillos. Carriages son estas cosas, en los viejos tiempos para viajar usaban carriages, no sé cómo se dice en español, estas cosas que jalaban un caballo</p> <p><b>Angel/Carlos:</b> Un caballo</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Cómo se dice?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> A veces también un burro.</p> <p><b>Juan:</b> Yo creo que se llama un carruaje</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Ok, carruaje, entonces uno de esos</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> It says Maria draws castles and carriages. (Reading from book)</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> What are carriages?</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> That her friend made donkies, flowers and houses. She made castles. Carriages are these things, in old times to travel they used carriages, I don't know how you say it in Spanish, but these things that are pulled by a horse</p> <p><b>Angel/Carlos:</b> a horse</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> sometimes a donkey</p> <p><b>Juan:</b> I think it's called a "carruaje"</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Ok, carruaje, then one of those</p>

In the classroom, not just in literature discussions, the students and I would have differences in vocabulary words. We were both speaking Spanish, but since the fact was that I came from a Colombian background, the words I used could sometimes be different from a word used by my students of Mexican background. An example of this was during *The Tale of La Llorona* discussion when Carlos asked me if when I watched *La Llorona* videos on the computer if I had turned on the speakers. I did not understand him at first because he was using a word that I normally did not, but I finally got what he meant. Whenever this occurs I make a point that neither word is more correct than the other, it is just different ways of saying the same thing.

Table 18

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Carlos:</b> Maestra tu cuando viste el video de la llorona, tu prendiste las bocinas?</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Cuáles bocinas? Oh, como los</p>	<p><b>Carlos:</b> Teacher when you say the video of La Llorona, did you turn on the speakers [bocinas]?</p>

parlantes? Sí. Me dio un miedo. <b>Carlos:</b> ¿Si? <b>Maestra:</b> Estaba sola, en la casa.	<b>Teacher:</b> What speakers [bocinas]? Oh, like speakers [parlantes]? Yes I was scared. <b>Carlos:</b> Yeah <b>Teacher:</b> I was home alone.
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In the discussion of *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, we considered who in the story spoke Spanish or English and how we knew that. This led to a discussion about how a person who speaks Spanish looks. I challenged students by asking, “Y entonces, ¿Y creen que toda la gente que se ve así no habla español, no creen que de vez en cuando hay personas que se ven así que hablan español?” [Do you think that all people who speak Spanish look like that, don’t you think that sometimes there are people that don’t look like that who speak Spanish?] This was followed up with me sharing a situation when I assumed a person was an English speaker and it turned out they spoke Spanish. Carlos also shared how he had assumed that one of his dad’s friends spoke only English, so Carlos had said something to his dad about him in Spanish, so the friend would not understand, but it turned out that the friend spoke Spanish as well. I was trying to make it clear to students that we can not always judge a person by how they look. We can not make assumptions, but have to get information.

Another example of judging what language a person speaks by the way they look can be found in the book discussion of *No, English*. During the discussion, the group was talking about one of the teachers and Alejandra says “she’s bilingual.” When asked how do you know, Alejandra answered, “I don’t know.” I continued to push the discussion to get Alejandra to back up her idea. I did not want to give students my opinion because then they would think it was the correct answer, but I did want them to start critically thinking about why they had certain ideas they had.

Table 19

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Why do you think she is bilingüe Alejandra? Es tu opinión, por que crees que es bilingüe?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> She looks bilingüe.</p> <p><b>Alejandra:</b> Yeah</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> She looks bilingüe? How do bilingüe people look?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> I don't know.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Well you said she looks bilingüe, what does she have that makes her look bilingüe? Why do you think she looks bilingüe. I'm just asking, I am not saying she is not or she is, I don't know. I'm reading the same story you are. So why do you think? What does she have that makes her look bilingüe?</p> <p><b>Alejandra:</b> uhhhhh</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Her clothes, it look Mexican.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Ok, her clothes look Mexican, what else?</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Why do you think she is bilingual Alejandra? In your opinión why do you think she is bilingual?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> She looks bilingual.</p> <p><b>Alejandra:</b> Yeah</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> She looks bilingual? How do bilingual people look?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> I don't know.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Well you said she looks bilingual, what does she have that makes her look bilingual? Why do you think she looks bilingual. I'm just asking, I am not saying she is not or she is, I don't know. I'm reading the same story you are. So why do you think? What does she have that makes her look bilingual?</p> <p><b>Alejandra:</b> uhhhhh</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Her clothes, it look Mexican.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Ok, her clothes look Mexican, what else?</p>

So, to sum up, we see that these students shared lots of personal narratives related to their experiences, specifically related to borders, societal discourse about “illegal immigrants,” separation and language itself. These are all topics that are not normally itself part of the second grade curriculum, but as seen from the stories shared by these students, it was a reality of their lives.

### Roles

From the data above, we can start to see that these students took on numerous roles during discussion: they asked/answered questions, shared personal narratives, took on a leadership role when they took on procedural control and even a expert role when they shared knowledge they had. In the following examples, I will show how particular

students took on leadership roles and how they helped to position themselves or each another as an expert.

### **Leadership Role**

During the boys' *Trencitas/Braids* as stated earlier there was not much in depth discussion or personal narratives shared. What did happen during the discussion was that José, as well as others in the group, took on a leadership role. They acted like the teacher by telling others whose turn it was to share one of their sticky notes and clarified each other's questions when they were not being understood.

For example, José said things such as “en orden alfabético” [in alphabetical order] or “Ahora le toca a Diego” [Now it's Diego's turn] when trying to run the discussion. He also clarified his classmate's point when he said “Oh ya se, ya se la pregunta de Sergio. El dice que no sabe leer y Angel dice que si se lo va leer.” [Oh I know, I know Sergio's question. He says that she does not know how to read and Angel says that she is going to read it,] when his classmate's point was not being understood.

José also tried to implement this same discussion format “con las preguntas, en abecedario” [with the questions, in alphabet order] when the teacher had asked how they were going to start during *La Llorona/ The Weeping Woman* book discussion, but the teacher did not allow it in this situation. I had learned from the previous discussion with *Trencitas/Braids* that this type of discussion format had not promoted lively discussion, therefore I avoided it being implemented again.

During the discussion of *I hate English!* José also took procedural leadership of the group by getting his own question in, saying “Maestra, aquí tengo una pregunta” [Teacher, I have a question here.] and also telling another student “No, pero

estamos aca” [No, but we are here] when a student tried to move to conversation to another page and I was letting him. During this discussion, José did not take an expert role in the fact of sharing his wealth of knowledge in any of the discussions. He did not share a lot of personal narratives and the questions he asked were very superficial, such as, “¿Por qué la niña tiene la cara muy fea?” [Why does the girl have such an ugly face?]. This could have been as a result of a lack of interest in the storyline. As one of the most popular boys in the classroom, as well as one of the most talkative I had expected that he would have shared a tremendous number of personal connections, but that was not the case.

During the second day of discussion with the girls’ group *Trencitas/ Braids*, Alejandra took on the teacher role when the teacher was not present. They had been told to reread the final part of the book that they would be discussing that day, while I helped another group that was at centers. All four girls had been reading the story aloud together, when Alejandra stopped and said, “punto, recuerde los puntos y los comas.” [period, remember the periods and the commas]. She was reminding her classmate that they had to pause at the periods and commas whenever reading. She also told her classmates, “Ya vamos a seguir” [We are now going to continue] when an argument had broken out between other members of the group about how softly they were to be reading. She also said, “¿Preguntas?” [Questions?] as a way to give her classmates a way into the discussion as the teacher sometimes did. This was all done when I, the teacher, was not present.

During the other two group discussions of *Superniña del Cilantro/ Super Cilantro Girl* and *Esperando mi papá/ Waiting for Papá* this type of vocal leadership was not

seen. The students seemed to make more connections to these storylines and therefore had more personal narratives to share. This resulted in the conversations being much more fluid. The leadership role that I saw with the boys' *Trencitas/ Braids* discussion seemed to be a fallback because they did not have much to say and therefore the conversation was forced. The whole group was pushing for something to talk about, even the teacher, but nothing was ever found that sparked the conversation.

During the discussion of *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, I as the teacher made it clear that I was not running the discussion by staying silent for over ten seconds. Sofia then said, “¿Carlos?” as if nudging him to speak and run the discussion. I said “Yo estoy tratando de no hablar, voy a dejar que ustedes discutan y yo escucho, hágale pues.” [I am trying not to talk, I am going to let you discuss and I will listen, go ahead.] Carlos then took the initiative and said “otra pagina, ummm, vaz hacer tu pregunta?” [The other page, ummm, are you going to ask your question?]. This was directed to Guillermo who had a sticky note on the next page, so then Guillermo shared his question with the group. Carlos then called on Sofia to share her thoughts on Guillermo's question. Carlos also finished Sofia's response, when she said “Es que como que alguna gente habla en ingles como. . .” [It's like when some people speak English. . .] and Carlos said “y otras en español” [and others in Spanish]. This shows how others in the group turned to Carlos to lead the discussion when the teacher was not doing it. Carlos was willing to take on this role.

### **Expert Role**

As seen before, Camila was excited and upfront about sharing her Q'anjob'al dialect knowledge, but she also realized her limitations of knowledge. She positioned

another Q'anjob'al speaker in the group, Juliana, as the expert and recognized that she had more background in Q'anjob'al. Juliana is a shyer student in this school context; she might not have shared this information if Camila had not positioned her in this positive way.

Table 20

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> -- Como se dice, "¿Allí hay un ardilla?"</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> Tu si sabes mucho más que yo. Mi papá no me enseñó como hacer – (hablando con Juliana)</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Yo quiero decir, "Alli hay una ardilla." En vez de solo ardilla.</p> <p><b>Juliana:</b> Vai twila un cu-quis.</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> How do you say, "There's a squirrel?"</p> <p><b>Camilia:</b> You know a lot more than me, my dad didn't teacher me how to (speaking to Juliana)</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> I want to say, "There's a squirrel" instead of just squirrel.</p> <p><b>Juliana:</b> Vai twila un cu-quis.</p>

Table 21

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Camila:</b> Y ella saber contar de uno a diez en dialecto.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Nos cuenta?</p> <p><b>Juliana:</b> No más puedo en cuatro, pero --</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> -- Okay, hágalo hasta cuatro.</p> <p><b>Juliana:</b> Hun, ka, oshep, canet</p>	<p><b>Camila:</b> And she knows how to count to 10 in dialect.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Can you count for us?</p> <p><b>Juliana:</b> I only can up to four.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Ok, do it up to four.</p> <p><b>Juliana:</b> Hun, ka, oshep, canet.</p>

José also positioned himself as an expert during the discussion of *La Llorona/The Weeping Woman*. He made it clear what his position was on whether he thought the death of the children was an accident or not by saying, "Maestra, ella dice que no los mató. Pero yo creo que si, que no fue ninguin accidente." [Teacher, she says she didn't kill them, but I think she did, it was no accident.] He also shared additional knowledge he had on *La Llorona*, which he had gotten from a movie he had seen on her. He referred to additional knowledge he had at various points in the discussion to support his ideas.

During the discussion of the book *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South*, the introduction to the story uses the word *deportation*, I wanted to make sure students understood what that word meant and Lucia was able to give a clear definition. Afterwards, this sparked the conversation and had all the students sharing personal narratives about their family members near deportations, run-ins with the police, or fear of deportation. This constant fear was part of their daily lives that I as their teacher had never truly realized.

Table 22

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿qué es deportar? Uds sabe que significa?</p> <p><b>Lucia:</b> Como a mi tío lo deportaron pero...</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Y qué significa eso?</p> <p><b>Lucia:</b> Como que, como que, Cuando a una policía para a una persona o a muchas personas, entonces se fijan si a la mejor los dejan irse o los deben que llevar y después como que con unas máquinas que tienen, si fumas, o usan drogas o matan o tienen pistolas y les toman las fingerprints y después se fijan si los deportan o no, pero deportar means, significa que los van a mandar a México sí o no.</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> What does deportation mean? Do you know what that means?</p> <p><b>Lucia:</b> Like my uncle, they deported him, but</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> And what does that mean?</p> <p><b>Lucia:</b> Like when, like when, when the police stop a person or lots of people, then they look to see if they are going to let them go or if they need to take them in. Like with some machines they look to see if you smoke, use drugs, kill people, have guns. They take your fingerprints and afterwards see if they are going to deport you or not. But to deport you means that they are going to send you back to Mexico.</p>

Through this example, we see that Lucia has seen first hand how police handled the deportation process, even if she did not have all the details right. Lucia also went on to talk about the court process. When she did not know how to refer to the court, she mentioned a popular TV show on the Spanish network, *Caso Cerrado*, that gave everyone in the group a clear reference point.

This then lead Alejandra to speak of her dad being stopped by police when they had been traveling to Chicago. When her parents spotted the police they had pulled the car into a parking lot and her mother had said, “bájense porque ahí está la policia y qué tal si nos detiene” [get out quick because there is the police and what if they stop us.] They did not get out of the car in time and when the police officer approached the car, mom said, “no escuché lo que estaba diciendo el policia” [don’t listen to what the police officer says]. Alejandra then continued to say that the police officer let them go, but followed them home and talked again to her father when at home. Her mother told her that it was a mistaken identity and they were looking for someone that looked like her father. This example shows that Alejandra might not have had a clear idea of what exactly was going on, but knew that her parents feared the police. Also this example shows how her parents tried to shelter and protect the family from being exposed to the reality that was their lives. Alejandra’s parents did not want their daughters to go through the fears that they went through on a daily basis.

Students were put in the expert role because they were the knowledge holders. They were the ones that were sharing personal narratives related to their lives. No one else knew the stories of their lives, but while discussing the different stories, students would think of ways that it related to their lives to share it with the group. This was a way to build mutual understanding and respect for each other’s experiences as well as a way to share personal feelings one might not get the chance to in another situation. During this process students continued to build their “conscientization” (Freire, 1974).

So, to sum up, students took on the leadership role when they shared the wealth of knowledge that they had, which had not been normally tapped into in the classroom.

They were the experts. Students of this young age could discuss topics that were normally not thought of age as appropriate, but still needed the teacher present in order to make sure everyone's voice was being heard. In the following chapter, we will see how the teacher's role had to change in this new discussion format to suit the needs of the students.

## Chapter 5

### The Teacher's Journey

This is a story about how a teacher had to change the way she normally did things in the classroom in order to successfully implement a new dialogue format of literature discussion. The previous year I had implemented literature discussions with this same group of students in first grade. I was now in my second year of implementation with these same students and decided to take a critical look at my role as the teacher. What I found was that I did change my teaching practices. This chapter shows how I changed my role and the position I normally took in order to, along with my students and the books, construct a space for voicing ideas and thoughts to build critical consciousness. In this chapter I present data that answers three of my research questions

- 1.) How does the teacher's role change over time?
- 2.) What roles are taken on by the teacher during literature discussions?
- 3.) How does the teacher position herself during the discussion?

I will first share data from my previous year of instruction when my students were in first grade. This data will show that previously I had taken on five different roles: Facilitator, a Reiterator, a Modeler, an Expander, and an Evaluator. When I looked at how my role had changed the second year of data collection, I found that I was no longer evaluating students' responses and I was more conscious of letting my students talk and work on their meaning making process with minimal teacher involvement. I did not become the Evaluator or the Modeler, since it was the second year students were using this discussion format.

During this current study, when it came to the roles I as teacher took during the discussions the data showed that I asked questions, reiterated what others said, clarified information when necessary, pushed students' thinking, and tried to make it personal for students whenever possible. I did all this while still having goals for what had to be accomplished during these discussions. When it came to how I positioned myself, I made sure to try to position myself as a conversation partner as well as a learner in the group.

### **Change over time**

When looking at the data from my students' first grade year, I was surprised to find that I was using the Initiate-Response-Evaluation (IRE) model of discourse (Mehan, 1982). I thought I had been giving my students ample opportunity to talk freely, but the results showed otherwise. Almost the whole sequence of turns during the literature discussions were teacher-student, teacher-student, with some evaluative comments. I was still afraid of silence. When the students did not respond right way I would just go ahead and talk. I did evaluate some of the students' turns by saying "muy bien" [good job]. This led to some of the students trying to find the one particular answer I wanted or could have even silenced some students because of the fear of being wrong.

Even though I did use the IRE model through the data analysis I realized that I did so with a purpose in mind. It did not have to be seen as a negative thing. I was using the IRE discourse model as a way to facilitate literature discussions. This was the very first time my students were participating in this kind of structured discussion format and as such, this resulted in me having to take on this particular role and providing a model of how to lead discussions.

This particular year, I found that there were five particular roles I had taken: Facilitator, a Reiterator, a Modeler, an Expander, and an Evaluator. As a Facilitator, I made sure students stayed on task. I would help students get “an in” into the discussion or even sometimes block students from getting “an in” when they wanted to change the discussion topic when the previous one had not been fully discussed. As Reiterator, I repeated students’ comments or questions in order to make them more authoritative and clarifying before developing any misunderstandings. As a Modeler, I demonstrated some of the kinds of connections I would like students to make to the story, by sharing personal narratives of my life that I was reminded of when reading the book. As Expander, I pushed my students to give more than a one word answer by asking questions that required students to give more details. Finally, as an Evaluator, I told my students when I thought they had come up with a good question, answer, or comment.

During this year’s study in second grade I found that I still took on many of the roles from the previous year, except, that of Evaluator and Modeler. I had been working hard to move away from the role of Evaluator and during this year of data collection I was able to do so. I never told a student “muy bien” [good job] and I allowed students more time to talk without the interference of the teacher. I will now share my findings from this study when it came to teacher roles and positionality.

## **Roles**

### **Questioner**

In all the discussions I asked questions of my students. I would try to get the students in each group to share what they had written on their sticky notes first. During the first day of discussion, most of the students’ questions had to do with understanding

the actual story line. I would step in and ask questions when I wanted my students to think more critically and move past the surface level in order to push their thinking on particular topics that came up throughout the discussion. When taking a closer look at the questions I asked, I noticed that lots of times I asked questions that could be answered by a yes/no answer or a one-word answer. This made me realize that I had to be more conscious of how I phrased questions. I would follow-up these kinds of questions by asking “why” in order to get students to explain their reasoning. I also got students to be more critical by making the discussion topics more personal to their particular lives. I will now share specific examples of questions I asked to get my students to think more critically below.

An example of a question that called for a yes/ no answer was during the book discussion *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South*, when I asked, “¿Ustedes creen que es justo que la echen a ella, cuando ella tiene su casa y su family en los Estados Unidos?” [Do you think it’s right that they throw her out when she has her home and family in the United States?]. This was when we were discussing how the mother had been removed from the United States and sent to Tijuana. This question could have been rephrased in a way that called for a longer response. Alejandra answered no, so I followed up with “¿Qué creen que necesita cambiar para que eso pare de pasar?” [What do you think needs to change in order for this to stop happening?].

Another example of a yes/ no question I asked was during the discussion of *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, I asked the students “Entonces la maestra puede hablar con la niña Carmen?” [So can the teacher speak with the little girl Carmen?]. Of course I got the response “no”, but followed it up by asking “why?” We

then got into a discussion on what language was spoken by the teacher as well as the classroom context and how we knew what it was.

During the discussion of the book *I hate English!*, I asked questions like “Have you ever hated English?” or “¿Ustedes piensan en ingles o en español?” [Do you think in Spanish or English?] This shows that as the teacher I really have to think about how I am phrasing my questions, if my ultimate goal is to get my students to be more critical, I need to be more conscious of the questioning techniques I implement.

### **Reiterator**

In all the discussions there were various times when I would reiterate a student’s question or comment in order to make sure they were understood or that their particular question was answered. In the first day of discussion of the book *Superniña del Cilantro/ Super Cilantro Girl*, when Carlos was talking about why there should not be borders, “Para que todos puedan ser free.” [So that everyone can be free.], I reiterated and expanded by saying, “Free, ok. ¿Por qué crees que eso es importante? [Free, ok, why do you think that’s important?]. I thought it was important point that Carlos was making but I wanted him to explain his reasoning to the group further.

I also reiterated to make sure that a student’s questions did not go unanswered. For example, in the first day of discussion of *Esperando mi papá/ Waiting for papá*, Lucia asked the “¿Por qué esta llorando-por qué estan llorando todos?” [Why are they crying-Why is everyone crying?]. This question resulted in the group arguing about the fact that not everyone was crying instead of actually answering why they were crying. I stated that they were right that not everyone was crying by saying, “Si, pero porque esta

llorando, es la pregunta de Lucia.” [Yes, but why are they crying, that’s Lucia’s question.] I wanted to make sure that each student’s question was answered.

Another example is during the discussion of *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, I made sure the group came back to a question another student had asked when we got off topic. I also reworded her question because the way Sofia had phrased it, was more like a statement.

Table 23

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Pudo ser. Entonces qué fue lo que usted dijo, ¿Sofía lo dices otra vez?  <b>Sofia:</b> Pepita no se tiene que enojar por lo del español; Pepita sí tiene que hablar español.  <b>Maestra:</b> ¿Por qué creen ustedes o creen ustedes de acuerdo con Sofia que Pepita debe habla español también?</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Could have been. Then what was it that you said, Sofia can you say it again?  <b>Sofia:</b> Pepita doesn’t have to get mad about speaking Spanish, Pepita does need to speak Spanish.  <b>Teacher:</b> Why do you think or are you in agreement with Sofia that Pepita should speak Spanish as well?</p>

I made sure that a question a student put out to the group was thoroughly discussed before the discussion moved forward. I wanted all students to feel like their ideas were being heard. I did not want this to become a situation in which all students were just sharing the questions they came up with from their sticky notes without having anyone answer them. This was done in order to build “conscientization” (Freire, 1974). I did not choose what topics were discussed; it was based on what questions and comments students had.

I also made sure that the questions were put back on the group instead of having myself answer. For example, during the *I hate English!* discussion Angel asked, “Entonces por qué la llevaron ahí?” [So why did they take her there?], when speaking of

the afterschool program that the main character went to in Chinatown. I answered the question by reiterating his question to the group and saying, “¿Ustedes por qué creen que la llevaron ahí?” [Why do you think that they took her there?] I wanted the other group members to answer the question. If I got in the habit of answering the questions, then students would always look at to me for the answers and I wanted to move away from that.

### **Clarifier**

There were different amounts of clarifying information that I had to give students during the discussions. When it came to the discussion group on *Trencitas/Braids*, I had to point out to both groups the fact that the grandmother was illiterate and have them go back to find clues on how we knew this fact in the story. All the members of the group missed this important fact of the story, which was necessary in order to understand the main idea of the story.

During the discussion of the book *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, there was some confusion about the language context of the classroom as well as what language the teacher spoke. I tried to clarify the situation without giving a direct answer by asking students, “Pero la maestra le está pidiendo a Pepita ayuda, verdad, entonces ¿por qué la maestra le pide ayuda a Pepita con esta niña Carmen, que sólo habla español, si ella habla español?” [ But the teacher is asking Pepita for help, right? So why would the teacher ask Pepita for help with this girl Carmen, who only speaks Spanish, if she speaks Spanish?] I wanted my students to use the information in the book to understand what exactly was going on. This was complicated by the fact that in the Spanish version

of the book there were sentences written in Spanish, but were said by the characters of the stories in English, so students had to be careful of this.

During the discussion of the book *I hate English!* there were words that I had to clarify meanings for, both in English and Spanish. One particular word was *arithmetic*, Camila could not pronounce it and therefore did not know exactly what the word was or what it meant. I was able to give her the Spanish definition in order for her to get the meaning of the word. Also towards the end of the book discussion when the group had been looking up what Chinese animal year they were born in and what that meant about their personality on the computer, I had shared how it said that I was nosy, Angel thought it meant I snored, so I translated the word into Spanish by saying, *mechite*. Students still did not seem to understand the word, so I gave a more expanded definition by saying, “que me meto en todo, que me gusta chismosear mucho” [that I like to get into everything, that I like to gossip a lot]. This shows that just because a word is translated into Spanish does not mean that students will get the meaning. There are lots of vocabulary words in Spanish based on various cultures, so students might not always be familiar with the words used.

During the discussion of *No, English* I did the same thing that Carlos had done when he translated a question that had not been understood by another classmate. I had asked the question in English and Carlos had responded yes, but when I asked him to expand I realized he really had not understood the question and so I translated it into Spanish. Being bilingual meant we had both languages at our disposal, so we could fluidly move from one language to another.

Table 24

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Carlos:</b> That's what I was saying.  <b>Maestra:</b> Oh, that's what you were saying. My question to you have your ever have someone do something for you? To make you feel welcome. Has anybody ever done anything nice to you, when you go somewhere?  <b>Carlos:</b> Yeah  <b>Maestra:</b> Somewhere new, where you don't know anyone, Like what?  <b>Carlos:</b> I don't get you.  <b>Maestra:</b> What do you mean you don't get me? You said yeah, but you don't get me? Si alguien te ha hecho sentir bienvenido, cuando usted va a un nuevo lugar, no conoce a nadie, ¿alguien ha hecho algo especial para hacerte sentir bienvenido?</p>	<p><b>Carlos:</b> That's what I was saying.  <b>Teacher:</b> Oh, that's what you were saying. My question to you have your ever have someone do something for you? To make you feel welcome. Has anybody ever done anything nice to you, when you go somewhere?  <b>Carlos:</b> Yeah  <b>Teacher:</b> Somewhere new, where you don't know anyone. Like what?  <b>Carlos:</b> I don't get you.  <b>Teacher:</b> What do you mean you don't get me? You said yeah, but you don't get me? If someone, has ever made you feel welcome, when you have gone to a new place where you don't know anyone, has someone done anything to make you feel welcome?</p>

In the *Superniña del Cilantro/ Super Cilantro Girl* discussion group, I had to provide lots of clarifying information because the complex topics we were discussing included being undocumented and crossing the border illegally. During the first day of discussion Carlos asked a question based on the fact that he does not understand why Americans could enter Mexico without any certain kind of permission, but for Mexicans to enter the United States it was a more complicated process. I provided some information about how the process was actually carried out.

Table 25

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Carlos:</b> ¿Cómo los americanos este, puede pasar por allá y los mejicanos no pueden pasar para acá?  <b>Maestra:</b> Porque necesitan permiso,</p>	<p><b>Carlos:</b> How is it that Americans can go there but Mexicans can't pass over here?  <b>Teacher:</b> Because they need permission, the Americans, Mexico doesn't ask for</p>

<p>entonces los americanos, Mexico no pide permiso extra, si ud es ciudadano americano, como yo soy ciudadano americana, y yo voy a ir a mexico, verdad, entonces yo cojo un passaporte. Yo puedo cruzar a Mexico y despues regresar.</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> si pero como (intentó interrumpir pero fue ignorado)</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> El problema es para entrar a los estados unidos si necesitas permiso del gobierno de los estados unidos; entonces muchos mejicanos, hay tanta gente que esta pidiendo permiso para venir a los estados unidos que el gobierno, muchas veces dice no.</p>	<p>extra permission, if you are an American citizen, like I am an American citizen, I can go to Mexico, right, so I take my passport. I can cross into Mexico and then come back.</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Yes but how (tried to interrupt but is ignored)</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> The problem is that to enter the United States you do need permission from the United States government, then lots of Mexicans, there are so many people asking for permission to come to the United States that the government lots of times says no.</p>
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During the last day of discussion of this book, I got the idea to pull out my IPAD in order to show the group an actual picture of the border fence located on the U.S.- Mexican border. Some of the students, including Carlos, had never seen it. Liliana who had traveled to Mexico on various occasions stated that she had seen it several times. This visual ignited the students discussion and had them sharing how exactly their parents had crossed the border. For example Carlos shared, “Mi papa el cuando vino para acá, el se vino caminado y después el dijo que el paso como de esos y que. . creo que el le- - casi le daba eletricidad.” [My dad, when he came over here, he came walking and afterwards he said he passed one of those and that. . I think that it- - almost electrocuted him.] Eduardo shared how his father almost got caught, but luckily had ducked down and not been seen. Liliana shared how her father hid on a bus in order to cross the border. She told the group that her father paid someone to hide him.

During the discussion of the book *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South*, when discussing the part of the story where we see mom at the home in Tijuana with other woman and children that had been deported, Alejandra asked “¿Niños también?”

[Children too?]. She could not believe that children could also be deported. I explained to the group that anyone without papers could be deported including children and that most likely these children had been deported back to Mexico because of lack of papers while their parents continued in the United States. Of course, this was surprising to Alejandra because this was not the norm. For most children of illegal parents in our class and in the United States, it is the parents and older siblings that do not have papers. The younger children are usually born in the United States and considered United States citizens.

Also during this book discussion, we talked about why their parents stayed in the United States, if, as the students said, they did not like it here. Alejandra shared that her mother stayed in the States because her grandmother was here, so she did not want to leave her. Lucia shared that her family in Mexico thought that the United States was the best country, so they were all trying to pass the border over here. I added to the conversation by saying that I also thought it was because of money. Alejandra then shared, “ Mi mamá dice que allá en México casi no hay trabajo.” [My mom says that there in Mexico there isn't any work.] From my own family experiences, I knew that one of the biggest reasons that people continue to struggle here in the United States is because they can make money to support their family. I made sure to share this information with my students.

I tried to give my students as much information as possible, but that was still age appropriate. The topics we were discussing were not typical second grade conversations, but it was a reality of my students' lives.

**Expander**

My students did a good job of discussing the different stories, but I saw one of my major roles as pushing their thinking and having them move beyond the surface level and thinking more critically about the topics we were discussing.

During the first day of the boys' discussion of the book *Trencitas/ Braids* while discussing the end of the story, I had my students think about whether they agreed with what I felt was the main idea of the book: That stories are like braids that are made and held with love. This concept of the braids was a confusing idea for the group and it took the group various days of discussion to verbalize their thoughts.

Table 26

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Ahora, yo tengo uno aquí entonces yo voy a leer mi pregunta. Yo digo, están de acuerdo con esto (José se inclina a través de la mesa para leer mi papel) que las historias son como las trenzas, entonces en la carta que manda la abuela dice que (Yo leó la carta de la abuela en voz alta) (Antonio empieza a leer) Ud lo puede leer.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Entonces que las historias son como las trenzas, entonces yo creo que esto es como la idea principal del libro, historias son como trenzas porque se teje y se sujetan (leyendo del libro), que es sujetan?</p> <p><b>José:</b> Que sé</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> como que se aguantan</p> <p><b>José:</b> que se aguantan</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> con amor. Uds estan de acuerdo o desacuerdo con esa idea?</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Now I have a question here, so I'm going to read my question. I said, do you agree with this (José leans across table to read post-it) that stories are like braids, so the letter that Grandmother sends says (teacher reads from book; Antonio starts to read). You can read it.</p> <p><b>Antonio:</b> (reads note outloud)</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> So that the stories are like braids, so I think this is the main idea of the book, stories are like braids because they are made and held (reading from book), what is held?</p> <p><b>José:</b> That they</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> That they hold</p> <p><b>José:</b> That they are held</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> with love. Do you agreed or disagree with this idea?</p>

During the book discussion of *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, once of the students, Guillermo, shared “como los Mexicanos no hablan en Ingles hablan en Español” [how Mexicans don't speak English, they speak Spanish.] I pushed this way of

thinking, asking the group whether they thought there were Mexicans that spoke English. Sofia and Carlos shared how both their families could speak both English and Spanish. This was a way of challenging a student's way of thinking without me, the teacher, having to do it.

Table 27

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Sí, pero usted dijo que los mexicanos saben español, sólo saben español, ¿usted cree que hay mexicanos que...</p> <p><b>Guillermo:</b> No, sólo saben español.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Ud cree?</p> <p><b>Sofia:</b> sí?</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> solo saben español?</p> <p><b>Sofia:</b> No, mi papá sí es mexicano y yo también y mi familia es mexicana y hablan en inglés, excepto mi mamá que habla un poco mal.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> OK</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Mi mamá ella sabe casi todo en inglés, ella ya sabe escribir en inglés.</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Yes, but you said that Mexicans only speak Spanish, they only know Spanish, do you think there are Mexicans that. . .</p> <p><b>Guillermo:</b> No, they only know Spanish.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> You think?</p> <p><b>Sofia:</b> Yes?</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> That they only know Spanish?</p> <p><b>Sofia:</b> No, my dad is Mexican and I am too, and my family is Mexican and we speak English, expect that my mom speaks it a little bad.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> OK</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> My mom almost knows everything in English; she already knows how to write in English.</p>

I was pushing my students to think about the statement that Guillermo was saying because in reality they were even the exception to Guillermo's statement, but instead of telling them this, I wanted them to come to that through their own discussion. The way they came to the fact that Mexicans can speak both languages was through personal family examples, instead of using themselves, but they did get the point.

During the discussion of the book, *Esperando mi papá/ Waiting for papá*, I wanted my students to express how they felt being separated from their various family members, since I knew all of them had part of their family in other countries. I wanted

them to feel safe expressing their feelings. This was building off the discussion of the little boy in the story Beto being separated from his dad. We got to this conversation based on Lucia asking the group, “¿Porque esta llorando -- porque estan llorando todos?” [Why are they crying--why is everyone crying?]. The group then started discussing how the family was sad that Beto and his mom were leaving the Dad behind. This gave me the idea to ask the following question.

Table 28

Transcription	Translation
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Okay. Entonces, ustedes saben que esto es algo muy común para muchas familias, especialmente familias Mexicanas, que parte la familia se queda en México, porque no pueden venir a Estados Unidos, y viene parte la familia a Estados Unidos a encontrar trabajo. ¿Verdad? Entonces, muchas familias que viven aquí están separados. ¿Verdad? Por ejemplo, yo aquí en Los Estados Unidos, tengo mamá, papá, hermano, ya no más. Toda mi otra familia queda en Colombia. ¿Okay? ¿Entonces como creen, ustedes que se siente eso cuando una familia es así, como dividida, que no están juntos?</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Ok, then you know that this is something that is common, especially for Mexican families, that part of the family stays in Mexico because they can't come to the United States and part of the family comes to the United States to find work. Right? Then lots of families live separated. Right? For example, I am here in the United States, I have my mom, dad, brother and no one else. All my family is in Colombia. Ok? So what do you think, how do you feel when a family is like that, divided, that they are not together?</p>

During the discussion of the same book, I also pushed my students to think more critically about what they were saying by challenging them in the safe space of literature discussions. This forced them to express their thoughts more clearly and give support for the ideas they expressed.

Table 29

Transcription	Translation
<p><b>Lucia:</b> Es que como si dice, como yo puedo hacer, [inaudible] dice tienes que hacer la ley o te quedas en México para siempre. Debes de seguir las reglas de todo el mundo, del país.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Y cruzando la frontera usted siguió las reglas?</p> <p><b>Lucia:</b> Todos tenemos, porque si no se tenía que regresar y tenían que vivir su resto de la vida en México aunque tengan papeles.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Pero ustedes creen, como Victor dijo, y Lucia dijo y mis papás también decían esto, cuando cruzan sin permisos ¿están siguiendo la ley? ¿Usted cree que deben cruzar sin permiso y no seguir la ley?</p>	<p><b>Lucia:</b> It's that, how do you say, I can do [inaudible] you have to follow the law or you will stay in Mexico forever. You should follow the rules of the whole world, of the country.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> And by crossing the border you are following the rules?</p> <p><b>Lucia:</b> We all have to because if not they are going to return you and you will have to live the rest of your life in Mexico even if you have papers.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> But do you the rest of you think, like Victor said, and Lucia said and my parents also said that, that crossing without permission, they are following the law? Do you think they should cross without permission and not follow the law?</p>

I also knew when there were particular students, based on our personal relationship, that I could push more. For example during the book discussion of *No, English*, the group was discussing one of the teachers that came to help out. Alejandra said she was bilingual and when I asked her why she thought she was bilingual she said she did not know. I knew I could push her a little more, so I said, “Why do you think she is bilingüe Ashley? Es tu opinion, por que crees que es bilingüe?” [Why do you think she is bilingual Ashley? It’s your opinion, why do you think she is bilingual?]. We then got into a discussion about how one looks bilingual. I knew Alejandra would be ok with my pushing because I had known her for several years and we had a good relationship with her.

In the discussion of the book, *La Superniña del Cilantro/ Super Cilantro Girl*, the group ended up taking the conversation towards a direction I had not planned. Students

starting talking about the size of different objects in the story and the possible meaning behind them, such as, maybe size was related to having power. This is what occurred during various discussions. The dialogue was guided by the students' ideas. I did not have a set agenda as a teacher of what points we were going to cover. With another group that discussed the same book, they did not talk about power relations as we did in the following example.

Table 30

Transcription	Translation
<p><b>Carlos:</b> ¿Quiénes son los helicópteros?  <b>Liliana:</b> son estos señores porque si volteo la pagina son estos señores  <b>Carlos:</b> pero como ahí no son helicópteros (maestra hablando con alguien de otra clase) si estos helicópteros son muy chiquitos y el señor-  <b>Jesus:</b> -por qué la cabeza esta más grande?  <b>Carlos:</b> que el helicóptero?  <b>Jesus:</b> uh hummm y sus pies  <b>Carlos:</b> y sus pies donde van a estar y su panza y todo  <b>Maestra:</b> si verdad esta raro que le hicieron la cara de él tan grande. Por qué creen uds que le hicieron la cara tan grande?  -----  <b>Maestra:</b> Pero que creen uds, creen que el tamaño de algo tiene que ver con demostración de poder, porque ella está grande también, ella esta mucho más grande que mamá.  <b>Carlos:</b> su cabeza es esta mas grande que  <b>Liliana:</b> Yo pienso que si, que los helicopteros si  <b>Carlos:</b> y la patrulla</p>	<p><b>Carlos:</b> Who are the helicopters?  <b>Liliana:</b> They are these men because if you turn the page, it's these men  <b>Carlos:</b> But why are they not helicopters there? (teacher talking to someone from other class) if these helicopters are so small and that man-  <b>Jesus:</b> Why is his head so big?  <b>Carlos:</b> What the helicopter?  <b>Jesus:</b> Uh hummm and his feet  <b>Carlos:</b> And his feet where are they going to go and his belly and everything  <b>Teacher:</b> Its true it's weird that they made the face so big but why do you thin they made the face so big?  -----  <b>Teacher:</b> But what do you think, do you think that the size has something to do with showing power, because she is bigger too, and she is much bigger than mom  <b>Carlos:</b> Her head is much bigger than-  <b>Liliana:</b> I think that yes, the helicopters yes  <b>Carlos:</b> And the police</p>

I always tried to get the students in the group to express the reasons behind their ideas, instead of just giving yes/no answers, students needed to be able to support their ideas. With the Common Core Standards that we as teachers were being told to use, we were to push for evidence-based answers. Students have to be able to support their ideas in the literature discussion groups, necessitating evidence always followed the ideas brought up by the students. The following discussion came about after the group talked about the little girl's last name, *Sinfronteras* [Without borders], as well as about needing to have papers in order to cross the border. I then furthered the conversation by asking if they felt we should have borders at all.

Table 31

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Entonces ud dice que no debe haber fronteras, por qué?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Para que todos puedan estar FREE.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Free, ok. Porque crees que eso es importante?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Para que no tenga que esconderse allí.</p> <p><b>Liliana:</b> Yo digo que sí y no, no porque hay muchos malos a veces (<b>Carlos:</b> Maestra yo no entiendo esto) y sí porque la gente que necesita visitar a su familia</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Como los americanos este, puede pasar por allá y los mejicanos no pueden pasar para acá?</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Porque necesitan permiso entonces los americanos, Mexico no pide permiso extra, si ud es ciudadano americano, como yo soy ciudadano americana, y yo voy a ir a Mexico, verdad, entonces yo coje un passaporte. Yo puedo cruzar a Mexico y despues regresar.</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> si pero como (intentó interrumpir pero fue ignorado)</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Then you are saying that there shouldn't be borders, but why?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> So that everyone can be FREE.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Free, ok. Why do you think that is important?</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> So they don't have to hide here.</p> <p><b>Liliana:</b> I say yes and no, no because there are lots of bad people sometimes (<b>Carlos:</b> Teacher I don't understand this) and yes because people need to visit their family</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> How is it that Americans can pass to go there but Mexicans can't pass over here?</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Because they need permission, so the Americans, Mexico doesn't ask for extra permission, if you are an American citizen, like I am an American citizen and I am going to Mexico, right, then I just take my passport. I can go to Mexico and later return.</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Yes but how (tried to interrupt but is ignored)</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> The problem is to enter the United States you do need permission from</p>

<p><b>Maestra:</b> El problema es para entrar a los estados unidos sí necesitas permiso del gobierno de los estados unidos, entonces muchos mejicanos, hay tanta gente que está pidiendo permiso para venir a los estados unidos que el gobierno, muchas veces dice no.</p>	<p>the United States government, then lots of Mexicans, there are so many people that are asking for permission to come into the United States, that the government lots of times says no.</p>
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During the discussion of the book *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South*, after Lucia had been sharing why she would prefer to live in Mexico and Alejandra shared how her mother does not let her sisters and her out because here there are a lot of people that steal children, I asked “Pero por qué creen que sus papás se quedan aquí si no se sienten seguros? [But why do you think your parents stay here if they don’t feel safe?]. I wanted students to critically think about why would their parents have their families stay in this situation.

These are just some of the many ways I tried to push my students’ thinking past the surface level to think critically and be able to support their ideas in order to develop “conscientization”(Freire, 1974). This is what I saw as my main job as the facilitator in the literature discussions.

### **Teacher goals**

Even though I saw my biggest job as facilitator of literature discussions to get my students to talk more critically about the topics being brought up in discussions, I still was the classroom teacher and took that role seriously. I wanted my students to run the discussion, but I realized that my presence was necessary in order to keep students on task. I, of course, would let my students take the discussion wherever they wanted, but I always made sure we got back to how what they were talking about connected to the book we had read.

For example, during the discussion of *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice* Carlos and Guillermo took the discussion to learning to skate, how Carlos skated better than his uncle and going to the local skating ring. I allowed them to take the discussion there, but also made sure we tied it back to the book we were reading and continued the discussion in a meaningful way.

I never took the dialogue anywhere where my students did not take it, but I did try to cover certain points during most of the discussions. I made sure students comprehended what they had read. I had students refer to the book or reread a certain section if they were not sure of what had happened. I did not want to be the one giving the answers. I wanted to be a conversation partner, not the discussion leader.

I used the literature discussions as a way to reinforce important skills that students had to use throughout all their readings, such as, reading for comprehension. During both group discussions of the book *Trencitas/Braids*, the students missed the fact that the grandmother could not read. I discussed with the girl group the importance of reading carefully.

Table 32

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Entonces ven por qué es tan importante leer con cuidado, porque ustedes cuando lo leyeron, por primera vez no notaron esas cosas. No siempre les van a decir las cosas así de frente; necesitan investigar y qué es lo que está pasando, por qué el autor normalmente está tratando de darnos un mensaje, entonces debemos ver qué es el mensaje. ¿Qué es el mensaje que nos esta dando el autor?</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Then you see why it's so important to read carefully because when you read the story for the first time you didn't notice these things. It's isn't always going to say things up front, you have to investigate what is happening because the author normally is trying to give you a message, then we have to find out what the message is. What is the message that the author is giving us?</p>

## Making it Personal

As a way to get my students to think more critically about the topics discussed I would try to make it as personal as possible to the lives of my students. This approach was a way to help them think about their own lives and make personal connections to the stories.

For example, the third day of discussion of the book *Esperando a mi papá/Waiting for papá* the group discussed why Beto was picking up cans to get money and how his classmates pulled together to help him reach his goal, I had students think about what are the different ways they might help their classmates.

Table 33

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Las botas que se le quemaron en el incendio. Su papá tiene botas, pero al principio [inaudible] Jennifer, voltea la página. El papá, las botas favoritas del papá se quemaron; su papá sí tiene zapatos, si miramos a esto, las botas favoritas se le quemaron, entonces Beto vio estas y dijo, mira, yo las quiero comprar, pero son carísimas, costaban \$75, entonces él hizo la decisión de él coger latas, entonces yo dije por qué él lo iba hacer solo, pero él haciéndolo solo se iba demorar mucho tiempo, entonces los amigos decidieron ayudarlo, entonces yo pregunto, qué buenos amigos, ¿qué podemos hacer nosotros para ayudar a nuestros amigos?</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> The boots that burnt in the fire. His father has boots, but in the beginning [inaudible] Jennifer, turn the page. The dad, his favorite books got burnt, his dad does have shoes, if we look here, his favorite boots are the ones that burnt, so Beto saw these and said look, I want to buy those, but they are super expensive, they cost \$75, so he made the decision to pick up cans, so I said why was he going to do it by himself, but him doing it alone was going to take lots of time, so his friends decided to help him, so I have a question, what are good friends. What can we do to help our friends?</p>

During the girls' discussion of the book *Trencitas/ Braids* after we had the discussed the fact that the grandmother could not read and how Isabel was teaching her, I had students think about a time they had been a teacher to someone else.

Table 34

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Muy bien, no sé si miraron esta página donde ella está con la abuelita; volteen a esta página por favor. [Pausa] Entonces aquí es donde yo creo que ella le está enseñando cómo leer, le está [Inaudible] de lotería del cual hace un dibujo, y si miramos, tiene la palabra en inglés y en español. Yo creo que así le está mostrando cómo leer. ¿Entonces aquí tengo, ustedes les ha tocado ser maestro o maestra alguna vez?</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Good, I don't know if you looked at this part where's there the grandmother, turn to that page please. [Pause] Then here is where she is teaching her how to read, she is [inaudible] from bingo and makes a picture and if we look it has the word in Spanish and English. I think that here she is showing her how to read.</p>

Also during the *I hate English!* discussion, I had students think about what other language they might like to learn and why by asking, “¿Y ustedes si podían aprender otro idioma fuera de ingles y español qué. . .?” [If you could learn another language other than English or Spanish what. . .?] I was not even able to complete my question before Camila jumped in and said she would like to learn French. She said she saw the movie *Ratatouille* where they spoke a little French. José shared that he wanted to learn to speak Italian. As the teacher, I was trying to get my students to think past the fact that they spoke Spanish and English, but realize that there are many other languages out there. The book particularly dealt with Chinese and English, so this was a little different for students.

Also during this same book discussion the students and I were talking about how the character might feel more comfortable at the afterschool program in Chinatown because others there spoke Chinese. To drive this point home, I asked students who they sat with at lunch. I was trying to get them to recognize that they sat with mostly Spanish speakers, but in the beginning they made it a gender issue.

Table 35

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Entonces yo creo que se siente más a gusto. Piensen ustedes cuando van a lunch, ¿ustedes con quién se sienten más a gusto?</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> Yo me siento más con las niñas.</p> <p><b>José:</b> Yo, con los niños.</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> A veces me siento con los niños.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Pero en inglés o en español?</p> <p><b>Angel:</b> Como en Middle School, como en high school creo cuando gana un equipo, después se sienta en una mesa del equipo que gana.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Uh-hun</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> Maestra, a mi me gusta más los españoles porque</p> <p><b>José:</b> Los que?</p> <p><b>Camila/Sergio:</b> Los españoles</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> Casi los que hablan inglés me da miedo, no más las niñas que hablan que le conozco y hablan español sí me gustan.</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> So I think she feels more comfortable. Think of yourselves when you go to lunch, with who are you more comfortable?</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> I sit more with the girls.</p> <p><b>Jordan:</b> Me with the boys.</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> Sometimes I sit with the boys.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> But with English or Spanish speakers?</p> <p><b>Angel:</b> Like it the Middle School or High School, I think, when your team wins, afterwards they sit at the winning team table.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Uh-hun</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> Teacher, I like the Spaniards more because</p> <p><b>José:</b> the what?</p> <p><b>Camila/Sergio:</b> the Spaniards</p> <p><b>Camila:</b> Almost all the ones that speak English scare me, just the girls that I know and that speak Spanish I like.</p>

Students did not see a problem with whom they sat. They were sitting with the individuals they felt most comfortable with, just like all the other students were doing. This example also shows Camila fear of students different from her, particularly when it came to what language they spoke.

During the discussion of the book *Superniña del Cilantro/ The Super Cilantro Girl*, when the group was talking about whether there should be borders or not, Liliana brought up the fact that there are some bad people that we do not want to let in. I wanted the students to think more critically about the fact of grouping large amounts of people together. I did this by making it more personal to them.

Table 36

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Es que lo que yo creo es que necesitamos darnos cuenta que cada país hay gente mala y (<b>Liliana:</b> y buena) hay gente buena. Aquí en los Estados Unidos hay gente que uno le tiene que tener miedo, porque son malos, pero hay otras personas que no debemos tener miedo porque son buenos. En Colombia también, porque yo digo que soy de Colombia; siempre lo que la gente piensa es en dos cosas: en la droga, porque se hace mucha droga en Colombia, y en el café.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Imagínense si todos nos tienen miedo, esos niños de segundo grado, y qué hice yo, sólo porque tenemos uno o dos que le hicieron algo malo a ese niño, verdad, no sería justo.</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> It's that I think we need to realize that every country has bad (<b>Liliana:</b> and good) and good people. Here in the United States there are people we should be afraid of because they are bad, but there are other people that we shouldn't be afraid of because they are good. In Colombia too, because when I say I am from Colombia, people always think of two things: drugs, because a lot of drug is made in Colombia, and coffee.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Imagine if everyone was afraid of us, those second graders, and what did I do, only because we have one or two students that did something wrong to another student, that wouldn't be right.</p>

During the discussion of the book *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South*, after we had discussed how José must of felt in the story having his mother in Tijuana while he was in San Diego, I asked students “¿Cómo se sentirían ustedes si sus papas están en México y ustedes están acá? [How would you feel if your parents were in Mexico and you were staying here?] I wanted my students to make connections between how José was feeling and how they would feel to be in the same situation, that in particular some of my students were in.

During the discussion of *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, I asked students, “Y ustedes les gusta hablar en ingles y español o les gusta uno más que el otro?” [Do you like to speak in English and Spanish or do you like one more than the other?]. We had been discussing whether the group felt that Pepita should have given up speaking Spanish. I wanted students to think about themselves in the same situation. Sofia stated

that she liked speaking both, Guillermo stated that he liked Spanish more because he knew it better, and Carlos that he liked English a little bit more, but could not give any reason why.

So here we saw how I tried to get my students to discuss the books more critically by helping them relate it to their lives. When students did not see the personal connection, I made sure to point it out. I was able to do this because I knew my students.

### **Positioning Myself**

#### **Conversation Partner**

When working in the literature discussions I pushed against the idea of the teacher being the main knowledge holder. I wanted students to share the wealth of knowledge they had and not look to me for the answer. During discussions I would place the questions on them, “Qué creen ustedes?” [What do you think?], instead of sharing my personal thoughts. I would share my ideas after the other students had gotten an opportunity to share. I also asked “por qué” [why?] a lot during the discussions. This was a way to get students to explain their understanding instead of having me tell them whether they were right or wrong.

I worked hard to position myself as just another conversation partner in the discussion groups. I did this by sharing personal narratives related to my life whenever possible. I felt it important to voice my own history, reflect on the politics of my own situation in order to join the conversation with my students. This process helped build my “conscientization” (Freire, 1974). During the discussion of *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, I shared with students my household rule that only Spanish could be spoken and Carlos asked me why I had such a rule. This was the way I showed the

importance I put on Spanish for my own children as well as my students. Spanish was something of great importance, even if the society did not always give students that same message.

Table 37

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Ah, entonces ustedes no tienen ninguna, por ejemplo la regla en mi casa es que deben están hablar español; entonces cuando Pepito y Poncho juegan y están hablando inglés yo les estaba gritando, si yo los oigo abajo jugando y digo, hablen inglés o hablen español, perdón, hablen español. Ustedes saben que hablan español en esta casa, entonces yo los regaño.</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> ¿Por qué?</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Porque ellos saben inglés, ellos saben inglés, pero quiero que practiquen español, porque yo tengo miedo que se les vaya a olvidar, el inglés, mucha gente aquí habla inglés, verdad, ellos cuando van a otras casas necesitan hablar inglés, entonces en la casa es que necesitan hablar español, porque necesitan practicar el español, porque sin practicarlo, se les va a olvidar.</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Ah, then you don't have any rule, for example in my house the rule is that they must speak Spanish, so when Pepito and Poncho are playing and talking in English, I yell at them. If I hear them playing downstairs, I say speak in English, I mean speak in Spanish, sorry. You know that speaking Spanish is our rule, so I yell at them.</p> <p><b>Carlos:</b> Why?</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Because they know English, but I want them to practice Spanish, because it's the Spanish that I'm afraid they will forget, the English, lots of people speak English, right? When they go places they have to speak English, so when we are at home they need to speak Spanish, they need to practice Spanish, because if they don't practice, they are going to forget.</p>

During the discussion of *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South*, after Lucia shared how her family in Mexico thought the United States was the best country, I shared “Así es en Colombia. Toda mi familia cree que yo estoy como rica acá, que estoy hecha de dinero.” [That’s how it is in Colombia. My whole family thinks that I’m rich here, that I’m made of money.] The following day during the discussion of why and how the mother was deported, I shared the story about how my dad once hid one of his friends from immigration officials at the factory where he worked. These personal narratives

reflect the process of “conscientization” (Freire, 1974). These stories came about naturally from the conversation I was having with my students.

Table 38

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Porque ella estaba trabajando en una factoría donde llegaron, o sea déjeme darle un ejemplo. Mi papá trabajaba en una factoría, mi papá ya se retiró, él trabajaba en una factoría de empaques, donde ellos hacían cosas como cosas de Kraft, y de Kool-aide y después lo meten en los camiones y los camiones los llevan a las tiendas...</p> <p><b>Juliana:</b> Oh, mi papá también...</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> Entonces ahí él trabajaba con el mejor amigo de él, que no tenía papeles, pues llegó migración,</p> <p><b>Lucia:</b> Un ambulancia?</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> migración. Entonces el amigo de mi papá se puso super nervioso y se asustaba que lo iban a deportar y él era de Guatemala, y entonces lo que mi papá hizo es que lo escondió en un tumbo, una cosa donde empaquen cosas que estaba vacía, lo metió y lo tapó, entonces migración pasó, porque lo que hacía migración es que pasaba preguntaba y pedía papeles, los papeles donde estaba quién es y esto y lo otro, y lo deportaban, pero entonces mamá es lo que hicieron, llegaron a la factoría, le pidieron papeles y ella no tenía nada, dijeron oh, usted no debe estar aquí.</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Because she was working in a factory when they arrive, let me give you an example. My dad worked in a factory, he is already retired, but he worked in a packaging company, where they do things like for Kraft and Kool-Aide and then they put it on trucks and the trucks take it to the stores.</p> <p><b>Juliana:</b> Oh, my dad too.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> So he was working there with his best friend that didn’t have papers and immigration arrived.</p> <p><b>Lucia:</b> an ambulance?</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Immigration. So my dad’s friend got super nervous and was scared they would deport him and send him back to Guatemala, so he had him hide in a container, a thing where they package things, but it was empty. He put him in there and covered it, then immigration passed, because what immigration would do was pass by and ask for papers, the papers that say who you are and everything and then deport them. But that’s what they did to the mother, they arrived at the factory, asked for papers and since she didn’t have any, they said oh you shouldn’t be here.</p>

Here in this example I put myself at the same level as my students sharing my own personal experience with immigration status. This made my students feel more comfortable in order to share theirs and also showed how I did not pass judgment on their own family experiences. I never said, “that’s wrong”, “your parents shouldn’t have done

that”, “that’s breaking the law,” etc. I had a similar background to my students that allowed us to share our own personal experiences in a safe space.

During the discussion of the book *I hate English!* I was trying to get my students into a conversation about code-switching and asked them if they ever did. I also shared a personal narrative of how I code-switched when speaking to my father. I was trying to get my students to this topic by hopefully having them share personal narratives, in order to make it meaningful for them.

Table 39

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Pero ustedes, cuando no saben una palabra en el otro idioma, ¿ustedes lo meten como yo lo meto, por ejemplo, si yo estoy hablando en español y resulta que llega una palabra que no la sé decir en español, yo la meto en inglés.  <b>Angel:</b> Es lo que yo hago.  <b>Camila:</b> Yo también.  <b>Maestra:</b> Porque las mezclo las dos, porque mi papá sabe las dos, entonces mi papá me entiende lo que estoy hablando.</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> But when you don’t know the word in the other language, do you put it in, for example, if I am speaking Spanish and there is a word I don’t know how to say in Spanish, I will put it in English.  <b>Angel:</b> That’s what I do.  <b>Camila:</b> Me too  <b>Teacher:</b> Because I mix both, because my dad knows both, so my dad understands what I am talking about.</p>

### Learner

In the literature discussions I positioned myself as a conversation partner, sharing my own personal connections, asking questions, but most importantly sharing how I did not have all the answers. I shared with students where I had some confusion about the story line or what I was thinking and opened it up for students to help me in the process of understanding.

During the book boys’ discussion of *Trencitas/Braids* I shared my thinking about the main idea thus far, but made it clear that I still was not sure how it was related to our

rotation theme of family. This positioning myself as a learner was a way to help students see me as just another member of the discussion group instead of the teacher who had all the right answers.

Table 40

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<b>Maestra:</b> Yo creo que la gran idea tiene algo que ver con familia, historia y trenzas pero no lo tengo, no sé muy bien qué exactamente es el mensaje que esta tratando de dar de la familia porque eso es nuestro tema verdad?	<b>Teacher:</b> I think that the big idea has something to do with family, stories and braids, but I don't have it, I don't know what exactly is the message that the author is trying to give about family because that is our theme?

In the *I hate English!* discussion, Sergio asked what were all those red Chinese characters. I then said, “¿Qué está hacinedo en Chino ahí? Todos escriben Chino. Ni idea tengo qué dicen” [What is all that Chinese doing there? Everything is written in Chinese. I have no idea what it says.] I showed my students that I did not have the answers, but I also showed my students how to use different resources to find answers. As the discussion continued, I decided to pull up an online translator on the computer. The students and I then decided to try to see how our own names would be written in Chinese. We could not figure out what was actually written in the story because we did not have any way to input the Chinese characters into the computer.

Also during this discussion I asked students if there were any words that they did not know in either one of their languages, English or Spanish, but did know how to say in the other language. I was trying to get my students to the idea of code-switching, but I made it a dichotomy between two languages, when in reality Camila spoke three languages. She made a point to express this by saying, “Yo no mas se como decir ardilla

en tres idiomas: ardilla, squirrel y cu-quis son la tres palabras.” [I only know how to say squirrel in three languages: ardilla, squirrel and cu-quis, those are the three words.] She made sure that I recognized her three languages, which of course I should have. I had assumed that since most of my students only spoke two languages that we just needed to talk about those two, but in reality it was important for me to take all the students’ knowledge ability into account.

During the book discussion of *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, we had a discussion about how Pepita and Carmen looked like twins as stated by Guillermo. I pushed my students to think about how these two girls were different from the rest of the class and then I made a stereotypical comment in a question form when asking if we had blond haired boys or girl. I was referring to the fact that since our classroom is full of Spanish speakers, none of us had blond hair. As if only dark hair individual could speak Spanish. This was then challenged by Sofia, when she pointed out that we had a student with lighter hair who had spoken Spanish.

Table 41

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Ok, ¿Pero estas dos niñas se parecen a los otros dos niños del salón?  <b>Niños:</b> No.  <b>Maestra:</b> ¿Cómo son diferentes?  <b>Sofia.</b> Porque ella tiene el pelo amarillo y Pepita y Carmen no tiene pelo amarillo.  <b>Maestra:</b> ¿Nosotros en este salón tenemos niños o niñas con pelo amarillo?  <b>Niños:</b> No.  <b>Maestra:</b> Todos tienen ¿color qué?  <b>Niños:</b> Negro o café.  <b>Sofia:</b> Pero cuando estaba Mariana sí había solo una niña.  <b>Maestra:</b> Sí, era más o menos clara, pero</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Ok, but do these two girls look like these two kids in the classroom?  <b>Children:</b> No  <b>Teacher:</b> How are they different?  <b>Sofia:</b> Because she has blond hair and Pepita and Carmen don’t have blond hair  <b>Teacher:</b> In our classroom, do we have boys or girls with blond hair?  <b>Children:</b> No  <b>Teacher:</b> Everyone has, what color hair?  <b>Children:</b> Black or brown.  <b>Sofia:</b> But when Mariana was here, we did have only one girl.  <b>Teacher:</b> Yes, she had a little bit lighter</p>

entonces ¿usted cree que esos dos niños hablen español?	hair, but do you think these two kids speak Spanish?
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Later on in the discussion I did push student’s thinking by asking them if they thought that everyone who spoke Spanish looked the same. I pointed out to students that speaking the same language does not mean we are the same. I challenged by students by saying, “Sofía y yo hablamos español, y nosotros somos iguales?” [Sofía and I speak Spanish and are we the same?] I also shared a personal narrative of when I made an assumption and turned out wrong.

Table 42

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<b>Maestra:</b> Porque a mí me ha pasado, por ejemplo, yo fui a una reunión aquí que hicieron en Lincoln, que tuvimos reunión de padres y era en inglés y español la reunión, la hicieron en los dos idiomas y resultó que había un papá que se veía para mí que hablaba inglés, pelo claro, ahí se veía lo que llamamos americano, verdad, y resultó que hablaba español muy bien, se puso a hablar español y hizo una pregunta en español y yo estaba como ¡ahhh! ¿A ustedes nunca les ha pasado eso que alguien que usted crea...	<b>Teacher:</b> Because it has happened to me, for example, I was at a meeting here at Lincoln, where we had a parent meeting and it was in English and in Spanish, they had it in both languages, and it turned out that a dad that to me looked like he spoke English, light hair, it looked like what we call American, right? And it turned out that he spoke Spanish very well, he started to speak Spanish and he asked me a question in Spanish and I was like ahhhh! Has that ever happened to you, that you think someone. . .

This example shows that even though I am the teacher I also have my own stereotypical ideas that I must be aware and critical of. I have to make sure to give a space for students to share their thoughts and ideas and make sure to not pass along the own stereotypes I might have. It is also good to be critical of my own thoughts and stereotypes in front of my students because it shows them that our ideas and thoughts can change, they are not stagnate.

I also had a similar discussion about how bilingual people look, with my *No, English* discussion group. When Alejandra and Carlos had stated that a teacher looked bilingual and I had asked why they both had answered they did not know. I responded by saying, “Well you said she looks bilingüe, what does she have that makes her look bilingüe? Why do you think she looks bilingüe. I'm just asking, I am not saying she is not or she is, I don't know. I'm reading the same story you are. So why do you think? What does she have that makes her look bilingüe?” Note that I did say the word bilingual in Spanish “bilingüe”. I wanted students to explain their reasoning but also wanted to make clear that there was not any correct answer.

Here we see how the previous year's data helped me become more conscious of what I did during literature discussions and lead to me making some changes. This year's data showed that it was important how I positioned myself in the discussion because it was very easy to fall back into the teacher being the leader. I had to allow students to share their ideas, I had to share personal narratives that related to the story and I also had to make a point to show that I did not have all the answers. All these discussions started off based on the storyline, but soon expanded outward. In the following chapter, I will show how the books chosen influenced the discussion.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Books**

This is a story about how the multicultural literature used during literature discussions influenced the dialogue. This chapter argues that the books chosen affected the discussion depending on how students connected to each particular book as well as on what ideas were portrayed in the story. In this chapter I will present data that answer two of my research questions: 1.) How do the students engage with the selected multicultural books? 2.) To what extent do the storyline and characters correspond to the educational and demographic trends in today's U.S. society, specifically those of my students?

I will first share the findings when it came to student engagement across the literature discussions. Then I will share a content analysis I did on all the books used in the literature discussions as way to get a closer look at what I was exposing my students to in each multicultural book and how representative it was of my students' lives.

### **Types of Engagement**

In looking at students' engagement across the literature discussions I identified four main types of engagement: procedural, literal, personal and critical. The procedural was when a student just asked a question or made a comment related to the process of the literature discussion, such as, who was going next. The literal engagement was when a student asked a literal question about the book, a question that could be directly answered by finding the answer inside the book. Both procedural and literal questions reflected

and contributed to low levels of engagement. These types of questions, both procedural and literal, did not get students talking.

Personal engagement occurred when students shared personal connections related to their lives. This was where I saw the highest level of engagement; typically both the book and the conversation were in Spanish. The language the book was written in influenced the discussion as well as the way the students connected to the characters' stories. Critical engagement occurred when I pushed my students past surface level of questioning and asked them to think critically about a particular situation.

### **Procedural**

During the first rotation on Family, both groups that discussed the book *Trencitas/Braids* had a very much question and answer format. José took various opportunities to try to control the discussion. For example he asked the group “Qué creen los demas?” [What do the others think?] and he told another student “Ahora te toca.” [Now it's your turn.]. José was a student who liked to talk, even if he did not have much to say. He seemed to always find a way for his voice to be heard.

In an all girl discussion group around the same book, when the group was working together to find clues in the book of the grandmother being unable to read, Alejandra helped keep the group on task by telling a classmate, “Pon esa, pone porque la abuela no sabe leer.” [Put that, put why the grandmother doesn't know how to read.] She also instructed another student, “Cada quien necesita poner una.” [Each person needs to put one], when referring to the required task of each student having to mark a sticky note in the book about how they knew that the grandmother could not read. Alejandra then had some level of engagement and understood the task given by the teacher. She worked on

finding the answer to “How do we know the grandmother cannot read?” while also making sure her classmates stayed on task.

Even though Carlos was engaged in the discussion during *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, it was necessary that I, the teacher, be present during the discussions in order to make sure the group stayed on task and connected back to the book. Carlos brought up learning to skate and going to a skating rink with his cousins. I allowed this discussion to take place, but also made sure that students connected back to the book in order to continue the discussion. I do not believe this would have happened without my presence.

In these examples we saw that when there was low engagement with the book, particularly because the students did not connect to the storyline, the students regressed to asking procedural questions. We also saw that while it was important for students to have the space to bring up various topics, it was also important that the teacher be present in order to aid in connecting those narratives with the story being read.

### **Literal**

I also found that when there was a low level of engagement with the book, students asked literal questions. Alejandra in the discussion around the story *Trecitas/ Braids*, asked the question, “¿Qué es bisabuela?” [What is greatgrandmother?] when she did not understand a particular vocabulary word.

The boys’ book discussion around *Braids/Trecitas* was very much a question-answer format without many personal connections or depth of discussion. José did take different opportunities to ask questions of his group members, such as, “Por qué Isabela quiere una trecita como su abuela?” [Why does Isabela want a braid like her

grandmother?] or “Por qué le enseña su tarea a su abuela, por qué no a su mamá? [Why does she show her homework to her grandmother, why not her mom?].

In *Trencitas/ Braids* book discussion groups, there were a lot of question-answer exchanges, but no in depth discussion. Both groups missed the main idea of the book about the fact that the grandmother was illiterate. Even after I pointed to the fact that the grandmother could not read and told the students to reread to find what clues they had missed, there was not much discussion in either one of the groups. This could have been because of the lack of personal connection to the storyline for students.

Even when there was a personal connection with a story, students sometimes asked literal questions to get an understanding of the story. In the discussion around *La superniña del cilantro/ The Super Cilantro Girl*, Carlos asked various questions of his classmates to clarify his understanding of the story. For example, Carlos asked during day one of the discussion, “¿Por qué se empezó hacer verde?” [Why did she start turning green?] when referring to the fact that the little girl in the story, Esmeralda, was turning completely green.

Camila during her *Esperando mi papá/ Waiting for papá* discussion answered questions. For example, she answered the first question during the discussion about why the little boy Beto was alone by sharing, “Es que allí en el cuento creo dice que si mamá iba a trabajar, trabajar en una cosa para arreglar, y el se queda solo. Porque si papá estaba encontrando trabajo.” [It’s that in the story it says that his mother was going to work, she works fixing something and he was staying alone because his dad was looking for work.] Literal questions were a way for students to make sure that they got an understanding of the story before moving into a more critical level of conversation; depending on the

student's personal connection to the storyline, though, this movement did not always happen.

### **Personal**

When students made personal connections to the book was when I saw the highest level of engagement (i.e., the most in-depth talk). This level of engagement was influenced by two things: the language of the book and students' identification with the characters' narratives.

**Influence of language of book.** I had thought that the Cultural Stories rotation would have a high level of engagement because it was a topic my students were bringing into the classroom before the literature discussions were started. I found that there were other factors that influenced the level of engagement, including the language of the book. When Carlos read the book *The Tale of La Llorona* in English he was quieter than in previous discussions. He asked questions, mostly about not understanding what a particular word meant. For example, as previously shared, he did not understand the words *carriages* and *bowl* in English. As the teacher, I felt that this lack of engagement was a result of the fact that this story was harder for him to get a clear understanding of because it was written in his second language. If he had chosen one of the other books from this particular rotation that had been written in Spanish, I felt he would have been highly engaged. This shows the difficulty bilingual students sometimes have when reading in their second language. If students do not have a clear understanding of the story, then they are not able to get into a more critical depth of discussion.

Also during the English rotation both Alejandra and Carlos read the book *No English!* in which both of them were rather quiet. Carlos had various questions about the

meaning of particular vocabulary words that he did not understand and Alejandra mostly answered questions. For example, during the discussion students did not have a clear idea of who was actually telling the story. I asked the question, “Who is telling the story?” Carlos made guesses by saying “Blanca,” “the teacher,” but when he tried to say the author, he was unsure how to say it in English, so said “The auth, el que lo escribió” [The auth, the one that wrote it]. All of Alejandra’s answers to questions in this discussion were given in one or two words, so there was not much discussion. One interesting thing to note was that while most of the discussion on this book was in English, Alejandra did try to take the discussion into Spanish, but it never stayed there because I would build off what students were saying and quote the text that was in English.

Table 43

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Maestra:</b> Entonces ¿quién está contando la historia?</p> <p><b>Carlos/Alejandra:</b> Ella.</p> <p><b>Maestra:</b> ¿Blanca? Dice, “no English, the new girl said.” No dice I said, “the new girl said, shaking her head. Español.”(leyendo del libro) Blanca, entonces who is talking?</p>	<p><b>Teacher:</b> Then, who is telling the story?</p> <p><b>Carlos/Alejandra:</b> She is.</p> <p><b>Teacher:</b> Blanca? It says, “no English, the new girl said.” It doesn’t say I said, “the new girl said, shaking her head. Español.” (Reading from book) Blanca, then who is talking?</p>

**Influence of student identification with characters’ narratives.** One of the biggest influences on a student’s level of engagement was their personal identification with a particular character’s narrative. In the books on Rotation 3 (Language), students were much more engaged. These stories were available in their native language and the storyline related to their lives. In the discussion groups I saw that when students were highly engaged the conversation was more fluid without much input from me. Also

students shared a lot more personal narratives about family experiences.

In the discussion of *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South* Alejandra shared different stories about different experiences her family had when it came to their illegal status. She shared how her father had been stopped by the police, followed home by police, told he could not drive anymore, but still did. She also spoke of the fact that her parents and older sister were illegal and if they got deported how she would be left here with her younger sister. She expressed how she has never been in Mexico, but would like to live there instead of here in the United States. She was the most engaged and had her longest responses during this third rotation *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South* book. She had personal experiences that related to the story and felt safe in this particular discussion group to share them.

Carlos was also very engaged during the book discussion of *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*. Carlos shared different personal narratives related to his bilingualism. He talked about how he likes English better, when he speaks English, how he knows more English than his father but not his mother and how he read the book first in Spanish and then in English. He spoke of having to speak English when playing outside his home because most of his friends were African American or white, “Este yo, casi todos mis amigos son como morenitos, pero a veces otros no, otros son blancos y otros así (apunta a su propia piel), pero hablan puro inglés y le tengo que hablar en inglés.” [I, almost all my friends are black, but some are not, others are white and others like this (points to his brown skin), but they speak English so I have to speak to them in English.] This story related directly to experiences Carlos had on a daily basis.

Camila during her *Esperando mi papá/ Waiting for papá* discussion jumped right in when I asked another student to teach us something in dialect and said:

Table 44

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
Camila: Yo sí! Teacher: Algo fácil Camila: Algo fácil es cu-quis, es ardilla Teacher: ¿Cu-quis es ardilla? Camila: Ah-ha [affirmative] Teacher: ¿Cómo se dice? Camila: cu-quis Teacher: ¿Cómo cookies?	Camila: I can! Teacher: Something easy Camila: Something easy is cu-quis, its squirrel Teacher: Cu-quis is squirrel? Camila: Ah- ha [affirmative] Teacher: How do you say it? Camila: cu-quis Teacher: Like cookies?

The above example showed how proud Camila was to share her own personal knowledge that she had, even if it was limited. I asked her, how do you say, “Allí hay una ardilla.”[There’s a squirrel], she stated that her dad had not taught her that, but Juliana should know, since she speaks more Q’anjob’al. Camila also shared various stories about her parents, such as, how they crossed over to the United States from Guatemala.

Camila during the discussion of the book *I hate English!* was a leader in the group by the fact that she shared many personal narratives about her own bilingual identity. When the group was discussing the fact that next year students would be receiving more English instruction, therefore would be expected to speak more English, Camila shared the following:

Table 45

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Camila:</b> Yo sí tengo pena, cuando vaya al otro año, a third grade, yo tengo una cosa que voy a hacer casi no mirar mucho a las personas que están; no más voy a poner atención a lo que estoy presentando porque el público me da un poco de miedo porque a lo mejor dicen qué me pasa, o tiene miedo, por eso mejor voy a poner atención a la presentación.</p>	<p><b>Camila:</b> I am shy, when I go next year, to third grade, I have something that I'm going to do which is not look at people much, I am going to pay attention to what is being presented because the public gives me a little bit of fear, maybe they'll say what's wrong or that I'm scared, because of that I will pay attention to the presentation.</p>

She also spoke about how she does not like to raise her hand or go to the board during math because she has been laughed at before when she did equations on the board. These examples show how difficult of a change it was for a child who was confident in a bilingual classroom setting to move to a mostly English setting. The student does not have the same confidence and instead silences herself for fear of being made fun of. In the bilingual setting, where she has the use of the native language as an option she feels most comfortable.

Camila also spoke of her frustration when she wanted to say something in English, but could not come up with the word.

Table 46

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Camila:</b> Maestra, cada vez que yo quiero hacerlo en inglés, cuando quiero hablar en algo, después se me olvida la palabra y cuando quiero agarrarla me enojo un poco porque digo, ay, no sé la palabra y me enojo y para que ya no me enoje, tengo que hacer el remedio que es hablar en español. Porque yo quiero, yo sí sé la palabra pero no puedo decirla, sí sé pero no; se me</p>	<p><b>Camila:</b> Teacher, everytime I to do it in English, when I want to talk about something, then I forget the word and when I want to get it I get a little mad because I say, I don't know the word and I get mad. To not get made, the remedy is that I have to do it in Spanish because I want to, I do know the word but I can't say it, I do know the word, but I forget how to say it, I think</p>

olvida, como decir que la pienso pero no la digo.	of it, but can't say it.
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Camila felt comfortable enough in the group to express her feelings and share some of her struggles she encountered with the English language. She also shared how she was shy speaking English to unknown strangers because she sometimes was not understood. She gave the example of being at a Chinese restaurant and asking for three strawberries with cream and only receiving two. She stated that she felt embarrassed because she thought maybe she had said it wrong. Camila was a very vocal, outgoing child in Spanish, but when it came to speaking English we see that she was a completely different individual who was more reserved because of the fact that she was scared of making a mistake.

When there was not this personal connection with the storyline, then there was a lack of engagement. In the book discussion of *I hate English!*, José talked but only to respond to a question, ask a superficial question, or take procedural control of the group. He did not have any personal narratives that he shared, except for one that moved the conversation into professional wrestlers. This could have been a result of lack of interest or connection to the book.

We see this same lack of engagement in the second rotation of literature discussion around La Llorona, a topic that had been chosen because my students were already bringing it into the classroom. I expected to see a higher level of engagement across all the literature discussions since I knew they were all interested in this storyline. What I found was that even though La Llorona tale was a cultural story students knew, it was a story that made it difficult for students to make personal connections too. Most of the

discussion around these stories was around La Llorona, why she had become her, if we believed that story that she had killed her children, etc. *La Llorona/ The Crying Woman*, was an indigenous version of La Llorona that none of the students had heard before. It spoke of Maya having children from plants and her children dying because their clay vases were broken and dissolved in the water. These abstract ideas were somewhat difficult for the students to understand. When it came to the English version read during this rotation, *The Tale of La Llorona*, students spent most of their time making sure they had the basic understanding of the story because it was in their second language. Some of the Just because the topic of the story was something of interest to the students did not mean that they were going to be highly engaged. There were other factors that had to be taken into account.

In the final rotation where the stories were only available in English we also see this lack of engagement. The fact that the stories were only available in English limited the access students had to the storyline. I had felt that students would be able to connect to these stories because they were about being bilingual, but the fact that they were written in English limited the access my students had to the story. Students did not get the clear connection between the storyline and their personal lives because they spent most of their time making sure they were understanding the general storyline. As previously shown through Carlos engagement in both English titles he read, *The Tale of La Llorona* and *No English!*, he spent most of his time trying to understand the basic storyline.

## Critical

The level, I, as the teacher was most concerned about was a critical level of engagement in which students would think critically about particular situations. I found that in order to get to this level, students first had to have personal connections to the book read; without that there was no way to get them to this critical level. During the discussion of the book *La Superniña de Cilantro/ Super Cilantro Girl*, Liliana shared the story about how her girl cousin had to cut her hair like a boy in order to cross the Mexico-US border illegally. This resulted in a lively discussion about whether we should have borders. I asked, “Ustedes creen que debemos tener fronteras o que no debemos tener fronteras?” [Do you think we should have borders or not have borders?]. This resulted in other group members sharing family border crossing stories.

During the book discussion of *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, Guillermo makes the comment that Mexicanos do not speak English and I push students to talk about that further.

Table 47

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Guillermo:</b> Como los mexicanos, no hablan en ingles, hablan en español. <b>Carlos:</b> Yo ya sé más que mi papá en inglés. <b>Maestra:</b> Sí, pero usted dijo que los mexicanos no saben inglés, sólo saben español, ¿usted cree que hay mexicanos que... <b>Guillermo:</b> No, sólo saben español. <b>Maestra:</b> Ud cree? <b>Guillermo:</b> Si <b>Maestra:</b> Solo saben español? <b>Sofia:</b> No, mi papá sí es mexicano y yo también y mi familia es mexicana y hablan</p>	<p><b>Guillermo:</b> Like Mexicans, they do not speak English, they speak Spanish. <b>Carlos:</b> I already know more than my dad in English. <b>Teacher:</b> Yes, but you said that Mexicanos do not know English, that they only know Spanish. Do you think there are Mexicans that. . . <b>Guillermo:</b> No, they only know Spanish. <b>Teacher:</b> You think? <b>Guillermo:</b> Yes <b>Teacher:</b> Only Spanish? <b>Sofia:</b> No, my dad is Mexican and I am and my family is Mexican and we speak</p>

<p>en inglés, excepto mi mamá que habla un poco mal.  <b>Maestra:</b> Ok  <b>Carlos:</b> Mi mamá ella sabe casi todo en inglés, ella ya sabe escribir en inglés.</p>	<p>English, except my mom speaks it kinda bad.  <b>Teacher:</b> Ok  <b>Carlos:</b> My mom knows almost everything in English, she already knows how to write in English.</p>
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These examples show that in order for there to be a high level of engagement and students to be able to get to a critical level of engagement, students have to connect to the multicultural book read. When there is no personal connection students stay at the surface level of understanding by only asking procedural or literal questions and having a low level of engagement. I will now continue by sharing the content analysis I did on the books used for literature discussions in order to take a closer look at the books I had chosen.

### **Representative of the Lives of my Students**

After conducting the literature discussions I decided to take a closer look at the particular books I had chosen by conducting a content analysis of the thirteen literature discussion books chosen by my focal students. I specifically wanted to answer the question: To what extent do the storyline and characters correspond to the educational and demographic trends in today’s U.S. society, specifically those of my students? In addition to the content analysis data, I also present specific examples of when the discussion groups spoke about each particular topic.

### **Gender and Positioning**

When it comes to the main character of the stories selected, eleven were female and two were male. What is interesting to note is that in all thirteen books, the main characters started out without having any power or control, but made a change in their

lives in order to acquire it. In *Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice*, the main character Pepita feels she has no control of her life because she is always being stopped to help translate into English or Spanish. She takes control and gives up speaking Spanish, but realizes that is not the solution. In *La Superniña del Cilantro/ Super Cilantro Girl*, Esmeralda cannot do anything about the fact that her mother has been detained or about the fact that she is becoming green, but when she becomes la Superniña del Cilantro she is able to save her mother by fighting off the police. In *Prietita y La Llorona/ Prietita and the Ghost Woman*, the main character Prietita must find a plant in order to get a remedy made for her sick mother. La Llorona is portrayed as a good person in this story who helps guide Prietita to the plant she needs as well as back home. So Prietita gets her strength from the help of another female.

In the two stories that had male protagonists, *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South* and *Esperando mi papá/ Waiting for papá*, the male characters are struggling through sadness because of the fact that they are separated from one of their parents. These stories were a good way to show students, especially through books, that being sad is not a sign of weakness, but a true feeling that we all have at some time or another in our lives. The important thing is to express it in some appropriate manner and not hold it all in.

In the discussion of the book *Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South*, we discussed how Jose's mother had no power over what happened to her. She did not have any papers and therefore was deported. Jose's mother now had to wait and see if she could get papers processed in order to return back to the United States. At the end of the story, it still was not known when Jose's mother would be able to return home. This

story allowed my students to share the same type of uncertainty they live with in their lives. Alejandra shared how her mother was not sure what would happen if she got caught because Alejandra’s parents as well as older sister are illegal, while Alejandra and her younger sister were born in the states. Alejandra knew that if her parents were deported there might be a chance she would never see them again.

Table 48

<u>Transcription</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<p><b>Alejandra:</b> Yo me siento mal porque mi mamá dice que si la van a deportar; bueno que si la llegan a llevar a México que no sabe a quién llevarse. Si nosotras, porque se lleva a Perla y a nosotras dos nos deja. Y sí, dice mi mamá que si llegan a parar como a Jennifer, como Jennifer es de Guatemala, le llegan a parar a sus padres, puede que ya nunca los vea porque ellos se van y puede que dejen a sus hijos con otra familia.</p>	<p><b>Alejandra:</b> I feel bad because my mom says that if they deport her, well if they take her to Mexico, that she doesn’t know who to take. If us, because if she take Perla and leaves us. And if, my mom says if they stop her like Jennifer, like Jennifer is from Guatemala, if they stop her parents, it can be that she never sees them because they will leave and they can leave their children with another family.</p>

This range of books reflects my classroom population because my students can sometimes feel like they do not have any control in their lives, since they are always being told by their parents, their teachers, and others what to do. Also my students all live with a certain level of uncertainty when it comes to the legal status of various family members. They also have experienced the conflicts that come with speaking two or more languages and have had to negotiate their uses. Also the fact that my students are a cultural minority in U.S. society means that they will encounter many situations in which they are made to feel that they need to assimilate in order to fit in, especially in school (Sano, 2009). My classroom was made up of 11 boys and 10 girls at this time, so it

would have been better to include more literature with male protagonists, as seen in table 49.

Table 49

Gender/Positioning	Male	Female	Begins with Power	Powerless at beginning
Trencitas/ Braids		X		X
La Superniña de Cilantro/ The Super Cilantro Girl		X		X
Esperando a mi papá/ Waiting for papa	X			X
La Llorona/The Crying Woman		X		X
La Llorona/ The Weeping Woman		X		X
The Tale of La Llorona		X		X
Preitita y la llorona/ Preitita and the Crying Woman		X		X
Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South	X			X
Gorrion de Metro		X		X
Gabi esta aqui		X		X
Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice		X		X
I hate English		X		X
No English		X		X

### Social class and Ethnicity

When it came to ethnicity the majority of the books, nine of them to be exact, had Mexican characters or storylines. The other books had storylines from various cultures, such as Argentina, El Salvador and China. When it came specifically to social class, most books did not make a clear reference but it could be inferred. For example, two of the stories, *La Superniña del Cilantro* and *Del Norte al Sur*, made reference to the border. In both stories the mothers crossed the border in order to work, so it can be inferred that these families are from a lower social class. In *Trencitas* and *Pepita habla dos veces*, there is no clear reference to social class, but from looking at the illustrations and storyline it can be assumed that the family is middle class. This was referred from the illustrations of the families' living conditions.

Even though there might not have been a specific reference to social class the students during the discussions gave personal narratives about their parents crossing the border, their family's illegal status, their fear of deportation, fear of police, and of course the fear and anxiety felt over possibly having their families separated.

The majority of my students are of Mexican descent, so when it came to ethnicity the books chosen did reflect the majority culture in my classroom. All four of my focal students had some Mexican heritage. What I as the teacher need to look into finding are more books for the minority cultures in my classroom, specifically those students who are from Guatemala. The majority of the students in my classroom are from a lower social economic status. The reason I know this is because all my students qualified for the free lunch program, which is based on their parents' income. Some of the books selected did reflect the lower social class, but what I could not find were books who had characters that lived in trailers, which is the type of housing most of my students currently live in.

Table 50

Social Class/Ethnicity	Social Class	Ethnicity Mexican
Trecitas/ Braids	Middle class	X
La Supermiña de Cilantro/ The Super Cilantro Girl	Working class	X
Esperando a mi papá/ Waiting for papa	Working class	
La Llorona/The Crying Woman	Working class	X
La Llorona/ The Weeping Woman	Working class	X
The Tale of La Llorona	Working class	X
Preitita y la llorona/ Preitita and the Crying Woman	Working class	X
Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South	Working class	X
Gorrion de Metro	Middle class	
Gabi esta aqui	Middle class	X
Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice	Middle class	X
I hate English	Middle class	
No English	Working class	

## Language Use

Eight of the books selected were bilingual, having English first and Spanish second. The Spanish versions of the book did not include any English, but the English versions did include some Spanish words. Most of the words that were used in Spanish in the English versions were related to a name. For instance, in *Prietita y la Llorona* the animal names are written in Spanish, but then followed by the English translation. Some examples of this are: venadita, little deer (p.12) and luciérnagas, lightening bugs (p.20). In *Esperando a mi papá*, the English version uses the words mamá, papá and m'ijo in Spanish.

What was interesting to note was that the literature book, *Pepita habla dos veces*, rarely combined languages, even though it was a story about translating. What the author would do was stay in the intended language, but followed it by the language spoken. For example, in the Spanish version Pepita says “Todas las canciones de ustedes son en español y yo ya no hablo español-dijo en ingles” [All your songs are in Spanish and I no longer speak Spanish-she said in English] (p.20). The story continues to her friends saying “Que lástima” [What a shame], referring to the fact that she no longer speaks Spanish. The only word in the Spanish version of the book that changed as a result of translation was that Pepita changed the dog's name from Lobo to Wolf. The only English spoken by Pepita in the Spanish version is when she tells her dad, “I don't speak Spanish anymore, Papá” (p.22). This use of Spanish to refer to words that Pepita said in English (in the Spanish version of the book) was confusing to my students.

The positioning of English first in each of the bilingual books, reflects the lower status that Spanish has in the English dominant U.S. culture (Escamilla, 1994; Shannon,

1995; Shannon & Escamilla, 1999), which is something my students are exposed to in their daily lives. The books did not reflect the true bilingual nature of my students and their ability to code-switch. My students were encouraged to read the Spanish versions of the books and in doing so they were exposed to the idea that to be a Spanish speaker you must stay in that language without including any words in English.

Three of the books chosen by the focal students, *The Tale of La Llorona*, *I Hate English and No English!*, were only available in English, so students could not choose what language to read it in. When it came to *The Tale of La Llorona*, a student questioned why it had been written in English when it was written by authors who lived in Guanajuato, Mexico. This student, Angel, was being critical of the fact that if the authors lived in Mexico why did not they write it in Spanish or at least bilingually.

The final two books, *Gabi esta aqui: Un día loco de palabras mezcladas and Gorrión del Metro* had versions available either in all English or in all Spanish. Students from these groups chose to read the Spanish versions of these stories. This shows how students are more comfortable in their native language.

### **Lesson for the Teacher**

What I learned through this look at student engagement as well as content analysis of the books was that given the limited amount of Spanish multicultural literature available to use with young children in the classroom, there is no way that a teacher will ever find the perfect book to fit her students. Even when I chose books that I felt my students would be interested in, the discussion did not always go where I wanted it to go or the students were not as engaged as I had hoped.

Of course it is important to have books that show various aspects of students' lives, but what is more important is the critical dialogue surrounding the discussion of the book. In order to get to this critical dialogue, students needed to be given the opportunity to engage with a wide range of literature and provide a safe space where they could critically discuss issues that arose (Fain, 2008; Labadie, Wetzel & Rogers, 2012; Martínez-Roldán, 2005). Particularly for my students, it was also important to allow the use of the native language (Flores-Dueñas, 2005; Martínez-Roldán, 2003). As I have shown in the previous chapters, students, even at a young age, can be pushed to problematize the ideas of each story and think about how the ideas portrayed in the books can be related to their lives, even if not in a direct manner.

## Chapter 7

### Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine how children defined “the word and their world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987), as structured by societal, school, and classroom constructions of race, culture and languages, when they discussed literature that pertained to these topics. I was particularly interested in how students negotiated their own understandings and enacted their multiple identities during literature discussions. I aimed to understand as well how my identities as teacher, and those I placed on students, were negotiated so that students could think about what it meant to be growing up bilingual in today’s political context. I wanted to understand how students in my classroom used their voices to express their ideas in literature discussions as well as how they navigated aspects of their identity when reading and responding to literature chosen because it was believed to reflect their cultural and lived experience.

Guided by sociocultural and critical theories of language and literacy, I looked at students’ interactions with myself, their teacher, during literature discussions around multicultural texts that evolved around intricate topics of being bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural. Despite the growing population of Latino bilingual children in the United States, we still see little research being conducted on native language instruction and on what happens when students are encouraged to bring in their “funds of knowledge” into the classroom (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005). This study looked at these two particular aspects in a bilingual second grade classroom.

To answer the research questions, I studied four focal students' interactions in literature discussions. The multicultural books used in the discussions were organized around four different rotations: family, cultural stories, language, and English. The data was collected during the spring 2012 semester of the student's second grade year. I used qualitative methods to collect my data including observations, field notes, and audio recordings of all the literature discussions conducted in the classroom. I also collected performance data on the students, such as their scores on the reading benchmark test. The data was analyzed inductively constantly comparing and contrasting the information from all sources in order to allow emergence and confirmation of salient themes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Some of the major themes included students' use of personal narratives to enact a critical consciousness, the teacher's role in helping students become more critical, and the influence of multicultural books on the discussion, particularly on how students were able to connect to the story. The ensuing discussion of the findings will be guided by my research questions. Afterwards, implications for instruction and research will be addressed.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The following research questions guided the data collection and analysis for this study:

1. What are the ways that Spanish-speaking bilingual second graders participate orally in literature discussions using literature that reflects aspects of their lives and understandings?
2. How do Spanish-speaking bilingual second graders discuss their own identity in literature discussions?
3. What roles/positions are taken on by the teacher and the students during literature discussions?
4. How do the students engage with the selected multicultural books?

I organized the findings to address each one of these questions. In the first findings Chapter 4, I concentrated on the students and how space was constructed for voicing ideas and thoughts about aspects of their families' history and of their own bilingualism. I spoke of students' identities, such as their cultural identity as well as their student identity. I also shared the power behind students' personal narratives around topics, such as, language. Finally I shared some of the roles students took on that I felt were necessary to get to critical consciousness. These included taking on leadership and expert roles in the discussion groups.

I then organized Chapter 5 around the teacher's journey in literature discussions, specifically around how my teaching practices had to change in order to accomplish this new dialogue format. I shared some of the roles I took as the teacher, but most importantly how I positioned myself as a conversation partner as well as a learner in the group. Similar to Rogers (2002) I wanted my institutional position as teacher/researcher to be invisible.

Finally in order to answer my last research question, I included Chapter 6, which focused on the actual multicultural literature used in the discussions. I shared the different types of engagement of students, including: procedural, literal, personal and critical. I then shared a content analysis I did on all the books used in the literature discussions as way to get a closer look at what I was exposing my students to in each multicultural book and how representative it was of my students' lives. As Medina (2006) showed, "reading across the literature helps one understand the complex gender, social and racial identities of Latino/a immigrants in the United States" (p.73). By providing

my students with a variety of literature that they could choose from and discuss in groups I allowed a space for them to engage with these complex issues.

If we look at the findings as related to Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys' (2002) discussion of four dimensions of critical literacy--disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice, we find that the first three dimensions emerged in this study.

In Chapter 4 we see how through their personal narratives, students began to examine the familiar through new lenses. They interrogated their own personal viewpoints, those of their discussion partners and those of their teacher (Fain, 2008). The discussion groups focused on sociopolitical issues such as immigrant and "illegal" status. We explored how sociopolitical systems, power relationships, and language were all intertwined. Students began to develop a critical consciousness because we were acknowledging the varied perspectives that both the students and teacher brought to the text and with each other (Aukerman, 2012).

As we saw in the teacher's journey chapter, none of this could have occurred if I had not relinquished control of the discussion. By doing so, I also had to accept that certain topics that I felt might be important to our critical literacy discussion might never surface (Aukerman, 2012). I also helped my students reach that critical consciousness by making it more personal, thus supporting real-life connections to the texts they were reading (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002).

When it came to the books used the most important factor was whether or not the students connected to the storyline in a personal way. Therefore, there was no way of knowing which books would be able to get students to that critical level of looking at

sociopolitical issues from multiple perspectives. Each student had different background knowledge as well as experiences therefore a discussion topic brought up by one group might not necessarily be brought up by another.

The final dimension, taking action and promoting social justice was one that the students and I did not particularly reach. This could have been a result of my being a novice teacher in the introduction of critical literacy with my second grade students (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). I was aware that this was the ultimate goal and I wanted my students to reach, but I did not feel they or I were ready. I struggled enough with having my students begin to question sociopolitical issues from multiple perspectives and felt that we still needed more experience with this dimension. This is one of the most difficult levels to accomplish. Other researchers have shown the difficulty of moving students beyond their personal experiences to engage in critical action in their social worlds (Lensmire, 2000; Rogers & Soter, 1997).

Also I felt like the lack of time did not allow me to take critical literacy to this fourth dimension. It was difficult to find time to implement these literature discussions since the basal reader curriculum, as well as, guided reading groups were required. This dimension of having students take action and promoting social justice is one of extreme importance and with more experience and time I felt my students would have greatly benefited from it.

### **Educational Implications**

By taking into account a school's obligation to meet the needs of all their students, specifically the growing population of Latino students in schools this study has implications for teaching practices in bilingual classrooms as well as any other classroom

that a Latino student might be a part of. Similar to Martinez-Roldan (2003), I address three aspects of the study that have implications for improving the education of Latino students in the United States: providing access to students' "funds of knowledge," specifically their personal narratives, access to a student's native language, and discussion of texts that address critical issues within heterogeneous groups.

Every student came into the classroom with a wealth of knowledge. Too often that knowledge is not accessed because it does not meet what is considered to be the normal school literacy practices. Many times the reading instruction students receive does not draw or extend on the resources they bring to school; this is specifically true of Latino students (Moll, Diaz, Estrada, & Lopes, 1992). Studies have shown the importance of creating a context that values students' backgrounds including their lives, language and identities (Darder, 1995; Garcia, 2001; Nieto, 2002; Soto, 1997). Nieto (2002) actually showed how when a student felt their background was valued it actually promoted their learning. This study showed how when a student was allowed to share personal narratives that related to the multicultural books they were able to reach a level of critical consciousness. This only occurred when they made personal connections to the storyline of the text. Therefore, it is important that teachers know their students and choose books that reflect aspects of their lives, in order for students to be able to make connections to them. Also students need to be given a space to express their ideas and thoughts, specifically their personal narratives. Too many times, students are silenced from sharing their stories because of lack of time or the fact that the teacher sees the story as getting off-task.

As we saw in this study, the personal narratives were produced when the students

were allowed to use their native language of Spanish. In this bilingual context, the student's native language was seen as a resource to build upon. Students' language is tied to their identity, so by valuing their language, I was also valuing the student. The reading curriculum required by the district had limited my students' engagement because it lacked others that looked like them and limited their ability to draw on their linguistic knowledge (DeNicolo, 2010). Too often, bilingual students are placed into a monolingual setting where their native language is not even taken into account. Even in a monolingual setting, through the use of bilingual literature a student's background and native language can be recognized and valued in order to promote student learning.

The final educational implication is that students need to be given a space to discuss texts that address sociopolitical issues in groups (Fain, 2008). The issues addressed in the literature discussions of this study were ones that were brought up by the students because it was the reality of their lives. These topics were part of their identity. If I had ignored them, then I would have been ignoring my own students. In order to accomplish this, teachers need to be willing to give up some of their power and change their teaching practices. This does not mean that the teacher gives up all control and that learning objectives are not covered. Instead, when the teacher takes the role of facilitator, conversation partner, and learner the students are able to make more meaningful connections while covering the learning objectives. This is because the context is now more personal and directly related to their lives. When there is a strong focus on the teaching of procedures or protocols then the focus is taken away from the meaning-making process of students (Martinez-Roldan, 2005). The most important thing for a teacher should be the process not just the final product, which is ultimately valued by the

accountability policies.

### **Research Implications**

The findings of this study have implications for literacy development and research, specifically for that of bilingual students. This study builds on the existing literature that advocates for culturally relevant texts in the classroom, creating a space for student voice and collaboration and that stresses how advantageous it is to consider both languages when it comes to bilingual students.

For example, further research must be done on what happens in classrooms where students see themselves reflected in the literature used in the classroom, including the language the text is written in. Also research has been done that looks at reader response theory in upper grade classrooms, but little has concentrated on younger children in English-speaking classrooms (Jewell & Pratt, 1999; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Pearson, 2010), and even fewer on bilingual students (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Martinez-Roldán, 2005; Martinez-Roldán & López-Robertson, 1999/2000; Medina, 2010). Almost none have concentrated on the use of a student's native language in their response to the literature (DeNicolo, 2010; López-Robertson, 2012; Martinez-Roldán, 2003). More recently, more studies have begun to look at students as they reach a level of critical consciousness (Aukerman, 2012; Fain, 2008; Labadie, Wetzel, & Rogers, 2012; Rogers, 2002), but this study has the unique factor that it takes place in a bilingual setting in the students' native language.

Teachers in different localities will have their own set of challenges when trying to implement this literacy practice into their classroom. This implementation of literature discussions in my classroom took time to set up and was a success because of the

relationship I had built with my students over the two-year period. Another teacher might have bilingual students that are English dominant and therefore do not necessarily identify as bilingual. Or a teacher could be an English as a Second Language teacher in which she has lots of various languages spoken in the classroom with the one common language being some English proficiency. This would all affect the type of literature each teacher would choose to work with her students. A teacher could also be teaching in an area in which bilingualism is not encouraged, but rather quick English proficiency is encouraged. This is currently occurring in areas such as California and Arizona. Luckily most of the books I used in my study were bilingual in that the book could be read in English, but still covered a topic related to the students' backgrounds. The context in which a particular teacher and students are placed will affect how literature discussions around multicultural literature can be implemented.

### **Limitations of Study**

The assertions made in this study might be limited by many aspects, including the fact that it was done in one bilingual classroom setting where I was the teacher, that the books used were only from a Latino perspective, and that the context influencing the classroom practices was not broadly looked at.

The study does portray what is possible in literature discussions. It does not give us a full picture of what will happen. Of course, it is impossible to know what will happen all the time, since the discussion depends upon each student's background and the personal connections they make to each particular story. Every student and context is different and this will affect what happens during literature discussion.

Moreover, the fact that I am the teacher means that there can be aspects of the

study that I did not clearly see because I was immersed in the context. Also there are a wide range of bilingual programs, so the context in which the literature discussions take place will influence how and what is dialogued. This study presented an analysis of what occurred in my classroom, with my student population, and me as the teacher with particular benefits. Any changes to the classroom context would result in changes in the findings.

All the books that were used were chosen because they were related to my students' Latino background or bilingualism. The first three rotations were all related to my students' particular background, while the fourth rotation dealt with the fact that my students were learning English as a Second Language. I decided to concentrate on finding books that related to my students' Latino background because I felt that they could not see themselves in the literature that had been used in the classroom. While it is important for students to be able to see themselves in the literature used it is also important for students to see similarities they have with others across different cultural groups, such as African American or Asian Americans. This study is limited in the fact that my students only saw a glimpse of a different cultural group (Asian Americans) in the fourth rotation. With more time I would have started off my having my students read books related to their background, but then in the following rotations branched out to different cultural groups. It is extremely important that students learn about various cultures since they will come into contact with lots of different people throughout their lifetime.

A final limitation is that I am not looking at the context of school in depth. I, as the teacher, felt pressures from the outside including the administrative staff, the district,

and federal accountability standards that I shared in the introduction. But this study does not take into consideration all of the classroom factors that influence students as well as the classroom structure, such as, administrative priorities, political environment, and parental involvement. It also does not look at reading and discussion practices outside the context of literature discussions. I looked at only the practice of literature discussions. I did not look at the students across the literacy practices that took place in the classroom where conversation around literature took place. Such studies await future scholars.

### **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that students, even at a young age, are able to achieve critical consciousness when they discuss literature to which they can make a personal connection. Moreover, Spanish bilingual students need to be allowed to use their native language in order to relay their personal narratives because this is how this critical consciousness becomes part of their identity.

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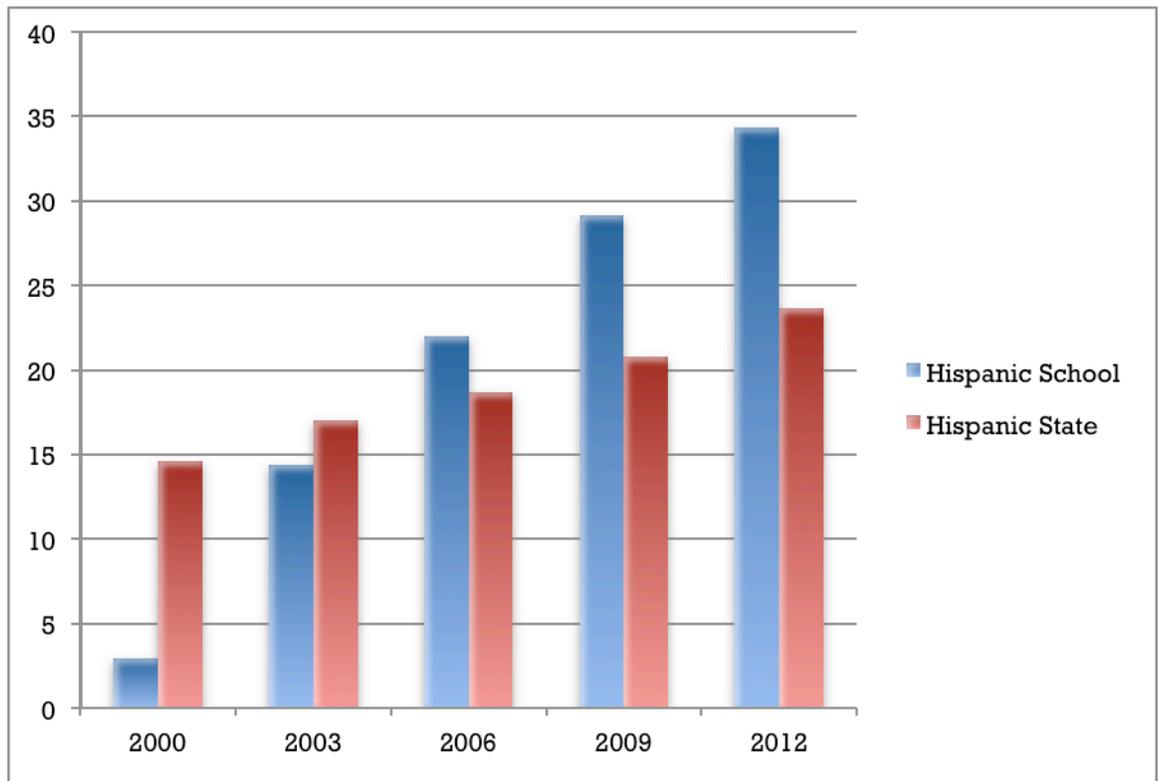
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## Appendix A

### Hispanic Population in State and School



## Appendix B

### District Bilingual Language of Instruction by Subject Area

(available on district website)

	<b>Language Arts &amp; Reading</b>	<b>Math</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Social Studies</b>	<b>P.E.</b>	<b>Fine Arts</b>
K	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	English
1st	Spanish	Spanish	English (ESL)	English (ESL)	Spanish and English	English
2nd	Spanish	Spanish	English(ESL)	English(ESL)	Spanish and English	English
3rd	Spanish and English(ESL)	English	English(ESL) <i>with bilingual support</i>	English(ESL)	English	English
4th	Spanish and English(ESL)	English	English(ESL)	English(ESL)	English	English
5th	Spanish and English(ESL)	English	English	English(ESL)	English	English

## Appendix C

### District Bilingual Language of Instruction by Time

<b>Spanish and English program minutes Total Instructional Hours/Minutes: 5.0/300</b>						
	K	1	2	3	4	5
Sp/En %	90/10	75/25	60/40	40/60	25/75	10/90
Sp/En hrs	4.25/0.75	3.75/1.25	3.0/2.0	2.0/3.0	1.25/3.75	0.75/4.25
Sp/En mins	255/45	225/75	180/120	120/130	75/225	45/225

## Appendix D

### Student Personal Information

Pseudonyms	Age	Birthplace	Father Birthplace	Mother Birthplace
Antonio	8	Chicago	Mexico	Mexico
Eduardo	7	School town	Mexico	Mexico
Adriana	8	Virginia	Mexico	Mexico
Juliana	8	Missouri	Guatemala	Guatemala
Diego	8	Nebraska	Guatemala	Guatemala
Angel	8	School town	Mexico	Mexico
Jesus	8	New York	Mexico	Mexico
Mercedes	8	Florida	Guatemala	Guatemala
Camila	7	School town	Guatemala	Mexico
Carlos	8	School town	Mexico	Mexico
Arcadia	8	School town	Mexico	Mexico
Sergio	8	School town	Mexico	Mexico
Jose	7	School town	Mexico	Mexico
Juan	8	School town	Mexico	Mexico
Alejandra	8	School town	Mexico	Mexico
Lucia	8	School town	Mexico	Mexico
Liliana	8	School town	Mexico	Mexico
Sofia	7	School town	Mexico	Mexico
Guillermo	8	School town	Mexico	Mexico
Victor	8	School town	Mexico	Mexico

## Appendix E

### School Data on Students

Pseudonyms	When student started our program	# of yrs in prog	English ACCESS Test Score Results from Jan 2011 (1-6)	ACCESS Proficiency Level	Logramos National Percentage in Spanish Reading
Antonio	1 <sup>st</sup> grade from all English	2	2.4	Beginning	64
Eduardo	K from Head Start English	4	3	Developing	68
Adriana	Our bilingual preschool	4	3.3	Developing	83
Juliana	Kindergarten	4	1.9	Beginning	51
Diego	Kindergarten	4	2.7	Beginning	75
Angel	Our bilingual preschool	4	2.4	Beginning	78
Jesus	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade from all English	1	Did not test	Did not test	Did not test
Mercedes	1 <sup>st</sup> grade from all English	2	3.2	Developing	52
Camila	Our bilingual preschool	4	2.9	Developing	89
Carlos	Our bilingual preschool	4	3.1	Developing	87
Arcadia	Head Start-all English	3	3.1	Developing	97
Sergio	1 <sup>st</sup> grade from another program	2	2.5	Beginning	61
Jose	Our bilingual preschool	4	2.6	Beginning	65
Juan	Our bilingual preschool	4	2.4	Beginning	80
Alejandra	Our bilingual preschool	4	1.9	Beginning	76
Lucia	Head Start-all English	3	3.6	Developing	57
Liliana	Head Start-all English	3	3.7	Developing	92
Sofia	Our bilingual preschool	4	2.9	Developing	83
Guillermo	Our bilingual preschool	4	3.1	Developing	76
Victor	Our bilingual preschool	4	3.8	Developing	78

## Appendix F

### MIDE Scores

Pseudonyms	Fall Benchmark Score	Fall Goal	Spring Benchmark Score	Spring Goal
Alejandra	46	40	78	74
Camila	101	40	146	74
Carlos	24	40	54	74
José	87	40	127	74

## Appendix G

### Sample Schedule

Sample Schedule of one complete rotation with whole class in literature discussion groups. Numbers pertain to the literature discussion group number, in which there are four total. The last two days of discussions for two groups was when the next to groups began preparing for their literature discussions.

Groups	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Mon
Lit Discussion			1	1	1	3	3	3	1	1
Lit Discussion			2	2	2	4	4	4	2	2
Preparing	1	1		3	3		1	1		
Preparing	2	2		4	4		2	2		

## Appendix H

### Sentence Starters Samples

<u>Español</u>	<u>English Translation</u>
Estoy pensando. . .	I am thinking. . .
Esta parte me recuerda a. . .	This part reminds me of. . .
Me pregunto por qué. . .	I wonder why. . .
Tengo una pregunta sobre. . .	I have a question about. . .
Estoy confundido sobre. . .	I don't understand why. . .
Estoy de acuerdo con tu idea porque. . .	I agree with your idea because. . .
No estoy de acuerdo con tu idea porque. . .	I disagree with your idea because. . .

## Appendix I

### Literature Discussion Schedule

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
<p data-bbox="248 569 594 772">Students will discuss what the story is about and share some of the parts they marked with sticky notes</p> <p data-bbox="240 825 602 1066">Based on discussion a section would be chosen by teacher to focus on for next day, students were to reread this section.</p>	<p data-bbox="643 569 989 814">Discussion would begin with section chosen previous day. Then students could share any other sticky notes they had.</p>	<p data-bbox="1037 569 1383 856">Students would share the rest of the pages marked with sticky notes. Teacher would give them a written response prompt related to the story.</p>

## Appendix J

### Book Titles for Rotation 1 (Family)

Title	Author	Author's background	Language of book	Main Character
La Supernina del Cilantro	Juan Felipe Herrera	Mexican	Bilingual	Esmeralda Sinfronteras
Trencitas	Kathleen Contreras	American	Bilingual	Isabela and grandmother
Soledad Suspiros	Rigoberto Gonzalez	Mexican	Bilingual	Soledad dreads staying home alone
El niño de cabeza	Juan Felipe Herrera	Mexican	Bilingual	Juanito's experience at a new school
Esperando a Papá	Rene Colato Lainez	Salvadorian	Bilingual	Beto is waiting for his dad from el Salvador

## Appendix K

### Book Titles for Rotation 2 (Cultural Stories)

Title	Author	Author's background	Language of book	Main Character
La Llorona/ The Weeping Woman	Joe Hayes	American, grew up in Southern Arizona, near border	Bilingual	La Llorona (the weeping woman)
La Llorona: the crying woman	Rudolfo Anaya	American, from New Mexico	Bilingual	La Llorona
Maya's Children: The Story of La Llorona	Rudolfo Anaya	American, from New Mexico	English	La Llorona
Prietita y La Llorona	Gloria Anzaldua	American, grew up in Texas bordertown	Bilingual	La Llorona
The Tooth Fairy Meets El Ratón Perez	Rene Colato Lainez	Salvadorian	English	Miguel, boy who loses a tooth

## Appendix L

### Book Titles for Rotation 3 (Language)

Title	Author	Author's background	Language of book	Main Character
Del Norte al Sur	Rene Colato Lainez	Salvadorian	Bilingual	Jose's mother is deported to Tijana
Gabi esta aqui: Un dia loco de palabras mexcladas	Marisa Montes	Puerto Rican	Spanish or English	Gabi code-mixing
La Mariposa	Francisco Jimenez	Mexican	Spanish or English	Francisco does not understand the language of the school, English
Gorrion del Metro	Leyla Torres	Colombian	Spanish or English	Sparrow listening to different languages on subway
Pepita habla dos veces	Ofelia Dumas Lachtan	Mexican-American	Bilingual	Pepita is tired of translating for everyone and gives up speaking Spanish

## Appendix M

### Book Titles for Rotation 4 (Speaking English)

Title	Author	Author's background	Language of book	Main Character
In English, of course	Josphine Nobisso	American, Bronx/Little Italy	English	Josephine uses her "broken English" to tell class about where she is from
I hate English	Ellen Levine	American, New York	English	Mei-Mei a student from China refuses to speak English
No English	Jacqueline Jules	American, from Virginia	English	"No English" is all a girl Blanca from Argentina will say

## Appendix N

### Story Summaries

#### Rotation 1: Family

*Trencitas/ Braids* by Kathleen Contreras  
Chosen by Alejandra and José

This is a story about a girl named Isabela and her relationship with her grandmother. Throughout the story, grandmother braids Isabela's hair and they both use this time to share stories. Isabela shares her written stories while grandmother shares her oral stories. Isabela then realizes that her grandmother can't read and helps teach her how to.

*La Superniña del Cilantro/ Super Cilantro Girl* by Juan Felipe Herrera  
Chosen by Carlos

This is the story of Esmeralda Sinfronteras who starts turning green and becomes Super Cilantro girl after her mother is detained. Super Cilantro girl is over fifty feet tall, can fly, and scale tall walls. Super Cilantro girl goes and rescues her mother in order to bring her back home.

*Esperando mi papá/ Waiting for papá* by René Colato Laínez  
Chosen by Camila

Beto and his mother had to leave El Salvador because of a war. His father stayed behind, resulting in Beto not seeing him for over three years. For father's day, Beto writes a letter to his father telling him why he is so special to him. The letter gets into the hands of a radio personal and Beto is invited to read it on air. At the end of the story, Beto is finally reunited with his father.

#### Rotation 2: Cultural Stories

*La Llorona/ The Crying Woman* by Rudolfo Anaya  
Chosen by Alejandra

In this story, Maya is an indigenous woman who Father Time becomes jealous of because she is immortal. In order to protect her, her parents send her off to live on her own. She becomes very lonely and is told by an owl how she will have children from planting various seeds. She has various children and is no longer lonely, when Father Time finds her. He tricks her and tells her that in order to protect her children she must break the vases they were born in. She dissolves the vases in a river and this results in her children disappearing. She then becomes La Llorana, a woman calling out for her children.

## Appendix O

### Story Summaries continued

*La Llorona/ The Weeping Woman* by Joe Hayes  
Chosen by José

This is a story about Maria who thought she was the prettiest girl in the village and better than everyone else. She married a handsome ranchero and had two children. The man left Maria for another woman. In her rage, Maria threw her two children into the river. Maria then became La Llorona that cried each night, “Where are my children?”

*The Tale of La Llorona* by Linda Lowery  
Chosen by Carlos

This is the story about Maria who worked in an inn and dreamed of marrying someone rich. She married a man who then left her and their children for another woman. When he left her, she was near the river with her children. She became upset and her children disappeared. It is not clearly explained in the story what happened to her children. She then became La Llorona.

*Prietita y La Llorona/ Prietita and the Crying Woman* by Gloria Anzaldúa  
Chosen by Camila

In this story Prietita must go a find a plant needed to make a remedy for her sick mother. She is guided to the plant by La Llorona, who has portrayed as a helping woman in this story.

### **Rotation 3: Language**

*Del Norte al Sur/ From North to South* by René Colato Laínez  
Chosen by Alejandra

José is separated from his mother after she is deported to Tijuana. José along with his father cross the border from San Diego to Tijuana in order to visit his mother, who is staying in a refugee home.

*Gorrion del Metro* by Leyla Torres  
Chosen by Camila

A sparrow gets lost on the subway and this tells the story about individuals from different cultures work together, even with limited vocabulary to catch it and send it into freedom.

## Appendix P

### Story Summaries continued

*Gabi esta aqui: Un dia loco de palabras mezcladas* by Marisa Montes  
Chosen by José

This is a story about Gabi, who is a bilingual child. When she is paired up with a boy she dislikes for a school project, she becomes upset and starts mixing both of her languages.

*Pepita habla dos veces/ Pepita talks twice* by Ofelia Dumas Luchtman  
Chosen by Carlos

Pepita is a bilingual child that always has to translate for different people in the neighborhood. She becomes sick of translating and decides to give up one of her languages, Spanish. This then comes with its own set up problems.

### **Rotation 4: Speaking English**

*I hate English* by Ellen Levine  
Chosen by José and Camila

Mei Mei has just moved to New York from China and does not understand everything that is being said to her in class. She

*No English* by Jacqueline Jules  
Chosen by Carlos and Alejandra

Blanca is a new student from Argentina has a conflict at recess with Diana because they are not able to communicate. This book shows how the girls become friends even when they are not able to speak each other's language.