ÉXITO: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SECOND GRADE LATINA/O AMERICAN STUDENTS' SUCCESSFUL ACQUISITION OF THE DISCOURSE OF SCHOOL

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BA, Lehman College, CUNY, 1972
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A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership in the Department of Education and Educational Psychology at Western Connecticut State University

2012
ÉXITO: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SECOND GRADE LATINA/O AMERICAN STUDENTS’ SUCCESSFUL ACQUISITION OF THE DISCOURSE OF SCHOOL

Emily Ramos, BA, MA
Western Connecticut State University

Abstract

This study presented a description of the social and cultural factors that contributed to the academic success of second grade Latina/o American students. The manner in which students whose primary Discourse differs from the dominant Discourse acquire the secondary Discourse of school is explained. This study views the school experience through the eyes of the children and acknowledged the courage that needs to be mustered in order to confront the multiple challenges that a Latina/o student faces each and every day of school. It is not only the different language but the implications of the new culture as well. The data from participant observation, student artifacts, and teacher interviews generated nine themes; five themes addressed the student behaviors of successful Latina/o successful students, two themes described teacher/adult behaviors, and two themes reflected adult/student conduct. The first five themes focused on student agency, sustaining remaining in the present moment, students envisioning their futures, metacognitive awareness, and student resourcefulness. Theme six and seven spoke to teachers being ambassadors of crossing borders between cultures and adults being supportive and sensitive to children. The last two themes dealt with communication through multiple pathways and reciprocal respect and positive relationships. The data gleaned from this investigation and the implications for practice factor into early
intervention strategies for the enhancement of academic stratagems for young struggling Latina/o students.
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EXITO: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SECOND GRADE LATINA/O AMERICAN STUDENTS’ SUCCESSFUL ACQUISITION OF THE DISCOURSE OF SCHOOL

Presented by

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I also would like to recognize my two nieces Andrea Hassler and Rebecca Hassler for their videoing, proofing, assistance with references, and for rallying around me during the last days before the dissertation was due. My mother Ida Ramos and my sister Patricia Hassler supported, encouraged, and sustained me throughout the dissertation process. Thank you for listening, consoling, and standing by me. I thank my sister Rita Cruz for giving that last vital push at the end of this process. I also would like to thank my nephew Nick Cruz for his assistance with all the final revisions. Finally, I want to acknowledge my niece Veronica Cruz for the many hours of assistance of technical support given to me throughout all five years of the program.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

the memory of my husband Arnold Frumkin, who was the best of all men,

my daughter Laura Grappo, and my twin grandchildren, Rocco and Luz.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Entering a new school can cause apprehension and anxiety for any student. For the immigrant Latina/o child, it presents an enormous challenge replete with feelings of inadequacy, incomprehensibility, and, at moments, even shame (Nieto, 2010). The culture shock is severe for the new arrival and subtler for the Latina/o child born in the United States or brought to the United States at a very young age.

In this study, I view the school experience through the eyes of the children. In this endeavor, I am cognizant of the courage that needs to be mustered in order to confront the multiple challenges that a Latina/o student faces each and every day of school. It is not only the different language but the implications of the new culture as well. The sociocultural dynamics of language informs my dissertation as well the notion of Discourse as opposed to discourse.

A discourse refers to the idea of language in use while “Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities” (Gee, 1990, p. 3). In order for the Latina/o student to function well in her new cultural environment and, of greater significance, to make academic progress, she must adapt to a bevy of constructs that dominant culture students are already aware of and take for granted.

Before becoming a researcher, I was a teacher for 32 years in the school where I conducted my research. I have been retired from the site district for nine years. Based on my experience as a classroom teacher, I composed the composite vignette that appears in Figure 1.1 as a way of describing the confusion and difficulty that negotiating the borderland of
home and school causes an immigrant child upon entering an American classroom (Merryfield, 1990). It is the tale of the voices of the many Latina/o students that I had the privilege of teaching. Like many of my students, in this composite Juan Carlos is a second grade student and a new arrival from Puerto Rico who speaks very little English and whose family is having difficulty sustaining themselves economically. See Figure 1.1.
Latina/o Culture Shock in an American Classroom:

An Immigrant Child’s Voice

My name is Juan Carlos Reyes Martinez and I am from Puerto Rico. Today is my first day of school in America. I know my new teacher will like me because my other teacher liked me a lot. Everyday she would smile at me, pat me on the head, and I always hugged her in the morning and when I went home.

I speak a little English because we study English from kindergarten on in Puerto Rico. I am very good in mathematics and I cannot wait to show my new teacher and my classmates. I wonder what is for lunch. I hope we have arroz con habichuelas (rice with beans) because I could not eat my breakfast because my stomach was hurting.

When I met my teacher, I was feeling nervous so I went over to her to hug her but she pulled away. Maybe she is shy. Her name is Mrs. Campbell and she has a very serious face.

She introduced me to the class but she got my name wrong. She called me Wahn Martinez. I could not tell her then or later that my name was not Juan Martinez; it was Juan Carlos Reyes Martinez because she is an adult and in my familia you never correct an adult.

Mrs. Campbell speaks very, very fast and it seems like she is always mad. My other teacher in Puerto Rico, Señora Peña Morales always made up little songs for our lessons and always smiled. We have to sit sooo long here and you cannot get up unless you raise your hand.
Lunch was not rice and beans. I do not know what they call what we had. I was starving so I ate it anyway. I made a friend whose name is José Luís. He is from Santo Domingo so he speaks Spanish too, like me. José Luís says the teacher calls him Hoasay. I laughed when he told me that.

After lunch something terrible happened! José Luís and another boy got into trouble. The bad boy pushed José Luís so naturally José Luís pushed him back. My parents always tell me if they hit you, hit them back, and hard. Mrs. Campbell got very mad and was yelling at José Luís and the boy.

I could not believe what happened next. The bad boy was looking disrespectfully right into Mrs. Campbell’s eyes. My friend José Luís had his eyes looking down at the floor like a good, respectful boy. The teacher yelled at José Luís and said, “Look me in the eyes when I am speaking to you.”

If I ever looked my mamí or papí in the eyes they would have gotten angrier and told me I was a málcriado (brought up badly) and that they were avergonzado (ashamed) of my disrespectful ways. Poor José Luís even got a letter sent home. Tonight he is really going to be in trouble. In my house and José Luís’s house, what the teacher says is very important.

We are supposed to love the teacher and respect her like a second mother. José Luís will not be able to tell his side of the story because the teacher is always right no matter what. He is in big trouble!
When we did mathematics, I was very happy because with the number written on the board it does not matter how fast you speak. I remembered to raise my hand when I saw five plus six and the teacher said, “Yes, Wahn,” and I said, “Elebon.” I was sure that was the answer but all the children began to laugh and laugh. My face got very, very red. I do not know why they laughed. I know that was the right answer.

I was glad when it was time to go home. Although I am scared what mamí and papí will say tonight. The teacher gave me a big paper with so many, many things to buy for class. Papí has his new job but I know that he does not get paid for two weeks. They will be mad, but since the teacher is always right… I do not know what is going to happen. I have a big headache.

Figure 1.1. Researcher created composite vignette as a way of describing the confusion and difficulty that negotiating the borderland of home and school causes an immigrant child upon entering an American classroom.
The above dramatization manifests the convoluted and often painful reality that immigrant students are faced with upon their introduction into the American classroom. The child in this vignette who approaches his new school enthusiastically increasingly becomes disenfranchised as his expectations meet a different reality. Some teachers may be unaware of the physical affection acceptable in Puerto Rican culture and thereby without meaning to reject the Latina/o student’s physical gesture. They may also be unaware of the emotional impact a mispronounced name may have on an immigrant student and they may not know that in certain cultures a student may not correct an adult under any circumstance, even correcting the pronunciation of one’s name. Teachers may not recognize how fast their speech seems to nonnative speakers, nor may they understand the significance of smiling. Teachers may not know the importance of including a “repertoire of practices” (Gutiérrez, Bien, Selland, & Pierce, 2011). Also, middle class teachers may not realize the hardship imposed on families when they are expected to buy school supplies when living paycheck to paycheck. American teachers may not be aware that some Latina/o cultures encourage their children to retaliate when they are being bullied.

While the ethnic and racial composition of teachers has continued to be predominantly White, female, and middle class, the ethnicity and racial composition of the American classroom has changed significantly over the last three decades. Our present day reality is that urban schools as well as suburban and rural schools have a considerable increase in Latina/o students. This current demographic reality presents serious challenges for educators. In this study, I describe second grade Latina/o students who are successfully navigating the Discourses of home and school despite the many challenges facing these children of poverty and color.
Rationale for Selecting the Topic

The challenges of the acquisition of the secondary Discourse for students whose primary Discourse differs from the dominant culture is under-researched, especially for young children. Often what studies exist focus on the “deficiencies” rather than the strengths and successes. Educators need to be aware of students who are successfully navigating two cultures. Young Latino students not born in the dominant culture can serve as a model for educators to assist their Latino students. This analysis of an early childhood setting may contribute to our understanding of the differences in academic achievement between White and Latino students, and may contribute to our understanding of why Latino students are underrepresented in higher education (Swail, Cabrera & Lee, 2004). Our present global society mandates a need to approach all problems and issues in an inclusive manner.

Problem Statement

In an effort to contribute to the research base and meet the challenge of providing the best possible education for English Language Learners (ELLs) this study seeks to collect data to reveal positive strategies utilized by second grade Latina/o American students who are making good academic achievement despite a myriad of home and community challenges, including acquiring the secondary Discourse of school.

The voices of Latina/o teachers are also an under-utilized resource. Based on the memories of their schooling in the dominant culture attempting to acquire the secondary Discourse of school, teachers possess valuable, and often untapped, insight into the Latina/o students’ experience.

Unfortunately, the research on Latina/o American elementary students is meager and generally deals with the academic gap and other deficiency constructs. At present much
research highlights the disparity in academic progress between students of color and dominant culture students. In my dissertation, the focus is the opposite; I investigate the positive characteristics, behaviors, and self-talk of successful Latina/o second grade students. While there have been studies on metacognition, this dissertation includes the metacognition of Latina/o second grade students. Further, I deliberately seek to uncover home resources that contribute to student’ success through student responses to specific lessons.

Academic success is contingent upon many factors: anxiety and comfort level of the student, prior academic preparation, familial responsibilities, time management skills, economic stressors, academic assistance in the home and English language proficiency. It behooves us as educators to address this issue as soon as possible in the early childhood years if we are to be successful in ameliorating this loss of human potential (Nieto, 2010). There are few studies in the literature exploring how younger Latina/o students are succeeding in their acquisition of their secondary Discourse (Nieto & Bode, 2008). My study investigates the manner in which these young students navigate the worlds of school and home.

Latinas/os are currently the largest and fastest growing minority and by the year 2026 Latinas/os will make up 70% of the K-12 enrollment in the United States (Garcia, 2001). It is, therefore, imperative that educators avail themselves of research that can impact on improved Latina/o student achievement. At present, the reality is dismal; the National Center for Education Statistics (2008) reports there was an 18.3% high school dropout rate in 2008 for Hispanics as opposed to a 4.8% for Whites and a 9.9% for African Americans.

While these changes are occurring nationwide, California, because it has had the highest growth in Latina/o demographics, is given as an example here. Latina/o students accounted for 37% of public school students 15 years ago and at present comprise 49% of
California’s 6.3 million public school students (California Department of Education, 2010). The numbers of dropouts in California beginning in grade seven as illustrated in Table 1 is reflective of the manner in which the educational system is not meeting the educational needs of Latina/o students. It is clear from Table 1.1 that research with Latino/a student is much needed.
Table 1.1

*Dropouts by Ethnic/Racial Designation by Grade, State of California for the Year 2007-08*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>White</th>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>1,983</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>2,257</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>1,092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>5,570</td>
<td>1,427</td>
<td>1,747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>6,303</td>
<td>1,498</td>
<td>2,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>8,078</td>
<td>1,950</td>
<td>3,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>1,882</td>
<td>23,069</td>
<td>6,084</td>
<td>9,148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ungraded Secondary Dropouts

|                  | 5     | 106   | 23    | 47    |

Grade 9-12 Dropout Total

|                  | 2,973 | 43,126| 10,982| 16,315|

California Department of Education (2010)
Potential Benefits of the Research

In an endeavor to increase our knowledge of intervention strategies, it is incumbent upon educators to identify the factors that enhance Latina/o academic achievement. Academic triumph is directly related to individual psychological, physical, social, and economic well-being (Castillo, Cano, Chen, Blocker, & Olds, 2008). Furthermore, there seems to also be a relationship among substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, and involvement with individuals with a proclivity for crime and students who have poor academic performance (Martínez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004).

It is estimated that by the year 2016 “four out of every ten new jobs will require some advanced education or training. Thirty of the fastest growing fields in the economy today require a minimum of a bachelor’s degree” (Duncan, 2009, p. 1).

My dissertation confronts the problem of the academic gap by its concentration on academically successful Latina/o students from its earliest onset during the early childhood years. In expanding on the process of successful secondary Discourse attainment in young students in second grade, insights are gained into how the process evolves. The inclusion of teacher perceptions in addition to the intensive observation and collection of artifacts added rigor to the findings and conclusions. The qualitative undertaking involved in the present study helps to clarify the identity and acculturation underpinnings facing marginalized Latina/o students. This study investigated the manner in which these young students navigated the worlds of school and home.
Definition of Key Terms

1. *Code-switch* occurs when a person goes back and forth from one language to another. “Speakers of more than one language (e.g., bilinguals) are known for their ability to code-switch or mix their languages during communication. This phenomenon occurs when bilinguals substitute a word or phrase from one language with a phrase or word from another language” (Heredia & Brown, 2010, p. 1).

2. “*Confianza* refers to mutual trust and shared confidence” (Moll, Amani, Neff, González, 2005, p. 74).

3. *Discourses* are “ways of using language, acting, interacting, valuing, dressing, thinking, believing, and feeling (or displaying these), as well as ways of interacting with various objects, tools, artifacts, technologies, spaces, and times so as to seek to get recognized as having a specific socially consequential identity” (Gee, 2003, p. 7).

4. *Funds of Knowledge* (FoK) are “cultural and cognitive resources possessed by families with great potential utility for classroom instruction” (Moll, Amani, Neff, & González, 2005, p. 75).

5. *Hispanic* is a synonym for Latina/o American.

6. *Latina/o* is more tied to national origin and not to language. *Latina/o* is more likely to be used by first or second-generation Latin Americans who have closer cultural ties to Latin America than to the USA. According to Murguia, “Generally speaking, the pan-ethnic term used in New York and California is
Latina/o while the pan-ethnic term used more often in Texas and Arizona is Hispanic” (Retta & Brink, 2007).

7. Primary Discourse is “attained early in life by individuals by being socialized in a family of a given type. There are ways with words, deeds, things, thoughts, and feelings that they recruit when they are being an everyday person, not a specialist of any sort” (Gee, 2003, p. 14).

8. Secondary school Discourse is the academic language of the school and dominant culture (Gee, 2003, p. 15).

9. Successful second graders are students selected by the researcher and classroom teachers using the researcher created Successful Second Grade Rubric.
Related Literature

I present three bodies of research in this dissertation to facilitate an explanation of the theories driving my investigation: Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) work in sociocultural cognition, James Paul Gee’s (1985, 1988, 1989, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2008) theory of Social Linguistics and Discourse Analysis, and Luis Moll’s (2005) theory of Funds of Knowledge (FoK), which forwards the need for a space in which students of color may share their home experiences and expertise.

In the explanation to follow, each of these literatures interprets particular social and cultural dynamics involved in the academic success of Latina/o American second graders and in the acquisition of the secondary Discourse of school. The literature sustaining this study indicates the need for educators to comprehend the complexity of the acquisition of a new Discourse for ELL students. The ELL must not merely become proficient in a new discourse or “language in use” but of necessity must also appropriate the hidden meanings of language: “ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects, to enact a particular set of socially recognizable identity” (Gee, 2008, p. 201).

Conceptual Framework: Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory

My study is based on a sociocultural understanding of the nature of language and the learning process. Specifically, speech is the indispensable factor in the organization of higher psychological functions (Vygotsky, 1978). Central to this concept is that thought development is shaped by language as well as the sociocultural background of the child (Kozulin, 1986). From this perspective it is imperative that ELL students acquire the new
Discourse in a timely way to ensure academic progress but in a way that does not denigrate their primary Discourse.

Vygotsky’s theory speaks to the notion of a permutation of the social environment with cognition. A culture is assimilated by youngsters through their attainment of cognitive constructs and behavior constructs learned from interaction with a “more knowledgeable person” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85). His conception was that the social interaction of the child would engender modifications in the thoughts and behaviors of the individual. Of particular importance is the idea that the thinking processes as well as behaviors differ between cultures (Berk, 1994). This idea is of great importance in my study in that one of my conjectures is predicated on the idea that successful Latina/o second graders have been more successful in the acculturation of the dominant culture of school.

Gallagher (1999) presents four basic tenets to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory:

1. Children construct their knowledge.
2. Development cannot be separated from its social context.
3. Learning can lead development.
4. Language plays a central role in mental development. (p. 1)

Self-talk as in soft whispering is prevalent among very young students in designing behavior and when attacking a rigorous task. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) assists a student in scaffolding the necessary components to problem solve with the support of a more skilled person thereby allowing the student to achieve beyond his developmental level. The last construct defining language as the mediator in cognition is part of the focus of my study.
Conceptual Framework: Discourse Analysis

James Paul Gee (2003) speaks to the notion of discourse with a capital D, describing lower case d in discourse to merely depict the conception of language-in-use. Alternatively, the word Discourse with the upper case D is a more comprehensive construct encompassing not only the uses of language but the nuances, the meanings, visible indicators such as clothing and body language, as well as the affective and cognitive interpretations and, of great salience, the social identities that are construed from the dynamics of the Discourse. In essence, Discourse influences our thinking, our emotional reactions, and our perceptions of who we are.

All individuals acquire a primary Discourse by virtue of living with their family in a community. The Discourse has sociolinguistic implications and predisposes the person to acquire a particular lifeworld. Gee adapted Habermas’s construct of worldview (Habermas, 1984). The lifeworld is an overarching construct that colors one’s manner of socially interacting as well as a development of norms, attitudes, expectations, deeds, and an affective sense of solidarity with members of the same lifeworld perception (Gee, 2003).

In the natural course of life, all individuals inherently are exposed to and of necessity acquire secondary Discourses. Students upon entering the academic arena are required to adapt to academic Discourse as well as adjust to the teacher and classroom. Naturally the more congruent the primary Discourse of the individual is with the secondary academic Discourse, the easier is the acquisition of the new Discourse. Gee (2003) presents a compelling example of an African American child involved in a share time in an early childhood class. In this case, the child as per her primary Discourse rendered an exciting topic-associated story reflective of the oral culture of her family much to the chagrin of her
White middle class teacher who could not relate or appreciate a tale not expressed in a sequential one topic manner.

In the course of my data collection, I specifically concentrate on the manner in which my focal students as well as the other students in the sample evidence the learning of the dominant culture’s discourse and Discourse. Secondary Discourse proficiency is directly aligned with positive academic outcomes (Gee, 2003). Smooth transition into a secondary Discourse is impacted by one’s ability to identify and relate to the voice and literal meaning of text as well as the implied meanings. Gee (2003) presents the notion of an individual’s vernacular and how one is required to acclimate oneself to academic language in order to attain academic success. In the case of Latina/o students and other students whose home language is not English, and whose culture is not the dominant European-American culture of school, the learning of academic language is doubly difficult as well as interacts with “identity formation and connections or lack of them” (Gee, 2003, p. 17).

Conceptual Framework: Funds of Knowledge

Another dynamic of the problem of attaining a secondary Discourse is the perception of educators as Latina/o students being positioned as deficient rather than viewed as owners of divergent Funds of Knowledge (FoK). Moll (2005) explains the idea that children of color and their families should not be viewed in this manner. They possess other FoK that merit our respect as educators and should be inculcated into our curriculum and effective practices. In addition, Oughton (2010) articulates that when educators recognize these familial funds of knowledge as valuable in the educational process of students then there is a disruption in the current perspective of the “discourse of deficiency” (p. 75) for this segment of the
population. I utilize these FoK in my interactions with the participants in an endeavor to access the knowledge they possess.

Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González (2005) address the idea that within each home in which a child of color resides there exist a multiplicity of skills and knowledge that the authors recommend teachers acknowledge in their curriculum. The authors advise teachers of students of color to make the school-home connection in a more effective manner in which parents can participate in their children’s education via their expertise. This way, students can articulate a voice reflective of well-honed skills developed in the home facilitating a relevance and problem-based approach to the educational experience.

Moll and Greenberg (1990) describe the construct of the exchange of FoK in which the teacher develops a network of connections with community resources utilizing the life experiences of real community individuals as a cogent approach to curriculum. The authors speak to the notion of confianza, mutual trust between parents and teachers. The confianza construct facilitates the sharing of family FoK in the school setting. The context of teaching and learning becomes real and has a direct impact on motivation and improved academic achievement. The authors explain literacy events as depicted by a student writing the life story of his immigrant grandparents. In essence, instruction is reorganized in such a way that the student, his family, and the community are the focus through which the child develops literacy.

Methodology

Research Questions

My study examined how second grade Latina/o American students achieve success in school. By using a systematic approach, I addressed the following questions:
1. What social and cultural factors contribute to the academic success of Latina/o second graders?

2. How have students whose primary Discourse differs from the dominant Discourse acquired the secondary Discourse of school?

**Population**

The participants in this study were a sample of convenience that suited the purpose of the study. The sample was drawn from a population of 466 K-2 students from a small, suburban community in the Northeast. The sample consisted of two second grade classes whose demographics are 81% Latino, 14% African American, 4% White, and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander. Seventy-four per cent of the school’s student body qualified for free or reduced price lunch and 51% of the student population was ELLs. In addition, a focal group of four students from each class was chosen. The classroom teacher and I together selected students making good progress in the acquisition of the secondary Discourse as illustrated by their written work and oral participation and as reflected in the *Successful Second Grade Rubric* (Appendix A).

**Research Design**

My investigation was a qualitative case study employing the ethnographic tools of observation, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, as well as the collection of a series of artifacts created by the sample revealing data comparing and contrasting the dynamics of home versus school. Through this series of observations of academically proficient Latina/o American students, interviews with teachers, and a collection of student artifacts my intention was to attain a list of academic behaviors used by these successful
students, identify themes, develop a thick description, and, based on my empirical data, make recommendations for practice and research.

To recapitulate, this study was a qualitative study of the factors that contribute to the successful attainment of the Discourse of school by second grade Latina/o American students. The present investigation addresses the social and cultural factors that contribute to this achievement. In addition, the research focused on how the secondary Discourse of school was actually attained. The data I gleaned from this study and implications for practice factor into strategies for the enhancement of academic strategies for other young struggling Latina/o students.

My insider status (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005) of being both a retired teacher from the sample school as well as a member of the group being studied both assist and impede my progress. My critical reflection was augmented by my memories of having taught for 32 years as well as my autobiographical reflections of my own school years and influences both the tone and nuances that I include. On the other hand, I considered despite my consciousness of attempting to simply record what I heard and saw that a small amount of residual bias may have colored my telling of the story as it was impossible to completely eliminate all bias.

Guided by Saldaña’s 30 coding categories, with a focus on In Vivo, Values Coding, and Focused coding, I generated many codes in the first cycle coding phase (Saldaña, 2009). In the second cycle coding phase, I sought to merge codes by developing “a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 149).

I coded all data from the various sources: observation, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and the collection of written and drawn artifacts. My coding consisted
of: descriptions, “regularly occurring kinds of behavior,” observations on how people tell their stories, passages, and observed “ways of thinking” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 174).

I used thematic analysis as described by Bernard and Ryan (2010) to analyze my data. My unit of study was the eight focal children identified in the two second grade classes. Using observations of and interactions with those students, the teachers and I identified the focal participants of the study. These children were analyzed in a more in-depth manner in order to ascertain what could be garnered about the students’ academic success. I also conducted small mini-lessons during the course of the study whenever the classroom teachers were able to spare the instructional time. After the small mini-lessons artifacts were constructed by all students, which I coded.

**Successful second grade student rubric.** I constructed an instrument in an effort to meet the overall areas of the focus of the study as well as to select the focal students. As a retired early childhood teacher with 32 years of experience in public education, I felt qualified to create an instrument. The rubric addressed the following areas: participation, assignments, working in groups, social skills, small group work assisted by teacher, and observed reading skills. See Appendix A. The classroom teachers and I scored the rubrics separately and came to consensus in the final selection of four focal participants from each class.

**Student created artifacts.** I taught mini-lessons that were reflective of second grade language arts and social studies curricula. Analysis of artifacts was limited to students whose parents gave written consent. Comparisons were made between focal students’ artifacts and other participants in the two classes.
**Informal student interviews.** Students with parental written consent were informally questioned, on occasion, in an attempt to fully understand a created artifact. An example of such a procedure was, “Will you tell me about your drawing?”

**Teacher interviews.** Interview questions in Appendix C consisted of queries addressing teacher perceptions of student behaviors and strategies utilized in student acquisition of the Discourse of school. These questions were not a protocol as the interviews were all semi-structured.

**Field notes and observations.** Thick description of all second grade students who provided consent were collected reflecting my impressions of language exchanges, student behaviors, and other dynamics in the acquisition of the Discourse of school. In addition, I spent time studying, scripting, and quoting the eight focal participants. There was no specific protocol used to collect this information. Observations of the second grade Latina/o American students garnered a comprehensive description relating to the strategies and behaviors they employ in the successful acquisition of the secondary Discourse of school.

**Video-taping observation protocol.** During small group lessons the four focal participants from each class were videotaped with the other members of the group who had given consent. I viewed the videos at a later point in an effort to confirm data collected during interviews and observations.

**Limitations**

Limitations that may affect the generalizability of this study were the small groups of four participants per class for the observations. In addition, the overall groups consisted of only second grade Latina/o American students from one geographic location. Furthermore,
all participants hailed from the same K-2 school and the same working class community (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature is submitted to substantiate the necessity for research in the area of Latina/o successful academic achievement in the elementary school. The review also presents a comprehensive foundation for the understanding of the dynamics involved in the acquisition of a new school Discourse as well as an insight into the challenges of such an undertaking. The theoretical basis for this research are founded on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) in social cognition, James Paul Gee’s (1985, 1988, 1989, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2008) theory of Discourse Analysis and its influence on students’ learning, and Luis Moll’s (2005) theory of Funds of Knowledge (FoK) advocating for a platform on which students of color may share their home experiences and texts, as well as the potential for moderating curriculum. I have also included references from Sonia Nieto (2010), a renowned Latina educator whose focus has been on multiculturalism. Furthermore, I have included writings from other Latina/o educators as a means of articulating their perspectives as educators of English Language Learners (ELLs) as well as their personal memories of their American school experiences as ELLs. I believe their voices were essential in my understanding the dynamics of my investigation. The above theorists and researchers mentioned have all made significant contributions to the corpus of knowledge that informs the direction and foundation of this study. The scaffolding and interrelationships of these theories and their impact on the study will be evidenced throughout this chapter.

Vygotskian Psychology

Vygotsky’s conception of psychology is predicated on specific ideas relating to the main notion that thinking is a human mental activity that is acquired by means of social
learning. Social signs, culture, and social relationships impact upon the thinking of an individual through a process of internalization. Culture specifically is adopted by neuropsychic systems that become part of the physiological activity of the human brain. The process is perpetuated by social interaction with adults in a manner that instantiates sensorimotor schemas that are salient in future understanding of social meanings (Blanck, 1990).

Furthermore, Vygotsky explains that an individual's internalization of these culturally created sign systems alters behavioral constructs, impacting the development of that individual. Speech specifically is the mediator and conduit through which higher psychological functions are systematized. It is through the joining of speech and practical activity that children form the foundation upon which they subsequently develop the capacity to positively interact with their environment as well as the ability to self-regulate their own behavior. Hence, speech and action are both necessities to systematizing higher psychological functions during children's development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Diaz, Neal, and Amaya-Williams (1990) described four stages in Vygotsky’s theory of cognitive development. The first stage is the “natural and primitive responses” stage, in which children, in reaction to the environment and by virtue of their nervous systems, respond to their surroundings in a basic stimulus-response fashion. The second stage involves beginning mediation. Children execute behavior in response to external signs; however, they do not completely comprehend the complexity of the mediation of signs. The sign must be concrete and visually connected to the stimulus, such as pressing a lever to create a sound. During the third stage, children develop an awareness of a relationship between signs and cognitive activity. They dynamically exploit signs in an endeavor to
facilitate a specified outcome. Children have a rudimentary sense of self-regulation. Internalization occurs during the fourth stage. Children develop an “internal representation” of the relationship among stimuli, signs, and behavior.

By the conclusion of the final stage of cognitive development, children have expanded their self-regulatory expertise and the activity and use of external signs have been incorporated into the organization of their brains. The brain’s organization commences from the external in the form of social activities, which are replete with the usage of signs, to the internal activity of the brain “aimed at mastering oneself; the sign is internally oriented” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55). The difficulty of internalization for ELL students was of considerable concern to me throughout the entire process of my field experience. Speech in English, as well as the signs of the classroom, is culturally conceived and their use is predicated upon an understanding of the complete Discourse.

Gallimore and Tharp (1990) addressed the concept of a Vygotskian theory of education in which teaching is viewed as assisted performance with six strategies of delivery. The following six strategies of assisting performance in detail are: modeling, contingency managing, feeding back, instructing, questioning, and cognitive structuring. Modeling is a technique in which the adult presents behavior that the students will imitate in the execution of their social activities through a “guided participation” mode. In terms of schooling this is enacted among the teacher specialist, students of higher ability or peer models, and the students who are to learn the modeled behavior.

Contingency managing is a strategy for assisting performance in which the teacher or other adult employs rewards and punishments for desired or undesired behaviors. This strategy cannot be used with a new behavior, however, which limits its usage.
Another strategy for assisted performance is feeding back. This technique must include the construct of a standard to be compared with the individual performance if it is to be effective. There is a bevy of feeding back mechanisms such as graded written tests, corrected tests, and assessments that use rubrics as a standard for comparison. Feeding back is a natural phenomenon in interactive teaching.

The next strategy for assisted performance is instructing, which is the most commonly used strategy for assisted performance in everyday activities in all contexts. The instructing strategy is utilized in behavioral matters as well as in explanations of assignments. Gallimore and Tharp (1990) revealed that instructing should be used often in teaching. The “self-instructing voice” of the teacher becomes the student’s own “self-instructing voice” that is needed when engaged in the “transition from apprentice to self-regulated performer” (p. 181). The researchers reported that instructing is unfortunately rarely utilized to assist the performance of the next act needed for a student to begin to move through the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky's conception of the ZPD will be further explicated later in this section.

Questioning, and specifically employing higher-order thinking questions, is a fifth means of effectively assisting student performance. “Questioning explicitly calls for an active linguistic and cognitive response” (p. 181). In addition, when questioning is undertaken two outcomes occur:

First, there is the mental and verbal activation of the pupils, which provides them with practice and exercise. Second during the exercise of the pupils’ speech and thought, the teacher will be able to assist and regulate the students’ assembling of evidence
and their use of logic. If the teacher only lectures, he or she will never know what the students are thinking. (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 59)

Finally, cognitive structuring may be used to assist student performance. Cognitive structuring is a method in which the teacher directly helps the student by providing a structured manner in which to organize the cognition and actions of the learner. The way in which the teacher accomplishes this runs the gamut from a one-word definition to complex explanations of the process of organizing cues and clues from the text.

In conclusion, the above mentioned techniques of modeling, contingency managing, feeding back, questioning, and cognitive structuring are all effective in the assistance of student performance, as they all lead to the improvement of academic achievement. A cornerstone of Vygotsky's theory, however, is that all of these strategies must be directed towards individuals through their ZPD.

**Zone of Proximal Development**

“The development of any performance capacity in the individual represents a changing relationship between self-regulation and social regulation” (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990, p. 184). According to Vygotsky’s theory of cognition, students should be taught at a level above their current cognitive level as measured by their ability to complete a task individually. His construct consisted of a four-stage process. In the first stage, Assisted Performance by Others, a “more capable other” assists student performance of an activity. During Assisted Performance by Self, Stage 2, the student now has a working comprehension of the diverse components of the activity and how those components relate to one another. The student is furthermore cognizant of the meaning of the activity. The transfer of comprehension to application and the independent completion of the activity are now the
responsibility of the learner. Notably, though the performance of the activity is independent, it is not yet automatic. The student still self-assists using techniques such as: displaying verbalization aloud in what is termed *self-directed* speech.

It is in Stage 3, Automatic and Internalized Performance, that the student’s performance of the activity fully develops and becomes automatic and internalized. The student no longer uses self-regulatory constructs, such as self-directed speech, and therefore is no longer in the ZPD. Vygotsky uses the word *fossilized* to explain that the activity is fixed and no longer reactive to social or self-regulatory influence. The Deautomatization stage occurs when a student forgets how to complete the task and again must seek performance assistance. Thus, the learner is recycled through the ZPD. The recursion through the ZPD is quicker; the student requires much less assistance to reach automaticity again. See Figure 2.1.
Stages of the Zone of Proximal Development

Figure 2.1 Researcher made figure. Information from Gallimore & Tharp, 1990, p. 185.
I considered Vygotsky and research that supported his theory essential to the foundation of my study. His constructs of social cognition and internalization of culture through the acquisition of speech were dynamics that related to the Latina/o students and to the research questions driving my investigation concerning the social and cultural factors that facilitated the second grade successful academic achievement. In specific, his description of the inculcation of culture by neuropsychic systems of the brain of the individual was one of the most important constructs of the investigation. In terms of my second research question concerning the acquisition of the language of school, Vygotsky’s notion of the importance of speech as a channel for higher psychological functioning related to the importance of the acquisition of the new Discourse. Further, due to many ELLs limited English proficiency, the ZPD construct is fundamental in their academic journey. In addition, ELLs should be assisted in performance within the ZPD in a very structured manner habitually.

The following articles on ELLs were investigations whose theoretical underpinnings were attributed to Vygotsky. Jiménez, García, and Pearson (1996) conducted an experiment to study the relationship between bilingualism, biliteracy, and metacognition, in which the sample consisted of 14 sixth and seventh graders from two schools. The sample was made up of eight Latina/o successful English reading students, three Latina/o marginally successful English reading students, and three monolingual Anglo successful reading students. The instruments utilized in the study were reading passages chosen from textbooks, tradebooks, and encyclopedias. The materials were selected for their criterion of inducing metacognitive strategies. Prior knowledge task and a background questionnaire were also administered.

The researchers evidenced that successful Latina/o students used the following bilingual strategies for decoding: searching for cognates, translating, code-switching, and
transfering skills from the native language to the academic English language. In addition, the successful Latina/o students sought comprehension through the usage of the strategies of invoking prior knowledge, inferencing, stopping frequently during the reading of the text to question understanding, using context clues, and constant monitoring of their overall comprehension. The conclusions of the study reported that bilingual individuals appeared to display an acute awareness of the characteristics of language and its functions (Jíménez, García, & Pearson, 1996). They concluded that the more successful Latina/o students clearly articulated an awareness of the advantage of “cross-linguistic transfer.” During the time of my fieldwork, I paid close attention to the findings of this article and was gratified to find confirmatory evidence.

In a study conducted by Volk (1997), the relationship of culture to questioning in activity settings was undertaken in a bilingual kindergarten class and in the homes of two of the students from the class. The author sought to describe the meshing of “continuities” and “discontinuities” between “values, motives, and patterns of questioning in the home and school” (p. 23). Data collection was ethnographic and analysis consisted of the examination of interaction patterns as well as discourse patterns. During the course of one academic year, Volk observed in both the academic setting and in the homes of the two focal students. To achieve trustworthiness she also carried out a series of interviews with adult participants as well as audiotaped her fieldwork. Coding of data was completed by a third party, a bilingual Puerto Rican adult who translated all data. The 6,022 questions were coded and frequencies and percentages were done as well to add a small quantitative aspect to the qualitative investigation. The findings indicated that a recitation script type of questioning was
frequently used in both settings. A recitation script is a type of questioning in which the student orally answers questions on previously taught material that is asked by an adult.

In addition, Volk claimed that “recitation script has been universally described as constraining children’s language and cognitive development” (p. 43). In terms of cultural values, adult participants in both settings were congruent in their communicating the importance of education as well in their concurrent belief in the salience of the maintenance of Spanish and the culture of the home. The fact that the teacher was also Puerto Rican and bilingual may have influenced this result—had the teacher been Anglo, perhaps the findings would have been different. During the course of my fieldwork, I paid particular attention to comparing and contrasting Discourse between Anglo teachers and Latina/o teachers.

A study conducted in 1998 by Calderón, Hertz-Lazowitz, and Slavin evaluated the efficacy of a cooperative learning program entitled Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (BCIRC) with 222 ELLs in second and third grade who were transitioning from Spanish to English. The researchers expected that the program that promoted comprehension by giving daily time to students to have the choice of using their primary Discourse and/or their secondary Discourse to garner meaning cooperatively and to problem-solve would perpetuate higher academic achievement in English for those students. The researcher found that on the reading scale of the Norm-Referenced Assessment Program for Texas (NAPT), BCIRC students scored higher ($p < .01$) than comparison students, with an effect size of +0.63. Once again this study appears to support Vygotsky’s ideas of social meaning making and its relationship to achievement.

Klinger and Vaughn (2000) conducted an investigation exploring the means by which bilingual students assisted each other in content lessons while learning in small groups of
heterogeneous students. The groups were instructed in the use of a classroom strategy entitled Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) that endorses a four-step methodology: Preview, Click and clunk, Get the gist, and Wrap-up. In the Preview stage, students access prior knowledge and make predictions on what the text will be about. During the Click and clunk step, students are able to identify problems with comprehension by highlighting any words or concepts in the passage while they are reading silently. Students recapitulate the main idea of the text during the Get the gist stage by taking turns and individually relating each perspective. The Wrap-up consists of summarizing all data and initiating teacher type questions that might be asked on an assessment.

The sample for this investigation was 37 students from a fifth-grade elementary school. The demographics of the school were: 94% Hispanic, 3% White, 1% African American, and 1% Asian. Seventy-five percent of the school population qualified for free and reduced-price lunch. Each group was heterogeneous with two high achieving or average students, proficient in Spanish as well as English, and two ELLs. All text was in English but groups code-switched from Spanish to English particularly when discussing the unknown vocabulary and difficult concepts. All group sessions were audiotaped and later transcribed by a bilingual research assistant. The data produced 4,072 utterances for analysis. In addition, researcher-constructed vocabulary tests were administered twice. The test required the participants to write definitions for concepts in their own words.

Transcripts were analysed to ascertain if coding by two raters was concurrent in their interpretation of the frequency with which each participant used each CSR strategy. “Intercoder agreement was calculated at 96%” (p. 79). The second analysis required a reanalysis in which the investigators developed a classification system in which the
transcripts were reread and identification was made of helping behaviors that had occurred in
the groups. Once again interrater agreement was sound with 93% agreement. After this,
another researcher coded all transcripts by himself and two other researchers each coded half.
Differences of opinion were resolved through discussion and eventual consensus. A fourth
researcher coded all data with results indicating 95% agreement.

The six groups showed the following percentages of helping utterances: Group 1
showed 15%, Group 2 showed 10%, Group 3 showed 13%, Group 4 showed 5%, Group 5
showed 21%, and Group 6 showed 19%. In addition, two paired sample t-tests were
conducted on pre-tests-to-posttest gains on the researcher-made vocabulary tests. The results
were significant with \(t(21) = 7.28, p = .000\) for the first test and \(t(27) = 6.73, p = .000\) for the
second test. The findings revealed the efficacy of cooperative groups with bilingual students
of various levels helping one another to scaffold new concepts and vocabulary in a
comfortable manner through the use of student-led discussions. The CSR technique appears
to create a conducive setting for student agency as well as an effective manner in which
comprehension and vocabulary acquisition especially can advance. During my fieldwork I
noticed and documented this tendency of bilingual children to assist less competent English
speakers by translating teacher speak in soft undertones throughout formal lessons.

During an entire academic year, Jiménez (2000) conducted an investigation with the
goal of exploring how biliteracy interacts with identity. The author had a sample of 85
students from four bilingual classrooms from fourth to sixth grade. He endeavored to gain an
understanding of how these Latina/o students in bilingual classrooms were being instructed
in literacy. In addition, Jiménez and colleagues attempted to develop a different instructional
methodology that would promote Latina/o literacy expansion.
The data collection sources were: (a) classroom observations, (b) dialogue between teachers and the researcher, (c) think-aloud procedures where students attempted to understand and articulate their thinking, (d) student interviews, and (e) teacher interviews. All data were coded and recoded and generated the following assertions. Student participants had a fear associated with English literacy learning—that of losing their home language, Spanish. Findings from the data expressed the trepidation as “their fear of Spanish language loss was like a gaping hole left in their identities” (p. 995). There was tremendous stress generated in students' role of “language brokers” for their family members. In many instances, students relayed attempting to translate language and conceptual ideas beyond their comprehension level as in trying to understand the protocols of income tax or insurance issues. The acquisition of English literacy was viewed by participants as challenging and having little to do with who they were and as irrelevant to their lives. The author’s recommendation for this finding was that teacher training must focus on culturally relevant instruction and a change in pedagogy must be effected to reflect multiculturalism. The researcher also concluded that it was incumbent upon teachers of bilingual students to promote student awareness that bilingualism was advantageous and must not be viewed as a deficit.

Volk and de Acosta (2003) spoke to the construct of syncretism. They explained, "syncretism was defined as a creative process in which participants draw on texts from diverse contexts and, by putting them together in novel ways, reinvent cultural practices" (p. 8). The sample consisted of three bilingual Puerto Rican American kindergarten students and the adults, teachers, and family members who were directly involved in literacy events with them. The data collection methods were: participant observation, audiotaping, interviews,
network mapping, and cultural insider perspectives. The authors described the theoretical framework of this study as a means of “analyzing literacy practices as both culturally embedded and socially constructed” (p. 10). Through the use of tapes and field notes, literacy events were analyzed for syncretism through intertextuality and intercontextuality. The home transcripts produced 46 literacy events with the following findings:

1. Home literacies were defined as syncretic. Participants reinvented home oral and written texts (Bible) when engaged in literacy activities.
2. Participants also referred to school texts when engaged in literacy activities.
3. The syncretic nature of literacy events combining school and religion added subjective meaning to the players.

The documentation of the way in which children would play church, replete with imaginary readings from the Bible, revealed syncretism as a prospective strategy for transfer in literacy. The authors suggested that educators endeavor to create a time and space for students to perpetuate the expression of their experiences and home texts, thereby creating classroom environments that are respectful of children’s FoK as well as honor their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. During my field work, I paid particular attention to and documented children’s references to home literacy events such as writing letters to relatives in the Dominican Republic.

Pacheco (2010) investigated reading activity through a case study of third-grade bilingual classrooms. He revealed that in response to high stakes standardized tests there has been a promotion of the implementation of skills-based literacy instruction. In the case of ELLs, this type of remedial methodology is endemic. Gutiérrez et al. (2002) claimed that this skill-based pedagogy was time consuming and while attending to minutia, the ELLs
primary discourse (Spanish) was constrained, leading to less satisfactory comprehension. Furthermore, Gutiérrez, Morales, and Martínez (2009) illustrated the deficiency mode through which educators view ELLs and their goal of “fixing” these deficient ELLs through rigorous remediation. Thus, the skill-based instruction brought on by high stakes testing appears to decrease ELLs’ growth. Pacheco (2005) presented the construct that, rather than a skills-oriented remediation, the goal must become to support comprehension through meaningful activities using sign systems such as language and reading. This inherent waiting for mastery over basic skills before focusing on comprehension is a travesty and injustice to students in their literacy development. Supporting this idea is the work of Martínez-Roldán and Sayer (2006), who studied the manner in which Latina/o students applied their bilingual capacities in the retelling of text. They documented the use of Spanglish as a tool facilitating their complete understanding of passages.

Pacheco (2010) amassed data from four bilingual third-grade classrooms. Research inquiries focused on the methodology implemented in the reading activities for ELLs in Spanish and English as well as an evaluation of those strategies. The researcher conducted a series of observations and videotaping of language arts activities. In addition, Pacheco gathered data through two-hour in-depth interviews with the participating teachers. The investigator claimed a cultural-historical theoretical approach to his work. Coding was conducted manually several times.

The findings of this study were dismal. Despite the fact that the students were receiving bilingual literacy services, the data substantiated the idea that all personnel were more concerned with English literacy as assessed on the state tests. It appeared that teachers who delivered instruction in Spanish did so in a less rigorous manner due to their knowledge
that accountability was negligible. The message given to the Spanish speaking ELLs was that their language was inconsequential. The analysis revealed individual skill literacy teaching despite lip service being given to the focus on comprehension. In addition, Spanish was not used as a scaffolding strategy. The English and Spanish literacy classes were separate entities with little encouragement for cross-cultural transfer.

In conclusion, Vygotsky and researchers who adhere to his theory are cognizant of the sociocultural dynamics in the development of cognition. The fundamental social aspect of meaning-making as well as the complexity of acquiring a school Discourse was brought to my attention repeatedly as I conducted my field work. Students translating instructions and concepts to peers was a common occurrence during my time in the second grade classes.

**Discourse With a Capital D**

In association with Vygotskian theory is Discourse Analysis theory. The following portion of this literature review will be both a description of the important constructs of Gee’s theory as well as a presentation of researchers whose theoretical base are reflective of Discourse Analysis. James Paul Gee (1985) spoke to the notion of discourse with a capital D, describing discourse with a lower case d to merely depict the conception of language-use. Alternatively, the word *Discourse* with the upper case D is a more comprehensive construct encompassing not only the uses of language but also the nuances and meanings. Further, the concept includes the affective and cognitive interpretations and, of great significance, the social identities that are construed from the dynamics of the Discourse. In essence, Discourse influences our thinking, our emotional reactions, and our perceptions of who we are. In this study, I paid particular attention to the many facets of Gee’s definition of
Discourse and focused on the hidden meanings and unsaid issues that were inferred in the many utterances of my participants in my field notes.

In the natural course of life, all individuals inherently are exposed to and of necessity acquire secondary Discourses. Upon entering the academic arena, students are required to adapt to academic Discourse as well as adjust and adapt to teacher and classrooms. Naturally the more congruent the primary Discourse of the individual is with the secondary academic Discourse, the easier is the acquisition of the new Discourse.

**Communicative Strategies**

Gee (1985) endorsed the idea that various social-cultural groups in our country developed distinct communicative strategies as well as diverse tactics for problem solving, social interaction, and even conceptualizing. He further proposed that these differences greatly impacted their making sense of experience. People of poverty often come from an oral tradition while the dominant White middle class hail from a literate based strategy (Gee, 1985). This construct of literate based communicative style privileges students whose primary Discourse is congruent with the school Discourse. On the other hand, even though the oral based communicative strategy has a lofty history with such works as the *Bible* and *Homer*, students whose home language practices adhere to this style are disadvantaged in the classroom.

**The Three Interlocking Systems of Language**

In 1988, Gee advanced the construct of three distinct systems involved in language. He presented the following: (a) the referential system, consisting of the literal meaning of an utterance, (b) a contextualization system whose function is to sustain social relations, and (c) an ideological system that reveals values and beliefs. Gee made reference to the concept of
worldview, a synonym for his aforementioned lifeworld, and its interrelationship with the themes, images, and ideas that are communicated through the choices we make in the language planning process.

Gee also illustrated a study in which an oral text entitled The Alligator River Story was told to a group of African American students and a group of White American students in high school. Upon having heard the story, each group was directed to rank the characters “from the most offensive to the least objective” (Gee, 1988, p. 28). The outcome revealed that each group of students interpreted the context in a divergent manner. The African American group focused on the social interactions and what the characters specifically said while the White American students attended to the psychological states of each character. Furthermore, each group revealed a distinct way of interacting in the world; the African American students were collectivistic while the White American students had an individualistic approach in their analysis of the story.

Of further significance is Gee’s idea that reading should not be construed as merely “the ability to decode and encode,” but rather to “view literacy as the interpretation that people give to the text” (Gee, 1988, p. 27). He also articulated the description of a teacher’s job as being the arbiter of Discourse. I observed and recorded many utterances by the adults in my study giving confirmatory evidence to their agreement in principle with Gee.

In 1989, Gee described the new discipline of Literacy Studies or Applied Linguistics in which he articulated the necessity for the spotlight to not just be on language or literacy but on the conception of social practices. He presented the idea of Discourse being analogous to an “identity kit” that requires adherence to the wearing of particular clothing as well as directives “on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that
others will recognize” (p. 7). Of particular interest in informing my study was his idea that acquiring a Discourse was very similar to second language acquisition and that both ventures were directly related to socially situated cognition (Gee, 1989).

He also articulated that the learning of a Discourse was undertaken in the form of “enculturation” (p. 7), which may be defined as an apprenticeship characterized by the learning of social practices perpetuated by scaffolding as well as the extended interface with individuals who are experts in the new Discourse. In my particular case, the experts, of course, were the teachers and other adults who interacted with the student apprentices as well as any student whose primary Discourse is reflective of White middle class Discourse. My study’s analysis of the successful focal students addressed the notion of acquisition of a new sociocultural perspective as a consequence of the acculturation process as being a central characteristic describing the subgroup.

Each person is greatly impacted by the original home primary Discourse that has been inculcated during the socialization process in childhood. Gee presented the possibility that, at times, acquisition of new Discourses, rife with the ideological component of language, creates variance with the values and beliefs of the primary Discourse. This discrepancy causes the person psychological dissonance and identity confusion as well. I was extremely interested in this facet of Gee’s theory. One aspect of my observations in my investigation of differences in student academic behaviors was to ponder as to the impact of cultural implications in the varied student behaviors I observed and to reflect on their impact on identity issues.
Situated Meanings, Cultural Models, and Reflexivity

Gee and Green (1998) continued the conversation in promoting the notion of studying learning from a sociocultural perspective in the “community of practice”—the classroom. The authors presented the idea that “language is a sociocultural practice and social resource of a group” (p. 121). They affirmed that Discourse Analysis is best done within an ethnographic framework. They presented “four key dimensions of language as social action and cultural resource that provide a foundation for our ethnographically grounded approach to Discourse Analysis: situated meanings, cultural models, reflexivity, and an ethnographic perspective” (p. 121). This research offered me a comprehensive overview of the way to mesh my study using the specific constructs of situated meanings, cultural models, and reflexivity.

A situated meaning as per Gee and Green (1998) is what we perceive as happening in that moment of communication predicated on our reading of the context based on our past experiences. Gumperz (1982) reported the idea of contextual cues that allow individuals to make meaning of the event. Nonverbal cues such as pitch, stress, intonation, pause, juncture, eye gaze, kinesics, gesture, and body language: “provide information to participants about the meaning of words and grammar and how to move back and forth between language and context (situations). Furthermore as conversations develop, participants often continually revise their situated meanings” (Gee & Green, 1998, p. 123). This specific idea of situated meanings is of relevance in the acquisition of a second language as so much of Discourse is founded on being privy to the unsaid understandings and perceptions of the culture in a specific context. Further, this construct of situated meaning making is crucial in interpreting the dilemma the new arrival is presented with when entering the American school setting.
The authors defined cultural models as:

story lines, families of connected images (like a mental movie) or informal theories shared by people belonging to a specific social or cultural group. Cultural models explain relative to the standards (norms) of a particular social group, why words have the range of situated meanings they do for members and shape members’ ability to construct new ones. (p. 123)

This idea is central in my interpretations of bilingual-bicultural children and adults. Do bilingual-bicultural individuals have cultural models from both cultures and/or a blend of both? Special attention was given to this dynamic during the data collection process and data analysis of my study.

Since Gee and Green (1998) viewed the idea of cultural models as a resource that individuals access to give direction to their actions, it is crucial for a bicultural person to be mindful of the need to reflect extensively. In addition, it behooves educators to be aware that ELLs must be privy to the new cultural models in order to act in accordance with the norms of middle class academic Discourse. For example, the cultural model of the importance of the individual in relation to self-reliance is a new construct diametrically opposed to an ELL’s notion of the collective and its interdependence. The reality in the American classroom is that ELLs must at times choose the individual approach and develop their capacity to utilize inner resources. The teacher can enhance this awareness by conveying the importance of individual efforts in the classroom without denigrating the equally salient construct of collective interdependence.

Gee and Green (1998) revealed that language furnishes “meaning to and gets meaning from social activity” (p. 127). The reflexivity piece of language was described as a strategy
in which, due to context, the person reflects on the possible meanings that could potentially be extracted from the social interaction and arrives at a specific interpretation based on his reading of the dynamics of what has transpired. Speaker-hearer relations are directly contingent upon the interpretation of each actor in the interaction.

Naturally our cultural perspectives define our construction of meaning. Once again the student from a non-dominant culture is at a disadvantage if his reflexivity draws different constructions of meanings, as illustrated in the story of Juan in chapter one. My study focused on this idea in terms of ascertaining if the focal successful Latina/o students and not the other students were making different sociocultural interpretations contingent upon their level of acculturation. In other words, is the ability to reinterpret meaning socioculturally the mediating factor that perpetuates the focal students’ academic success?

Using the techniques of Discourse Analysis, I analyzed and characterized sequences of verbal expression within events and scrutinized the connections among the sequences over time and among other activities in the classroom. In this manner, I developed an understanding of how congruent processes of reflection and construction of meaning were occurring when language was utilized in the particular situation. Learning was consummately interwoven with the Discourse transpiring at the moment of the event through the social practices that were being acted out. See Figure 2.2.
Figure 2.2. Researcher designed figure. Relationship among learning, Discourse, and social practices.
Gee (2011) presented the construct that speaking and writing create seven areas of reality (a) significance, (b) practices or activities, (c) identities, (d) relationships, (e) politics, as in the distribution of social goods, (f) connections, and (g) sign systems and knowledge. Significance can be construed to be universal in regard to particular events in life such as marriage or religious events; however, in other instances the significance of an event or meaning of an interaction is contingent upon one’s cultural orientation. For example, the notion of a grown child acquiring his own apartment would be a positive move towards independence in one Discourse while a sad rejection of the collectivistic group, in this case the family, in another Discourse.

In terms of practice or activity, we employ distinct ways of communicating. My Discourse for a professional meeting is dissimilar from my Discourse when going to the zoo with my great nieces. Practices or activities are enterprises that are sustained by their social, institutional, and cultural underpinnings. To natives of the Discourse, the practice is natural and can be defined loosely as the manner in which the actors endeavor to chain the various actions as well as the manner in which they intermix what and how they will present in the activity (Gee, 2011). During my investigation, I paid particular attention to the ways in which individual students carried out activities and in general I sought to identify students whose behavior stood out from the other students by virtue of the manner in which the student enacted the activity as well as the process she or he utilized.

Language also contributes to the structuring of identity. Role recognition is in the moment and dependent upon the individual task at hand: a teacher giving directions for an activity, a person speaking confidentially to a best friend, or a casual transaction with a stranger. All three examples require a specific type of language as well as other discursive
components. Relationship development and persistence are social and directly related to the Discourse of use. Our capacity to signal our affiliation or lack thereof is a means by which we build solidarity or distance ourselves. This dynamic of Discourse Analysis is an important issue specifically when working with Latina/o students as the research purports that relationships are a key characteristic for success with Latina/o students (Nieto & Bode, 2011).

Politics defined as the distribution of social goods is possibly an issue whenever language and its dynamics posit an interpretation as to normalcy or deviance. The communication of what constitutes suitability is dependent upon one’s social and cultural group. In the same way, the individual speaking as well as the person listening construct or are oblivious to the creation of connections or relevance. The sign systems and knowledge that specific language communicates are reliant on the convictions held by the particular speaker or listener and the social and cultural groups from which each hails. In this process, the notion that a portion of language has the capacity to privilege or deny privilege to specific sign systems is of portentous value for educators when denying students the right to speak their home language. In doing so, educators infer that students' native sign system is of little worth (Nieto & Bode, 2011).

Gee (2001) explained his view that “language is not about conveying neutral or objective information” (p. 716) but rather a means of expressing multiple perspectives about human experiences. He presented the idea that the grammar and words of a language are the catalysts by which the individual is allowed to construct individual perspectives. Furthermore, Gee presents an idea similar to that of Vygotsky: advanced students and/or
adults are fundamental in the students’ acquisition of the grammar and words needed to scaffold above student level constructs and resultant perspectives.

For the instruction of students whose primary Discourse is dissimilar from the dominant school Discourse, it is essential that teachers integrate into their lessons the vocabulary, syntax, and Discourse that will assist ELLs in their learning. As a former teacher of ELLs, I was aware that special attention was typically given to graphic organizers and that other hands-on materials were utilized as a means of assisting the ELL student in the internalization of the new academic Discourse. Graphic organizers assist ELL students by systematizing the secondary Discourse and highlighting the essential vocabulary and constructs and modeling how the language rules are applied. I took specific note of all such techniques during my fieldwork and documented these many resources in my record of my field experience.

Gee (2001) reiterated the construct that every language is compiled of various social languages. Socialization is the method by which new social languages are internalized replete with scaffolding, modeling, and direct instruction presented by more capable students and adult instructors. In the attainment of the new social language, the student or adult is acquiring a new identity as well. Value laden cultural models are the basic framework upon which individuals new to the Discourse are informed in relation to the social practices that are characteristic of the Discourse. They inform all as to what is considered normal “and what counts as inappropriate and deviant” (Gee, 2001, p. 720). In my investigation, I concentrated on identification of cultural models evidenced by both the focal group as well as the other Latina/o students.
At a forum in 2003, Gee presented a vision of how his thinking had evolved through the years in relation to Discourse as well as his transition from the discipline of linguistics to his compelling interest in education. Of particular interest to me and of extreme importance to my study, was his comprehensive explanation of the benefits given to White middle class students from the moment they are born. He illustrated how the daily dinner meal discussions in White middle class homes served as a forum upon which children were encouraged and allowed to give voice to their doings of the day while parents and older and more competent siblings scaffolded their efforts. This perpetual activity consisting of “concise, linear, and explicit language” (p. 16) is reminiscent of school literacy events.

In addition, and of more significance, is Gee’s idea that students integrate these practices into their own psyches and identify the practices as “part of the core sense of who they are in the world” (p. 16). The practices and the social language “resonate” with the students who have arrived with the “correct” primary Discourse, the middle class Discourse that is currently in power and unfortunately is often used to punish other equally valuable Discourses. On the other hand, students whose families do not engage in middle class dinner conversation are disadvantaged and must instantly acquire the new practice if they are to achieve academic success during literacy events. In the case of the Latina/o student who arrives at school without speaking English, the student is required to not just learn the English language but the complete repertoire of the academic Discourse as well.

Gee (2006) analyzed writing in comparison with oral discourse. One of his main points was the idea that writing is not decontextualized but rather depends upon the social languages or Discourses that the reader brings to the text. From this perspective, the reader bears the responsibility of attaching the writer’s meanings in his interpretations. The closer
the reader’s “membership in various social groupings (e.g., physicists, feminists, or fundamentalists)” (p. 155) is to that of the writer, the more the communication will be correctly interpreted as the author intended.

Gee presented the construct that there is often interplay between speech and writing and that both actions are contingent on “contextual interactions” for elucidation. He described the necessity of an examination of the social practices attached to each process as well as a need to focus specifically on the “values, ways of thinking, believing, acting, and interacting, and using various objects, tools, and technologies” (p. 155). Gee cited examples such as “practices in courtrooms, secondary science classrooms, urban tagging groups” (p. 155) and even second grade classrooms. He reiterated his conception of literacy being more than the study of reading and writing but rather an analysis of the practices in which literacy is “embedded.”

Of special note was Gee’s (2008) interpretation of the rationale for the academic achievement gap between students of color and their White counterparts. He claimed that the main thrust of the gap was attributed to the incomprehension of complex language on the part of students of color through the grades. His construal of what advances student comprehension of complex language was exposure to a fund of complex vocabulary before kindergarten. Gee’s referral to “home-based preparation” is further explained as social interaction through regular conversation with family members within the context of family practices. Once again, the Latina/o child is usually barred from this instruction by virtue of familial educational level and/or difference of home language.

The focus in early literacy on phonics, word recognition, and basic comprehension skills, such as recalling details and finding the main idea of a paragraph, are not reflective of
complex vocabulary and more convoluted comprehension skills. In reviewing Gee’s book *Situated Language and Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling*, Maybin (2006) revealed Gee’s dissatisfaction with the current teaching of reading in early childhood classes, especially in classes for children of color. The emphasis on phonics is tantamount to promoting student disengagement with literacy practices due to the fact that such skill teaching in isolation is tedious as well as does not promote an appreciation of literature.

The third edition of Gee’s *Social Linguistics and Literacies* (2008) was a comprehensive corpus of his Discourse Analysis theory. The author also explicated his view on the idea of the meaning of words. He reported the meaning making of specific words as “a negotiation between different social practices with different interests by people who share or seek to share some common ground” (p. 12). His discourse continued to illustrate that these negotiated meanings are constantly renegotiated and refined in the normal course of social interactions.

Gee (2008) illuminated the daunting task ELL students face in their educational process. He also presented a philosophical vision on his view of ethical human communication and interaction. With a social justice foundation, the author revealed his conviction that one should never do something that would harm another. His reference here referred to committing acts that in essence “deprive them of what they or the society they are in view as social goods” (p. 26). He spoke to the notion that each individual has a “moral obligation” to facilitate the alteration of cultural models that in some way privilege one group over another. Eakle and Dalesio (2008), in a study influenced by Gee, conducted an investigation in a second grade classroom in which the focus was on the manner in which museums can facilitate literacy learning in a complex and meaningful manner. The authors
cited Gee: "Some literacy researchers advance ideas that reading objects (e.g., pictures), spatial arrangements, and gestures are intimately connected with reading language texts, such as textbooks" (Eakle & Dalesio, 2008, p. 604). The researchers revealed museums to be a generative platform for “the reading of text as well as culture.” The reading served a specific communicative function, which is the way literacy works in the real world.

In the beginning of the study, the students of the class, led by their teacher, made their own exhibits in the classroom and also chose different museum jobs to role play, such as curator, public relations, tour guide, exhibit maintenance, librarian, or security guard. Writing played an important role in the project for researching topics, writing invitations, and the making of brochures and maps. The students also accessed digital art resources. The outcomes of the undertaking showed success. In one particular case, an Ethiopian (ELL) boy who was below level in reading and had a keen interest in automobiles was so motivated that the literacy acts and research he did actually assisted him in gaining twenty reading levels. This is the power of meaningful activities driven by personal interest. The students achieved more when reading, writing, and speaking to communicate relevant material concerning a subjective interest rather than to decode some abstract text.

Another important outcome was the social growth of a very academically advanced student. In the beginning of the project the student presented as an isolate but by the study’s end, through his role as curator, he assisted less capable students with the research and development of their exhibits. This role fostered interaction between the socially lacking child and other members of the class community. What was particularly noteworthy was that the process melded in-school literacy events with out-of-school literacy events in order for
the students both to realize the importance of literacy for life in general as well as to be exposed to great resources in their community.

In another study influenced by Gee and Discourse Analysis, Ciechanowski (2009) described the way in which ELLs in second and third grades learned the language of school. The sample consisted of 35 students in a Spanish-English immersion school. The author reflected on Gee and described his notion of any language being comprised of various social languages as well as the idea that different registers are utilized in different contexts. This study presented a step-by-step formulaic manner in which to work on the development of the constructs of a science unit on glaciers while at the same time allowing the students to draw on their previous knowledge amassed from popular culture in a movie about the Ice Age.

The methodology of the investigation was through analysis of texts and Discourse Analysis. Ciechanowski presented the idea that a Discourse Analysis of text expedited comprehension of the text within a larger realm and that the specific features of said text signify particular purposes, values, and norms of the dominant culture. The bilingual Latina researcher conducted on-site observations for six months collecting data through field notes and the collection of artifacts consisting of classroom texts and written work during science class. Interviews and observations were conducted specifically with a purposeful sampling of 12 focal students. The essence of the study was to illustrate content learning as well as consequential language development when the teacher made an attempt to fuse teachings among multiple texts while specifically addressing reality versus entertainment. ELL students were able to address the multiple texts and in their own words make meaning and sense of the contradictory constructs that they had been exposed to through popular culture and academic instruction. This crucial concept of student ability not only to access
information but more importantly to assess multiple texts is one of the facets of concentration in my study. The author presented utterances, small portions of text, from her fieldwork that clearly evidenced the deep learning of her ELL students.

In concluding this section of the review of the literature, successful academic achievement for ELLs based on Gee’s theories were facilitated by the use of both popular culture Discourse as well as the Discourse of a museum. These examples of Discourse were generative and rich evidencing that literacy practices that do not just focus on discrete literacy skills but instead embrace the multiple contextual aspects of literacy are the most productive and meaningful.

**Familial Funds of Knowledge**

In congruence with Vygotsky’s sociocultural view of cognition and Gee’s Discourse Analysis theory is Luis Moll’s Funds of Knowledge (FoK) theory, in which he asserted that ELLs should not be viewed as deficient but rather as possessing different FoK than their middle class teachers. Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González (2005) addressed the idea that within each home in which a child of color resides there exists a multiplicity of skills and knowledge that the authors recommended teachers inculcate into their curriculum. The authors encourage teachers of students of color to make the school-home connection in a more effective manner in which parents can participate in their children’s education via their expertise. In this way students can articulate a voice reflective of well-honed skills developed in the home, facilitating a relevance and problem-based approach to the educational experience.

Moll and Greenberg (1990) described the construct of the exchange of FoK in which the teacher developed a network of connections with community resources, utilizing the life
experiences of real community individuals as a cogent approach to curriculum. The authors spoke to the notion of confianza, mutual trust between parents and teachers. The confianza construct facilitated the sharing of family FoK in the school setting. Through the inclusion of family guest speakers, family interviews, as well as topics of study reflective of Latina/o American student life, the context of teaching and learning becomes real and has a direct impact on motivation and improved academic achievement. Moll and Greenberg (2003) explained literacy events, for example, as being depicted as students writing the life story of their immigrant grandparents. In essence, instruction is reorganized in such a way that students, their families, and the community are the focus through which children develop literacy. I tapped into the FoK when I conducted the mini lessons on home and school.

Moll and his colleagues are and have been actively engaged in the obliteration of the construct of deficiency in regard to students of poverty. When children of color arrive at school, they are often received in a dubious manner by their teachers, principal, peers, and the institution itself. These students are perceived as lacking in every conceivable manner; they speak the wrong language or a nonstandard form of the right language, possess the wrong values, and even have the audacity to have an interactive form of conversational style encouraging them to call out incessantly during lessons. All of these concepts are used as a rationale for lack of success in school (Gonzáles, 2005; Schultz & Hull, 2002).

Brown & Souto-Manning (2008) in addressing the deficiency issue stated that the “focus is on what the children’s home culture failed to provide them” (p. 26). Consequently, the strategy employed is that the deficiencies must be rectified in order for the students to gain access to academic achievement (Valdés, 1996). Furthermore, Valdés (1996) and Ogbu
(1981) spoke to the notion of a need to also “fix” the parents by the offering of a myriad of parenting classes and workshops.

Latina/o students and their families internalize these deficit messages as they attempt to acculturate themselves to a new environment and generate a perspective of not belonging and a confusion of one’s self-worth. In a study conducted by Brown and Souto-Manning (2008), a Discourse Analysis of a parental transcript indicated the Latina/o parents viewed their children’s knowledge of Spanish language as a deficit and were anxious, as well, to have their offspring transferred out of the ESL classes. Latina/o students also indicated a disdain for the students in the ELL classes, even mimicking Spanish accents as they conversed with the researchers.

The perception that speaking a language other than English is an obstacle to success in school leads many Latina/o students to lose fluency in their language of origin, thereby constructing walls to family intimacy and ties as well as leading to individual identity confusion. Brown and Souto-Manning (2008) expressed the destruction of culture and home language:

By promoting English-only practices and overvaluing English in and out of the classroom, we promote cultural genocide. It is our responsibility as teachers to make every language and cultural background count in the classroom so that students can feel successful and don’t have to lead double lives. (p. 37)

The above quotation is precisely what last century’s assimilation strategy did to the many groups of immigrants who came to America. In the name of becoming American, immigrants were forced to lose their primary Discourse as well as knowledge of their rich
ethnic origins. This loss of history and customs can negatively affect the Latina/o child’s identity as well.

In *Funds of Knowledge* (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) stressed the “power of social relationships in the construction of knowledge” (p. 2). Influenced by Vygotsky, Moll and his associates sought to explore “how cultural practices and resources mediate the development of thinking” (p. 4). The central focus of the authors was the idea that the households of students of color must be characterized as spaces reflective of strengths and resources. They suggested that in order to achieve a functioning teacher-parent partnership, the teachers must step out of their comfort zone and initiate home visits in the role of a learner and ethnographer. These visits, according to the researchers, allow the educators to begin to understand how the families, and consequently the students, “make sense of their lives” (p. 9). Through the creation of family narratives and labor histories, the teacher is made aware of the resiliency and problem solving skills that each family possesses. In addition, through these meaningful ethnographic endeavors, the teachers become part of the family’s social network. With this newly emerged tool of *confianza*, the parents are emboldened to ask questions and to participate in depth in the educational process of their children. The writers addressed the concept of zones of comfort. In the home the students learn by observing competent others complete tasks. They then, as apprentices, attempt to complete the task and are assisted by the adults through the initiation of questions asked by the learner as needed. The explanations are given during the actual doing of the task. This strategy is reminiscent of Vygotsky’s ZPD. Veléz-Ibáñez and Greenberg (2005) claimed: Because the feedback process is in the hands of the child, such zones of comfort allow self-evaluation and self-judgment. Children learn quickly that there are
constraints, but these are so obviously in their favor that such an understanding becomes the underlying basis for zones of comfort. (p. 62)

The authors verified that this wonderful strategy is not the way in which children are taught in American public schools. There is “little active student-controlled interaction” in most instructional activities. I was gratified to note that both the classroom teachers of my study’s classes seemed to innately be aware of these zones of comfort and conducted their lessons allowing for an interactive conversational tone that did not interfere with the impetus of the lesson.

Willis (1977) described his interpretation on acculturation in the following way:

Individuals actively appropriate certain elements of cultural practices, while discarding others. Students were seen as resisting certain structures and as active agents in constructing their own identities and ideologies. They were not passive recipients of reproductionist modes of culture. (p. 36)

González (2005) appeared to support Willis’s perception of acculturation when he describes the construct of FoK as a hybridity of culture.

In conclusion, Moll and colleagues are in agreement with both Vygotsky and Gee in that they view learning, cognition, and development as sociocultural processes. Moll’s emphasis has been and continues to be a focus on households and the potential inherent for student learning when teachers go to the trouble of investigating the areas of expertise that the families of their students possess. Involving familial assets directly into appropriate units of instruction is motivational, relevant, and respectful to students and their families.
Reflections of Latina Educators and Dominant School Discourse

In *The Light in Their Eyes* (2010), Sonia Nieto expounded on there being five important principles of learning that greatly impact student achievement:

1. Learning is actively constructed. (p. 35)
2. Learning emerges from and builds on experience. (p. 37)
3. Learning is influenced by cultural differences. (p. 40)
4. Learning is influenced by the context in which it occurs. (p. 42)
5. Learning is socially mediated and develops within a culture and community. (p. 45)

Other researchers supported Nieto's first construct that learning is actively constructed (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992; Freire 1970b). Paulo Freire presented the concept of “banking education,” (2011, p. 72) a method that he considered incomplete, as equating teaching with putting knowledge into students’ brains without any active engagement or meaning making on the students’ part. Therefore, according to Nieto, the learner being an agent of his own learning is crucial and can be promoted by active engagement in meaningful activities.

In addition, Nieto and Bode (2010) asserted the necessity of educators’ inclusion of evaluative tools beyond standardized tests and other short answer assessments. The employment of student portfolios as well as performance type evaluative tools would be superior indicators of deeper learning and would lead to greater cognition and applicability.

The second principle addressed is the construct that learning emerges from and builds upon experience. This construct is predicated on the assumption that all learners arrive at school having been exposed to encounters that perpetuate and lay a foundation for the
educational experience. Unfortunately, children of poverty have often not had the good 
fortune to participate in enrichment activities such as visits to museums, being read to 
habitually, and the myriad of other sundry White middle class activities that are congruent 
with school academic language and Discourse. This cultural capital possessed by certain 
members of society arms students with the wherewithal to sustain economic privilege. 

Bourdieu (1986) stated that:

Cultural capital is forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person 
has, which give them a higher status in society. Parents provide their children with 
cultural capital by transmitting the attitudes and knowledge needed to succeed in the 
current educational system. (p. 38)

Furthermore, Nieto (2010) raised the point when she gave an example of how a 
student who travels to Europe for a week in the summer is considered to have had a valued 
cultural experience while a Haitian child or Puerto Rican child who spends the summer with 
their grandparents, in their country of origin, is not perceived to have experienced a positive 
cultural experience. Perhaps educators must expand their notion of the definition of what 
constitutes a positive and enriching experience.

The perception that learning is influenced by cultural differences is also an important 
construct to consider. Greenfield and Cocking (1994) addressed this concept in a study in 
which she presents the notion of value themes and contrasts European American culture with 
that of African, Asian, Latin American, and Native American societies. Her view of 
individualistic societies reflected in European American culture value independence and 
personal goals. In a dissimilar manner, the other named cultures value a collectivistic 
approach in which the individual works towards the good of the group interdependently.
Educators armed with this information about cultural conflict can implement more group work and shared responsibility activities for all students substantiated by the construct of globalization.

Nieto (2010) further conceptualized that learning is also influenced by the context in which it occurs. Steele’s work (1992) presented the concept of stereotype stigma in a study about African American students reporting that some students perceive devaluation and are unable to identify with the entire mission of school due to an inability to identify and see themselves as part of the establishment. The students develop a psychological alienation impeding them from academic achievement viewing their ability to do the work as acting White. Conversely if students of color are made to feel respected and that who they are is acceptable, they are then motivated to engage in the academic process and, in addition, become agents of their own learning.

Another of Nieto’s constructs is that learning is socially mediated and develops within a culture and community. In support of this idea is Vygotsky’s work (1978), in which he considers learning and cognition as a sociocultural process, as well as the work of Bruner who states that “learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting and always dependent upon the utilization of cultural resources” (Bruner, 1996, p. 4). Furthermore, Forman, Minick, and Stone (1993) state that:

For example, appropriating the speech or actions of another person requires a degree of identification with the person and the cultural community he or she represents. Educational failure, in this respect, can represent unwillingness to subordinate one’s own voice to another rather than an inability to learn. (p. 6)
I attempted to be sensitive to this identification construct in my analysis and bore it in mind when drawing conclusions and uncovering implications.

The research that is presented next is an amalgamation of many Latina educators’ voices. Their pedagogical viewpoints are essential in comparing and contrasting their methodology with traditional American practices in schools. Latina educators offered their perspectives (Aguilar, MacGillivray, & Walker, 2000) concerning cultural conflicts as well as memories of learning how to read, reflections of higher education, and the contradiction of values between the Discourses of home and school.

The authors employed the use of two focus groups and 12 interviews to gather their data. The investigators’ focus was on the dynamics involved in successful Latina students’ identities and relationships. Participants reported considerable tension ensuing from a conflict of values. The issue was familial expectation that the daughter’s focus be on finding a husband to support her and on honing her domestic skills versus the dominant Discourse of individual attainment of academic accomplishments. In addition, several of the participants defined their role in their home as a language broker since they spoke better English than their parents. This reversal of the parent-child relationship in which the child, due to her expertise in English, is forced to assume the higher power position in the family in some cases leads to resentment, confusion, and discomfort to all (Aguilar, MacGillivray, & Walker, 2000).

Of considerable impact was the notion that familial problems were always viewed as being more relevant than school activities and schoolwork. The family story of one of my Latina friend’s cousins stands in juxtaposition to this finding. The young man had received a full scholarship to an Ivy League college and was doing well. Unfortunately, the father had
an accident and was not able to work, thereby compelling the student to quit college and his individualistic goals in order to come home and work to support the family.

Many participants received familial messages of the importance of school as a way out of the poverty in which they presently lived. In contrast, however, respondents also developed respect for the members of the family who, although not formally educated, possessed skills that had allowed the family to progress. One participant relayed that her grandmother equated education with power and the potential for independence (Aguilar, MacGillivray, & Walker, 2000).

Many of the participants agreed that being in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in school had a much lower status than regular education classes. They described their impatience to be transferred to the regular education classes as soon as possible, as they felt stigmatized by White teachers and students as well as by more acculturated Latina/o students (Aguilar, MacGillivray, & Walker, 2000).

In terms of identity, all of the teacher participants in the above study defined themselves as nerds completely focused on academic pursuits and rarely involved in social pastimes. In addition, the importance of positive role models was brought up as an influence in the promotion of a professional identification. Participants were positively impacted by the educational practice of tracking in terms of their educational progress. In terms of maintaining Latina/o social connections, only other academically successful Latina/o students were in the same classes. Participants spoke to the endurance and importance of these few relationships and to the negative treatment given to them by Latina/os not in the top classes (Aguilar, MacGillivray, & Walker, 2000).
English Language Learners

The focus of my study was second grade Latina/o American students and how they make successful academic progress, as well as an exploration into the process by which they learn English. In addition, the theoretical underpinnings of my study were contingent on learning being viewed as a sociocultural process. The corpus of field notes also was analyzed aided by Discourse Analysis theory and examination was also given to the notion of FoK. Therefore, the following articles are a review of studies undertaken within a range of the age group of my sample as well as the ethnicity of my participants.

In a qualitative article in a preschool classroom, Cheatham and Roe (2010) spoke to the notion that when young children are endeavoring to acquire a new language and have a rudimentary grasp of their first language, the students seem to go through a nonverbal period. This dynamic leads to the development of an interlanguage that is a type of transitory grammar in which the second language learner is engaged in internalizing the rules of the new language and accommodating the new structures with the rules of the first language. Many early childhood teachers may be led to assume that the child has no language when what appears to be happening is that the two grammars are being processed. In addition, as the speaker becomes more proficient, he begins to code-switch and may finish a sentence with the opposite language as well as substitute unknown words from the primary Discourse.

In a quantitative study conducted by Gottardo and Mueller (2009), 131 Spanish-speaking English learners were studied as they proceeded from first to second grade. English and Spanish oral language skills, word reading, and phonological awareness were utilized as predictors of second language reading comprehension. The resulting conclusions inferred
that oral language proficiency and word reading proficiency were significant variables in predicting proficient grade level reading comprehension ($R^2 = .80$).

In a longitudinal study of 57 fourth grade Latina/o children in which 26 were English Language Learners and 31 were English proficient, Morrison, Cosden, O’Farrell, and Campos (2003) endeavored to ascertain data that investigated factors discerning students’ perceptions of school belonging. The impact of English proficiency on students’ feelings of belonging was gleaned by the employment of two one-way repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVA) completed in the fourth grade and the sixth grade.

The analyses yielded a significant interaction between language proficiency and change in school belonging, $F (1, 55) = 5.72, p = .02$. At the end of fourth grade, the English Language Learners had a lower score using the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM; Goodenow, 1993a) than on the first administration of the instrument. At the end of sixth grade, however, findings did not indicate any interaction between language proficiency and school belonging.

Coleman and Goldenberg (2010) conducted a review of literature for Kappa Delta Pi Record on ELLs concerning academic language and literacy and contended that ELLs must specifically be taught and given practice in becoming fluent speakers and listeners of academic language. In any endeavor, to participate in content area discussions and in order to acquire meaning from lecture type lessons, the ELL learner must be provided with sheltered instructional strategies, such as context or visual clues, clarification of context, and construction of background knowledge contingent on students’ life experiences. The authors suggested teachers of ELL students focus on key passages in texts and highlight and define important words, phrases, and concepts with the class prior to their individual reading. They
also recommended the utilization of supportive visuals such as charts, graphs, maps, and photos.

In a study consisting of 22 Spanish-speaking children of migrant families, ages four-to-six years, engaged in a shared storybook reading activity, Lugo-Neris, Wood Jackson, and Goldstein (2010) investigated the impact of vocabulary intervention on the following three indicators of vocabulary growth on targeted words: English naming, expressive definitions, and receptive vocabulary. The study’s platform was a summer migrant education program. The study was carried out in a relaxed manner in which researchers selected members of the sample on a one-to-one basis and conducted the mini-vocabulary instruction during the reading of a big book.

This quantitative investigation was analyzed by the use of mixed analyses of variance (ANOVAs) done on the three dependent variables of vocabulary growth, which were English naming, expressive definitions, and receptive vocabulary. The results indicated that there were no significant interactions between the three factors on the three dependent variable measures. Significant interaction was, however, unearthed between language of instruction and expressive definitions. Furthermore, significant interactions were also discovered between language proficiency at the beginning of the study and growth on the three dependent variables. The outstanding implication of this study is that it sustained the idea that experiences in literary activities with entrenched vocabulary instruction facilitate new language acquisition and help develop academic language of the new language. Entrenched vocabulary instruction refers to the strategy of presenting direct instruction of new words in storybooks by the translating of new words into the home language in simple terms to enhance comprehension during the reading of the story.
Fradd & Lee (1999) evidenced that ELL students learning science should be instructed with the use of concrete experiences as well as the provision of advance organizers. They further promoted the inclusion of cooperative-learning activities, imaging, and interactive writing as a vehicle to enhance comprehension and a means of periodic assessment to correct misapprehensions as soon as they occurred.

The presentation of science constructs in a thematic manner greatly assisted ELL science students according to Krashen (2000). He also promoted supportive learning measures such as related topics, concepts, and vocabulary being infused throughout the day and the week, thereby guaranteeing exposure to the information enhancing retention and deep understanding. Krashen’s study further advised that ELL learners be assisted by a plethora of graphics, charts, and graphs to encourage the students to be agents of their own learning. Specific advice for teachers of ELLs was to gesture frequently and endeavor to conduct the lesson at a slower pace, enunciating clearly as well as rephrasing and repeating key terms, definitions, and concepts.

Conclusion

The theories and studies delineated in this chapter created a strong foundation and direction through the entire process of my study. The central focus of this investigation was to garner an understanding of how certain Latina/o students in second grade classes were able to make successful academic progress and to further comprehend the social and cultural factors that facilitated that outcome. In addition, I sought to bring clarity to the manner in which these focal students acquired the academic Discourse of school.

The literature review depicted here facilitated an understanding of the task involved in gaining a new Discourse as well as clarified the conception of the interconnectedness of
Discourses and cultural and social influences on cognition and learning. Further, an appreciation and realization of the strengths and coping strategies of the student households was substantiated and their relationship to academic success was elucidated. Much research has been conducted describing the failures of Latina/o students. I strove to analyze students who were successful in an attempt to document what behaviors they utilized and to foster sensitivity to the immense challenges to be overcome by students who arrive at school with a different Discourse than the dominant Discourse of school.

In this review of the literature, I have provided the theories and research that guided my investigation of the social and cultural factors that contributed to the academic success of second graders, and how those second grade students whose primary Discourse differs from the dominant Discourse of school have acquired a secondary Discourse. These second grade students faced a complex task and Vygotsky’s sociocultural learning theory, Gee’s Discourse Analysis, and Moll and his associates’ Funds of Knowledge research were especially informative in understanding the successful focal students in the study. Additionally Nieto’s principles of learning and studies on English Language Learners provided supplemental insights into my investigation.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative case study examined the social and cultural factors that contributed to successful learning for Latina/o American second graders as well as their acquisition of a secondary Discourse. Discourse Analysis theory guided my interpretation and methodology by focusing on the participants’ use of language in the attainment of their secondary discourse as they interacted in their daily school activities. Respect for family Funds of Knowledge (FoK) and Vygotsky’s focus on language and the role that language enacts on cognition in tandem with social interaction were also underlying theoretical frameworks.

In this chapter, I provide my biography; the research questions; a description of the setting; the research design; the instrumentation; the sampling procedures; the type of data; the method of analysis; the data collection procedures and timeline; and a statement of ethics.

Researcher’s Biography

To Be or Not to Be Latina/o

The following anecdote is a memoir from my childhood school days that I present as documentation substantiating the need for educators to understand the plight of the Latina/o American student. In third grade my teacher began a unit on nutrition. She glibly inquired as to what each student had had for breakfast. My class had only one other Latina/o student. This student when called on related that he had had coffee with milk, crackers, and cheese. The teacher became agitated and repeatedly said over and over that children didn’t drink coffee and that the breakfast did not have good nutrition. Other students related what they had had for breakfast and when my turn arrived I was faced with a quandary; if I told the truth the teacher would be upset and if I lied I wasn’t being true to my reality and my family.
Unfortunately and to my regret, the approval of the teacher seemed more important to me than being who I was. I related that I had had eggs, bacon, toast, orange juice, and a big glass of milk. Naturally the teacher was pleased with my response but the other Latina/o boy gave me such a look of sadness that I remember it to this day. In the quest to acquire a new Discourse a person should never be made to feel that their primary Discourse is less than or not acceptable.

**Ethnic Heritage**

I am first generation Puerto Rican in that my father came to the United States to seek employment in 1940. In 1942, he married my mother after a courtship of one year. My mother was first generation Puerto Rican American as her parents hailed from Puerto Rico thereby positioning me as second generation on my mother’s side. My family consisted of five children: two younger sisters and two older brothers, my parents, my maternal grandmother, and, on occasion, my grandfather. In addition, for a few years my aunt and her daughter lived with us. The construct of extended family and all its ramifications related to the Ramos household.

The fact my maternal grandmother lived with us for most of my life impacted me in many ways and created a respect for and pride in my ethnic heritage. I learned the language and the Discourse of Puerto Rico from this honorable woman. My grandmother was a child of pre-Bootstrap Puerto Rico. Operation Bootstrap was an industrialization project in the 1950’s that Governor Muñoz Marin implemented. It also promoted agrarian reform that put limitations on the quantity of land that elite sugarcane ranchers could buy. Tax concessions were also included to encourage United States business people to invest in Puerto Rico. The
resulting outcome of this legislation was that unemployment decreased and the standard of living improved (Moscoso, 1997).

In relation to her memories of her homeland, my grandmother related to poverty. In addition, she was an orphan at an early age and consequently became an itinerant relative traveling from home-to-home and thereby not having had the privilege of being educated. Nevertheless, she possessed a lyrical soul and retold poignant stories about her childhood such as when she would pick coffee beans to take to the market to sell.

When I became a teacher of first grade in a bilingual program, I had the privilege of teaching her to read in Spanish. It was a moment of joy for both of us. I was also extremely moved as a child when my grandmother after finishing her dinner would passionately say, “God bless America” in her beautifully accented voice. Apparently the ravages of hunger and poverty have lasting implications in the human experience.

My family was very fortunate in that although my father was a carpenter and my mother a bilingual secretary, with the help of my maternal grandfather, a hard working cigar maker, they always were able to live in a small house in a middle class area. This situation guaranteed my siblings and I always attended good public schools. This accident of birth foreshadowed the academic and professional success of my sisters, my brothers, and me.

Our otherwise good fortune included some negative consequences as well. Our peers were seldom Latina/o. Identity issues as well as ignorance and loss of heritage norms, customs, and most importantly language have been the negative aspect to growing up as middle class Latinas/os in the time when we were reared. Recent demographic trends will moderate this issue for other Latinas/os.
**Education**

I am the product of the American public school system. I attended public elementary school in a small suburban school in North Miami Beach, Florida, in the fifties. Since Florida’s demographics at that point in time were not reflective of a large Latina/o presence as they are now, I was consistently one of the few Latinas/os in my class. In fifth grade, my family moved to Boulder County, New York, where I completed the rest of my education. All through school I achieved excellent academic success. I attended Lehman College of the City University of New York and graduated with a BA in education. During my career of 32 years working for the North Boulder Central School District I attained the following graduate degrees and credits: MA, Lehman College; 60 credits from Montclair College, New Paltz of SUNY, Rockland Teacher Center; 45 doctoral credits from St. John’s University; and an EdD degree to be completed in 2012 from Western Connecticut State University.

**Role of Insider**

Being an insider assisted me in many ways. I had easy access to the district because I knew the superintendent fairly well as I had been employed by the district for 32 years. The principal and I had worked together in my classroom as she was a former ELL teacher and many of the teachers interviewed had been colleagues as well as personal friends. I felt comfortable enough to “ask more meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues, and most importantly be able to project a more truthful, authentic understanding of the culture under study (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 111). I refer to culture here as it will become clear that the culture of the site school was distinctly Latina/o American rather than just American.

My roles of insider were multifaceted in that I was a retired veteran second grade teacher from the site of the study, and a Latina/o who had always attained academic success.
During my undergraduate time, I had participated in an exchange program at the University of Puerto Rico from the City University of New York, thereby acquiring a sensitivity to the dynamics of being in a new culture’s academic institution. Even though I had been raised in a Latina/o home environment and could speak the language, I have vibrant memories of the exchange program, sensing that I was consistently out-of-step and apparently not cognizant of all the ramifications of the new Discourse.

This experience facilitated my social interactions with the teachers in this study and allowed me to glean valuable information and insights from both Discourses. I took particular care to have my teacher friends’ perceptions be substantiated by other teachers who I had not been acquainted with prior to the study as a means of compensating for any bias based on close personal association.

These comprehensive insider roles presented me with an impressive opportunity to add clarity and depth to my case study approach. I knew quite distinctly what the ramifications of the meanings of most encounters and perceptions signified. Gee defended my perspective when he stated “communication may mix two or more social languages or switch between two or more. In turn, a social language may be composed of words or phrases from more than one language” (e.g., it may mix English and Spanish) (Gee, 2011a, p. 200). I did, however, in my role as researcher, which was somewhat novel, make a serious attempt to wrestle with any bias that might have arisen from my aforementioned insider roles. My transcriptions and field notes were typed by one of my nieces and my audit trail was conducted by a teacher from the site district who has a doctoral degree.
Research Questions

The research questions that directed the origin of this research project were:

1. What social and cultural factors contribute to the academic success of Latina/o American second graders?

2. How have students whose primary Discourse differs from the dominant discourse acquired the secondary discourse of school?

Description of the Setting

Description of the School District County

Research was conducted at a suburban school district in the northeast region of the United States. Boulder County (pseudonym) is a typical suburban county with excellent academic outcomes for the majority of its students (see Table 3.1).

Description of the School District

North Boulder Central School District’s total student population was 8,239 students and there were 677 full-time teachers. The district was comprised of ten schools: five elementary schools, three middle schools, one secondary school of eighth and ninth grade, and one high school. The majority of the schools in the district are White middle class yet there are significant differences in demographics within the district. I constructed Table 3.1 and 3.2 to compare and contrast the village where I conducted my study, Sorbeto, with another village within the same district, Boulder Point. The Boulder Point community and school are more typical of the rest of the district and serve as a counterpoint to my site, which is populated by children of color and poverty. See Table 3.2.

The academic outcomes comparing the community of Boulder Point and Boulder Point Elementary and the community of Sorbeto and the Éxito Elementary School were the
following: the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) made at Boulder Point Elementary was five of five student groups making AYP in English language arts and mathematics compared to four of four student groups making AYP in English language arts and mathematics. In addition the Performance Index for Boulder Point was 180 as compared to Éxito’s score of 152. Further, during the last three academic years Boulder Point Elementary School did not receive Title 1 funding as compared to Éxito Elementary receiving funding for all three years.

Description of the School

Research was conducted at a small Kindergarten-Second Grade (K-2) school named Éxito Elementary situated in the village of Sorbeto positioned in a suburban middle class district in the Northeastern region of the United States. Despite the fact that the district where my school was placed is both suburban and middle class, my particular school was situated in the middle of a village that was populated mostly by people of color who, though working, were still poor.

The demographics of the school were 80% Latina/o, 14% African American, 4% Caucasian, 0% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1% Asian or Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islanders, and 1% Multiracial. The students were all second graders ranging in age from seven-to-eight years old. The demographics of the village promoted an actual segregation of children of color through all elementary and middle school years. The high school experience was integrated with the other predominantly White students from the surrounding middle class villages in the county. The teaching staff was 50% Latina/o and 50% White and the principal was of Dominican heritage. Fifty percent of the school’s
student body qualified for free or reduced price lunch. The gender composition of the classes was approximately 50% male and 50% female.
Table 3.1

*Comparison of Boulder County and Other New York State Counties*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School statistics</th>
<th>Boulder</th>
<th>NY State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>35,925.00</td>
<td>2,698,954.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT: Verbal (aver.)</td>
<td>438.00</td>
<td>416.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT: Math (aver.)</td>
<td>498.00</td>
<td>472.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boulder Regents Diplomas</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College entrants</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance rate</td>
<td>94.9%</td>
<td>91.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout rate</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil-teacher ratio</td>
<td>13-1</td>
<td>14.3-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aver. expenditure/pupil</td>
<td>$12,420.00</td>
<td>$8,241.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aver. median teacher salary</td>
<td>$64,411.00</td>
<td>$45,772.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aver. yrs. teacher experience</td>
<td>20.40</td>
<td>17.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of teachers at MA or above</td>
<td>53.60</td>
<td>31.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adopted from NEW YORK SCHOOLS.com (2011)
Table 3.2

Composition of Villages of Sorbeto and Boulder Point in North Boulder Central School

District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Sorbeto</th>
<th>Boulder Point</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign born</td>
<td>3,940</td>
<td>1,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks a language other than English at home (population 5 years and older)</td>
<td>6,518</td>
<td>2,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
<td>$44,981</td>
<td>$93,409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median family income</td>
<td>$53,484</td>
<td>$99,537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter-occupied housing units</td>
<td>1,471</td>
<td>615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied homes</td>
<td>1,640</td>
<td>3,761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>10,893</td>
<td>12,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under five years</td>
<td>1,079</td>
<td>739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>6,784</td>
<td>11,533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska native</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latina/o</td>
<td>5,898</td>
<td>1,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Adopted from US Census Bureau (2009)*
Qualitative Research

Qualitative research endeavors to understand human behavior and the rationale explaining the behavior. It is a focused exploration of specific phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). During my long career in elementary education I always questioned why certain of my Latina/o students made excellent academic progress while others struggled to learn how to read the simplest of text. The majority of the students I had taught were children of poverty and had had to acquire the Discourse of school upon their arrival at school. I was captivated with the notion of trying to analyze what the successful students did differently from those students who were not successful. I was of the opinion if I could discover particular behaviors that enhanced learning perhaps I would be able to teach the strategies to the other less engaged children. I finished my career without obtaining my goal. And now in the pursuit of my doctorate, conducting fieldwork with a sample very similar to the students when I taught, I have the answers that the study suggested.

Research Design

The design of my study was a qualitative case study. In a case study the researcher seeks to “understand a larger phenomenon through intensive study of one specific instance” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 94). By observing and interacting with second graders and their teachers, I sought to learn how eight focal children acquired the secondary Discourse of school, and identify the social and cultural factors that facilitated their academic success. Stake (2005) described three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and multiple case or collective case. In an intrinsic case study, a researcher is particularly interested in studying the case for the information that can be gleaned for an appreciation of the case in and of itself. On the other hand, a case is instrumental when it sets out to understand
phenomena outside the particular setting and participants (Stake, 2005). A multiple case study or collective case study is:

When there is even less interest in one particular case, a number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition. I call this multiple case study or collective case study. It is instrumental study extended to several cases. (Stake, 2005, p. 445)

In my situation, I conducted an instrumental case study and my unit of analysis consisted of the eight cases as an entity because all of the cases were situated at one site. Three qualitative methods were used to collect the data: participant observation, student artifacts, and teacher interviews. In addition, videotaping and photographs were taken.

**Instrumentation**

**Second Grade Successful Student Rubric**

The *Second Grade Successful Student Rubric* was a researcher designed assessment tool. See Appendix A. Based on my experience teaching second grade bilingual students during my lengthy teaching career, I felt qualified to design the instrument. In terms of the content and constructs selected to be included in this rating scale, the rubric evaluated the following constructs: Participation, Assignments, Group Work, Small Group Work Assisted by Teacher, and Observation of Reading Skills. The instrument was used by the two classroom teachers and myself in the selection of the eight focal students for the study. Further explanation of the way in which the instrument was used is explained under the sampling procedure section.
Observations

Observation-based research can be undertaken in three distinct ways: as participant observation in which the researcher develops rapport with the “host community” and is “immersed” in the everyday activities of the participants, as reactive observation based on the notion that participants are fully aware of the observation and are willing to interact with the researcher, and “unobtrusive/nonreactive observation” in which the people being studied are unaware of the process (Angrosino, 2000, p. 732).

My study’s design can be described as using all three types of observational strategies. In the beginning of the study, I utilized the unobtrusive/nonreactive tool in my overall scrutiny of the school and the students as they passed by in the hallway and in my social interactions with all the different people in the school. Later on, in the specific classrooms, my role became that of participant observer in that I observed, asked questions, partook of activities, and taught mini-lessons as well as oversaw the completion of the student artifacts (Angrosino, 2005). During the course of the study, individual students positioned me in the role of reactive observer in that I was questioned as to what I was doing and was required to respond despite the fact that I had given a class orientation at the beginning of the study when I was getting written parental permission.

My participant observation was lengthy and multifaceted. I observed both classes as well as my focal students during the spring of 2011 from March until June approximately twice a week for 50 hours. Parental permission was gleaned for all members of both classes with the exception of one student from each class. In addition, the students were observed in various lessons and multiple content areas such as science, social studies, language arts, math, as well as during art and music.
Field Notes

My field notes were a combination of narrative impressions, descriptions, summaries, important details, and direct quotations reflecting participants’ thoughts and actions. In addition, my field notes included impressions of video tapes and photographs. The field notes also were a running description of what had transpired on site after each session was completed.

Mini-lessons and Artifacts

I conducted six mini-lessons related to comparing and contrasting the dynamics of home and school during the course of the study. See Table 3.3 for a list of lesson topics and activities. Students completed artifacts after each mini-lesson. The artifacts were composed of four worksheets, one student paragraph, and two student drawings. These student artifacts were used as a means of understanding the students’ perspectives in relation to his role in school and home, to access attitudes regarding both places, as well as to ascertain information that would give insight into student behaviors. The information collected from the lessons and the resulting artifacts assisted me in confirming, understanding, and labeling much of the content of my field notes.
Table 3.3

*Student Artifacts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mini-lesson Topic</th>
<th>Description of Artifact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Home and school</td>
<td>Draw a picture of home and of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Compare and contrast</td>
<td>Write a paragraph comparing home and school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>All about school</td>
<td>Opinion questions about school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Spider map</td>
<td>Fill in words that make you think of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Story map</td>
<td>Fill in blanks to complete a story about school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>School yes and no</td>
<td>Answer yes or no to questions about abilities and affective issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher Interviews

I conducted seven teacher interviews and one teacher assistant (TA) interview during the course of the study. A semi-structured interview protocol was used. See Appendix G. The question topics ranged from perspectives on second language acquisition, to areas of strength and weakness of their students, to subjective interpretations of student success, as well as acculturation and secondary Discourse acquisition opinions and thoughts.

The questions were merely presented as anchors that facilitated people speaking to their personal pedagogical issues and concerns. These queries were not meant to be limiting and their purpose was to generate confirmatory information as well as divergent data that would contribute to my analyses. These open-ended interviews felt like pedagogical dialogues and were both pleasant and informative as well as were a vehicle for member checking.

Each interview was 40 minutes in duration with approximately four and one-half hours spent altogether. I recorded these experiences with a digital voice recorder. Transcriptions of the audio recordings were completed at a later time. In addition, during the entire time of the study I conversed and carried on dialogue frequently when teachers were switching activities. It was as if we partook in running dialogues whenever possible. I considered even random teacher and teacher assistant remarks valuable nuggets for my field notes. Many times as I wrote down remarks I felt compelled to say, “Can I quote you? That was really insightful.” My respondents appeared enthusiastic and seemed to get satisfaction from sharing the nuts and bolts of their craft as well as their profound insight into their students.
Video Recordings and Photographs

Video taping was completed during a four-hour session on site. Two hours were spent in each class. In one class, participants who had consent spoke about the projects they were creating on mammals. In the other class, students were filmed completing seatwork as well as interacting with peers. Some of the video also depicted teacher directed lessons.

Photographs were taken at another session that documented students engaged in various learning activities. It was interesting to note that some students were able to continue working and basically disregarded the picture taking while others actually stopped and posed and engaged in conversations.

The purpose for the videoing and the photography was to serve as another dynamic in sustaining or repudiating constructs of my thinking and impressions generated from field notes and observations. I studied these data before and after analyses of interview transcriptions and student artifacts.

Sampling Procedures

I engaged in purposeful sampling, “the process of selecting cases that are likely to be information rich” (Gall, Gall, Borg, 2007, p. 178) to facilitate the collecting of data that would speak to the population of Latina/o second graders that I was investigating.

Student Sample

The student sample was composed of two second grade classes whose members signed consent. In addition, a focal group from each class (n = 4) was selected on the basis of a rubric I designed entitled Successful Second Grade Student Rubric. The focal groups were my focus. I used the larger groups of students to compare and contrast the behaviors and observations that I made concerning the focal children.
The classroom teachers and I selected the focal children contingent on the rating of the rubric. The two classroom teachers whose classes were involved in the study completed the rubric for 4 students (2 male and 2 female). After two sessions of general observation, I also used the rubric to select 4 students from each class. Each of the classroom teachers met with me separately to compare our work. After discussion, consensus was achieved with each teacher and the sample was set. All selected focal students scored four in each area of the rubric, the highest score possible.

Teacher Sample

In selection of the teacher sample, I endeavored to create a cross-section of the teachers in the site school. Adult participants in my sample had diverse years of experience, different levels of education and degrees, taught either first or second grade, and were either classroom or ELL teachers. The participants also had dissimilar ethnic heritages from Cuba, Puerto Rico, or the Dominican Republic. Further I included a teacher assistant as well. Since there was a variety in the characteristics of the adult sample, I felt that in my interviews I was exposed to multiple perspectives.

Method of Analysis

Data analysis commenced upon completion of the first student artifact and was ongoing throughout the entire investigation. To analyze the data, I read and re-read my field notes, interview transcriptions, and student written artifacts. I also viewed and reviewed videos and photographs. I hand-coded the raw data. The first cycle coding phase (Saldaña, 2009) generated 163 codes (see Appendix B). In the second cycle coding phase, I condensed the original list to 104 codes based on similarities and refinement. Some codes were eliminated because they occurred rarely while others were rejected because they were
redundant and finally some codes were fused together. I assigned different colored magic markers to distinguish each focal student and student of interest. I then used the magic markers to indicate each observation or In Vivo quotation made by the particular student.

Of Bernard and Ryan’s (2010) eight observational techniques, which provided the blueprint of my thematic analysis, the following four were most pertinent to this study: repetitions; indigenous typologies (In Vivo); similarities and differences; and, theory-related materials guidelines. Using Saldaña’s (2009) First and Second Cycle Coding, and Bernard and Ryan’s (2010) thematic analysis techniques nine themes were generated. I then aligned field notes with codes and themes.

My quest was to present a bicultural interpretation of what I witnessed and documented about the students, the focus students, and the educators enacting in their everyday activities. My interpretation was unique in that as a bicultural, bilingual researcher I was able to extract a complex interpretation delineating not just the spoken words regardless of which language was spoken but also a cultural understanding of both the standard English and Spanish. See Figure 3.1.
Read and reread field notes, interview transcriptions, and student written artifacts; viewed and reviewed videos and photographs

First Cycle Coding Phase:
Generated 163 codes

Second Cycle Coding Phase:
Generated 104 codes

Thematic Analysis
Observational Techniques:
- Repetitions
- In Vivo
- Similarities and differences
- Theory-related materials

Generation of Nine Themes
using Saldaña’s (2009) First and Second Cycle Coding and Bernard and Ryan’s (2010) thematic analysis techniques

Figure 3.1. Researcher created figure. Conceptual theory constructs from field notes.
Data Collection Procedures and Timeline

The following procedures were followed according to the proposed timeline.

Observations

I observed the classes and recorded field notes in various school contexts during March, April, May, and June of 2011.

Artifacts

I conducted six small mini-lessons during April and May having to do with comparing and contrasting home and school. As a follow-up participants created the following artifacts: (a) draw a picture of home and of school, (b) write a paragraph comparing home and school, (c) answer opinion questions about school, (d) fill in words that make you think of school, (e) fill in blanks to complete story about school, and (f) answer yes or no to questions about abilities. All students with permission created six artifacts unless absent.

Interviews

Due to unforeseen time constraints, all interviews were done in June. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven teachers and one teacher assistant.

Trustworthiness

Prolonged Engagement

The credibility of this study is founded upon many factors: prolonged engagement, reflection, member checking, credibility through thick description, theoretical framework, auditing of the study, and triangulation of data (Toma, 2006). I conducted my study for four months during the spring semester of 2011. My field experience was not only prolonged but also consisted of many contexts from music class to math lessons to the observation of
students constructing follow-up projects. Some visits were as brief as two hours while other
days I stayed as long as four hours.

I observed students multiple times (50 hours) in a variety of settings. Students with
permission were observed during direct instruction, interactive whole group and small group
work, and while engaged in independent tasks.

**Reflection**

My reflexivity journal addressed issues ranging from concerns about the general
project to critiques on the efficacy of certain student artifacts and other methodological
concerns. It was a place to figure out exactly what I was experiencing and to record my
entire process with critical deliberation. The memoing process encouraged me to not only
reflect but also deconstruct my narrative field notes.

**Member Checking**

Due to my close relationships with many of the teachers, I was given the opportunity
at every session to do member checking about my impressions and to collaborate consistently
about the students. During interviews, I would read back my notes to the participant as a
means of substantiating veracity.

**Credibility Through Thick Description**

The field notes, transcriptions of interviews, and analyses of student artifacts,
videotapes, and photographs all provided “a comprehensive content-rich account” (Toma,
2006, p. 414) of my field experience full of description, rich in detail and with explanations
of context.
Theoretical Framework

My strong theoretical framework assisted me in systematizing the data. The theoretical underpinnings were important in analysis as well. Further, I was influenced by the concepts and models that I processed through the writing of the review of the literature (Toma, 2006).

Auditing of the Study

An audit trail was conducted by Dr. Reina Martinez, Chairperson of Foreign Languages at the high school in the site district.

Triangulation of Data

The triangulation of my data sources drove the crosschecking and “minimized distortion from a single data source or from a biased researcher” (Krefting, 1991, p. 177). I had access to various and diverse perspectives from myself, the adult researcher in my field notes, to the voices of the children in their artifact products, and the adult teacher and teacher assistant viewpoints in their interviews as well as our ongoing interactive dialogue. In addition, I also viewed and re-viewed videos and photographs.

Ethics Statement

Permission to participate in this research was sought from the district’s superintendent, the school principal, participating teachers, and parents of student participants. Copies of all letters of permission were included in Appendices C, E, F, and G. To assure confidentiality, each participant, the school, and the school district were assigned pseudonyms at the onset of the study. Upon analysis of the data and the completion of chapters four and five, data were made available to those participating individuals who
requested it by contacting me. Each adult participant received a copy of the permission that had been signed. The copy had my email address and telephone number.

**Summary of Chapter 3**

I designed this study to explore the social and cultural factors effecting Latina/o American students’ successful navigation of second grade by comparing and contrasting the behaviors, the work, and utterances of the focal students with the other students of the study. In addition, I investigated the strategies employed by the students in their quest to process and acquire not just the new language, English, but also all of the ramifications, cultural norms, and nuances comprised in the academic Discourse of school.

My familiarity with the Spanish language and culture, the operations of a second grade class, as well as my prior relationship with many of the adult participants all contributed to grant me access to insider status that greatly enhanced my efforts and accomplishments. The theoretical framework of social cognition was pivotal in most of my solidification of the field note narrative. Discourse Analysis theory encouraged me to use a different lens in my analysis of data. The FoK aspect of my theoretical underpinnings influenced my interactions with the student participants in my direct informal use of questions when reacting to artifacts about home and what was learned at home.
CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND EXPLANATION OF THE FINDINGS

The aim of this study was to analyze the social and cultural factors contributing to the academic success of Latina/o second graders. This investigation also sought to explain the process through which the focal students acquired the secondary, academic Discourse of school. Chapter four presents a discussion of the research findings from the following: participant observation, analysis of student produced artifacts, teacher interviews, photographs, and videotapes.

The research questions attended to in this study were:

1. What social and cultural factors contribute to the academic success of Latina/o second graders?

2. How have students whose primary Discourse differs from the dominant Discourse acquired the secondary Discourse of school?

To answer these questions, I conducted research for 50 hours during four months, approximately twice a week during the spring of 2011 in two second grade classrooms in one school. The teachers of the two classes were Mr. D and Mrs. P, both of whom I interviewed. I also interviewed six other adults at the site: Mrs. F and Mrs. Z, who were English Language Learner teachers; Mrs. S and Mrs. R, two other second grade teachers; Ms. B, who was a first grade teacher; and Mrs. M, a teacher assistant in Mrs. P’s class.

Mr. D and Mrs. P helped me select the eight focal students for this study. Both teachers are Latina/o Americans. Mr. D is of Dominican descent and his classroom was characterized by fluidity and, although productive, a relaxed atmosphere. Mrs. P was born in
Cuba and her classroom was characterized by both cutting-edge pedagogy as well as more traditional classroom practices.

In this chapter I begin with specific descriptions of the site school, the two classroom teachers whose children were part of the study, the focal student participants, and the adult participants. I then present narratives of the case study, introducing the focal students from Mrs. P’s class first and Mr. D’s second. In addition to the focal students, two students from Mr. D’s class contributed relevant insights into this study, so I include a discussion of them as well. In order to differentiate them from the focal students, I have categorized them as two students of interest. Then, I present nine themes generated from the data collected.

**Descriptions of Setting and Participants**

**Description of Éxito Elementary**

Éxito Elementary seemed a wonderful example of all of the best of early childhood requirements. The school seemed warm, friendly, and the general tone was one of excitement for learning. Throughout the school, children went from class to class in a happy manner with a minimum of censure from adults. The interactive Latina/o conversational style has permeated the majority of the classes creating an informal and yet salutary environment in which students seemed engaged in a natural way.

The physicality of the building was extremely cheerful, replete with student work displayed in artful and unusual ways. The outside of the building has lovely plants and trees surrounding the school. There was even evidence of student gardens. Each classroom has a beautiful early childhood carpet with a curricular concept such as the alphabet or solar system and all the tables are in vibrant primary colors. It seemed apparent that all teachers took pride in their classrooms.
Change in Demographics

I had anticipated that the Latina/o students in my sample would have been approximately 50% Puerto Rican American and 50% Dominican American, as those were the demographics that existed eight years ago when I retired. I taught at the site school for 30 of my 32 years in elementary education. Surprisingly the demographics of the community have changed and I, therefore, was unable to find even one Puerto Rican American student for the study. I did include one student in the focal group who was half Puerto Rican American and half Filipino American. The majority of the students in the focal groups were Dominican American. Other students hailed from Ecuador.

Description of Second Grade Classes

Mrs. P’s class was a second grade class consisting of the following demographics: 16 Latina/o students, two African American students, and one Caucasian student with a total of 19 children. Mr. D’s second grade class had 21 Latina/o students, two African American students, and one Caucasian student with a total of 24 children (see Table 4.1). Mrs. P’s class had higher reading levels according to individual reading records than Mr. D’s class, and a total of only five students were serviced by English Language Learner (ELL) teachers. Many of Mr. D’s 21 Latina/o students received English language services. In addition, his class received all new arrivals from Spanish speaking countries. Table 4.1 shows the demographics; racial/ethnic and social economic breakdown of the students in the two classes. See Table 4.1.
Table 4.1

*Class Demographic Data Comparison*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic descriptor</th>
<th>Ms. P’s class</th>
<th>Mr. D’s class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/o</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced lunch</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language learners</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students in class</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Description of Mrs. P

Mrs. P was an experienced veteran teacher who has worked at Éxito Elementary for 20 years. She was extremely involved in the inner workings of the school and was very committed to all of her students. As a Cuban immigrant arriving in the United States at the age of 10, she had a unique perspective and understanding of the students she teaches, along with the parents and their problems, and this insider status facilitated her interactions with both parents and students.

Her classroom was a reflection of curriculum ideas, replete with leveled boxes of books, charts on writing procedures, a word wall, and various other instructional aides. Although Mrs. P’s collection of books contained some books with pictures of children of color, they were few and far between. The room was pleasant, user friendly, and full of print as well as examples of student work. Her lessons were exemplary, peppered with higher order questions, and were also interactive, allowing a great deal of student participation. During my study, I saw several student projects in various phases and noted the collaborative nature of the process.

The students in this class mainly conversed in English; even those students with accents seemed to prefer English at all times. The children habitually displayed positive affect and seemed consistently engaged in meaningful activities. As per developmentally appropriate early childhood practices, movement was allowed and students conversed while completing assignments. The general climate of the room was comfortable, yet time was used well and students were usually engaged in academic pursuits.
Description of Mr. D

Mr. D was a relatively newer teacher and had been working at Éxito Elementary for eight years. He was a product of the district as well as had also attended the site school. His heritage was Dominican and he had an impressive camaraderie and influence on the parents of his students as well as the community. His status as insider also assisted him in understanding his students as well as teaching them and having high expectations. Mr. D spoke Spanish often in the classroom and encouraged children to speak in both languages.

His classroom looked different from Mrs. P but nevertheless was also reflective of student work. His bulletin boards contained stories written by the students as well as math worksheets with shapes divided into fractional pieces. Interestingly, he had a large picture graph displayed reflecting heritage countries of all the students. He taught in a very relaxed yet competent way, also allowing for interactive student speaking. His lessons were conducted in English and Spanish at all times. I noted that students who were more competent in English would translate into Spanish when new arrivals seemed unsure. Mr. D did not object to the procedure and the new arrivals seemed very grateful and relieved. He conducted many hands-on lessons and was patient when correcting students. He used humor quite often for disciplining. I noted that although his pace was slow he was always working and oftentimes individually assisting students.

Description of Focal Students in Mrs. P’s Class

Gilberto was an articulate student who consistently participated in all lessons. His comments displayed that he was knowledgeable. He was serious and appeared very thoughtful. I noted he would help other students at his table during work time. His way of speaking and his vocabulary were advanced for a second grade student.
Ana was a social child but demonstrated deep engagement during all activities. I noted that she was sensitive to modeling and endeavored to replicate specifically what was taught. She exhibited proficiency for detail and always appeared work-oriented. She also had a talent for assisting other students at her table and seemed to enjoy helping the teacher, the aide, and me.

Carlos also was proficient in all academic areas. He was not an active participant but gave very rich answers when called upon. His work displayed detail and extensions way beyond the level of the other students. At times, I noted that he would also strive to support peers but did so in a rather quiet and soft manner.

Liana was a quiet child who sat at the same table as Ana and appeared to mimic all of Ana’s behaviors. Even though Liana was in a lower reading group than the other focal students, Mrs. P and I still felt that she qualified as per the Successful Second Grade Rubric. I believe Liana’s steady replication of Ana’s good academic habits greatly impacted her learning. She was a quiet child but sweet to her peers and also seemed to like helping. Liana appeared to be engaged in lessons consistently but did not participate orally often. In addition, when called upon, although usually having given the right answer, she nevertheless appeared unsure. I noted that out of all the focal students in this class she was the one with the least competence in English and that she also was still receiving English services.

**Description of Focal Students in Mr. D’s Class**

Veronica arrived at Éxito Elementary at the end of first grade. She had a strong foundation in Spanish and consequently had made excellent progress in all academic areas. Her English was well-spoken, without any discernable accent and she also displayed a good English vocabulary. Veronica also had a good sense of humor and was always kidding
around with Mr. D. She presented as confident and capable and had good social skills as well.

Emilio was a serious child who spoke English like a native speaker. In first grade he had had discipline issues with his female teacher. Mr. D considered him a complex student who needed firm direction and monitoring. He would often boast about what level he had achieved on the math computer program. He seemed engaged during lessons and would participate but in a seemingly very noncommittal manner.

Elia was a relatively new arrival who had entered Éxito in September of second grade. She was particularly cooperative and conscientious in all that she did. I noted that when given the choice of what language to speak or write she constantly selected English even though her stronger language was still Spanish at this point in time. Elia went about completing all activities with vigor and total engagement. She presented as a willing helper and had a sweet disposition. When helping others, she did so in such an unassuming manner that the student being helped in no way felt diminished.

José was an exceptionally quiet child. He rarely participated in lessons or in speaking to peers. Nevertheless, his written work was excellent, containing great detail and extra information. José was of Puerto Rican and Philippine heritage and his family spoke the Philippine heritage language. His English, however, was excellent. Of all the focal students, I feel I knew José the least despite my considerable efforts.

Description of Students of Interest in Mr. D’s Class

I am also reporting on two students of interest from Mr. D’s class who provided me with valuable information concerning my research questions. They are Aisha and Jacobo. The reason that Aisha had not been selected to be a focal student was that originally my
intention was to have only Puerto Rican and Dominican students in my sample and Afsha is from Ecuador. Since the demographics of the site school had changed it was necessary to edit the title of my dissertation to say Latina/o American students. In any event, Afsha was a bright, talkative, and competent second grader who communicated valuable data. The other student of interest, Jacobo, was a new arrival who did not speak a lot of English and had been in Mr. D’s class too short a period of time to be evaluated. Nevertheless, he also imparted substantial information about the process he went through and was continuing to go through as he acquired the secondary Discourse of school. Demographic descriptors of student participants are represented in Table 4. 2.
### Table 4.2

**Focal Groups’ Student Demographic Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Pseudonym</th>
<th>Heritage Country</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8 yrs. 3 mo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8 yrs. 3 mo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liana</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7 yrs. 8 mo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilberto</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7 yrs. 11 mo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilio</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7 yrs. 8 mo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José</td>
<td>Philippines and Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7 yrs. 10 mo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7 yrs. 8 mo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elia</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8 yrs. 2 mo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisha</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7 yrs. 8 mo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adult Participants

Seven teachers and one teacher aide (TA) participated in the study. The teachers consisted of two second grade classroom teachers, two ELL teachers, one first grade classroom teacher, and two different second grade classroom teachers whose classes were part of the study. In addition, one teacher assistant was interviewed as well. Table 4.3 represents a profile of the adult participants from the study, including gender, heritage, years teaching, grade currently teaching and their tertiary degrees and beyond. See Appendix I for an example of an interview transcription.
Table 4.3

* = classroom teacher of focal students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Heritage</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Current grade</th>
<th>Degrees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. P*</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Second grade</td>
<td>MA + 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. D*</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Second grade</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. F</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Second grade</td>
<td>MA + 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. R</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. S</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Second grade</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. B</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>First grade</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Z</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Second grade</td>
<td>MA + 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. M</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Teacher aide</td>
<td>Associate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focal Student Narratives

**Gilberto: Focal Student One**

Gilberto was a student in Mrs. P’s class who at the beginning of the study was 7.11 years old. He lived with his mother, stepfather and a new sibling. His mother had emigrated to the US from the Dominican Republic (DR) when the student was two years old. Gilberto appeared to be a conscientious student who was actively engaged in his learning. He was exceptionally knowledgeable and shared that knowledge by his customary participation in lessons. Gilberto was a serious student but also had the ability to interact socially with peers. Further this student’s vocabulary was beyond that of a typical second grader. His written work was precise and consisted of complex sentences. His attention to detail facilitated his learning. In addition, he had a sophisticated grasp of reality and the complexities of his world.

An incident revealing this student’s ethnic awareness was when the students and I were talking informally during an independent work time. I told them about my grandmother and how I had spoken Spanish as a child. After my disclosure, many of the students told me where their families came from. This seemed to prompt Gilberto to tell me about his family. He had figured out the ethnic heritage of each member of his new family. Interestingly, he was able to articulate the ethnicity of his half-sister and new step-father as well.

Gilberto typically appeared to be *listo* (ready for whatever was to come) as he engaged in academic activities in the classroom and in specials such as art and music. He seemed to have a strong belief about his individual capabilities and even articulated his opinion that he was intelligent. The other students and all the teachers would habitually call
on him when no one else knew the answer and Gilberto consistently was able to perform up to their expectation. He revealed that he saw himself as efficacious in his academic ventures. In conclusion, Gilberto was an ambitious student who appeared to be focused on his learning. His classmates and his teachers encouraged him to participate during lessons. He added intellectual rigor to the simplest of lessons and was an active collaborator as well when working in groups. Having Gilberto as a student in Mrs. P’s class benefitted all of the students and made the teacher’s job easier.

**Liana: Focal Student Two**

Liana was also a student in Mrs. P’s class who was 7.7 years old at the beginning of the study. She lived with her mother and three older siblings. Liana was a relatively new arrival from the DR who began in the site school in January of first grade.

She was an interesting participant in that despite the fact that she was still receiving push-in English Language Learner (ELL) support and spoke with a discernible Spanish accent, I did not hear her code-switch or speak in Spanish. Even when assisting other less academically proficient Latina/o students, she would repeat the directions of the assignment or explain the concept of the lesson slowly but usually in English.

Further she was an attentive listener but would not participate in whole group instruction unless directly solicited to do so. When asked to participate, she complied and Mrs. P would positively reinforce her, seeming to comprehend that Liana lacked confidence. Despite the fact that Liana was not an active participant during lessons, she did ask teachers questions.

Her reticence did not extend to peers at her table. Liana appeared to be more comfortable interacting on a one-to-one basis. Liana also revealed leadership qualities when
interacting with peers. She was a considerable helper to other students and seemed to enjoy collaboration.

Her oral reading was expressive and fluent despite the fact Mrs. P related that she was not in the top reading group but the one right below it. Perhaps her lack of confidence was a dynamic when having her running records done. Liana’s written work was excellent, illustrating application of reading/language arts skills and knowledge. Her written work revealed a detail-oriented conscientious student able to understand the main concepts of a lesson. This student also elaborated and/or extended her learning by doing more than was required by the teacher. This personal initiative helped her in getting the most from her instruction.

To conclude Liana was a self-motivated student who seemed to process what was presented to her. She was a conscientious student and endeavored to be on task. She participated in activities precisely in the manner the teacher of whatever class (home, art, music, substitute) expected that she should. She was resourceful and knew how to access information. Liana appeared to reflect before tackling assignments but unfortunately appeared to question her ability and even verbalized this insecurity. This finding was very different from the other focal students.

**Carlos: Focal Student Three**

Carlos was a focal student in Mrs. P’s class who was 8.3 years old at the onset of the study. He lived with his parents, two older siblings, and his adult *tia* (aunt) who was very influential in his learning and his life. The family moved to New York from the DR when Carlos was four years old. At first, Carlos seemed a quiet child but during the course of the investigation, I realized that Carlos was not so much quiet as soft-spoken.
Over time it became evident that Carlos had a very well-developed sense of humor and was constantly the cause of much laughter in his group during independent or collaborative work time. His humor was not disruptive but rather a unique component of his personality appreciated by his peers.

This student was a caring classmate and assisted his peers in a soft-spoken manner. He was involved in his learning and an active participant during lessons, answering questions and adding comments that enhanced the rigor and energy of the learning. When working in groups, Carlos was a catalyst for elaboration and extension of lessons.

He energetically applied himself in his written and artistic work. For example, when I asked the students to produce pictures depicting home and school with a caption, Carlos’s work stood out for its complexity; see Figures 4.1 and 4.2. When I analyzed the drawings, they revealed complete engagement, a detailed orientation and advanced conceptualization of his role as a student (Figure 4.2) as well as his vision of his home environment (Figure 4.1). In the picture of home, what is striking is the aerial perspective. Both drawings seemed like blueprints; ironically, Carlos expressed a desire to be an engineer when he grew up.
Figure 4.1. Focal student Carlos’s artifact one.
Figure 4.2. Focal student Carlos’s artifact two.
Carlos revealed an understanding of the process by which he had learned English. His tía (aunt) had played a crucial role in the procedure as well as in his learning in general. It appeared as if his aunt spent considerable time reading to him as well as explaining concepts that were of interest to him. The importance of a student having an adult advocate sharing family Funds of Knowledge (FoK) was revealed.

This focal student often articulated connections that he made during his learning and would discuss these learnings with his peers, an example of Vygotsky’s notion of children’s attaining higher levels of knowledge through social interaction (Diaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams, 1990). The content of these social interactions facilitated the development of cognition for both Carlos and his classmates. His ability to enact the transfer of previous knowledge and skills was an effective strategy in his new learning. In addition, Carlos was resourceful and would consistently access assistance for his work by retrieving books from the classroom library.

To conclude, Carlos’s written work consisted of complex sentences and detailed punctuation. In addition, he would put extra effort into his written work such as making a coloring pattern, which seems appropriate for a future engineer, when making lists. One interesting page in his notebook was a comprehensive list of occupations reflecting his knowledge of aspiration possibilities.

**Ana: Focal Student Four**

Ana was a focal student in Ms. P’s class who was 8.3 years old at the beginning of the study. She lived with her mom and three older sisters. When the family had first arrived from the DR, they had lived with the maternal grandmother for an extended period of time. Ana was three years old at the time of the move from the DR to the US.
This focal student was a consummate agent of her own learning. She was seated at a table with a bright, funny, and talkative African American student. It seemed Ana had selected this student as her model as she would replicate many of her behaviors. I noted that Ana would repeat words softly in an undertone that had been articulated by both teachers and student models. This subtonal strategy is reminiscent of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development in which the child is at the point where she needs to softly verbalize what she is doing or saying because the learning is not yet internalized (Vygotsky, 1978).

Ana often asked questions during lessons and was an active participant from volunteering to read passages aloud to continuously revising her answers on the animal packet after seeing an informative movie. Further, she would persistently refer to prior learning. Her ability to make connections and transfer skills was evident throughout the study and impacted her learning.

This focal student revealed a metacognitive knowledge of how she had learned English. She was able to give advice concerning strategies that other students would be advised to use. Ana was loquacious with her peers, her teachers, and myself. She informed me of protocols that were pertinent for the art room. She also explained the expectations and manner of doing things. This sensitivity to the norms, patterns, and manner of doing things in the new Discourse (Gee, 1992) partly accounted for Ana’s success in second grade.

Ana was a student who appeared to have a strong work ethic. She was immersed in her learning. Her conversation habitually related to topics from class. She would admonish the students she was working with to go beyond what was required of the assignment thereby enhancing and extending learning.
Ana’s written work was a study in improvement. The beginning entries of her notebook were simplistic and contained a minimum of punctuation. The later entries illustrated marked improvement in spelling, as well as complexity in sentences and use of conventions of Standard English.

In conclusion, this student had a sense of the future, which included not only being a hairdresser but the owner as well, who would be required to direct the other hairdressers in her shop. These leadership qualities were also revealed when she worked with her peers.

**Emilio: Focal Student Five**

Emilio was a focal student in Mr. D’s class who was 7.8 years old at the commencement of the study. This student lived with his parents and a younger sibling and had emigrated from the DR when Emilio was five years old. He attended the site school for half of the academic year of kindergarten. His command of English was excellent and he did not receive ELL support, which was unusual for a student in Mr. D’s class.

This focal student had a self-assured way of speaking. Emilio’s affect was serious most of the time and I noted that his social skills were not as well-developed as the other focal students in that many times he appeared to prefer to work alone and when working in groups, at times, he seemed to want to direct all actions and make all decisions for the group. Nevertheless, he asked questions frequently and evidenced having a long attention span as well as interest in learning. On the rare occasion when Emilio did not grasp a concept immediately, he appeared to get annoyed, I noted that he would continue to pay attention and was rewarded with quick understanding.

In one particular instance during a math lesson’s independent practice time, Emilio did not understand how to do the assignment. Another focal student, Elia, softly explained
the process to both Emilio and me. Almost immediately he grasped what to do saying, “I got it.” I appealed to him that the appropriate thing to do would be to show his gratitude to Elia. He stopped, looked at me, and considered my suggestion and then looked at Elia and said, “Gracias.” I considered this behavior of acknowledgement to have been a big step for Emilio to have taken. I also found it funny that he responded in Spanish as Elia was a recent arrival.

In small groups, Emilio would assume a leadership role and would apply himself to the task at hand. At first, this student’s interactions with me were brief and monosyllabic. As I visited more frequently, however, he began to share quite a bit. Emilio would articulate what were the dynamics of the assignment and the rationale thereof. This focal student was on task consistently and seemed to do most things at a fast pace. Emilio wasted little time upon completion of an activity and would seek permission to go to a math computer program in the computer lab that all the students seemed to enjoy. He appeared to be a self-motivated student and a serious agent of his own learning. Emilio appeared to enjoy collaboration particularly when working with students close to his high ability.

Unfortunately, I observed that he would often boast of his accomplishments in the computer lab, as well as in comparing his project work to that of other peers. I believe that this behavior was not merely an awareness of capability but also he was in competition with the other students. The extremity of this competitive quality is not consistent with Latina/o culture as the competitive behavior directly negates a sense of cooperation and focus on the importance of the group (Nieto & Bode, 2008). In a sense, I viewed this competitiveness as an exaggeration of American individualism. Another interpretation might be that this was an indicator of a high ability student wanting and needing more challenge (Renzulli, 1978).
Emilio revealed metacognition when he told me about his working at home on math with his mother and described the process by which he was able to compute quickly. It is apparent that this student’s mother was supportive and instrumental in Emilio’s academic efforts. This focal student spoke English almost exclusively. He would, however, switch to Spanish when addressing new arrival students showing his insight that the students were not yet skilled in English.

A specific incident in which I was surprised was during a library lesson the teacher stated that there was only one computer in the library. Emilio informed the library teacher that that was not accurate, and that actually there were three computers in the library. The teacher took the comment in stride and retorted that there were indeed three but only one was available to students and the other two were designated for the adult workers. I was astonished that Emilio would challenge a teacher or any adult as Latina/o cultural norms has a strict construct of never questioning authority.

**Elia: Focal Student Six**

Elia was a student in Mr. D’s class who was 8.2 years old at the time the study began. She lived with her parents and three younger siblings; two were infant twins. Elia was a new arrival from the DR and had been in Mr. D’s class since October. She seemed to seek approval and frequently would check with the teacher or peers to assure herself that she was doing her assignments correctly. Elia frequently collaborated with peers and would often assist nearby new arrivals explaining and repeating what Mr. D had said. Elia was an active participant during lessons, calling out answers to Mr. D’s questions. She displayed an ease and comfort with Mr. D even venturing to ask permission to work in another group with the
ELL teacher. This reflected an unusual acculturalization because in Latina/o culture, children do not question adults and typically do as they are told (Nieto & Bode, 2008).

Elia was an agent of her own learning; she often self-corrected and successfully modeled behaviors of students who were more competent in the new Discourse. Elia also enjoyed assisting the teacher by giving out and collecting materials before and after lessons.

This focal student code-switched constantly. Elia showed growth in English acquisition from the beginning of the study when she spoke with a defined accent and code_switched seemingly most of the time to the end of the study when her accent was practically gone. During the study, Elia became good friends with Veronica, another focal student and Aisha, a student of interest. This relationship was partly responsible for her quick acquisition of English and her acculturation. Both of the students spoke English like native speakers and were well-versed in the Discourse of school. Mr. D told me that the girls played school at home with each other. This play was instrumental in Elia’s adjustment to school resonating with Vygotsky’s (1978) thoughts on the importance of play. Gee’s (1992) notion of learning not just the language_in_use but acquiring the entire Discourse is applicable in Elia’s case.

**José: Focal Student Seven**

José was a student in Mr. D’s class who at the beginning of the study was 7.10 years old. He lived with his mother and grandmother and had been born in the community where this study was conducted. His ethnicity was half-Filipino and half-Puerto Rican. He spoke English like a native speaker despite the fact that he came from a bilingual home. José was not an active participant in large group lessons. In small groups, however, José had a great deal to say and contributed valuable details to projects. I was impressed when he used the
names of streets from the community in his naming of streets of the group project, which was an example of transfer.

José was a fount of knowledge and seemed to possess information beyond the level of the rest of the class. He was an attentive listener during lessons and usually performed his work well as evidenced by his computations on the small student whiteboards during interactive math lessons. José was a conscientious worker as reflected in his notebook entries. His sentences were complex, well-punctuated, and his writing was well-organized. When I inquired what José liked best about school, he informed me that he liked coloring, reading books, and being with friends.

To conclude, I noticed that José revealed an ability to recognize his physical needs by hydrating as a means of facilitating his concentration. I was surprised by his getting his water bottle out of the closet. All students had the same entrée as well as a water fountain in the classroom but none of the other students obtained water.

**Veronica: Focal Student Eight**

Veronica was a focal student in Mr. D’s class who was 7.8 years old at the advent of the study. She lived with her parents and one older sibling. She had come to the school at the end of first grade from the DR. Mr. D had informed me that the reason she had acclimated herself so well was that Veronica had attended school in the DR in her heritage language and had transferred skills and constructs learned there. This focal student spoke English articulately and with no discernible accent.

An incident of note and an example of cultural misunderstanding occurred when Mr. D in introducing me to Veronica in a humorous endeavor informed me that Veronica had been absent the day before because she had taken a day off to go shopping. Not recognizing
the attempt at humor, the child responded inappropriately by telling me the teacher was not
telling the truth. I imagine Veronica was embarrassed to be depicted as being truant.

This incident reflected the misunderstanding that might occur when a person or
student does not fully appreciate the detailed nuances of a secondary Discourse. It was my
impression that the incident revealed a clash of cultural values as well as a conflict between
authoritarian vs. a more casual, laid-back interaction. This episode provided me insight; even
though the student spoke similarly to a native speaker her understanding of the new
Discourse was not complete. Veronica did not recognize the nuances, body language, and
tone that proclaimed Mr. D’s comment as the joke that it was. I found it interesting that
Veronica possessed a very well-developed sense of humor in Spanish and was a habitual
comedian with her peers, which was surprising because she did not understand Mr. D’s
attempt at humor in English.

At the beginning of my participant observation, I noted that Veronica would switch
into Spanish when conversing with her good friend Elia. By the end of the study, however,
Veronica characteristically would speak with Elia strictly in English as if cognizant of Elia’s
formidable new command of the secondary Discourse.

Veronica revealed metacognitive understanding in her collaboration with peers during
time allocated to group projects. Further, she seemed an agent of her own learning in her
self-corrections during interactive practice sessions. She was consistently invested in
completing answers and assignments accurately.

Veronica was a conscientious student endeavoring to do her best as evidenced by her
written work. Her paragraphs were complex, words were spelled in Standard English and
she had excellent punctuation as well. I was also quite surprised when after a mini-lesson in
which I had made a list of characteristics pertaining first to home and then to school using bullets to distinguish each characteristic to note that Veronica incorporated bullets in her written work. This attention to detail was not characteristic of second graders in my career experience.

To conclude, Veronica was a resourceful student. An example of her resourcefulness was when after the long tedious library lesson depicted in the beginning of this chapter, she informed me that she had selected her library book by using OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue- the software the librarian had been attempting to teach). Despite the librarian having spent considerable time instructing students in the procedure for selecting books using the computer OPAC software, few students had availed themselves of the resource during the time of my study.

Students of Interest

Two students from Mr. D’s class who were not selected to be focal students provided me with important data. The following two students had several informal conversations with me furnishing me with extra information.

Aisha: Student of Interest One

Although not selected as a focal student due to my original notion of having my sample consist specifically of Puerto Rican American and Dominican American students only, Aisha was a fount of information who spoke directly to the research questions of the study. Therefore, I have included Aisha and another student of interest, whose pseudonym is Jacobo, who helped answer my research questions.

Aisha was a student in Mr. D’s class who was 7.8 years old at the beginning of the investigation. She lived with her mom, new stepfather, and new sibling and had come to the
US from Ecuador when she was three years old. Aisha was an enthusiastic participant in all ways. She self-corrected often and was an invaluable aid to all new arrivals by persistently and softly translating all instructions and concepts into Spanish as Mr. D conducted lessons.

The student disclosed that she translated for her parents as they did not speak English. Aisha also related she consistently translated and helped other students in her class due to her ability to complete her work quickly. This student seemed very bright and would habitually make comments on former learning indicative of transfer. During one of the library sessions, Aisha gave me a whole lesson on the Dewey Decimal System. She even went over to one of the shelves of books and pointed out the numbers replete with an explanation of the system.

I was so taken with her confidence and articulation that I began a conversation inquiring into how she had learned English so well. Aisha related that her mother told her: to listen to the television in English; to attend to everything the teacher said; and, to ask the teacher questions during lessons. Aisha also read aloud to her mother in both English and Spanish, and her mother had placed her when she was three years old in a pre-K program to learn English with non-Spanish speaking peers. Aisha had not only learned to speak English but had also learned the manners, ways of doing things, the norms, and many of the nuances of the new secondary Discourse.

**Jacobo: Student of Interest Two**

Jacobo was a new arrival in Mr. D’s class who was 8.3 years old at the beginning of the study. He had come to school from the DR in January of second grade. He lived in his aunt’s house with his aunt, uncle, three older boy cousins, his parents, and his baby sister. This student seemed not only mature but self-assured as well. He had a concrete metacognitive sense of how he had learned English as well as how he had made academic
progress previously in his home country of the Dominican Republic. He told me that he learned English by playing with friends; he would repeat the words to himself such as ball (pelota) or run (corre). Jacobo’s command of the Spanish language was particularly strong; he read and wrote proficiently in Spanish. He told me that he was good in reading and writing because he read a lot and liked doing schoolwork.

**Findings**

To analyze the data, I read and re-read my field notes, interview transcriptions, and student written artifacts. I also viewed and re-viewed videos and photographs. The first cycle coding phase (Saldaña, 2009) generated 163 codes (see Appendix B). In the second cycle coding phase, I condensed the original list to 104 codes based on similarities and refinement. Some codes were eliminated because they occurred rarely while others were rejected because they were redundant and finally some codes were fused together.

These codes informed the generation of nine themes. Bernard and Ryan (2010) write:

Looking for themes in written material typically involves pawing through texts and marking them up with different colored pens. For recorded interviews, the process of identifying themes begins with the act of transcription. Whether the data come in the form of video, audio or written documents, handling them physically is always helpful for finding themes. (p. 56)

Of Bernard and Ryan’s eight observational techniques, which provided the blueprint of my thematic analysis, the following four were most pertinent to this study: repetitions; indigenous typologies (In Vivo); similarities and differences; and, theory-related materials
guidelines. Saldaña’s (2009) First and Second Cycle Coding, and Bernard and Ryan’s (2010) thematic analysis techniques generated nine themes. See Figure 4.3 and Table 4.4.
LATINA/O SUCCESSFUL SECOND GRADERS

NINE THEMES FACILITATING SUCCESS:

**Theme One**
The students exercised agency in their own learning.

**Theme Two**
The students consistently sustained remaining in the present moment.

**Theme Three**
The students envisioned their futures.

**Theme Four**
The students demonstrated metacognitive awareness.

**Theme Five**
The students displayed resourcefulness in locating what they need for their own learning.

**Theme Six**
The teachers and teacher assistants served as ambassadors of crossing borders between cultures.

**Theme Seven**
Adults supported and were sensitive to the children.

**Theme Eight**
Adults and children communicated through multiple pathways.

**Theme Nine**
Adults and children showed reciprocal respect and positive relationships.

*Figure 4.3.* Nine themes facilitating success.
Table 4.4  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Codes</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The students exercised agency in their own learning.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The students consistently sustained remaining in the present moment.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The students envisioned their futures.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The students demonstrated metacognitive awareness.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The students displayed resourcefulness in locating what they need for their own learning.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The teachers and teacher assistants served as ambassadors of crossing borders between cultures.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Adults supported and were sensitive to the children.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Adults and children communicated through multiple pathways.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Adults and children showed reciprocal respect and positive relationships.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Theme One: The students exercised agency in their own learning**

Theme one emerged from the following 11 codes: accessing prior knowledge, self-motivation, transfer, making connections, sense of responsibility, awareness of one’s needs, enjoyment of reading, conscientiousness, strategies for learning, ownership of learning, and self-correction. As the study progressed it became apparent that the focal students achieved success because they practiced specific self-directed behaviors that aided them in their learning.

For example, in a social studies lesson Mrs. P conducted on rural communities by reading a big book and then asking the children to assist her in listing the characteristics of farm communities, such as “lots of farms, quiet and peaceful,” Gilberto made these contributions to the list: “Way out in the country, animals, farm animals, cows, pigs, sheepdogs, ducks, chickens, sheep, roosters” (Field Notes, May 26, 2011). In this example, Gilberto exhibited self-motivation and accessed his prior knowledge.

In another example of accessing prior knowledge, after having completed a practice test in reading, Carlos and his group were reading a book when Carlos called his classmates’ attention to the similarity between the content of the book and the question they had just completed from the test. Carlos also exercised agency in his own learning in his notebook, where he conscientiously wrote lists of words with a coloring pattern; using the colors red, blue, and green he used an ABCC pattern (red, blue, green-green and then repeat). I was reminded of my teaching experience when I had often noted that the students who were successful many times decorated or in some way added extra effort to their endeavors.

As an agent of her own learning, a strategy Ana employed in Mrs. P’s class was when she would softly repeat words the teacher used in the lesson. Ana also referred to prior knowledge. When Mrs. P guided the children to look at the pictures on a practice test, Ana...
said, “Like a picture walk” (Field Notes, March 24, 2011). Veronica had come from the DR at the end of first grade. She, too, accessed her prior knowledge of her schooling experience in the DR. Because her literacy skills were strong, I asked Mr. D what he thought. Mr. D told me he felt the reason is that she had attended school in the DR and was transferring skills.

Emilio demonstrated ownership of learning and a sense of responsibility in the following example. In a project where the children were making maps of the community, the teacher told the students they had 20 minutes to continue working. Emilio, wanting to make sure their placement of the buildings on the map were accurate, questioned the teacher if they could glue. He wanted to complete the task so as to get to what he really wanted to learn, which was math. “Can we go to the computer lab and finish gluing when we get back?” he asked, aware of his need to achieve in an area of strength (Field Notes, March 24, 2012). Not only did the focal children have an awareness of intellectual needs, but I noticed on one occasion that, in the middle of independent work, José without asking went to the closet to retrieve his water bottle.

The focal students frequently displayed self-correction, for example, I noticed over the course of the study that Elia’s Spanish accent faded to become almost indiscernible from her English-speaking peers. On several occasions I observed that when Elia noticed an error she would self-correct immediately. She would start out speaking to herself in Spanish, then switch to English.

The focal children also displayed an enjoyment of reading. For example, Liana, when asked to read aloud, read more expressively than is typical for second graders, especially for
being a new arrival. Additionally, although she was not in the top reading group, her notebook appeared to be the work of a superior student.

Theme one, the students exercising agency in their learning, addresses research question one on the social and cultural factors contributing to the academic success of Latina/o American students. These students were proactive in individual kinds of ways that differed from the collectivistic primary Discourse into which they were born. Theme one also addresses research question two on how these students acquire the secondary Discourse of school by the strength of their heritage language and their ability to make connections, access prior knowledge, and transfer their knowledge of Spanish to English. As Gee (2008) points out, what advances student comprehension of complex language is exposure to a complex vocabulary before kindergarten.

**Theme Two: The students consistently sustained remaining in the present moment**

The 16 codes that informed theme two were: eye contact, active engagement, participation during lessons, focus on learning, total involvement, longer attention span, student sustainability, *esforsandose* (pushing herself), good feeling from succeeding, self-regulation, concentration, pride in work, persevering until satisfied, ready to learn, and buying in. The combination of both focal students’ efforts as well as characteristics that the groups revealed facilitated their success in learning.

When I conducted the home-school mini-lesson, I used a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between home and school. Five of the students who were not focal students, I noticed, did not even put themselves in the pictures of school. The focal students’ artifacts, however, reflected total involvement and active engagement. These characteristics were prevalent in other activities as well. For example, Gilberto
brought energy to most situations, beginning-to-end, demonstrating perseverance. Liana also perservered and *se esforzaba* (pushed herself); I noticed during a science review she kept going back to the packet to improve her responses. Demonstrating a longer attention span than the other students, Liana continued working until she was satisfied.

During a particularly tedious lesson led by one of the special teachers, the focal students sustained themselves, concentrated, self-regulated, and maintained their attention while the other students in the class exhibited behaviors supporting their inability to focus on the lesson. In our interview Mrs. F, the English Language Learner teacher who serviced Mr. D’s class said, “The students who are successful are ready when you begin the lesson…. They are looking right at you” (Interview Transcription, June 8, 2011). In an interview, Ms. B, the first-grade teacher, said, "I think the students who do well have the right attitude about learning. They are focused on the learning. Not like other students who are not paying attention and seem distracted and are looking around. The successful students feel proud of themselves when they get a skill. They raise their hands and ask questions. They are with you” (Interview Transcription, June 8, 2011).

Mrs. P, one of the classroom teachers’ of the focal students, had similar observations, “The successful students are so ready to learn new things. They seem so interested and are with you from the beginning of the lesson to the end” (Interview Transcription, June 15, 2011). Theme two—students remaining in the present moment—addresses research question two in that their ability to actively engage helped them acquire the dominant Discourse.
Theme Three: The students envisioned their futures

The focal students had aspirations for the future and were able to articulate what they wanted to be as well as either explain what that would mean or delineate necessary steps that would have to be taken to arrive at their goal. Twelve codes informed this theme: vision of the future, aspirations, awareness of skills needed, job as a means to invent, job as a means to make money, going to college, reading a lot, importance of education, see deeper meaning, home influence, wanting to know, and open-minded.

One day in Mrs. P’s class, I sat with Ana and Liana and asked them what they wanted to be when they grew up. Ana told me she wanted to become a hairdresser; she envisioned being the boss, telling her employees what to do, and making money. Liana responded that she wants to become a teacher and knew that meant she had to go to college. She also observed that teachers read a lot, and seemed ready to do the same. I then moved near Gilberto and asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up. He told me he wanted to become a scientist so he could discover new things and invent new things in a lab. At another table, Carlos informed me that he wanted to be an engineer when he grew up (recall his drawings in Figure 4.1 and 4.2); Carlos had in his notebook an extensive list of occupations, showing his open-mindedness. While in Mr. D’s class, Elia and Aisha told me they were both going to be teachers like Mr. D. Mr. D told me Veronica wanted to be a medical doctor when she grows up.

Envisioning a future, theme three, addresses research question two. These children’s parents were not part of the professional class, yet six of the focal children and one student of interest were developing social identities of a secondary Discourse. Gee and Green (1998)
saw “cultural models” as one of the “four key dimensions of language as social action and cultural resources” (p. 121).

**Theme Four: The students demonstrated metacognitive awareness**

The focal students in this study appeared to think about their cognition. The following eight codes informed theme four: reflection, student awareness of his thinking, detail orientation, awareness of capabilities, multi-tasking, pause-think-act, facility with home language, and student insight. This theme was evident in the ways in which students were able to express their thinking aloud. Often times the focal students would speak aloud softly, revealing the processes by which their answers were formulated.

When the students were watching a movie in science class, I noticed the focal children were able to multi-task, moving easily from viewing to writing. Gilberto was aware of his capabilities. When questions periodically appeared on the screen, Mrs. P would allow the children to call out without censure. Gilberto answered all the questions, which Mrs. P would restate. Gilberto said, “I am the smart one” (Field Notes, March 30, 2011).

He was indeed smart and reflective enough to know that not all topics are school-appropriate. During the social studies lesson on the farm, there was this exchange:

Gilberto: I have a question that may be inappropriate.

Mrs. P: Go on.

Gilberto: When farmers go to the bathroom where does it go? (Field Notes, May 26, 2011)

Here, Gilberto realized and cued his teacher into his realization that talking about sewage might be offensive. Mrs. P took it in stride; she discussed septic tanks vs. sewage going
through pipes underground and did a compare and contrast with the other types of communities, taking advantage of a teachable moment.

Also during the same lesson, Carlos explained to his fellow classmates how he remembered the characteristics of the rural community. Mrs. P had drawn on chart paper a large bubble “R” for “rural.” With characteristic detail-orientation, Carlos (the future engineer) drew inside the “R” crops and animals, explaining that this would help the class remember.

In Mr. D’s class, Emilio came back from FastMath having mastered a new level. He explained to me his success: “When my mom gives me problems, I go fast and my head is shaking from thinking” (Field Notes, March 24, 2011). Also in Mr. D’s class, I observed Elia thinking about a math problem out loud, “So there must be a zero” (Field Notes, March 24, 2011).

In an interview I learned that teaching metacognition is a district focus. Mrs. Z, an ELL teacher, said, “The district has changed a lot. It is like one year we are teaching with a basal program and now we are starting sort of from the end like with a theme. We are focused on what are the bigger constructs. We are sort of teaching the kids to think about their thinking” (Interview Transcription, June 15, 2011). During my field experience, I observed Mrs. P and Mr. D both promoting metacognition by requiring that students not just give answers but explain how they had gotten the answer as well. When reviewing the videos, I observed the students working on their animal habitat shoeboxes. The focal children appeared to pause at intervals, seeming to think of what to do next.

The classroom teachers as well as the ELL teachers all told me that one dynamic that helped the focal students with their learning and their thinking was the fact that most of them
spoke their heritage/home language articulately. Mrs. S stated in her interview, “The successful students have a good foundation in Spanish. It helps them with their thinking like when they use cognates” (words that are similar in Spanish and English such as art and arte or police and policia) (Teacher Interview, June 6, 2011).

Theme four, where students demonstrated their metacognitive awareness, addresses research question one because their strengths in their home language and their ability to think about their thinking in two languages are social and cultural factors that address their academic success. Jiménez, Garcia, and Pearson (1996) affirmed the strong relationship between bilingualism, biliteracy, and metacognition in their study. The conclusions of the investigation reported that bilingual individuals appear to display an acute awareness of the characteristics of language and its functions.

**Theme Five: The students displayed resourcefulness in locating what they needed for their own learning**

The focal students were resourceful in procuring materials and/or asking questions for clarification when doing assigned tasks as well as endeavoring to fully understand discussions or direct instruction. Theme five was informed by the following 10 codes: accessing books from class library, accessing the computer, accessing information on the bulletin boards, accessing former pages in notebooks, googling, gathering new information, interacting with peers, having materials ready, revising work packets, and being inquisitive.

Most of the students knew how to access informational technology. In Mr. D’s class, Veronica informed me that she had used the OPAC system (Online Public Access Catalogue) to find her library book. Mrs. P asked the students what “streaming” meant, and Gilberto
called out, “Google it!” (Field Notes, March 24, 2011). The children also used the computers in Mrs. P’s class to learn more about their animals during science.

In addition to information technology, the children accessed books. When reviewing the video, I saw Carlos go to the class library to retrieve a book about his animal. He then used the picture as a model, creating the drawings before writing the definitions.

Also in the video, focal students frequently asked both the teacher and teacher assistant on occasion to ask questions. From my field notes, I noticed Liana, who was typically shy, asking her teacher “How do you spell___?” (Field Notes, May 24, 2011). The focal students also accessed their peers as needed, such as when Emilio was having difficulty grasping a math concept, and asked Elia to explain it to him. He understood quickly and told her “I got it” (Field Notes, May 24, 2012).

In an interview, Mrs. P said, “A successful student is one who learns how to be resourceful. In today’s world you know the resources are there. You just have to access them. I think a successful student is one who can access information and is therefore sort of autonomous. It is not just about memorizing. That is not what it is all about any more” (Interview Transcription, June 15, 2011). Mrs. F, the ELL teacher with Mr. D, said, “They have all the materials they need” (Interview Transcription, June 8, 2011).

Theme five, accessing resources, addresses research question two. It is clear that the focal students, in part, attained the secondary Discourse by their ability to locate what they needed from informational technology, books, drawings, and their peers. Eakle and Dalesio (2008), in a study influenced by Gee, showed in a second grade classroom that had a partnership with a museum the importance of children being able to access multiple symbol systems: authentic writing (such as in invitations) and visual art (such as in brochures). The
children also benefitted from digital resources such as computer art software. The outcomes of the undertaking showed success. Understanding that one can help oneself in learning by finding either print texts or digital materials is also a sociocultural factor that supports learning, addressing research question one. The successful Latina/o second graders were aware that they had the capacity to enrich their comprehension as well as improve their written assignments by knowing where to look or who to ask.

**Theme Six: The teachers served as ambassadors of crossing borders between culture**

The teachers and teacher assistants in my study were liaisons between the families and the school, acting as interpreters of not just the language-in-use of English but also striving to be translators of the Discourse of school. They were able to explain school expectations in a manner in which the parents felt validated in their primary Discourse and yet informed in the Discourse of school. They were able also to be the conduit through which the Latina/o students were taught the nuances, norms, and expectations of the Discourse of school. The following 13 codes informed theme six: acknowledging importance of mother, understanding students’ lives, understanding students’ home background, structure of school, sense of belonging, importance of school, feeling comfortable, adaptation to new culture, cultural clash, meeting with parents outside of school, awareness of Latina/o gender roles, school as a place to love and be loved, and pleasant place.

Mr. D took his role as ambassador seriously enough that, on his own time, during the summer he visited the households of every child in an effort to understand their lives and background. As a cultural insider, Mr. D knew the importance of the Latina/o concept of confianza, in this case meaning mutual trust between parents and educators. About the home
visits, he said, “I also get to see what the home is like and get a feel for the parents.” He also used these visits to help parents understand the importance of school, such as the importance of attendance and homework: “I kind of tell them you know when it rains we still have school and they just have to cover up and come. I also tell them how important homework is and that they should help in any way they can” (Interview transcription, June 6, 2011).

*Confianza* allowed him to approach the father of one of the children in a way a teacher who did not conduct home visits probably could not. Mr. D said, “One time I saw Pedro’s father hanging out on the corner with his friends and I went up to him and said, ‘Man you are forty years old and still hanging out on the corner. Go home and help your kid with his homework. He needs help’” (Interview Transcription, June 8, 2011). Without seeming to take offense, the father did as Mr. D requested.

Ms. B, a first grade teacher, was motivated to understand her students’ lives and backgrounds because of her own negative experiences as a child. She was a good student in school who did not get into trouble. On the one occasion that she got into trouble, the teacher did not understand Ms. B’s life or background. The teacher required Ms. B’s parents to sign an index card indicating that Ms. B’s homework had been completed. Usually, Ms. B’s father signed Ms. B’s homework; however, one night he did not come until after Ms. B had gone to bed. When Ms. B brought her homework to school unsigned, the teacher could not understand why Ms. B’s mother had not signed. Ms. B’s mother was very shy, and did not feel comfortable signing. It was a cultural misunderstanding. Ms. B said, “So it was like, they didn’t understand my life outside of school….Never in my life had I gotten in trouble and I got yelled at” (Interview Transcript, June 8, 2011).
Interestingly, Ms. B had attended the same school at which she now taught. Prior to attending Éxito Elementary, she had attended school in New York City where she had experienced much diversity with teachers—“an African American teacher, a Filipino teacher, a Korean teacher, and a Chinese teacher.” At that time, however, there was little diversity at Éxito. Her teacher did not understand Ms. B’s home background as depicted above in the excerpt about unsigned homework.

Mrs. F went out of her way to help parents feel comfortable. She said, “When Elia told me that mommy wasn’t coming to the parent conferences because of the twin babies, I went and called her and explained that she should come anyway, that the babies no molestaban y que era muy importante que hablemos del progreso de la nina (didn’t bother anyone and that it was very important that they talk about the student’s progress). Guess what? She came with the twins” (Interview Transcription, June 8, 2011).

In attempting to help parents adapt to the new culture and gain the new Discourse, Mrs. S said, “I tell the parents it is very important for the children at this age to have a routine. When they get home, they should know when to do their homework and have a place to do it. It becomes a habit that will carry them through as they get older and their work gets more difficult. I also tell them the importance of reading at home whether in English or Spanish and having the student explain what they have read to the parent. Even if they read to you in English, have them tell you about it in Spanish” (Interview Transcription, June 15, 2011). Also to help their children gain the new Discourse, Mrs. P said, “I tell the parents ‘Empujalo’ (push him or her)” in their academic endeavors (Interview Transcription, June 15, 2011).
To help parents develop a sense of belonging and see school as a pleasant place where they can love and be loved, Mrs. B suggested a culturally compatible way: “So it’s like why don’t …instead of making it so formal, why can’t you have like, a cafecito (little coffee) night? A time and place where you come and everybody talks. And you educate them about the school system and you answer their questions in their language” (Interview Transcription, June 8, 2011). She continued, “I honestly think that, you know, we need to reach out to Latina/o parents and the community and educate them. Tell them what can be offered for their kids. These types of meetings have to be in their language and in their cultural setting. And in a way that they feel confianza. Because you know, they don’t feel…The parents themselves feel judged. When they walk into a school, it’s intimidating. They don’t know the language! They don’t know…you know?” (Interview Transcription, June 8, 2011).

Theme six provides insight on teachers’ motivations to serve as ambassadors to help parents cross borders, answering research questions one and two. For question one, social and cultural factors such as facilitating parents’ comfort level and accommodating parents by meeting with them outside of school helped children attain academic success. For question two, the people in my investigation were adept at crossing borders as they had all had to learn the Discourse of school in order to achieve success for themselves. Teachers and teacher assistants’ flexibility and intimate knowledge of both cultures contributed to the academic success of the focal students as well as facilitated the learning of the other Latina/o students. In the case of Ms. B especially, her painful past experiences helped her understand her role as a teacher in making explicit the secondary Discourse.
Two of Nieto’s (2010) five principles of learning calls on educators to recognize that learning is affected by cultural difference and context. Clearly, the teachers in this study grasped the importance of these principles. In addition, González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) spoke to the notion to achieve a functioning teacher-parent partnership, teachers must step out of their comfort zone and initiate home visits in the role of a learner and ethnographer. These visits, according to the researchers, allow the educators to begin to understand how the families, and consequently the students, “make sense of their lives” (p. 9)

**Theme Seven: Adults supported and were sensitive to the children**

The adults in my study were aware of the importance of the affective domain when interacting with their students as well as the students’ families. They accepted the students just as they were and ventured to assist them in learning not only the second grade curriculum, or the language-in-use, but also the whole Discourse of school. They did this in subtle ways such as allowing the speaking of Spanish for comfort and clarification, using humor as a way of instructing, and also by positively reinforcing students.

The following codes informed theme seven: emotional connection to school, importance of teacher, importance of relationship with teacher, importance of one important relationship at home, focus on relationships, familial and/or parental support, student acceptance, allowing code-switching, allowing for competitive spirit, accepting students as individuals, and not tolerated but accepted.

As with theme six, teachers were sometimes sensitive to children because of the insensitivity that they had experienced as children themselves. When Mrs. P was in middle school, she had, she said, “a very thick Spanish accent.” One particularly humiliating incident was still fresh on Mrs. P’s mind. Her teacher, she said, “put her hands on my face
and squeezed trying to help me pronounce correctly. All the other kids laughed. I felt so small that I wanted to evaporate” (Interview Transcript, June 15, 2011). In her teaching Mrs. P is very careful not to humiliate her students, which nurtures their emotional connection to school and to the teacher. For example, Mrs. P was very patient with Ana when she told a long story about her sister and earrings. Mrs. P was also supportive of Liana, who she knew to be a shy child, with comments like, “Wow, that’s a good answer!” (Field Notes, March 21, 2011).

Mr. D was sensitive to students’ needs to code-switch. For example, during a math lesson, Elia said to another child, “Mr. D. dijo que le ponga una square (Mr. D said to draw a square)” (Field Notes, March 24, 2011). I noticed Mr. D heard Elia, but did not stop her translating for her classmate. And, as mentioned in the narrative on Emilio at the introduction of this chapter, Mr. D accepted Emilio’s competitive spirit.

Family members were also sensitive to and supported the focal children. Carlos also told me his tía had taught him “many, many things about science and all sorts of things” (Field Notes, May 13, 2011). When I asked him what he did in the summer, he told me he had a pool in his backyard and that he played with his friends and sometimes he read a lot of books in the summer and learned things from his tía. In an interview, Mrs. M, the teacher assistant, confirmed, “Well, the reason Carlos does so well is that his parents seem to take a personal interest in his learning. It is that home-to-school connection” (Interview Transcript, June 8, 2011).

Theme seven, adult sensitivity and support, answers research question one. The teachers’ focus on relationships and that the teachers themselves were bilingual
and bicultural afforded them a sensitivity and insight into their students’ needs. Their sensitivity was balanced by their high expectations.

Nieto (2010) advises educators that if students of color are made to feel that who they are is acceptable, they are then motivated to engage in the academic process and, in addition, become agents of their own learning. This sociocultural dynamic contributes to the academic success of Latina/o second graders.

**Theme Eight: Adults and children communicated through multiple pathways**

Adults and children in my study had multiple perspectives and communicated their views in various ways. In particular contexts, the message of what was communicated as well as the medium varied. The following 11 codes informed theme eight: collaboration, elaborate or extend learning, defining oneself as an individual, leadership qualities, translator role at home, translator role at school, showing progress, being funny, and expressing worldview, assertion vs. compliance, and questioning authority vs. acquiescence.

Mrs. P’s and Mr. D’s classrooms were both contexts in which collaboration was not only allowed but encouraged. The interactive nature of most lessons set the stage for the collaboration that occurred at the student tables. In Mrs. P’s class, Ana would share a leadership role with Kenya, a student who was an active participant in her learning. Together they assisted the other two students at their table to extend their learning by helping each other by explaining what had to be done and actually showing processes in math problems.

Liana also was a leader and assisted others in her group to extend their learning by doing more than was required by the teacher. An example of this that I observed was in music class. The objective of the lesson was to play a series of musical notes with wooden sticks. I saw Liana organize her group and facilitate their learning of the notes. Since they
mastered the skill more quickly than the other groups, the group had time left over. Liana guided the students in her group to make up an original song. Mrs. M, the music teacher, communicated her pleasure by saying, “Wow, that was beautifully done” (Field Notes, March 21, 2011).

Aisha in Mr. D’s class not only collaborated but played the role of translator in her class. Though she was not the only student translator, I observed her translating many times. One day while I was seated at her table and she was helping a new arrival with her work I told her that she was very kind to help the students. She said, “I always help everyone. I finish my work fast so that’s why I can. I like helping” (Field Notes, March 30, 2011).

That day Aisha also informed me that she always translated for her parents as well because they couldn’t speak English. She explained, “Like when we go to Burger King. I have to go up and tell them what we want. You know French fries or hamburger or soda. I’m the one that always talks” (Field Notes, April 7, 2011).

Many of the teachers at Éxito Elementary expressed their bicultural worldviews in that when interacting with students and adults who were not Latina/o they seemed to communicate in the dominant Discourse such as when I overheard Mrs. P speaking to the PTA president whose child was in her class and said, “Then I will change your appointment from 9:00 A.M. to 10:20” (Field Notes, April 7, 2011). A couple of days later oddly enough in speaking to a student whose mom had not kept her appointment she told the child “Dile a mamí que me venga a ver cuando ella puede” (tell mommy to come see me when she can) (Field Notes, April 9, 2011).

Another example of teacher adaptation of a bicultural worldview was when Mr. D in speaking to the ELL teacher commiserated about having to call Maria’s mom to see if she
could change plans to go to DR to coincide with Spring vacation. He and the ELL teacher decided if the tickets were already bought, they would both send written work so the student would not miss the work that would be done while she was on vacation.

Both Carlos, a focal student in Mrs. P’s class and Veronica, a focal student in Mr. D’s class, communicated by humor by being funny when they worked in groups. I observed that both Mrs. P and Mr. D allowed this behavior as it didn’t seem to detract from their work. On occasion, I noted that both teachers themselves would communicate using humor to make a point or as a way to help a student cope with a negative situation such as when Mr. D said to Maria, “No te voy a matar. Trata a ver si lo puedes hacer” (I am not going to kill you. Try to figure it out) (Field Notes, May 6, 2011). Maria naturally laughed at the absurdity that he had communicated and she worked out the math problem correctly.

Once a week on Fridays, Mrs. P would have her children write to her in their journals about anything that had happened during the week or anything they wanted to share. On Mondays, the students would check their journals to see what Mrs. M had written them in return. In addition, Mrs. P used the students’ class notebooks as opposed to the journal notebooks as an alternative pathway for students to exhibit their progress. I believe that the use of student journals for teacher-student communication is an excellent medium particularly for shy or reticent students.

The students in both classes were provided with several opportunities to communicate their learning in creative and artistic ways. Mr. P often had students collaboratively do projects such as making a map of the community, making bar graphs of the countries that the students’ families came from, and role playing the plot of a story from reading. Mrs. P also promoted communication through multiple pathways by having small groups in her class
prepare poems to recite and act out and having students make dioramas of the animal they were studying for a mammal report.

Theme eight addresses both research question number one and number two. The focal students’ sociocultural behaviors such as leading collaborative efforts in their groups that elaborated or extended learning enhanced and facilitated their learning personally and assisted their peers’ learning as well. Freire’s (2000) concept of banking education, as equating teaching with putting knowledge into students’ brains without any active engagement or meaning making on the students’ part was contra indicated by the focal students’ behaviors in my study. Nieto (2010) purported that the learner as an agent of learning is crucial and supported by active engagement in meaningful activities. The focal students in my investigation epitomized active engagement as they communicated through multiple pathways. In addition the codes of theme eight such as the translator roles that described focal students’ behaviors supported their acquisition of the secondary Discourse of school.

The literature also supports the communication of students through multiple pathways in a study by Fradd and Lee (1999). They explained that ELL students learning science should be instructed with the use of concrete experiences as well as the provision of advance organizers. They further promoted the inclusion of cooperative-learning activities, imaging, and interactive writing as a vehicle to enhance comprehension.

**Theme Nine: Adults and children showed reciprocal respect and positive relationships**

Both the adults and children in my study revealed respectful and positive relationships. The students persistently assisted peers who were having difficulty. They explained constructs to classmates in a courteous manner. The teachers showed patience
when focal students asked questions that went off on tangents. In addition, the teacher assistant in Mr. D’s class attached herself to the new arrivals to expedite their adjustment to the new school and new Discourse.

The following codes informed theme nine: acceptance of calling out, need to keep peers on task, social awareness, peer influence, positive role models, parental interaction, confianza, hospitality, parent-teacher connection, feeling comfortable, socially active, acculturation, and delegation.

The classroom teachers of my study, Mrs. P and Mr. D, both created a climate in their classrooms that allowed the students to feel comfortable by embracing lessons that were interactive. They both acknowledged the need their students had for social activity. In addition, the adults demonstrated their social awareness that the students calling out during a lesson was an indicator of enthusiasm and engagement and thereby allowed the behavior of calling out to be a part of the process of learning.

The confianza that was apparent in the classroom between teacher and student extended also to most teacher parent interactions. The hospitality towards parents and families was not just a characteristic during parent-teacher conference time but was something that was typical in the culture of Éxito Elementary as well as in both the classrooms. A few times during my study I observed the two teachers interacting with parents. On one occasion, I heard Mr. D tell a parent that her son, Luis, was reading much better and indicated that thanks to the mother’s effort her child was making much better progress. The parent-teacher connection was evident.

Liana, a focal student in Mrs. P’s class, during a music lesson in which the students were playing notes with wooden sticks as mentioned previously exhibited her influence on
her peers. The other two girls in her group were basically fooling around and not doing the task. Liana softly but firmly reminded them that they should practice so that when they had to play for the whole class their piece would be good.

Many of the focal students served as positive peer role models in that they were usually involved in the lessons and the written tasks and were usually willing to help other students. The tone of both classrooms were collectivistic in that I observed a feeling of community that facilitated students helping by teachers delegating responsibilities such as giving out supplies or getting a lunch count. In both classes I often saw the focal students engaged in cooperative activity.

One day, Mr. D stepped out into the hallway for a minute to speak to Mrs. F, the ELL teacher. The classroom phone rang and all of the students looked to Aisha. She went to the phone to answer. It was apparent that this was her assigned job. She said, “Good afternoon. This is Mr. D’s class. How may I help you?” (Field Notes, May 12, 2011). Her acculturation to the new Discourse was excellent.

The relationship building and mutual respect of theme nine address research question one and two. Positive relationships and reciprocal respect are both sociocultural factors that contributed to the academic success of the focal students and the learning of the other Latina/o students. The acceptance of Latina/o style interactive lessons in which students were not denigrated for calling out as a means of participating in the lesson facilitated the acquisition of the Discourse of school for all the students.

Gee (2011) reported that relationship development and persistence are social and directly related to the Discourse-of-use. Our capacity to signal our affiliation or lack thereof is a means by which we build solidarity or distance ourselves. This dynamic of
sociolinguistics and of Discourse Analysis are an important issue specifically when working with Latina/o students as the research purports that relationships are a key characteristic for success with Latina/o students (Nieto, 2010).

**Conclusion**

To conclude, the social and cultural factors that contribute to the academic success of Latina/o second graders as well as the manner in which these students acquire the Discourse of school are defined within the dynamics of the nine themes that were generated by this study. To recapitulate, they are:

1. The students exercised agency in their own learning.
2. The students consistently sustained remaining in the present moment.
3. The students envisioned their futures.
4. The students demonstrated metacognitive awareness.
5. The students displayed resourcefulness in locating what they need for their own learning.
6. The teachers and teacher assistants served as ambassadors of crossing borders between cultures.
7. Adults supported and were sensitive to the children.
8. Adults and children communicated through multiple pathways.
9. Adults and children showed reciprocal respect and positive relationships.
CHAPTER FIVE:

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Questions

The questions that guided this research were:

1. What social and cultural factors contribute to the academic success of Latina/o second graders?

2. How have students whose primary Discourse differs from the dominant Discourse acquired the secondary Discourse of school?

Review of Findings Related to the Research Questions

Chapter five offers a summation of the study and imparts the major findings as well. Further, the implications of the investigation are explicated and the limitations and recommendations for practice and research are presented. This study explored the social and cultural factors that contributed to the academic success of Latina/o second graders. It also strove to gain insight into the manner in which these students acquired the secondary Discourse of school. Findings resulted in the creation of nine themes. They are:

1. The students exercised agency in their own learning

2. The students consistently sustained remaining in the present moment.

3. The students envisioned their futures.

4. The students demonstrated metacognitive awareness.

5. The students displayed resourcefulness in locating what they need for their own learning.

6. The teachers and teacher assistants served as ambassadors of crossing borders between cultures.
7. Adults supported and were sensitive to the children.

8. Adults and children communicated through multiple pathways.

9. Adults and children showed reciprocal respect and positive relationships.

Theme one deals with students being agents of their own learning and presents the notion that successful Latina/o second graders execute specific behaviors consistently that facilitate their learning. They appear to be intrinsically self-motivated and endeavor to make connections and further transfer skills from one situation to another. They take ownership of their progress and are conscientious in accessing previous knowledge as well as in developing strategies that assist their processing of skills. Further they are diligent in correcting their work and they appear to have an innate awareness of their needs.

Theme two advances the idea that these successful Latina/o second grade students have the capacity to be fully in the present moment. Whether the teacher is conducting a lesson or the student is independently completing a task or she is engaged in a collaborative endeavor, the successful Latina/o student is actively engaged, totally involved, and focused on the learning. They appear to give eye contact consistently and it seems as if they can sustain a longer attention span than less successful children in the class. Further they are ready to learn with all the necessary materials at hand. These children sustain themselves by participating during lessons and feeling pride in their work. The successful second graders seem to have a more developed ability to concentrate and they persevere in their tasks until satisfied. These students appear to be self-regulated and are concerned with the work to be done.

Theme three evidenced the successful students as having a vision of the future. Their aspirations ran the gamut: an engineer, a scientist, several teachers, a hair dresser with her
own shop, and a medical doctor. They revealed an awareness of the need to go to college as well as the importance of education. Further individual focal students described their understanding of the skills that were needed to reach the career goal. One student articulated that he wanted to be a scientist to invent things. These children wanted to know about the world and seemed as if they were committed to being part of the institution of school.

Theme four expressed the idea that the successful Latina/o students engaged in metacognitive processes. They seemed to contemplate and figure out sophisticated concepts such as identity issues when different members of a blended family came from different Latin American countries. On various occasions I witnessed different focal students thinking out loud when completing a task as well as orally planning the execution of a project. A salient point is that all of the successful focal students had strong language skills in Spanish. I sensed that their ability to speak fluently in both languages helped them to think about their thinking. They presented also as being cognizant of their capabilities.

Theme five advanced the notion of successful Latina/o students being resourceful and capable of accessing what was needed to advance their learning. Students would access pictures to help with diagrams for work packets. They gathered new information by looking things up in books from the class library, on the computer, and even accessing former pages of their notebooks. They were knowledgeable about Google and made excellent progress on the computer programs used in the classroom as well as at the computer lab. These students would initiate and sustain collaboration at their tables with peers that helped them with their work. Very importantly the successful students consistently asked questions of all the adults to clarify what they were learning.
Theme six advanced the idea of the salient role that the teachers and teacher assistant (TA) played as the interpreters of the new Discourse both for all of the students as well as the Latina/o community. The idea that these ambassadors were fully conversant with the Discourse of the homes of the Latina/o students as well as the Discourse of school facilitated their social interactions with the children as well as their families. Being acquainted with cultural constructs such as the importance of the mother and the notion that the needs of the family take precedence over the individual allowed teachers to approach problems in culturally sensitive ways such as in the case when a student is being taken out of school not during a school break to go and visit in the country of origin. The teacher would validate the parent that, of course, family was important but selecting a date for the trip that would coincide with a school break would help the student not miss any work.

The teachers and TAs understood the importance of affect in their students’ lives and were warm and affectionate in their interactions with the students and created environments in which students felt comfortable and as if they belonged. They welcomed the Latina/o parents into the schools allowing siblings to attend parent conferences and even habitually making home visits.

Theme seven revealed the importance of the adults in a child’s school life to be sensitive and supportive. The adults at school set the tone of the learning environment. My study found that the Latina/o students had an emotional connection to school. It was important for students to feel accepted and comfortable. A significant strategy for insuring student ease was allowing code-switching when needed for clarification or for emotional support. Further adults understood the importance of acknowledging the students as individuals. The importance of the teacher in playing a vital role in the creation of a positive
atmosphere was instrumental in the focal students’ success. The notion that they were able to ask any question and be answered in a dignified manner encouraged their inquisitiveness. In addition, the findings of my study suggested that all the successful focal students had a particular adult in the home who advocated for them in every way from helping them with homework, to encouraging them to taking an interest in their activities. Home support appeared to be key for success and conversely not having home support resulted in poor academic progress for the student based on the consensus of Mr. D and Mrs. P as well as the other teachers and the TA interviewed.

Theme eight advances the idea that the students and the adults in my study communicated in a variety of ways. The students’ collaborations with peers were a dynamic in the elaboration and extension of their learning. Focal students were natural leaders and were encouraged to develop this quality by the adults. The students were not censured for being funny and in general were allowed to define themselves as per their inclination. Disparate worldviews such as the importance of the group vs. the importance of the individual were not just tolerated but accepted. Adults presented with bicultural worldviews that allowed for crossing borders with ease and flexibility. Both students and the adults in my investigation enacted the role of translators at home and in school. To conclude, students communicated what they learned in multiple ways such as in performing, drawing, making of murals, and making of dioramas.

Theme nine expounded on the importance of a reciprocity of respect and the promotion of positive relationships. Most of the adults in the site school were accepting of cultural idiosyncrasies, such as calling out during lessons. This practice reflects Latina/o interactive conversational style. The parent-teacher connection was enhanced by the manner
in which adults welcomed both parents and families into their school developing their 
*confianza.* The community was always received in a cordial manner whether the person had 
an appointment or not. Parents and children were made comfortable by adults speaking to 
them in their heritage language. All notices were printed in both languages. There was a 
unique flexibility at parent teacher conferences in that parents would be attended to even if 
they did not adhere to their specified appointment time. Latina/o role models were in 
abundance at the site school. There were several male teachers and a male Latino 
psychologist as well. Further students were encouraged to be socially active not just at lunch 
but through the entire school day. This aspect of making meaning socially with peers and 
adults facilitated their learning and cognition as per Vygotsky (1978). And finally 
acculturation seemed to happen in a natural relaxed manner with dignity for all. Nieto (2010) 
explained that a focus on relationship building is crucial when teaching Latina/o students.

The code of understanding students’ home life developed from the teacher interviews 
in which each of the Latina/o teachers related the importance of respecting each students’ 
home and degree of English proficiency. They consistently relayed similar stories of their 
experiences as children in which the White teachers had inadvertently disrespected them by 
focusing on pronunciation to the point of student embarrassment, by not accepting the lived 
reality of their homes and making demands that students could not comply with, and in 
general facilitating a feeling that they were not included nor acceptable. I was moved by 
these narratives and could relate to happenings in my own life.

**Discussion**

The review of the literature in chapter two expounded upon the theoretical framework 
upon which this study was designed. The interconnection among the three theories: Lev
Vygotsky (1978) in social cognition, James Paul Gee’s (1985, 1988, 1989, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2008) theory of sociolinguistics and Discourse Analysis and its influence on students’ learning, and Luis Moll’s (2005) theory of Funds of Knowledge (FoK) promoting the notion that schools should tap into the expertise of students’ homes and resist seeing the poor and working class as deficient as well as that allowing Latina/o students to share their home experiences and texts was apparent throughout the entire study.

The inclusion of Sonia Nieto’s (2010) work on multiculturalism allowed me to understand the impact of exclusionary and inclusionary practices. Further, the incorporation of writings from other Latina/o educators gave voice to their perspectives as educators of English Language Learners (ELLs). Their personal memories of their American school experiences as ELLs were very similar to the memories of the Latina/o teachers who were interviewed. I believe all of these voices were essential in my understanding this investigation.

It is imperative that Latinas/os develop a strong ethnic identity as a dynamic in the natural search for self-identity. The Latina/o student is immediately confronted with a myriad of cultural and linguistic differences upon entering school. If he is not cognizant of the influencing concepts of his heritage culture, it is more difficult to adjust to the necessary negotiations needed to succeed in the middle class culture of the American classroom. One’s expectations, sense of security and general well-being are all connected and bound by the home language, customs, and norms of the home environment. Furthermore, having a strong ethnic identity has a dramatic impact on a positive sense of self (Clark & Bustos, 2001).

Academically successful Latino students have had the good fortune of connecting to and identifying with individuals who are role models of academic achievement. In my own
life, I was critically aware that on the island of Puerto Rico, I had a medical doctor, a civil engineer, and a university professor among my relatives. These role models with whom I had limited contact created an inner construct that allowed all my brothers and sisters and myself to visualize ourselves in professional roles. Mr. D spoke often of his uncle and the influence he had on his life as well as his recognition of how he had been such a strong role model attending college while Mr. D was in middle school. Mrs. F referred to her father often during the interview process and related that his being a math professor colored her personal aspirations (Interview transcriptions, June 8, 2011).

This fluidity of identity is essential to students in their ability to encompass new and effective behaviors that lead to academic success. The Latina/o students must in a sense develop the ability to adapt and learn the nuances of the American middle class culture or, as Gee expresses it, they must learn the new Discourse if they are to succeed academically as well as politically as they enter adulthood. To clarify, I am not suggesting a need to assimilate totally but rather a conscious acculturation in order to succeed academically. My contention is that if one is to dare to be a participant in the dominant culture one must possess a comprehensive and positive perception of their heritage culture. The positive self-concept engendered by a strong sense of ethnic identity leads to an efficacy in acquiring the necessary norms necessary to sustain oneself in the new cultural environment (Shorris, 1992).

Rivas-Drake (2008) considers “ethnicity is a key dimension upon which individuals define themselves” (p. 121). In addition, she claims that motivation is activated and sustained by a strong sense of connection to one’s ethnic group. Affiliation with members of one’s ethnic group promotes a collective identity and a sense of commonality in terms of
pressing societal problems. Ethnic identity is considered to be situational, influenced by both positive and negative experiences, and politically positioned (Zarate, 2005).

Kinship contact and visits to countries of ethnic origin contribute to the Latino students’ understanding of where they come from as well as to their self understanding of values and ways of thinking. Celebrations, holidays, conversational styles, and beliefs have a direct influence on how we view the world and how we make sense of our lives as well as our endeavors (Zarate, 2005).

Successful Latina/o students are integrated psychologically and do not feel diminished by their openness to partaking in the opportunities offered by the educational experience (Martínez, DeGarmo & Eddy, 2004). They are secure in their definition of being both Latina/o and American understanding by default that one need not surrender one’s identity in order to inculcate efficacious behaviors and mindsets. This inculcation and harmonious blending of differentiated cultural constructs transform into an individualized version of the students’ innate culture that allow them to see value and feel pride in both cultures, the loving supportive culture of the family and home as well as the aspirant environment providing learning and academic competence (Rivas-Drake, 2008).

The mentoring of Latina/o students by teachers or principals have a profound influence on the students’ propensity to engage in the academic experience. The Latina/o constructs of confianza (having an intimate communicative relationship) and respeto (respect) are operating dynamics in the influence of significant others. In addition, positive interactions with significant others have profound impact in the process of self-definition and positive self-concept (Devos & Cruz-Torres, 2007).
Implications for Education and Instructional Leaders

The students exercised agency in their own learning

Teachers can directly impact students becoming agents of their own learning by bringing certain aspects of agency to the attention of their students. For example, when a new skill is introduced, teachers can habitually ask students if the new construct reminds them of something they have already learned. This strategy will train the children to make connections with formerly learned skills and will encourage transfer of skills to new situations. In terms of helping students to be conscientious about their work and to develop a sense of ownership raising the question to a student such as “Are you proud of this?” will present the notion of how the assignment represents the student. Allowing students the privilege of correcting their work and having it regraded will promote agency. Further the use of the gradual release of responsibility will assist students in taking ownership of their learning (Routman, 2003).

The students consistently sustained remaining in the present moment

Teachers can promote students remaining in the present moment by using some kind of a signal to remind the students to attend such as clicking of the fingers or knocking softly on the desk. Children can be encouraged to be more actively engaged by designing lessons to be more interactive such as having students explain processes. Further, giving students as much choice as possible in different follow-up activities to practice a skill will encourage students remaining in the present moment.

I suggest teachers use alternative assessment measures and as often as possible to allow students to select the way in which they can show their learning by projects, skits, rap songs, reports on personal topics accessing the computer (Ramos, 2010). Teachers can
engage students by allowing them to make decisions about their work as much as possible, such as having folders or packets of assignments and allowing students flexibility whenever feasible. Attention span can be increased by providing longer periods of time to work on projects and considering the notion of an assignment being extended over the length of a week.

**The students envisioned their futures**

Students must be exposed to a rich array of career possibilities. In early childhood classes, aspirations are frequently studied in Social Studies. More must be done to create cultural models that children will emulate. I suggest dressing up and role playing a particular career choice, interviewing family and neighbors, accessing information from the computer and making presentations based on the research. The teachers must augment their children’s literature collection to include books on careers, biographies and autobiographies, especially of imminent Latinas/os.

Older children and, of course, younger children must have frequent visitors to the classroom from various professions and jobs to serve as role models. In terms of children of color, it is imperative that some of the visitors be from ethnically diverse populations. A second grade student of mine once asked if Dominican people were not allowed to be teachers. I asked him why he thought that. He told me that all the teachers were either Puerto Rican or Cuban. At that time in the site school the Latina/o teachers were indeed either Puerto Rican or Cuban. I naturally informed him that Dominicans could certainly be teachers also. Tapping the FoK of students’ families for individual family members to present in school is also suggested. The ability to connect and identify with the role model is crucial (Rivas-Drake, 2008).
The students demonstrated metacognitive awareness

Teachers can be instrumental in encouraging metacognition by modeling their own thinking out loud to students. It is even appropriate to explain what metacognition is and how one goes about developing the process. The use of the notion of Think Alouds in which students explain the manner in which they arrived at the answer is crucial and I suggest should be a consistent part of what is required when answering. The implementation of math notebooks in which students explain by writing how a problem was solved would also improve metacognition.

In addition, I suggest having students use a double-entry journal strategy in which students respond to what they are reading by jotting down notes of what they perceive as relevant. In addition, the pupils also write their reactions to the text. The purpose of the strategy is to offer a platform in which students give expression to their thinking as well as become dynamically enmeshed with the text. Educators may implement this tactic in various ways such as when students are taking notes. It is an effective way of encouraging individuals in becoming more actively engaged in their learning (Ruddell, 2002).

The students displayed resourcefulness in locating what they needed for their own learning

Teachers can assist students in locating what they need for their learning by giving assignments that require students to gather new information, such as projects on topics that students know little about and therefore have to access the computer, library books, and journals. Teachers can design assignments for group work that have to do with problem solving such as, “What would the group do if they were stranded on a deserted island?”
Teachers can help younger children by making up or having the students make up fingerplays and/or songs that name all of the materials necessary for each lesson. For example:

It is math time, it is math time. Sí, sí, sí.
Do I have my math book, math book, math book?
Here is my pencil, pencil and my notebook, notebook.
And yes, I have my counters, counters. Sí, sí, sí.

In addition, having students do demonstrations that require several materials such as making up experiments on their own will develop their capacity to be resourceful. Further providing young students with checklists of necessary materials for different lessons or having the student herself make up a checklist and then using it are all strategies that will increase student resourcefulness.

The teachers and teacher assistants served as ambassadors of crossing borders between cultures

It is essential that teachers be exposed to professional development that advances multicultural practices. Specifically, the dynamics of Latina/o culture must also be explored because Latinas/os are currently the largest and fastest growing minority and by the year 2026 it is estimated Latinas/os will make up 70% of the K-12 enrollment in the United States (Garcia, 2001). In a mere 14 years, 70% of the children in American classrooms will be Latina/o.

Adults supported and were sensitive to the children

Overall, I believe that teachers endeavor to be supportive and sensitive to their students as long as the students follow the norms of the Discourse of school. It is when
students code-switch, translate, or behave according to the norms of their primary Discourse that some teachers seem to have difficulty sustaining their good will. Once again, I believe the answer is professional development on diversity sensitizing teachers to cultural realities. I advocate a professional development (PD) program of extended duration; PD training addressing such a large and multifaceted program like diversity could not possibly be effective in one session.

A small but important strategy would be for teachers to make sure their class libraries contain multiple diverse titles, as well as that the books have illustrations of children of color. Another easily implemented suggestion is to have teachers purposefully and deliberately celebrate, and teach lessons, give homework all about Latina/o characters not just during Hispanic Heritage month but all through the school year.

**Adults and children communicated through multiple pathways**

In essence people communicate in many different ways dependent on with whom they are communicating. When friends go out for a social evening a particular Discourse is utilized. On the other hand, a person at a professional conference would enact a more formal professional Discourse (Gee, 1992). This theme evolved from the notion that the students and children in my study were communicating in many different ways and on many different levels. The positive aspect was that diversity in communication was acceptable such as when Carlos would make funny comments at his table. His expression was a unique part of him; his humor added to the students’ endeavors rather than detracted.

Accepting and empowering the students in permitting them to assume the role of translator, or encouraging collaborative activities allows the student to imprint their learning and develop their cognition on a variety of levels. Allowing students to talk is important. It
feels good and it works as a means of insuring retention (Vygotsky, 1978). Sanctioning the use of various pathways to communicate increases the likelihood of elaboration or extension of learning.

Teachers can foster the communication through multiple pathways by being more accepting of the individual idiosyncrasies of their students. If a child is humorous allow him to express that part of his personality. If there are ELLs in the class allow them to code-switch and even translate for their peers when needed. If a student is artistic allow him to communicate his learning through art when possible. Let student leaders lead and allow children who appear to be individualistic and different from the norm act and communicate as the individuals that they are. To conclude, teachers must develop not just tolerance but acceptance of diversity on every level.

**Adults and children showed reciprocal respect and positive relationships**

The teachers in a school can show reciprocal respect and develop positive relationships with the parents and families of Latina/o students by making cultural accommodations. In response to this statement many teachers would take the stance that it is the immigrant’s responsibility to learn the new Discourse and adhere to dominant notions of punctuality and other cultural norms. My response is that acculturation is a slow and never ending process that requires great concentration. I was born in the United States and had all my schooling here as well and at times I still make cultural faux pas such as interrupting in conversations. The Latina/o conversational style is interactive. One person may finish another’s sentence. Individuals speak at any time while the other person is speaking. I mean no disrespect and try not to do it when interacting with those in the dominant Discourse.
Perhaps teachers can attempt to be more flexible about appointments at conference time. Conceivably teachers can assume that a Latina/o parent did not come to Meet the Teacher Night not because they do not care about their children but because they have babies or small children and have no one to care for them while they are at school. Perchance the issue is that these parents feel intimidated and do not feel comfortable. Teachers can do what Mrs. F did and called the mom and invited the twin babies or what Mr. D did, make home visits.

Ms. B suggests making a Cafecito Night in which the parents meet the teacher at the school over a cup of coffee and piece of cake. The teachers can attempt to speak in conversational language remembering that comprehension in a new language is difficult. They can attempt to develop confianza with the families and try to comprehend that family is first and foremost to Latinas/os and at times this focus on the group as opposed to the individual creates cultural conflicts. One time when I was teaching, one of my new arrival children came to school without her notebook. I inquired where it was and she told me her tía had taken it to write a letter to DR. I told her to go home and to please ask the aunt if she could get the notebook back as she needed it for school. I advised her to be very polite when she asked.

**Limitations**

Limitations that may affect the generalizability of this study are the small groups of eight participants per class for the observations. Another limitation is that the students that were selected were more verbal and displayed verbal ability in both languages. In addition, the overall groups consisted of only second grade Latina/o American students from one
geographic location. Furthermore, all participants hailed from the same K-2 school and were children of color from the same community (Lincoln & Guba, 2004).

Implications for Future Research

An area for further research would be an examination of other Latina/o successful early childhood students composed of a larger participant pool to further examine the theoretical framework of this study as well as the themes that emerged from the study. In addition, I suggest that studies be conducted at other geographical locations such as the Southwest and Southeastern parts of the country to determine if there are disparities in divergent regions of the country. Further investigations of Latina/o successful students in urban areas should be conducted to ascertain differences or similarities in urban areas as opposed to the suburban setting of my study.

To conclude, I suggest research exploration also be effected in early childhood environments where successful Latina/o students are not in the majority and where the teachers are more stereotypically White women. It would be interesting to determine if acculturation and acquisition of the secondary Discourse of school occurs more quickly, less quickly, or at the same pace.

Summary

This chapter imparted the findings that responded to my two research questions.

1. What social and cultural factors contribute to the academic success of Latina/o second graders?

2. How have students whose primary Discourse differs from the dominant Discourse acquired the secondary Discourse of school?
The data analysis of the study suggested nine themes that spoke to both behaviors of the students as well as the adults in the study. To conclude, the first five themes addressed the constructs of the students exercising of agency in their learning, students remaining in the present moment, students envisioning their future, students being metacognitively aware, and student resourcefulness in locating what they need for their learning. The next two themes addressed behaviors of the adults in the study: teachers and TAs serving as ambassadors of crossing borders between cultures, adults supported and were sensitive to children. The last two themes involved both children and adults communicating through multiple pathways and showing reciprocal respect and having positive relationships.

In conclusion, I present this dissertation as a way of giving voice to the many Latina/o children who I had the good fortune of teaching as well as all the students at Éxito Elementary. It is my hope that what was learned from my eight focal students and my two students of interest: Gilberto, Liana, Carlos, Ana, Emilio, Elia, José, Veronica, Aisha, and Jacobo can impact the practice of teachers who teach ELLs. Éxito Elementary School and the wonderful teachers who teach there endeavor to make the acculturation of ELL students as they cross the borderland from their primary Discourse to the secondary Discourse of school as pleasant and comfortable as they can, cultivating confianza with their students and their students’ families as well.
References


communities, and classrooms (pp. 71-87). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.


APPENDIX A:

Successful Second Grade Student Rubric
## Second Grade Successful Student Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Student participates in activities and discussions voluntarily</td>
<td>Student participates in activities and discussions when called on and directed to do so</td>
<td>Student participates in activities and discussions only when probed extensively and repeatedly asked to do so</td>
<td>Student refuses to engage in classroom activities and discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments</td>
<td>Student completes assignments in a satisfactory manner</td>
<td>Student completes assignments in a fair manner</td>
<td>Student completes assignments in a poor manner</td>
<td>Student refuses to complete assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Work</td>
<td>Student displays good social skills and focuses on group goal</td>
<td>Student displays fair social skills and must be urged to focus on group goal</td>
<td>Student displays poor social skills and must be repeatedly reminded to focus on group goal</td>
<td>Student refuses to engage in group assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Work Assisted by Teacher</td>
<td>Student is eager to participate and adds to discussions and understanding of others</td>
<td>Student must be coaxed to participate in all activities and discussions</td>
<td>Student must be repeatedly called on to participate in activities and rarely partakes in discussions</td>
<td>Student refuses to answer when called on and will not partake in discussions regardless of encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation of Reading Skills</td>
<td>Student is on second grade level or above</td>
<td>Student is below grade level by one year</td>
<td>Student is below grade level by more than one year</td>
<td>Student is a nonreader</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B:

Master Code

List
1. Acceptance of calling out*
2. Accepting students as individuals*
3. Accessing books from class library*
4. Accessing former pages in notebook*
5. Accessing information from bulletin boards*
6. Accessing prior knowledge*
7. Accessing the computers*
8. Acculturation*
9. Acknowledging importance of mother*
10. Active engagement*
11. Adaptation to new culture*
12. Allowing code-switching*
13. Allowing for competitive spirit*
14. Angst
15. Aspirations*
16. Assertion versus compliance*
17. Attentive versus distracted
18. Awareness of capabilities*
19. Awareness of Latina/o gender roles*
20. Awareness of one’s needs*
21. Awareness of skills needed*
22. Being a hard worker versus being lazy
23. Being accepted
24. Being funny*
25. Being inquisitive/asking questions*
26. Building a home with good foundation - metaphor
27. Buying in versus not getting it
28. Buying in*
29. Caring versus not caring
30. Collaboration*
31. Computer-metaphor
32. Concentration
33. Confianza*
34. Conformity
35. Conscientiousness*
36. Consideration*
37. Cooperation
38. Crowd pleaser
39. Cultural clash*
40. Defining oneself as an individual*
41. Delegation*
42. Detail oriented*
43. Developed sense of humor
44. Diligence
45. Distracted
46. Dynamo - metaphor
47. Elaborate or extend learning*
48. Emotional connection to home
49. Emotional connection to school*
50. Emotional frustration
51. Encyclopedia-metaphor
52. Engaged versus not engaged
53. Enjoyment of reading*
54. *Esforzandose* (pushing herself)*
55. Exceptional push
56. Expressing worldview*
57. Eye contact*
58. Facility with heritage language*
59. Familial and/or parental support*
60. Feeling comfortable*
61. Feeling understood*
62. Feeling of loneliness
63. Focus on learning*
64. Focus on relationships*
65. Gathering new information*
66. Good feeling from succeeding*
67. Going to college*
68. Google it*
69. Growing plant - metaphor
70. Habitual effort
71. Having good memory*
72. Having materials ready*
73. Home experiences
74. Home influence vs. school influence
75. Home influence*
76. Hospitality*
77. Identity*
78. Importance of education*
79. Importance of one important relationship at home*
80. Importance of relationship with teacher*
81. Importance of school*
82. Importance of teacher*
83. In background
84. Interaction with peers at table*
85. Invested
86. Job as a means to invent*
87. Job as a means to make money*
88. Leadership qualities*
89. Learned behaviors
90. Lesson too long
91. Longer attention span*
92. Making connections*
93. Meeting with parents outside of school*
94. Multi-task*
95. Need to keep peers on task*
96. Negotiation
97. No *relagen*
98. Non-Spanish speaking peers
99. Not focused on learning
100. Not tolerated but accepted*
101. Open-minded*
102. Ownership of learning*
103. Parental help*
104. Parental input
105. Parent-teacher connection*
106. Participation during lessons*
107. Pause, think, then act
108. Peer influence*
109. Persevering until satisfied*
110. Place to have fun
111. Place to love and be loved*
112. Positive role models*
113. Pride in work*
114. Questioning authority versus acquiescence*
115. Reading a lot*
116. Ready to learn*
117. Reflection*
118. Reflective thinking*
119. Revel in success
120. Revision of work packets*
121. Rigidity of school
122. Rigor of English
123. School as a large structure
124. See alternate perspective
125. See deeper meaning*
126. Self-satisfaction
127. Self-correction*
128. Self-motivation*
129. Self-regulation*
130. Sense of belonging*
131. Sense of responsibility*
132. Showing progress*
133. Social awareness*
134. Socially active*
135. Socially uncomfortable
136. Sponge - metaphor
137. Strategies for learning*
138. Structure of school*
139. Student acceptance*
140. Student awareness of his thinking*
141. Student insight*
142. Student sustainability*
143. Students not represented
144. Success breeds success
145. Symbol of US
146. Telling others
147. Thinking
148. Total involvement*
149. Transfer*
150. Translation role at home*
151. Translator role at school*
152. Understanding students’ lives*
153. Vacuum cleaner-metaphor
154. Values being right
155. Vision of future*
156. Wagon wheel-metaphor
157. Wanting to know*
158. Wanting to play
159. Wanting to succeed versus not caring
160. Work ethic
161. Work versus play
162. Working

163. Yearn to learn

Key: * indicates final codes
APPENDIX C:

Student Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study
Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am a retired teacher from Neary Elementary. I am now in a program to obtain my doctorate at Western Connecticut State University in education. In this program, I have to do a study in school in order to write a dissertation.

The purpose of this study is to find out how Puerto Rican and Dominican American second graders attain success in school and also to learn the strategies and behaviors that the children use to learn. I would like to observe the students while the teacher is teaching to see what they do. I am also going to speak with the children about the things that are different and the same at home and at school. Afterwards, the children will create many things such as: paragraphs, drawings, poetry, songs, and dances. The lessons that I will teach are part of the language arts and social studies lesson plans. The study will also examine parents' and teachers' perceptions relating to how students become successful in learning the second grade subjects. The study has been approved by the Internal Review Board (WCSU Approval # 1011-73) and the superintendent of the North Rockland School District.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your child from the study at any time. If a parent does not agree with his son’s or daughter’s participation in the study there will be no prejudice in regard to their grades or in any other
way. All information is private and completely confidential. If you have any questions, please contact me via email at emilyramos48@hotmail.com or phone me at [redacted].

I, _______________________________,

(Printed name of parent or guardian)

recognize that the researcher has explained to me the purpose of this research study, identified any risks involved, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my participation. I voluntarily consent to my child’s participation. I understand all information gathered during this project will be completely confidential.

In addition, I understand that volunteer means that my child does not have to answer every question and can withdraw at anytime.

__________________________________________ Date______________________

(Signature of parent or guardian)
Apreciados Padres,

Soy una maestra retirada de la Escuela Primaria Neary. Ahora estoy en un programa para obtener mi doctorado en Pedagogía en la Universidad de Connecticut del Oeste. En este programa tengo que hacer un estudio en la escuela para escribir una disertación.

El propósito del estudio se trata de encontrar como niños en segundo grado que son Puertorriqueños y Dominicanos Americanos llegan a tener éxito en la escuela y también cuáles son las estrategias y comportamientos que los niños usan para aprender. Quiero observar los estudiantes mientras la maestra está dando clases para ver lo que hacen. También voy a hablar con los niños sobre las cosas iguales y distintas en la casa y la escuela. Después los niños van a crear cosas como: escribir párrafos, dibujos, poesía, canciones, y bailes. Las lecciones que voy a enseñar son parte de los planes de estudios del artes de lenguaje y estudios sociales. El estudio también va a examinar las percepciones de los padres y las maestras en relación a como el estudiante llega a tener éxito en el aprendizaje de los estudios de segundo grado. Este estudio ha pasado por una revisión por la Junta de Revisión de la Universidad (WCSU Approval # 1011-73 y el superintendente del distrito de

WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

Forma de Consentimiento Para Participar en un

Estudio de Investigación

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La participación en el estudio es completamente voluntaria. Se puede sacar el niño o niña del estudio en cualquier momento y también el niño o niña no tiene que contestar todas las preguntas. Si el padre no está de acuerdo con la participación de su hijo o hija en el estudio no sería perjudicado en sus grados o en cualquier forma. Toda la información es privada y confidencial. Si tienen preguntas hagan el favor de llamarme a [proporcionar número de teléfono] o me pueden enviar un email: EmilyRamos48@hotmail.com.
Script for Oral Presentation:

I would like to do a study to find out how successful Puerto Rican and Dominican American second graders learn English and all their subjects in second grade. By observing when the teacher is teaching, I will be able to write down the behaviors of the students. I hope that I will then help teachers to understand and be able to describe these important skills to other Latino students who are having a difficult time learning. Please understand that volunteer means that your child does not have to answer every question and can withdraw at anytime without prejudice.

Quiero hacer un estudio para averiguar cómo niños de segundo grado que son Puertorriqueño y Dominicano Americano aprenden el inglés y las otras clases de segundo grado y como llegan a tener éxito. Observando los niños mientras la maestra está dando clases puedo fijarme en las cosas que hacen los niños para aprender. De esta manera podre ayudar a las maestras en el entendimiento de las destrezas de aprender y para ayudar a otros alumnos Latinos que tengan dificultad en aprender. Es muy importante que sepan que voluntariamente quiere decir que su niño o niña no tiene que contestar todas las preguntas y también que pueden dejar el estudio en cualquier momento, sin perjudicarse.
APPENDIX E:

Letter to Superintendent of District
Dear Superintendent:

I am a retired teacher who was employed by the (name of district) for 32 years and am now a doctoral candidate at Western Connecticut State University. I have completed the required course work for the doctoral program and I am preparing to conduct my doctoral research project. I am seeking permission to carry out my study at (name of school) Elementary School.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain how Puerto Rican and Dominican American second graders attain success in school. Through weekly observations from January - May of young Puerto Rican and Dominican American students, a body of work describing specific behaviors and strategies successfully employed to acquire a secondary Discourse will evolve. The successful navigation of two cultures by young Latino students will serve as a model for educators to assist other Latino students in replicating these efficacious academic strategies as well as define tactics for effective use of Discourse resources.

Artifacts will be created and collected after the researcher has conducted monthly small mini-lessons directing students to focus on comparisons between home and school via: drawings, acrostic poetry, descriptive paragraphs, and the making up of songs and dances. These lessons will be video-taped. A subgroup of students will be selected using a researcher developed observation tool. These students will be recognized for their resilience in the school environment and asked to participate in an interview about their perceptions of school.
This study is designed to examine parental and teacher perceptions as well. I will be asking parents and teachers to partake in interviews having to do with their perceptions of their children to access the knowledge parents and teachers have about their children’s success in school.

Permission to participate in the study will be requested from students, parents, teachers, and the principal related to 2 second grade classrooms. Confidentiality will be strictly adhered to in an endeavor to protect all parties. I hope that the results of this research will be of value to the students and teachers of (name of district) schools as well as to the wider educational community.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. If you agree that this study can be conducted in the (name of district) please sign and return this form.

Sincerely,

Emily Ramos

I agree that the study described above can be conducted in (name of district).

____________________________________  Please Print Name

_________________________________  ____________________

Signature    Date
APPENDIX F:
Building Principal Letter of Permission
Dear (name of principal):

As you know, I am a retired teacher who was employed by the (name of district) for 32 years and am now a doctoral candidate at Western Connecticut State University. I have completed the required course work for the doctoral program and I am preparing to conduct my doctoral research project. I am seeking permission to carry out my study at (name of school) Elementary School.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain how Puerto Rican and Dominican American second graders attain success in school. Through weekly observations from January - May of young Puerto Rican and Dominican American students, a body of work describing specific behaviors and strategies successfully employed to acquire a secondary Discourse will evolve. The successful navigation of two cultures by young Latino students will serve as a model for educators to assist other Latino students in replicating these efficacious academic strategies as well as define tactics for effective use of Discourse resources.

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This study is designed to examine parental and teacher perceptions as well. I will be asking parents and teachers to partake in interviews having to do with their perceptions of their children to access the knowledge parents and teachers have about their children’s success in school.

Permission to participate in the study will be requested from students, parents, teachers, and the principal related to two second grade classrooms. Confidentiality will be strictly adhered to in an endeavor to protect all parties. I hope that the results of this research will be of value to the students and teachers of (name of district) schools as well as to the wider educational community.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. If you agree that this study can be conducted in the (name of district) please sign and return this form.

Sincerely,

Emily Ramos

I agree that the study described above can be conducted in (name of school).

________________________________ Please Print Name

________________________________________ Signature

________________________________________ Date
APPENDIX G:

Letter to Participating Teachers
Dear ______________________:

As you know, I am a retired teacher who was employed by the (name of district) for 32 years and am now a doctoral candidate at Western Connecticut State University. I have completed the required course work for the doctoral program and I am preparing to conduct my doctoral research project. I am seeking permission to carry out my study at (name of school) Elementary School.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain how Puerto Rican and Dominican American second graders attain success in school. Through weekly observations from January-May of young Puerto Rican and Dominican American students, a body of work describing specific behaviors and strategies successfully employed to acquire a secondary Discourse will evolve. The successful navigation of two cultures by young Latino students will serve as a model for educators to assist other Latino students in replicating these efficacious academic strategies as well as define tactics for effective use of Discourse resources.

Artifacts will be created and collected after the researcher has conducted monthly small mini-lessons directing students to focus on comparisons between home and school via: drawings, acrostic poetry, descriptive paragraphs, and the making up of songs and dances. These lessons will be video-taped. A subgroup of students will be selected using a researcher
developed observation tool. These students will be recognized for their resilience in the school environment and asked to participate in an interview about their perceptions of school.

This study is designed to examine parental and teacher perceptions as well. I will be asking parents and teachers to partake in interviews having to do with their perceptions of their children to access the knowledge parents and teachers have about their children’s success in school.

Permission to participate in the study will be requested from students, parents, teachers, and the principal related to two second grade classrooms. Confidentiality will be strictly adhered to in an endeavor to protect all parties. I hope that the results of this research will be of value to the students and teachers of (name of district) schools as well as to the wider educational community.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. If you agree to be part of this study please sign and return this form.

Sincerely,

Emily Ramos

I, ________________________________, agree to participate in the study described above. I acknowledge that the researcher has explained to me the purpose this research study, identified any risks involved, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my participation. I voluntarily consent to my participation. I understand all information gathered during this project will be completely confidential.

______________________________ Date________________

(signature of teacher)
APPENDIX H:

Teacher Interview Questions
Teacher Interview Questions

1. What are your thoughts on secondary language acquisition?

2. Explain how language acquisition occurs in the students in your class.

3. What are the greatest strengths of each of the focal participants from your class?

4. What are your goals for each of the students in the focus sample from your class?

5. How would you describe a successful second grade student?

6. Discuss the relevance of student integration to school culture in terms of your educational practice.

7. What conclusions did you draw from looking at the student artifacts?

8. What are the next steps for each of the targeted students?

9. What concepts/characteristics should be considered when assessing student success in school? In other words, looking at the rubric, what suggestions do you have for changing the items or criteria of the rubric?

10. Provide a definition of Discourse. What is your feedback on the notion of the comprehensive definition of Discourse?
APPENDIX I:

Interview Transcription Page
MS. B: Exactly. Because, you know, they don’t feel... The parents themselves feel judged. When they walk into a place like that, it’s intimidating. They don’t know the language! They don’t know... You know? So it’s like why don’t... Instead of making it so formal, why can’t you have like, some type of like... One of my, when I did my research, one of my interviews gave this idea and I loved it. He said, “Why don’t we do like a cafe tipo?”