"We are the stories": narrative competence and cognitive mapping as a culturally sustaining pedagogy in the education of emergent bilinguals

Sepideh Yasrebi
University at Albany, State University of New York, syasrebi@icloud.com

The University at Albany community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/legacy-etd

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, and the Language and Literacy Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Yasrebi, Sepideh, ""We are the stories": narrative competence and cognitive mapping as a culturally sustaining pedagogy in the education of emergent bilinguals" (2022). Legacy Theses & Dissertations (2009 - 2024). 3061.
https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/legacy-etd/3061

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Legacy Theses & Dissertations (2009 - 2024) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive.
Please see Terms of Use. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@albany.edu.
“We are the stories”:
Narrative Competence and Cognitive Mapping as a
Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in the
Education of Emergent Bilinguals

by

Sepideh Yasrebi

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
Department of Educational Theory and Practice
2022
Abstract

Much has been said about the drawbacks of “teaching to the test” in K-12 public education in the U.S. When it comes to English as a New Language (ENL), however, few studies have explored the ways in which ENL literacy and education is framed and conceptualized in the New York State Next Generation Learning Standards (NGLS), which, in turn, decisively shape ENL curriculum and instruction at schools. Considering the issues of deficits perspectives, context and pragmatics in Second Language Acquisition, mechanical approaches to writing, and narrative and agency, this study intends to reframe narrative writing around students’ lived experiences. In doing so, it moves away from deficit-oriented and hegemonic pedagogies and contributes to culturally sustaining research in the field of second language acquisition, which explores the efficacy of narrative inquiry as a vehicle of contextualizing language use and developing a sense of agency and autonomy in emergent bilinguals.

Drawing upon culturally sustaining pedagogy, critical curriculum theory as well as perspectives on multicultural education, and narrative inquiry, the conceptual and empirical framework of this study posits education, literacy, and the construction of meaning as holistic, socially mediated practices, and seeks to foreground the social contents of curriculum, instruction, and literacy as well as the lived experiences of emergent bilinguals in the process of second language acquisition. To traverse the epistemological complexity of such multiple contexts, the methodological core of this study is guided by a two-pronged approach to ENL education in which each phase informs and is shaped by the other: namely, practitioner inquiry and ethnography. This qualitative study, therefore, was informed by a five-month ethnographic inquiry to explore the pedagogical, curricular, and discursive practices of eighth-grade, stand-alone ENL as well as integrated ENL/ELA classes at a public middle school. During this phase,
the data sources included observations of participants’ classes, field notes, analytical memos, and interviews. At the same time, drawing on a two-month-long practitioner inquiry, this study attempted to propose an alternative approach to eighth-grade ENL writing by implementing a particular mode of narrative inquiry invested in developing narrative competence and cognitive mapping. Data sources in this phase included participants’ narratives, semi-structured interviews, and whole-class reflection sessions.

The ethnographic phase of the study produced the following key findings: (a) the limitations of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) and phonics-based instruction in ENL stand-alone classes; (b) the ideological slant of the curriculum in ELA/ENL integrated class; (c) inequitable distribution of resources; and (d) institutionalization of difference and discourses of “othering.” Likewise, four themes emerged from the data analysis of the participants’ narratives during the practitioner inquiry phase: (a) perceiving and mapping spatial dimensions, (b) perceiving and mapping temporal dimensions, (c) connecting the personal to the social, and (d) regaining voice and agency. Finally, the analysis of the participants’ reflections on their narratives produced three key themes: (a) “I felt important, not embarrassed”; (b) “People in the stories were like us; we are the stories!”; (c) “I wish this was all we did in all other classes.”

The findings of this study seem to suggest several points of possible intervention for practice, theory, and research: namely, recentering the marginalized voices and lived experiences of emergent bilinguals; narrative inquiry as intercultural mediation and a holistic approach to language development; decentering monolithic, monological, and ideological perspectives; contextualizing and historicizing models of ENL curriculum and instruction; and cultivating plurality of narratives, literacies, identities, and modes of epistemological inquiries.
Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the participants without whose contributions this study would not have been possible. I specially want to thank each emergent bilingual for their willingness to share with me their experiences and narratives. A big thank you to all the faculty and staff where this study took place.

I was very fortunate to work with a dissertation committee whose excellent ethos of scholarship, intellectual rigor, and generosity of spirit have not only been immensely helpful throughout but also have set exceptional models for me to emulate. I am grateful to Dr. Alandeom Oliveira whose tireless devotion to rigorous research and advice guided this dissertation from the outset. Dr. Kelly Wissman’s mentorship, intellectual, professional, and personal support has been indispensable in ways that I cannot imagine this project without her. Dr. Reza Feyzi-Behnagh’s brilliant insights and detailed feedback immensely aided the completion of this project. I am also profoundly indebted to Dr. James Collins whose mentorship and seminars early on were essential in shaping my own research interests as well as the contours and the trajectory of this project.

It was also a genuine pleasure to have worked and studied with a group of smart, thoughtful, and committed fellow graduate students. Among them are Adele Touhey, Kewsi Burgess, and Jim Wager.

My parents and two sisters have always been incredibly supportive, encouraging me to pursue my interests, especially during the eight difficult years that I have not been able to see them in person. I thank them for their love.

I am thankful to my partner, Pouya, without whose love and support this dissertation would not have been possible.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................. 11
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .......................................................................................................... 14
CHAPTER ONE  AN INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH ...................................................... 1
THE PROBLEM IN THE FIELD AND IN THE LITERATURE .................................................. 3
   DEFICIT PERSPECTIVES ................................................................................................. 3
   CONTEXT/PRACTAGMICS IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION .................................. 8
   MECHANICAL APPROACH TO WRITING .................................................................... 10
   NARRATIVE AND AGENCY ......................................................................................... 12
PURPOSE STATEMENT ......................................................................................................... 19
RESEARCH QUESTIONS ....................................................................................................... 22
ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION ........................................................................... 23
CHAPTER TWO EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL LITERATURES ........................................... 26
PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE AND LITERACY ................................................................. 26
   PERSPECTIVES ON SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (SLA) .................................... 26
   LITERACY AS SOCIAL PRACTICE .............................................................................. 34
   LANGUAGE AND POWER .............................................................................................. 38
PERSPECTIVES ON NARRATIVE .......................................................................................... 41
   NARRATIVE INQUIRY AND LIVED EXPERIENCE ....................................................... 42
   COGNITIVE MAPPING AND NARRATIVE COMPETENCE ............................................. 45
PERSPECTIVES ON CURRICULUM ....................................................................................... 49
   MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION ................................................................................... 49
   CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY ..................................................................... 56
   CRITICAL CURRICULUM THEORY ............................................................................. 60
CHAPTER THREE  METHODOLOGY AND METHODS ............................................................ 66
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH ....................................................................................... 66
RESEARCH CONTEXT .......................................................................................................... 68
RECRUITMENT AND ACCESS ............................................................................................. 69
   PHASE ONE: ETHNOGRAPHY ...................................................................................... 69
   PHASE TWO: PRACTITIONER RESEARCH .................................................................... 80
   QUALITY CHECKS: TRUSTWORTHINESS AND VALIDITY ............................................. 97
CONCLUSION ....................................................................................................................... 99
CHAPTER FOUR  AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF ENL CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, 
   CLIMATE/CULTURE, AND DISCOURSE ...................................................................... 101
THEME ONE: THE LIMITATIONS LEA AND PHONICS-BASED INSTRUCTION .................... 105
   LEA AND A LESSON ON HALLOWEEN ...................................................................... 106
   “I Spy with my little eyes … something beginning with “b””: A LESSON ON PHONICS ...... 111
   LEA AND PHONICS: A DISCUSSION ......................................................................... 114
THEME TWO: IDEOLOGICAL SLANT OF THE CURRICULUM IN ELA/ENL CLASS ............... 117
   TEACHING NOVELS ................................................................................................. 117
   TEACHING POETRY .................................................................................................... 120
   WRITING TASKS ........................................................................................................ 124
   ASSESSMENTS AND TEACHING TO THE TESTS ...................................................... 125
   ELA/ENL INTEGRATED CLASS .................................................................................. 126
THEME THREE: INEQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES ......................................... 134
   SHARED INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES ......................................................................... 134
   INEQUITABLE TESTING LOCATIONS ...................................................................... 135
   INADEQUATE L1 RESOURCES .............................................................................. 137
THEME FOUR: INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF DIFFERENCE AND DISCOURSES OF OTHERING .. 139
SUMMARY .......................................................................................................................... 146
CHAPTER FIVE  COGNITIVE MAPPING AND NARRATIVE COMPETENCE: EMERGENT 
   BILINGUALS’ NARRATIVES OF HOME ...................................................................... 148
FOUR STUDENTS’ NARRATIVES AND ANALYSIS ................................................................ 150
   HOWIN: GRANDMOTHER AND THE CHICKENS .............................................................. 153
APPENDICES

REFERENCES

CONCLUSION

LIMITATIONS

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

STUDENTS’ REFLECTIONS AND THEIR ANALYSES

REFLECTIONS

SUMMARY

THEMES EMERGING FROM NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

CHAPTER SIX “PEOPLE IN THE STORIES WERE LIKE US”: EMERGENT BILINGUALS’ REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER SEVEN DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

IMPLICATIONS

LIMITATIONS

CONCLUSION

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LIST OF ALL ENGAGEMENT TASKS

APPENDIX B: PARENT INFORMED CONSENT INFORMATION FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

APPENDIX D: DATA STORAGE
CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to the Research

Over the course of five months, I carried out this study to reframe and rethink certain specific aspects of pedagogies and curricula in eighth-grade ENL classes at a public school. Central to my pedagogy was the development and implementation of a specific mode of narrative inquiry revolving around a series of narrative engagements, which I shall explain below. This study, however, takes it as axiomatic that theory and practice, in their mutual mediation, constitute a complex, if not unified, whole. In addition, it understands education and literacy as socially mediated practices. Likewise, the effective development and enactment of my own teaching practices, therefore, were contingent upon acquiring first-hand knowledge of the specificity of not only eighth-grade ENL curricula and pedagogy at the research site, but also of the latter’s climate/culture, institutional, and discursive practices. Observation and teaching, therefore, constituted the core components of the study’s methodological approaches—that is, ethnography and practitioner research. I, however, did not carry out these two phases in isolation; rather, they were profoundly interlaced. The development of my pedagogical imperatives, priorities, and practices, therefore, would often take their cue from my observation of existent classroom practices and school’s climate/culture; while the scope and specificity of my observation was gauged by my theoretical and pedagogical framework. Ethnography and practitioner research techniques, therefore, are mutually constitutive, empirical components of this study in that each shapes and is informed by the other.

The ethnographic inquiry, therefore, guided the observation process, which sought to chart and understand the curriculum and pedagogies in eighth-grade ENL stand-alone and ENL/ELA co-taught/integrated classes, the school’s climate/culture, discursive practices, and
educational resources. Concomitantly, the practitioner inquiry involved my development and implementation of an English as a New Language (ENL) course for eighth-grade emergent bilinguals\(^1\) at the school. In this chapter, I articulate the empirical grounds of this study and elucidate the ways in which this dissertation mounts a critical, conceptual, and pedagogical response to specific issues/problems in the field by rethinking and reframing the prevalent instructional tendencies in the education of eighth-grade emergent bilinguals.

In my purpose statement, I specify and elaborate on the ways in which the theoretical and pedagogical contributions of this study may help ENL/ELA educators recognize emergent bilinguals’ existing linguistic resources and create conditions in which they can thrive and expand their rich cultural and linguistic repertoires. This study therefore encourages ENL teachers to reimagine their pedagogies by recognizing their already diverse, valuable multicultural classrooms from a “strength-based perspective” (Souto-Manning & Martel, 2016). Thus, eschewing the widespread rhetoric and discursive practices of deficit models in ENL education while drawing on marginalized students’ rich cultural and linguistic repertoires, this study explores the ways in which educators can “position such richness as sources for transforming teaching and learning” (Souto-Manning & Martel, 2016, p. 2).

I then identify the methodology of this study and specify the research questions in response to which I have carried out this research. Finally, I sketch out the organization of this dissertation by outlining the components of each chapter.

---

\(^1\) I borrow the term “emergent bilinguals” from Garcia (2009) as it more accurately describes ENL students in affirmative (e.g., bi- and/or multi-lingual) rather than privative terms (e.g., Limited English Proficient and English Language Learners). See the “Deficit Perspective” section below. However, in referring to the specific field of multilingual education, in this study, I use the New York State terminology, namely, English as a New Language (ENL). Furthermore, I keep the school terminology when referring to the discourse in the site of study.
The Problem in the Field and in the Literature

In this section, I explore what I believe to be some of the key areas in ENL education to which this study responds and contributes: namely, (a) deficit perspectives, (b) context and pragmatics in Second Language Acquisition, (c) mechanical approaches to writing, and (d) narrative and agency.

Deficit Perspectives

In the field of K-12 education, among the central issue concerning immigrant students seems to be not, as one would hope, the actual quality of the education they are receiving, but rather the issue of terminology (Garcia, 2009): namely, what is the most “accurate” term under which we can group this culturally diverse student population (e.g., “non-native” speakers, ESL, ELL, LEP, long-term ELLs, ever-ELLs, ENL)? Whatever your response may be, one thing is quite clear: such labels are only the outward manifestations and symptoms of underlying systemic and/or structural issues, and that is precisely why they are important.

Among researchers who reject such labels (e.g., ELLs, ENLs, etc.) as problematic, Garcia (2009) argues that such terminologies are not only stigmatizing but have debilitating effects on students’ educational prospects. She compellingly argues that labeling students as either LEPs or ELLs omits an idea that is critical to the discussion of equity in the teaching of these children. When officials and educators ignore the bilingualism that these students can—and must—develop through schooling in the United States, they perpetuate inequities in the education of these children. (p. 322)

Instead, Garcia introduces and defends the term “emergent bilinguals” to address what she has identified as “the monoglossic\(^2\) and monolingual ideology” underlying policies, curriculum, pedagogy and even the U.S. census:

---
\(^2\) Adopted from Bakhtin (1981), heteroglossia in this study refers to the co-existence in the same social context of multiple, heterogenous, if not conflicting, languages/discourses/voices context that stand in tension with the
But if we adopt a more heteroglossic approach, allowing for bilingual practices that do not have English monolingualism as the sole standard, emergent bilinguals would be considered only those who do not speak English at all, potentializing their ability to move on the bilingualism continuum and to join those whose home language practices include minority home languages as well as English. The potential of bilingualism will be maximized. (p. 323)

What Garcia argues—and this study seeks to enact—is a meaningful shift in standpoint: that is, rather than reinforcing the monolingual, and privative, standpoint of English, which views students based on what they do not know (i.e., the deficit model), the category of emergent bilinguals not only invests in what the students already know (i.e., their first language), but also what they aspire to know, hence emergent bilinguals.

Similarly, scholars have called attention to the dangers of locating the problem of academic performance, often framed in essentialist ways, within the students themselves, thus further promoting deficit views (Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006; Wang et al., 2021) rather than exploring structures that can support or constrain their academic success (Wassell et al., 2010). Wang et al. (2021) have also challenged the prevalent deficit models regarding the education, language use/development of historically marginalized students. They contend that

Deficit views involve a narrow focus on what students do not have or cannot do, derived from a long-lived perspective that attributes the failure of individuals to internal or presumed deficiencies of their families and communities. Deficit lenses are typical of research that examines “gaps” of different kinds, positioning individuals, rather than structural inequities, as the subjects of scrutiny. . . . By focusing narrowly on individuals, deficit thinking obscures structural factors, like school segregation, disinvestment, or tracking. (p. 2)

In other words, deficit models/perspectives are based on essentialist positions that attribute students’ failures to some “innate” deficiency. Such essentialist views are often rooted in a particular form of biological determinism that deemphasizes the mediating roles of history, centrality of a given hegemonic national language. Monoglossic and monological relations, by contrast, characterize a situation where these other conflicting languages/voices have been completely marginalized, if not erased.
culture, social context. “When deficit thinking is applied in classroom settings,” Wang et al. (2021) argue, “the results often include segregation of students who are viewed as inferior, and arguments about the educability of certain groups of students that rely on pseudoscientific beliefs in cultural or genetic deficits” (p. 2).

These considerations also illuminate another category that hinges on and further reproduces the problematic tendencies of labeling, namely, the slogan of “achievement gaps” and its discursive and practical implications. The negative undertone of this prevalent category has haunted various racialized groups, minorities, and marginalized students in U.S. public schools (Garcia et al., 2008). It has had direct bearing on the ways in which we view the academic performance of emergent bilinguals as well. Any inquiry into the politics of language, representation, and narrative—that is, who should speak what language, how, when, and where—is essentially about what counts as “legitimate” language/voice and the regimes of power and control that delegitimize the rest. This is a structural, and ideological, issue that often permeates the research conducted in the field of education concerning emergent bilinguals. Therefore, the theoretical and empirical frameworks of this study, too, reject any approach to developing ENL pedagogy that stakes its claims based on such essentialist assumptions.

For example, a longitudinal study performed by National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) from 2003 to 2010 on fourth to eighth graders found that English Language Learners lagged behind their English-speaking counterparts by 2 to 3 years in U.S. public schools (Louie, 2005; Wassell et al., 2010). What such studies construct, reinforce, and popularize, however, is the normative category of “achievement gap” among these groups. As Ladson-Billings (2006) contends, however, what is often framed as “achievement gap” between white students and their black and brown peers is more accurately characterized as an “education
debt,” which must be understood as an index of resource inequities. This insight informs the pedagogical approach I develop in this study in relation to the education of emergent bilinguals, many of whom, like most African-Americans, attend low-performing schools in urban districts that face challenges such as high rates of poverty, increased teacher turnover, low standardized test scores, and high dropout rates (Noguera, 2003; Wassell et al., 2010).

In this study, to remedy this deficit model, I draw on the empirical and theoretical framework of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris and Alim, 2017; Souto-Manning and Martel, 2016), which articulates its vocation against “persistence deficit perceptions of diversities and to educational policies fixated on the standardization of curriculum and teaching” (Souto-Manning and Martel, 2016, p. 2). The deficit perspective along with policies and regulations promoting standardization of curriculum create stereotypes, foster exclusion, promote racialization of language, and erase students’ rich cultural resources (Rosa, 2016; Souto-Manning and Martel, 2016).

Drawing inspiration from these studies, my research affirms that all emergent bilinguals have rich and sophisticated linguistic and cultural repertoires—notions that may be new to some teachers but are integral and meaningful parts of who they are. Instead of quantifying students’ language skills and measuring them against what is accepted as the “norm,” this study posits an approach to writing—as a mode of narrative inquiry—where students can cognitively map and narrativize their lived experiences and histories by regaining their voice and agency; and develop their process of knowledge production based on that empowering model. In doing so, I explore the ways in which emergent bilinguals construct meanings and knowledge about the world by treating writing as a social practice, because the concept (and practice) of literacy is “socially, historically, and culturally defined” (Souto-Manning & Martel, p. 17).
To sum up, the development and enactment of narrative inquiry in this study defines its pedagogical imperatives over against such essentialist perspectives, which tend to reduce the individual and cultural capacities and complexities of emergent bilinguals to a set of highly questionable and problematic policies underpinning the category of “achievement gaps.” Therefore, as a form of resistance to the educational, curricular, and pedagogical mold that relegates the linguistic and cultural heritage of these students to the status of nonentity, my pedagogical choices and practices implemented as part of my practitioner inquiry seek to cultivate a culturally affirmative instructional setting and to elicit/situate the narratives of emergent bilinguals in their social context. Yet as noted above, the specific curriculum and instruction I developed in this study have been also mediated by the larger social context of the research site. The analytical description and rigorous ethnographic observation of the school’s curricular practices and sociocultural context in phase one, therefore, constituted a crucial part of this study, without whose insights the practitioner inquiry would scarcely have been possible. Therefore, rather than delivering instruction informed by academic theories and studies in abstraction from the existing practices and dynamic of the school, I took as my point of departure the concrete curricular, pedagogical, and contextual realities of the research site.

This study seeks to promote an approach to writing—and by extension to ENL literacy—that encourages emergent bilinguals to articulate a highly differentiated sense of individuality, which is also sensitive to shared collective human experience. This, however, would not be possible without also attending to the multiple contexts and social relations embedded in the educational setting, which not only mediate the overall education of emergent bilinguals but the specific facets of the literacies (i.e., writing, reading, listening, speaking).
Context/Pragmatics in Second Language Acquisition

NGLS’s writing criteria lack a meaningful consideration of context. Where NGLS does mention context in “8th Grade Language Standards,” it is often framed either in terms of syntax, or in terms of semantics; that is, as a locus from which meaning of words can be inferred: “Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase” (p. 94). In other words, the sociocultural context of language use, or writing for that matter, as well as the multifaceted context in which the issues/claims in questions are situated, seems to be of no particular significance to NGLS. Nor does social context seem to figure in the kind of pedagogy it fosters. The failure to consider such contextual grounds has profound consequences for all students, but specifically, emergent bilinguals, for whom a primary signifying context is always one of linguistic, cultural, and geographic displacement.

The development of syntactic and semantic competence, which constitute the bulk of research in the field of Second Language Acquisition (Strong, 1986; Cooper et al., 1980; Pliatsikas, 2010; Guasti, 2017; August et al, 2005), should nevertheless always be considered in conjunction with pragmatic competence: that is, individual’s sociolinguistic and discursive competence, and the contextual appropriateness of language use. The social-contextual nature of pragmatic competence constitutes a crucial component of overall language use. Hymes (1972), for instance, underscores the need of L2 learners to become communicatively competent for a given social context. Pragmatics then has been recognized as an essential aspect of communicative competence (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). Everyone, it is true, lives in a concrete social milieu, which mediates their life, consciousness, decisions and actions, identities, and speech. But it is crucial to note that for marginalized groups, including emergent
bilinguals, this context (e.g., forced migration, linguistic displacement, exile, prolonged separation from family members, cultural alienation, etc.) cannot be taken for granted at all.

In this study, therefore, I explore the significance of this socio-contextual dimension in the development of a particular form of narrative inquiry (see “Narrative and Agency” below). To put it another way, my pedagogical approach to writing as narrative in my research involves contextualizing students’ narratives by restoring to them their missing histories. In engaging with these tasks and producing narrative, emergent bilinguals effectively engage with history—both individual and collective—in their narratives. For instance, pedagogically, this process entails exploring the ways in which at least one narrative task should always be filtered through the students’ personal lived experiences. Next, as the level of social context widens, personal experience is shown to be in fact mediated by transindividual dimensions such as the sociocultural context and structures. This study then pays special attention to pragmatics and the contextual mediations of narrative, in at least two ways: namely, the specific history of the individual and the individual situated in a specific history.

Consequently, in this study, I have tried to address the issue of concrete context in my pedagogy, analytical description, ethnographic observations, and subsequent data analyses. In doing so, I explore the degree to which historically specific racial, patriarchal, and socio-economic discourses/practices/structures determine the literacy level of emergent bilinguals. Even though several studies (Granger, 1996; Granger et al., 2009; Murakami, 2013) have emphasized and explored the importance of such social factors, the field of English as a Second Language still suffers from a paucity of critical research from this standpoint. This study then carefully examines and interrogates some of the contextual factors listed above and the ways in which they mediate the writing process, if not literacies, eight-grade emergent bilinguals.
Mechanical Approach to Writing

NGLS defines and codifies the production and range of writing for the eighth grade. According to this document, students are expected to write in different genres (i.e., argument, informative/explanatory, narrative, and creative [e.g., poem, story, play, artwork, etc.]) and towards specific aims: “Students in 8th grade will write for multiple purposes (to entertain, to explain, to persuade)” (NGLS, 2017, p. 91). Each category is broken down to its constitutive elements. For instance, here are the criteria for writing arguments:

8W1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
   8W1a: Introduce a precise claim, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from a counterclaim, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
   8W1b: Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using credible sources while demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
   8W1c: Use precise language and content-specific vocabulary to argue a claim.
   8W1d: Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
   8W1e: Provide a concluding statement or section that explains the significance of the argument presented.
   8W1f: Maintain a style and tone appropriate to the writing task. (NGLS, p. 91)

The benchmarks for other genres follow a similar, fixed progression and pattern. At first glance, this looks like a perfectly legitimate set of standards for writing argumentative essays; that is, it seems to underscore what are thought of as the fundamentals of this kind of writing: It requires a claim, evidence to support the claim, acknowledging counterarguments, logical reasoning, consulting, and using credible sources; appropriate diction, transitions, and style; finally, a conclusion. Nevertheless, what these standards seem to implicitly evoke and enforce, by virtue of the official mandate they carry, is a particular formulaic approach to thinking, reasoning, and writing, which, in practice, often finds its most pedagogically convenient form of expression in the mechanics of the five-paragraph essay.
These standards underscore certain aspects of what is often thought of as persuasive or argumentative writing. Yet the efficacy of NGLS’s standards is belied by the prescriptive nature of the criteria as well as their form of presentation, as it premised in set of key, unstated assumptions. Here, I consider five of them: (a) one can and must always precisely and clearly state the claim at the beginning, thus leaving no room for subtlety, mediation, and complexity; (b) there is always a clear distinction between claims and counterclaims, thus enforcing a rigid, binary thinking; (c) implying that reasoning and critical thinking are the same as logical organization (“organize the reasons and evidence logically”) and/or the (false) security of relevant evidence (“support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence”), thus not only turning reasoning and logic into fuzzy terms, but also divesting them of any potential for questioning, complicating, and challenging that very same sense of false security; (d) argument has a plot-like rhythm whereby one introduces a conflict, develops it by working toward a climax, after which it resolves itself and its thrust can be contained, if not neutralized, in the “concluding statement or section”; this reinforces the idea that there is no room in argumentative/critical writing for tarrying with the conflict and/or for skepticism, because built into the form of presentation is the circular logic and false security of re-stating the opening in the end, that is, the argument in the conclusion; and finally (e) there is no need for revision, thus reinforcing a formulaic, product-based model, which ignores the fact that writing as such, but also crucially argumentative writing, is a process: that is, it is a mode of inquiry that necessitates working through the issue(s) in various stages, drafts, and revisions.

As a case in point, this is precisely what I mean by a mechanical, if not instrumental, approach to writing. Critical, argumentative writing is the externalization of critical, argumentative thinking, which seems scarcely to have any place in NGLS. Downplaying the
process of writing as a mode of inquiry, therefore, gives the impression that writing “arguments” is just a matter of word play, that is, of “precisely” introducing and “logically” arranging the “right” ideas, words, transitions, and style, rather than working through an issue through conceptual cognition. This last can scarcely fit or be contained in the tightly, packaged form of a five-paragraph essay.

It is important to note, therefore, that this study distinguishes between writing as a mechanical production of rhetoric and opinion on the one hand, and, writing as a process of meaning-making and mode of inquiry, on the other. I understand process not merely in the sense of a series of steps to accomplish a task, but rather as interconnected holistic operations that are also mediated by external contexts and conditions. Such a view of writing then refuses to subtract from this process the social context in which the writer lives and under which she produces the text. It is precisely the emphasis on the process of writing, but also writing as a process that is missing from the rather mechanical approach of NGLS to eighth-grade writing (Zamel, 1982; Yagelski, 2011 & 2012; Barkhuizen, 2011). This study, however, proposes and considers narrative competence/inquiry as an alternative model of process-oriented approach to writing, to which I turn below.

Narrative and Agency

Considering the NGLS, again, one might be justified in thinking that these standards conceive of writing narratives as a hybrid form. This can also be discerned from narrative’s position (8W3) on NGLS’s hierarchy of writing standards (i.e., 8W1–8W6). It therefore constitutes a liminal category between argumentative (8W1) and informative (8W2) on the one hand, and creative (and the none-category of 8W5), on the other. Here are NGLS’s (2017) criteria for writing narratives:
8W3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, relevant descriptive details and clear sequencing.

8W3a: Engage the reader by establishing a point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters.
8W3b: Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
8W3c: Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence, signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another, and show the relationships among experiences and events.
8W3d: Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.
8W3e: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflect on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative. (p. 92)

NGLS requires that narrative, like the two preceding standards, implement certain formulaic elements, e.g., “effective techniques, relevant descriptive details and clear sequencing” as well as use of transition and “precise words and phrases.” Yet like the creative genres following it, it must also depict “real or imagined experiences or events,” introduce “a narrator and/or characters,” use “dialogue” or “sensory language” and establish “a point of view,” and so forth. Some of these elements are nevertheless technically nonnarrative: for example, dialogue and description. Furthermore, although syntax (simplified above in terms of transition words) and semantics are noted, pragmatic concerns are overlooked in favor of cultivating a prescriptive paradigm that seems to constitute yet another iteration of mechanical approach to writing.

In this study, my pedagogical focus on writing narratives seeks to propose an alternative approach to the instrumental view of writing sketched out above. In doing so, I endeavored to refine and expand the basic definition of narrative competence—that is, the ability to comprehend and construct narratives. Spurred on, therefore, by locating the etymological cognate of narrate in gnārus—that is, “knowing, skilled” (OED)—I wanted to explore the feasibility and pedagogical implications of recentering narrative as process and the process of narrativization in relation to causal, temporal, intelligibility and meaning making (i.e., narrative
competence). Since this study considers writing (personal) narratives—and by extension literacy and education—to be socially mediated, I thus felt most compelled to explore the epistemological assumptions of narrative competence in terms of how it relates to the larger social milieu. In particular, I wanted to study how the development of narrative competence can be said to be contingent upon the ways in which it can register the situatedness of the emergent bilingual in the world, or rather the social totality (i.e., cognitive mapping). Since the narrative form has often been studied in terms of its temporal considerations, I wanted to explore the epistemological implications of narrative competence in terms of the spatial considerations of cognitive mapping as well. My pedagogical use of narrative inquiry is, therefore, grounded in a dyadic, dynamic relationship between narrative competence and cognitive mapping in that they inform and mediate one another.

Narrative competence and cognitive mapping, therefore, constitute the mutually mediating, narratological dyad underpinning the study’s development and implementation of narrative inquiry and its associated pedagogical practices. It is worth noting that my conceptualization and development of narrative competence defies or rejects any teleological notion of progress that posits an ultimate apex of development, at which point maturation and development supposedly give way to complacent stasis. Quite the contrary: I understand “competence” as a ceaseless process of becoming, which can be set in motion by the spatio-temporal registers of narrative and cognitive mapping. Such an understanding of narrative competence as a process resonates with Bakhtin (1988) for whom “only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a process” (p. 7).³

---

³ I flesh out my conceptualization and development of narrative competence and cognitive mapping in detail in Chapter Two under “Perspectives on Narrative.”
Furthermore, my use of narrative inquiry in this study resonates with Luttrell (2010), for whom it “places demands on researchers to attend to links between history, biography, identity, emotions and change over time” (p. 225). Such a critical understanding posits a holistic, pragmatic approach to second language education that entails both bottom-up (e.g., curriculum, teaching, and pedagogical practices) as well as top-down analyses (e.g., educational standards, regulations and policies, and climate and culture).

Luttrell’s complex view of narrative stands in stark contrast to the task-oriented policies and mechanical approach to writing embodied in NGLS, which basically evacuates from the concept of narrative the complexity, the living nature and historicity that make it register a properly human process.\textsuperscript{4} What is stressed in this relatively new codification by state standards of narrative form is the latter’s sequential or chronological dimension. This seems to overlook the pragmatic, holistic, form-giving, and knowledge-making dimension of narrative form as well as its mediation of social relations, lived experience, change, and history. Taking working-class immigrant boys and girls in U.S. public schools as the subjects of her research, Luttrell (2010) contends that narrative is

*intersubjective*—produced of many available voices where meanings are shared, contested and attributed to experience. Narratives are retrospective—they shape and order past experience and organise people, events and objects into a meaningful whole. Unlike a chronology—“I did this, then this, then that”—narratives communicate a point of view and aim to accomplish particular purposes—for example, to entertain, inform, impress or dispute. (p. 225)

Not only does Luttrell suggest that narratives can express critical thought, it is also her emphasis on intersubjectivity, meaning, and the totality of human relationships mediated by narrative and history that is also missing from NGLS’s criteria, which betray a tendency to

\textsuperscript{4} Only in 2017 did the revised Next Generation Learning Standards (NGLS) add the narrative component as described above to the writing modalities of eighth-grade ELA.
reduce the complexity of human lived relationships to a neatly packaged pre-fabricated Aristotelian organizational schema of a beginning, a middle and an end. Luttrell’s (2010) study comes as a potent reminder that “when working with children and youth, narratives can be offered in bits and pieces and without the same sense of ‘coherence’ often associated with adult speakers.” Children’s narrative can “provide a space for authorship, dialogue, cultural belongings and critical social awareness (p. 225). Narrative inquiry, therefore, in the context of emergent bilinguals’ instruction should similarly strive to develop a new cultural and creative consciousness both in and outside of classroom.

Regarding the epistemological capacities of narrative inquiry, Nelson (2011) argues that utilizing narrative forms “highlight not only the said but also the unsaid, not only the known but the unknown: the limits of knowledge, the impossibilities of knowing” (p. 475). Nelson further adds that incorporating any form of narrative (i.e., poems, plays, stories) “serve to illuminate the joys, challenges, and nuances of classroom life in these transglobal times” (p. 480). She observes that incorporating poetry and stories, or what she calls “crafted narratives,” in classroom education is heavily understudied. In addition to a genre of writing or communication in classroom pedagogy, Nelson argues that narrative form should be understood as “a performative epistemology, a knowledge structure, a mode of inquiry” (p. 467). She further argues that narrative inquiry in classrooms promotes “democratizing knowledge production and exchange (p.463) and calls for “critical narrative knowledge—that is, expertise and versatility in interpreting, analyzing, critiquing, learning from, incorporating, creating, co-constructing, and performing narratives” (p. 469). She also insists that critical narrative studies serve several crucial functions in the field:

a pedagogic or developmental function, by promoting learning and reflection among students, teachers, or researchers; a methodological or analytic function, by providing
Such a multifunctional utilization of narrative form coheres in this study under the rubric of narrative competence and cognitive mapping to address the gap in scholarship and NGLS regarding the education of emergent bilinguals. The narrative inquiry I intend to implement entails a careful examination of narrative form itself. Thus inquire into the ways in which narratives both shape and are shaped by students’ particular discursive and material contexts and practices.

Insofar as narrative form embodies an implicit process for organization and development of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), this study, similarly, seeks to restore to the theoretical discourse the register of *praxis* as well (Freire, 1970). Praxis refers to the larger social terrain of individual and collective transformation, which Paulo Freire has defined as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 51). Bakhtin (1981) has convincingly argued that discursive chains or strings of utterances are fundamentally dialogic and *historically contingent*; that is to say, they are positioned within and are inseparable from a specific community. In this study, I aim to demonstrate that, by providing a dialogic space at a macro level of social totality, narrative form enables students to carve up a space for themselves and become storytellers of their own experiences. In doing so, this study demonstrates, students come to appreciate the temporal core of narrative: the way in which time and history (both in individual and collective senses) can be activated and articulated. This dissertation explores the ways in which the development of such competence and the pedagogical implementation of this pragmatic approach to writing has microstructural implications as well: it empowers students to
reflect more deeply on the construction of more sophisticated syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic units.

Drawing on earlier practitioner inquiry conducted by Gerald Campano (2007) concerning immigrant students and their literacies, in this dissertation, I intend to demonstrate that developing narrative competence and cognitive mapping enables students to critically reflect on their lived experiences in a world mediated by local and global relations. Only then can they begin to make sense of their own subjective position, struggle, progress, and growth in relation to the world at large. Immigrant students are “historically situated agents,” Campano (2007) observes, “who have the capacity to reflect on their lives because of the dissonances of their own marginalized experiences” (p. 102). Consequently, they are better “able to explain social inequality both in their everyday lives and in the world more generally” (p. 123). In other words, it is not merely the fact of historically situated subjectivity but rather students’ reality of geographic and cultural displacement/dissociation that throws into relief the crucial dimension of that historicity.

My analysis of the narratives of eighth-grade emergent bilinguals is therefore attentive to such individual as well as socio-historical contexts: This is initially framed as a reflection upon individual lived experience, which later is shown to be itself socially mediated. The shorthand of the “social” here stands for a host of cultural, economic, political, legal relations and mechanisms through and against which the individual articulates the contours and the content of their social being. For eighth-grade emergent bilinguals that social sphere of influence encompasses both the country and culture they left behind as well as the one in which they find themselves labeled ENL or ELL.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to (a) carefully examine the pedagogical and curricular tendencies and practices of eighth-grade ENL stand-alone and ENL/ELA co-cought classes at a public middle school; and (b) to develop and enact a pedagogical approach with eighth-grade emergent bilinguals that engaged them in narrative writing. In doing so, the core empirical and methodological components of this study involve (a) ethnography (Hymes, 1977; Bloomaert, 2009; Heath, 1982; Heath & Brian Street, 2008; González et al., 2005) and (b) practitioner research (Campano, 2007; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009; 2013). I, however, did not carry out these two phases in isolation. The ethnographic phase of this study, corresponding to the objective (a) above, not only provided invaluable data and insights into the pedagogical, curricular, and contextual status quo at the school, but also raised several concrete contextual considerations, all of which informed, enriched—and helped me refine—the enactment of my own pedagogy in phase two. This dissertation then articulates its central vocation against the traditional divisions between academic research and practitioner research.

During the first phase of my study, therefore, my aim was to map out the school’s current ENL pedagogical and curricular practices at eight-grade level as well as to chart the school’s climate and culture, which constituted the discursive and pragmatic context of the education of eighth-grade emergent bilinguals. The objective was to paint a picture of the school’s larger institutional discourses, practices and resources that encompass curriculum/pedagogy to consider the extent to which the former mediated the latter as well as their pedagogical implications. For instance, I carefully recorded the distribution of school’s educational resources and opportunities, especially in relation to eighth-grade emergent bilinguals. I also focused on the discursive and ideological dimensions of the school’s climate and culture by registering the ways
in which emergent bilinguals were talked about, addressed, referred to, and represented. The goal was to examine the extent to which these discursive practices were empowering and affirming, or, on the contrary, decentering, stigmatizing, and marginalizing. In other words, phase one allowed me to recalibrate and situate the “academic” theories and pedagogies I was developing in phase two (practitioner inquiry) in terms of the concrete contexts of the school/classroom settings. Additionally, the ethnographic phase can also be said to have raised awareness regarding certain pedagogical, curricular, and cultural at the school issues.

During the practitioner phase, the objective was to underscore the emergent bilinguals’ strength and draw on their rich experiences as well as to challenge the institutional, deficit-oriented perspectives, which marginalize and decenter their experiences, cultural capital, and linguistic repertoires. Another important pedagogical objective of this study was to demonstrate the inseparability of narrative production from the realm of reflection and praxis. The aims was to cultivate a sense of agency in and among emergent bilinguals by allowing them to reflect on and make sense of their lived experiences. It was meant to affirm rather than negate students’ cultural heritage as well as empower their voices and agency. This process was also intended to expand the instructor’s knowledge about the students’ lived experiences and multiple identities (i.e., cultural, linguistic, gender, racial, and ethnic).

As a practitioner researcher, I was aiming to create pedagogical practices grounded in co-constructive models by enabling emergent bilinguals to generate meaning/knowledge as they reflect on and express their lived experiences. I tried to be intentional with my pedagogy and to view my class as a place of inquiry in which both students and I inquired and co-created meaning and assumed multiple perspectives.
The pedagogical rationale behind the practitioner inquiry of this study has been to improve the overall educational opportunities of eighth-grade emergent bilinguals. In particular, regarding narrative writing, the specific engagement tasks I designed and implemented were intended to address and mitigate the mechanical nature of and approach to eighth-grade ENL writing instruction that I had identified in NGLS and observed in stand-clone and co-taught classes during phase one. In contradistinction to the monocultural/monolingual tendency I had observed in phase one, I endeavored to include diverse readings in my curriculum, which, from the standpoint of culturally sustaining pedagogy, were more relevant to and affirming of the emergent bilinguals lived experiences, diverse voices, cultural and historical backgrounds. The readings also, directly, or indirectly, engaged with history at two levels of individual and collective. This, coupled with the writing tasks, aimed to provide the emergent bilinguals with opportunities to reflect critically on their own diverse lived experiences and to seek connections across seemingly disparate individual and collective histories.

Therefore, rather than limiting my approach to the process of writing to sentence starters and/or scaffolding formulaic five-paragraph essays (i.e., prevalent practices I had observed during phase one), I sought to incorporate in my narrative tasks multiple perspectives and voices that aimed at opening up the writing and thinking processes to a range of possibilities, not constraining students’ cognitive and creative skills. Another important corollary was to develop students’ narrative competence as a cultural capacity to transform pedagogical practice into a critical instrument for decolonizing the curriculum. In this way, my narrative inquiry was geared towards actualizing the counter-hegemonic principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy, the

---

5 See Chapter Two.
critical scope of which it also aimed to complement and extend in relation to the pedagogical and curricular concerns of emergent bilinguals.

Finally, my goal was to empower immigrant students to develop their own creative, personal as well as cultural agency. Such a pedagogical practice aimed at transforming education into a validating and affirmative process for marginalized students, whose lives and histories before their arrival in the United States, based on my observations, had often been pushed aside and ignored under the rubric and rhetoric of state standards and assimilation.

**Research Questions**

Considering the problems in the field I have already identified and elucidated, and the objectives I have laid out in my purpose statement, I set out to carry out this qualitative study in two phases. As I have already explained, phase one involved an ethnographic inquiry in which I observed the curricular and pedagogical practices in eighth-grade ENL and ELA/ENL classrooms as well as the school’s climate and culture. I carried out this phase in person, during which I collected and analyzed multiple kinds of data such as observations, field notes, and analytical memos.

Phase Two entailed a practitioner inquiry, which lasted two months. During this phase, I taught and worked with twelve eighth-grade emergent bilinguals in research site’s after-school ENL program. My pedagogical practices and curriculum choices revolved around four specific engagements, which involved reading and writing tasks in narrative forms. Each engagement culminated in emergent bilinguals crafting their own personal narratives. These narratives and students’ reflections and comments on their contents as well as the narrativization process comprise the primary sources of data analysis in this phase.

---

6 Due to restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, I was forced to carry out my practitioner inquiry online via Zoom as an after-school ENL support class.
The first research question, corresponding to the study’s ethnographic explorations, examines two key areas: (1a) In what ways does the eighth-grade ENL curriculum define and elicit language instruction and pedagogy? (1b) How are these pedagogical practices shaped by the climate and culture of the school?

The second research question, corresponding to the practitioner inquiry phase of this study, revolves around my pedagogical implementation of narrative inquiry and the students’ reflections on this process: (2a) In what ways have emergent bilinguals encoded in their narratives key dimensions of cognitive mapping and narrative competence as conceptualized in this study? (2b) What are the emergent bilinguals’ reflections on their own process of narrative production?

**Organization of the Dissertation**

In this dissertation, I explore the curricular choices as well as pedagogical practices and models of ENL education. I examine the inclusionary and exclusionary tendencies, the ideological contents, and the specific social relations embedded and/or repressed in such models and practices. More specifically, I consider alternative curricular and pedagogical forms that emerge when the ENL programs re-center emergent bilinguals, acknowledge their lived experience, value their multivocal, multilingual and multicultural identities and experiences.

In Chapter One, I have delineated the purpose of this study, specified the research questions, traced the problems in the field, and explained the ways in which this study attempts to address the gaps in the literature. Chapter Two introduces the conceptual framework of this

---

7 A curriculum, or any set of codified guidelines/directions—regardless of how rigid, scripted, or flexible they are—can in fact define the content and specificity of classroom instruction, which I am inquiring into in this study. Define, that is, in the sense that, for example, the U.S. constitution defines the framework of the government, and so forth. Neither the curriculum nor the constitution are human agents per se, though they are obviously designed and codified by human beings. Curricula, therefore, define the contour and content of pedagogy based on the institutional authority invested in them.
dissertation by exploring specific conceptual/pedagogical models, namely, theories of language and literacy, theories of narrative, and theories of curriculum. Here, I consider the efficacy of such models and approaches for my research, especially in relation to the pedagogical models of narrative competence and cognitive mapping. In this chapter, I review some empirical studies as well. In Chapter Three, I discuss the methodological orientations of this study, which situate it within ethnography and practitioner research. I also demonstrate the profound interconnection between the methodology, methods, and the pedagogical practices proposed for this study.

Chapters Four and Five present the findings of the study from the ethnographic and the practitioner inquiry phases respectively. Chapter Four explores and interrogates the pedagogical framework and practices underpinning the curriculum and language instruction for eighth-grade emergent bilinguals at a public middle school in New York. In this chapter, I also consider the implications of Critical Curriculum theory and Apple’s (2018) ideology critique for this study under the rubric of “hidden curriculum” by exploring the data and the emerging themes during the ethnographic phase.

Chapter Five stages my analysis of the emergent bilinguals’ narratives through the critical lens of narrative inquiry informed by the works of Clandinin et al. (2016), Fairclough (1992), and Jameson (1988, 1991). In this chapter, I explore and explicate the four recurring themes that have emerged from my analysis. Here, my findings resonate with Campano’s (2007) insight that storytelling, by serving an immediate and pragmatic goal, is one effective way for students to gain a degree of control over past experiences. This enables them to examine their own current lives and make themselves and their experiences heard, understood, and validated. As Campano observes, “The stories may be personal, but the emotions they convey have social import, reflecting readings of the world that are embedded in collective history and group experience”
Consequently, I demonstrate that by mapping their relations in the social totality in their own narratives as well as reflecting on other students’ narratives, emergent bilinguals will be able to (a) develop a perspectival multiplicity, (b) establish connections across multiple temporal and spatial zones, and (c) develop their own unique voice and agency.

In Chapter Six, I present the individual and collective reflections of the emergent bilinguals on the narrative tasks and the narratives they have produced for this study during the practitioner phase. Furthermore, I identify and explicate the three themes that have emerged from these reflections.

In Chapter Seven, I discuss the ways in which the narrative model I have developed in this study—far from imposing a rigid, prescriptive model—should be thought of as a heuristic framework whose capacities need to be critically and creatively reinvented and developed by the teacher and emergent bilinguals at middle school level. Moreover, I argue that this kind of pedagogy, which allows for the narrativization of lived experience, stands in contradistinction to the prevalent assimilationist models of monologic and monocultural ideology, can also re-center marginalized students’ voices. In doing so, I underscore the pedagogical implications of Gutiérrez’s (2008) metaphor of the third space as well as Campano’s (2007) “second classroom,” for the development of students’ voice and agency. I then explore the pedagogical implications of this study in relation to theory, research, and practice. I conclude this chapter by consider the limitations of the study, followed by a discussion of future directions.
CHAPTER TWO

Empirical and Theoretical Literatures

The empirical and theoretical perspectives that inform this study are located within three broad categories: (a) perspectives on language and literacy, (b) perspectives on narrative, and (c) perspectives on curriculum. I examine each category in terms of specific approaches that embody its key characteristics. First, I consider theories and studies of second language acquisition, literacy as social practice, and language and power. Next, I delineate theories and studies of narrative inquiry and lived experience as well as cognitive mapping and narrative competence. Finally, I explore the crucial dimensions of multicultural education, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and critical curriculum theory. In each section, I also unpack the significance and modes of application of each approach in relation to the methodological and conceptual imperatives of this study.

Perspectives on Language and Literacy

Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Studies conducted in the field of English as a Second Language Acquisition can be classified into three main groups: (a) research focusing on syntactical aspect of language development; (b) research giving primacy to semantic skills; and (c) studies that understand language development in pragmatic terms.

Syntactic maturity, as the central component of the first tendency, is “broadly understood in educational settings as the range and the sophistication of grammatical resources learners exhibit during language production” (Ortega, 2015, p. 82). Yet syntactic maturity continues to remain a fuzzy term for which no clear criteria have so far been obtained to evaluate and map out its development. Grammar contains specific facts and rules about the given language which it
then codifies into a system that must be followed (at least to some extent) otherwise language is presumably unintelligible. One can deduce therefore that syntactic maturity is more bound to the “correct usage” of grammatical forms. It is also important to note that syntactic maturity has mostly been studied in relation to successful usage of syntactically complex structures in L2 writing (Strong, 1986; Cooper et al., 1980).

Cooper et al. (1980) argue that writing skills can be systematically taught, and that syntactic development can be accelerated using certain grammatical exercises, especially Sentence Combining exercises. They contend that English language learners will be able to construct more T-units or more complex thoughts in fewer words, while, at the same time, incorporating more complex clauses and syntax. It follows then that the linguistic markers of syntactic maturity consist in the length of the sentence, the embeddedness of various clausal structures, and, finally, the ability to generate more complex sentences. Consequently, from this perspective, linguistic maturity seems to be reduced to a mere formal play or language game.

Strong (1986), in contradistinction to Cooper et al. (1980), claims that simply adding more complex structures to a sentence is little more than sentence manipulation. Rather than focusing on the “outer,” physiological game of writing, he believes in automaticity in the inner and the psychological, which he argues enables students to self-direct themselves to the basics of syntax. He draws attention, on that account, to the fact that automaticity cannot be directly taught. It is rather a set of “psycholinguistic processes” that each person must internalize independently of well-intentioned instruction. By retreating to the sphere of interiority, however, Strong seems to be evacuating language use maturity, or language as such, of its socio-cultural determinants: that is to say, by conceiving automaticity in purely psychological terms, he fails to delineate the degree to which the process of internalization always acts on, or rather mediates,
external, sociocultural materials. His analysis, therefore, seems to essentially efface one pole in favor of the other.

While writing is a social activity that can happen almost everywhere in our lives, the bulk of research in L2 writing, with good reasons, is limited to educational and academic contexts. The implication of this type of research is unmistakable: namely, the learner will become more syntactically mature insofar as they are exposed to formal, classroom-mediated, institutional education. At the same time, and despite this narrow focus, it has been adequately demonstrated that a learner’s syntactical maturation is overdetermined by a variety of internal and external factors, namely, psychological, socioeconomic, and cultural (Vygotsky, 1978). Syntactic maturity, which can manifest itself in a variety of instructional modalities, is thus understood here as a symptom of a more general trajectory of language development. In other words, one operative assumption here seems to involve ways in which syntactic maturity indexes the expansion of the capacity to use language in more complex and skillful ways, drawing on the full range of linguistic resources to fulfill various communicative goals efficiently. What is often ignored, however, is that syntactic maturity, from the standpoint of sociology of language, can scarcely be regarded as a fixed, static concept; rather, it constitutes a dependent variable and as such should be examined as the specific quality of language production, which is structurally contingent on and a function of other linguistic and extralinguistic factors (e.g., L1 linguistic repertoire, lived experiences, social class).

What is at issue here is that perhaps syntactic maturity in and of itself constitute an adequate index of literacy. Rather, it demands a more holistic approach to second language acquisition. I have argued elsewhere that the domains of semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic maturity are inextricably intertwined to the extent that one cannot understand the complex issue
of second language acquisition without addressing all three spheres of semantics, syntax, and pragmatics (Yasrebi, 2019). Semantic considerations therefore cannot be ignored when we study the language use maturity of learners. Semantics and vocabulary knowledge are defined by Isaacson (1988) as the originality and the maturity of a learner’s choice of words or diction. Therefore, the development of a rich and varied vocabulary is considered an essential step in becoming an effective writer (Baker et al., 2003; Roth, 2000). Accuracy in choice and use of words, likewise, is an essential skill. However, for the reasons I shall explain later, I argue that defining semantic maturity in isolation and in the terms set by Isaacson seems to be inadequate as well.

Halliday (1973), for instance, views semantic development as important as syntactic sophistication, which he aptly frames as the lexico-grammatical resource. He argues that “the grammatical metaphor” (i.e., what he theorizes as a crucial component of semantic skills), boosts the propositional and informational density of language, which is in turn produced by construing as nouns (e.g., motion, distance, reason) what might normally be thought of as processes (to move), qualities (distant), or logical relations (because). One important corollary of this approach turns on building noun-centered rather than verb-centered syntax, the semantic implication of which carries meaning that spills over the sentence level and into the whole discourse. Additionally, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 28) argue that our conceptual system is “fundamentally metaphorical in nature,” which is reflected in our everyday language by a wide variety of expressions and vocabulary. Understanding figurative language involves a process of inference, which, as scholars have pointed out, requires an act of “completion” on the part of the reader, who establishes a “linkage” between the two disparate elements being compared, and makes a series of linguistic inferences (Nowottny, 1962; p. 59).
One approach to second language acquisition that seems to heavily focus on isolated and decontextualized skills is the phonics-based approach. The extent to which phonics instruction can be effective in building reading skills has been heavily debated and documented in recent empirical studies in the field. According to the National Reading Panel (2000, p. 2–99), “systematic phonics instruction typically involves explicitly teaching students a prespecified set of letter-sound relations and having students read text that provides practice using these relations to decode words” (p. 2–132). The report, however, insists that “systematic phonics instruction should be integrated with other reading instruction to create a balanced reading program” and that “[p]honics instruction is never a total reading program” (p. 2–136). The report also recommends the use of “controlled vocabulary texts” as well as “quality literature” to “build a sense of story and to develop vocabulary and comprehension” (p. 2–136). Finally, it warns that [p]honics should not become the dominant component in a reading program, neither in the amount of time devoted to it nor in the significance attached. It is important to evaluate children’s reading competence in many ways, not only by their phonics skills but also by their interest in books and their ability to understand information that is read to them. By emphasizing all of the processes that contribute to growth in reading, teachers will have the best chance of making every child a reader. (p. 2–136)

Likewise, other empirical studies have suggested that phonics-based instruction can hardly constitute an effective approach to curriculum design and developing reading comprehension skills among second- through sixth-grade English language learners (Stahl et al., 2001). Scholars, therefore, advocate and insist on pedagogies that strike a balance between different skills, emphasizing ways in which students “discuss, create, read and write” (Garcia et al., 2008, p. 38). What is at stake here is the kind of pedagogy that builds on and cultivates students’ multiple literacies, cultures and affirms their multiple identities (i.e., racial, cultural, gendered, and linguistic). It is also persuasively argued that the practice of learning a new language and reading must be expanded beyond sounds, words, and sentences—even “beyond books” (Souto-Manning
& Martel, 2016). In designing such literacy practices, we must view our students as “creators and knowledge generators, emerging organic intellectuals who employ reading to cultivate critical ideas about the world and imagine a better future . . . remind[ing] educators of the need to restore a fuller sense of humanity to humanities” (Campano et al., 2013. p. 119). The implication here is that language development always unfolds in a context that is socioculturally mediated: This is where our discussion of perspectives on semantic and syntactic development turns on pragmatic considerations.

Halliday (1973), and Halliday and Hasan (2013) argue that linguistic systems are mediated by sociocultural contexts that inform meaning in discursive situations. Pragmatics, therefore, has been recognized as an essential aspect of communicative competence (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). Pragmatic maturity, similarly, is tied to grammatical knowledge and they are understood to be closely interdependent (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). The notion of pragmatic competence is defined as “knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and finally knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular language’s linguistic resources” (Barron, 2003, p. 10). Thus, pragmatic competence refers to the knowledge of the linguistic resources/repertoires and the ability to use and interpret them appropriately in different contexts. According to Rueda (2006), teaching pragmatic competence should lay the groundwork in terms of proper input for instruction and using genuine activities for nurturing the competence.

Therefore, the foregoing approaches to L2 language development that reify syntactic or semantic maturity as primary pedagogical instruments, I would argue, make for rather mechanical views toward second language acquisition. That is, such frameworks scarcely attend to the social mediations of language development—not to mention the implicit ideological
assumptions underpinning the normative categories of “correct” lexico-grammatical usage. To put it another way, such approaches to language development, which do not consider pragmatic contexts, seem to perpetuate the normative, ideological category of the “standard” while relegating the actual, real-life heterogeneity of discursive utterances to the margins. They essentially codify and generalize as the “standard/normal” what is in effect the discourse of a historically, racially specific social class. Therefore, the language use of the working class, indigenous peoples, ethnic and racial minorities, migrant workers, and other marginalized groups seems to constitute the discursive other of the “Standard” usage, whose grammar subsumes the repression of these others into its own laws and structure.

One such pragmatic approach to second language acquisition is Language Experience Approach (LEA), whose pragmatic relevance and shortcomings have been documented in a number of empirical studies. Taylor (1992) defines LEA as a whole language approach that promotes comprehension and receptive skills. It relies on the use of personal experience and oral language for beginners, whereby they relate their daily experiences to a teacher or an aide, who transcribes them. These transcriptions are then used as the basis for complementary reading and writing activities. LEA, first introduced at the beginning of the 20th century, however, is now considered to be an outdated approach (Huey, 1908; Ashton-Warner, 1963). Later in the 1960s, it was used by some elementary school teachers in the U.S. and other countries, where the medium of instruction was not English, as a technique for teaching skills such as sound-symbol correspondences and decoding skills. (Hall, 1977; Ashton-Warner, 1963; Stauffer, 1965). Rather than working on isolated skills, LEA operates based on the holistic premise that by incorporating students’ everyday experiences into the lesson, they will have the opportunity to be involved in and create an entire text. Moreover, since the texts are ultimately generated by the students
themselves, this approach falls under Krashen’s (i + 1) formula of comprehensible input (Taylor, 1992). LEA, however, has been widely criticized for overcorrection of mistakes and errors as well as the negative influence it may have on learners’ motivation, confidence, and imagination (Yan, 1990). LEA’s holistic approach to SLA notwithstanding, from the standpoint of culturally sustaining pedagogy, LEA fails to consider and draw on the students’ diverse linguistic and cultural repertoires as invaluable resources.

One of the key assertions of my research, therefore, is that syntactic and semantic maturity must, however, always recognize and draw on the sociolinguistic and L1 linguistic competence of emergent bilinguals, rather than peripheralizing their lived experiences and L1 repertoires. What is often discussed under the rubric of pragmatics offers a more complex form of inquiry into the process of language development than is indicated by either syntactic or semantic maturity in isolation, or LEA/phonics. Pragmatics takes as its unit of analysis the concrete context and position of the speaker, which it reintegrates into what hitherto appeared as abstract verbal utterances. In this study, I have endeavored to frame and utilize narrative inquiry and competence as precisely the synthesis of such syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels.

Scholars have argued that storytelling and narrative build on semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic skills (Paley; 1990; Yasrebi, 2019) of students by helping them to narrate their own stories dialogically (Bakhtin, 1981) and performatively (Austin, 1975). Narrative also opens a space for them to provide feedback to their peers (Souto-Manning & Martel, 2016). Therefore, it is in this capacity that pragmatics constitutes a crucial component of my pedagogical approach to the development of narrative competence.

---

8 See “Perspectives on Curriculum” below.
My engagement with Literacy as Social Practice and attention to the intimate relation between language and power, not to mention theories of curriculum and multicultural education, aims at restoring the social ground to the abstract logic of theories of literacy discussed above.

**Literacy as Social Practice**

As indicated in the preceding discussion, literacy and language acquisition are sociocultural process (Gutiérrez, 2008), that is, sociocultural interactions and contexts are central to learning. Language therefore, “is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). Recognizing language and literacy as social practices, Wang et al. (2021) argue, “allows educators—and researchers—to recognize what students are able to do in academic settings using the wide range of language and other semiotic resources already available to them” (p. 7). Likewise, Street (1995) argues that literacy as social practice posits literacy as an “essentially social process” which is instrumental in “the construction of a particular kind of citizen, a particular kind of identity, and a particular concept of the nation” (p. 128). Within schools, this process entails

the association of literacy acquisition with the child’s development of specific social identities and positions; the privileging of written over oral language; the interpretation of ‘metalinguistic’ awareness in terms of specific literacy practices and grammatical terminology; and the neutralizing and objectification of language that disguises its social and ideological character. (p. 128)

Street has productively demystified the ideological core of what is often referred to as the autonomous view of literacy: That is, literacy as independent of any social and material basis—that is, reified, decontextualized, and abstracted from its sociocultural moorings. On the other hand, literacy as social practice conceives of education as a collection of socioculturally embedded values and activities. It is such a demystifying understanding of literacy, accompanied by ideology critique, which has the theoretical advantage of revealing the class specific nature of
a host of seemingly progressive reading and writing assessments, and classroom practices that are nevertheless geared towards the ideological production of the status quo: an inherently hegemonic process, permeated by cultural norms and controlled by structures of power (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1993).

Literary as social practice, therefore, calls attention to the kinds of knowledge that is sought in schools today—driven by slogans/practices such as learning “how to do school,” or “teaching to the test”—which seem to privilege specific mechanical forms of performance that regulate and discipline students’ participation. Such tendencies are aptly captured in the notion of “schooled literacy,” which describes a set of universalized abilities assumed to be, in highly abstract and formal terms, democratic and accessible to all (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). What slogans like “knowing how to do school” fail to consider, however, is the way in which its rhetoric (of “achievement,” “proficiency,” and “success”) is mediated by, yet seeks to conceal, the operative ideology of a specific social class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, 1999). Collins (1996) gives schooled literacy further specificity as “a stratified literacy, with achievement calibrated by technical (standardized) measures of skill, and with hierarchy and segregation as basic principles” (p. 205).

Moreover, the pedagogical principles of literacy as social practice can scarcely be satisfied by merely re-centering the social core of literacy, which is, to be sure, a crucial step in the right direction. What is also needed, however, is specific pedagogical approaches to language and education that seek to resist, if not overcome, the normative, pseudo-individualistic, atomizing, and exclusionary ideologies and practices embedded in the curriculum. Such counter hegemonic pedagogies, or what Campano and Simon (2010) call “resistant pedagogies” are
grounded in consequential connections with students, communities, and larger social movements.

Basil Bernstein (1964), in a similar vein, calls attention to the crucial interrelations between social structure, forms of speech/linguistic processes and the ways in which children’s mental structures and behaviors are ideologically coded and regulated at schools: the child thus “learns the requirements of his social structure” (p. 56). He further argues that specific social relationships give rise to several distinct “speech systems or linguistic codes,” which generate “different orders of significance” for the speaker; and embedded in any given “speech system” are specific social relations: the speech system thus is “a quality of social structure” (p. 56). He also makes a clear distinction between language and speech. The former is a tool that represents the “totality of options and the attendant rules for doing things with words”; it thus “symbolizes what can be done”; speech, however, is regulated by “the dictate of a local social relation and so symbolizes not what can be done, but what is done with different degrees of frequency.” Such overdetermination of linguistic processes by social relationships then establishes what Bernstein calls “specific principles of choice: coding principles” (p. 56). By this point, a crucial implication of Bernstein’s theory will have become clear: these codes signify the extent to which a particular student’s access to sociolinguistic resources is ultimately mediated by structural and differential class relations: (uneven) distribution of these codes as well as discursive practices correspond to social class differences, which have real implications for students’ educational and academic performance.

Language, then, for Bernstein is the privileged vehicle that mediates between the child’s lived experience and the deeper substratum of the social structure. The main argument for his study is based on the view that “certain areas of experience are differentiated, made specific and
stabilized, so that what is relevant to the functioning of the social structure becomes relevant for the child” (p.55). Therefore,

every time the child speaks or listens, the social structure of which he is part is reinforced and his social identity is contained. The social structure becomes for the developing child his psychological reality by the shaping of his acts of speech. (pp. 56–57)

Bernstein raises important questions in terms of the sociolinguistic determinants of a learning environment, the conditions of learning and the limitations on the subsequent learning. And yet even though the more emphatic structural dimension in Bernstein’s approach may raise certain questions regarding students’ agency and the degree to which there is possibility of meaningful change, I would argue that the specific form of narrative inquiry I have endeavored to develop in this study seeks to walk precisely this tightrope between the impersonal social structures and the subjective agency of the individual student: in other words, to explore the mutual determination of literacy and social practice.

Therefore, the development of narrative competence in this study, as an instance of literacy as social practice, is mediated by both linguistic and social factors. In other words, rather than enforcing the ideological model of “how to do school,” the conceptual and pedagogical imperatives of this study involve illuminating precisely the social grounds of the process of schooling. It aims to reframe students as active creators of (cross-cultural) meanings as they narrativize their identities, personhood, cultural repertoires, and histories, all of which are, ultimately, carried out against the grain of the prevalent deficit models of literacy that constantly decenters them.

Another component of my conceptual framework turns on the social relations embedded in literacy and practice, which are mediated by power relations and hegemonic discourses. Next, I examine the intimate relationship between language and power as well as their epistemological
implications for my model of narrative inquiry. As Bennett and Royle (2004) argue, “The telling of a story is always bound up with power, with questions of authority, property and domination” (p. 52). It is therefore the regimes of power and control over representation that determine who can speak, what, when and where that make up the components of this section; the way in which language as such, and the individual and collective production of narratives, in particular, are regulated, policed and dominated by social relations of which these very narratives must be taken as registering instruments as well as forms of resistance.

**Language and Power**

Considering it in relation to its underlying regimes of power, Paulo Freire (1972) views education in two forms: liberatory and oppressive. He argues that

> Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the preserver’s consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor. (p. 47)

If language in general, and narrative form, in particular, embodies universal ideas as well as particular social relations, then these specific relations, too, must constitute a crucial dimension of any serious research, including, this study. Language, as the larger category mediating narrative competence, therefore, becomes a symbolic vehicle of repressing or disclosing such relations. Social relations of power, control, and domination play important roles in how we conceive of education/literacy, especially ENL instruction and narrative competence. For the purposes of this study, we can think of at least two important ways in which specific social relations mediate the education of emergent bilinguals: (a) directly, which for the most part concerns the issue of equity, access, and distribution of educational resources; (b) indirectly, which concerns the ways in which power and domination become matters of representation; or
more specifically, discursive practices permeating curriculum and pedagogy as well as schools’ climate and culture.

Blommaert (2005) effectively calls attention to the ways in which language/discourse functions as an “ingredient of power”:

The deepest effect of power everywhere is *inequality*, as power differentiates and selects, includes and excludes. An analysis of such effects is also an analysis of the conditions for power—of what it takes to organise power regimes in societies. The focus will be on how language is an ingredient of power processes resulting in, and sustained by, forms of inequality, and how discourse can be or become a justifiable object of analysis, crucial to an understanding of wider aspects of power relations. (p. 2)

Language and (the production of) knowledge are, therefore, inextricably linked to the questions of inequality and inequity, which, Blommaert argues, are mediated by societal regimes of power. Moreover, emphasizing the intimate interconnection between language and social relations, Blommaert asserts that “every language act is intrinsically historical” (p. 265). That is, not only does language evolve through history, but history mediates language as well. Society, however, “imposes hierarchies and value scales on language, and the looking-glass of linguistic practice often provides a magnified image of the workings of powers and the deep structures of inequality in society” (Blommaert, 2009, p. 265). Discursive constructions, and by extension narrative, then can create a microcosm through which we can catch a glimpse of those “deep structures of inequality in society.”

Thus by studying language—-and the ways in which it is regulated, taught, expressed, controlled, censored, and policed—we would be able to study how particular beliefs, conventions, and value systems are reproduced, maintained and normalized while others stigmatized and marginalized, if repressed. Recognizing the heterogeneity of our linguistic and discursive capacities, which also constitutes a crucial dimension of my framework, Blommaert (2005) further argues that
“language” needs to be seen as a collection of varieties, and the distribution of such varieties is a matter of analysis in and of itself, for no two human beings, even if they speak the same “language”, have the same complex of varieties. Their *repertoire* is different; they will each control a different complex of linguistic resources which will reflect their social being and which will determine what they can actually do with and in language. The repertoires allow people to deploy certain linguistic resources more or less appropriately in certain contexts. (p. 13)

According to Blommaert, therefore, language itself is the very critical terrain upon which struggle for equity can unfold, because “apart from what people do to language, there is a lot that language does to people” (p. 13). Such a nuanced conceptualization of linguistic and discursive repertoires and resources, has far-reaching implications in this study for emergent bilinguals, whose access to and actualization of both L1 and L2 repertoires is a function of the school’s cultural and curricular practices. The notion of unique linguistic repertoire, in particular, as we shall see, constitutes a significant dimension of my data analysis and pedagogical practice in this study.

Blommaert (2005) also notably foregrounds the semiotics of power by emphasizing the way in which people “can speak from different semiotic worlds, within different economies of signs and general conditions of sayability and hearability, orienting to different norms and rules, often not consistent with the norms and rules of the interlocutors” (p. 156). The social conditions that mediate access to and mobility of these semiotic resources become issues of equity in the case of emergent bilinguals. Blommaert finds that “some resources could easily move from one space to another, both socially and geographically, while others appeared to have a very restricted range of mobility. These resources were ‘placed’, they only functioned in one particular environment.” Therefore, he shows how issues of choice and self-determination play out over against a host of socioeconomic issues. For being placed in a particular system, “imposes all sorts of constraints on what people can do with language” (p. 156–57).
This study, therefore, insists that emergent bilinguals’ linguistic and cultural resources/repertoires are mediated by their specific experiences of migration and displacement, which can in turn create an epistemological rift between their multiple, radically different, semiotic worlds. The access to and actualization of their repertoires is also a function of the degree to which they are tapped into during classroom instruction as well as the extent to which the educational resources are distributed equitably, not to mention the regimes of power underpinning such relations. An important implication here for our purposes concerns the way in which, through their imbrication with power relations, language in education and the discourse of education are revealed be political issues as well. The particular mode of narrative writing I develop in this study, however, does not claim to rectify such systemic inequities on its own. Informed by the contextual imperatives of the ethnographic phase as well as the study’s theoretical and empirical framework, however, the practitioner inquiry might be said to put forth alternative set of pedagogical practices whereby emergent bilinguals are reframed and repositioned as effective agents of their narratives. Such symbolic narrative enactments, therefore, provide a space for them to draw on and acknowledge their lived experiences and linguistic/cultural repertoires, as well as to actively participate in and shape their semiotic worlds.

**Perspectives on Narrative**

In what follows, I present the theoretical, and pragmatic, grounds of the conceptual model of narrative competence and cognitive mapping. I attempt to illustrate the ways in which narrative inquiry—as the pedagogical expression and contextualization of narrative competence—can serve as a privileged vehicle for the expression of cognitive mapping. I argue that this model not only provides a structure that can amplify the voice and agency of emergent
bilinguals (and other marginalized students), but it also functions as a compelling lens through which we can recognize students’ lived experiences and draw on and affirm, rather than flatten, their unique cultural/linguistic repertoires.

**Narrative Inquiry and Lived Experience**

Narrative is one of the most broadly employed ways of systematizing human experience. As human beings, we experience our worlds and live our lives through telling stories. It is through narratives that our experiences are ordered and permeated with meaning (Bruner, 1990). Narrative, therefore, is “the primary scheme by which human existence is rendered meaningful” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 11): it allows us to interpret new experiences, as narrative and life imitate and emulate one another (Bruner, 1990). Situating the theoretical basis of their narrative model “within a Deweyan theory of experience,” Clandinin & Connelly (2000) frame experience as a narrative phenomenon in which “individuals . . . liv[e] storied lives on storied landscapes” (p. 24). For them, “life—as we come to it and as it comes to others—is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (p. 17). As we tell stories, therefore, stories also tell us. Stories therefore not only reveal something crucial about the nature of narrative form, but also the relationship of our daily lived experience to the social construction of cultural norms and institutional discourses (Ochs and Capps, 2001).

Empirical studies have found that assigning autobiographical narratives is a common practice in K-6 ENL classrooms in the U.S. today. Teachers often view and implement narrative as a way of fostering student learning and helping students recapture their own voice and adapt to the new cultural environment. Recent studies in the field have often noted (Hussein, 2008; Stein, 1998) that writing autobiographical narratives, for example, can have affirmative and
empowering influences on learners, especially in terms of valuing their own experiential knowledge; this has been especially true for those students for whom the act of naming and framing lived experience in an educational context is not necessarily familiar, comfortable, or historically valued. Teachers, too, can write autobiographical narratives and studies regarding second language teachers’ own classroom experiences have shown to help identify the developmental needs of novice teachers and to enhance their thinking and practice in relation to immigrant students (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008; Golombek & Johnson, 2004).

Reading life narratives is also viewed as a compelling way to incorporate neglected, marginalized perspectives into school curricula (e.g., O’Mochain, 2006). Although incorporating students’ personal narratives in classroom pedagogy has been argued to be a valuable resource, mainly to build on English language learner’s sociolinguistic skills (Thornbury, 2006), the field of narrative is not widely recognized in relation to learners’ socio-pragmatic skills (Thornbury & Slade, 2006; Holmes & Marra, 2011). As language learners face many socio-pragmatic issues at various stages of their studies in a new environment, narrative inquiry helps learners to “develop a distinctive sense of self and to present this to the world in different ways. In the role of a narrator, the potentially disadvantaged nonnative speaker becomes a proactive rather than a responsive participant (Holmes & Marra, 2011 p. 530).

Asanuma (1990, p. 164) argues that narrative inquiry is also a way of “sharpening the aesthetic senses,” which constitutes an integral aspect of language learning, teaching, and critical inquiry. Morris (2001) draws attention to the narratives we live in our lives and how we understand our lives in terms of these lived narratives; he noted that “these narratives of personal identity often reproduce (or crash into) concealed social narratives, with major ethical consequences” (p. 62). “The concept of thinking with stories,” Morris elucidates, “is meant to
oppose and modify (not replace) the institutionalized Western practice of thinking about stories. Thinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinking with stories is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative as of allowing narrative to work on us” (p. 55). Hence, she argues that developing narrative skills promotes creativity and imagination skills among learners.

In another empirical study on what he calls “narrative knowledging,” Barkhuizen noticed that his students were actively engaged in the process of meaning making not only of his teaching but also of their own learning experiences. For Barkhuizen, then, narrative is an active meaning making process, or “do[ing] things with narratives.” In other words, Barkhuizen understands “narrative knowledging” as fluid, rather than static and unchangeable. Swain (2006) uses the concept of “languaging” in a similar way as a cognitive activity: “the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language. It is part of what constitutes learning” (Swain, 2006, p. 98).

Likewise, regarding the pragmatic potential of narrative inquiry from the standpoint of culturally sustaining pedagogy, Thomas and Stornaiuolo’s (2016) qualitative study builds on Louise Rosenblatt’s (1993) transactional theory of reading and Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) “ideological becoming.” By moving beyond the four corners of texts to explore the intersections between identities, social contexts, and the reader’s textual transactions, their study suggests the process of “restorying” to capture the ways in which it inscribes learners into existence by tapping on their lived experiences and multiple identities. They further identify six elements in this process of restorying: “as young readers imagine themselves into stories, they reimagine the very stories themselves, as people of all ages collectively reimagine time, place, perspective, mode, metanarrative, and identity through retold stories” (p. 317). Their findings indicate that
through such a process of reimagination, the young learners “restory the world from their own perspectives,” and thus “they engage in new forms of becoming” (p. 332). This process of reimagining the self in relationship to others but also the larger social field is central to what this study seeks to develop in terms of cognitive mapping and narrative competence.

**Cognitive Mapping and Narrative Competence**

Retaining the basic epistemological premise of the inextricable link between experience and narrative form delineated above, we must nevertheless further refine, complicate, and expand the basic conceptions of narrative competence—for example, in terms of rules and intuition (Prince, 1982) and tradition (Lyotard, 1984)—so as to parse out their theoretical merits for the present study. Prince (1982), for instance, views narrative competence in terms of our ability to comprehend and construct narratives, which, he argues, is mediated for everyone by the same set of universal intuitions and rules: “It is this set of rules and intuitions, this narrative competence, that allows us (human beings) to produce and process narratives, to tell, retell, paraphrase, expand, summarize, and understand them in like manner” (p. 181). Prince’s understanding of narrative competence aims towards universality, as he seeks to codify a narratology that can always apply to all narratives. In this study, however, I understand *narrative competence to be aiming toward totality, which is nevertheless historically situated and individually modulated.*

This may be seen as a strategic exploration of the individual’s conscious and critical relationship to the social totality, productively captured and developed by Jameson (1991) in the concept of cognitive mapping. Thus, originally conceived in terms of an aesthetic, political model, the central point of cognitive mapping still deeply resonates with this study in that it seeks to enable the individual subject to represent to themselves, however partially or
imperfectly, their relationship to the “vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s structures as a whole” (p. 51). Crucially, the pedagogical and political implications of this notion can transcend the structural limits of the individual by infusing the latter “with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system,” and thus generating a new, imaginative mode of representation in which “we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle” (p. 54).

What makes the adaptation of this model particularly relevant to this study is the effective way in which the process of cognitive mapping lends itself to narrative inquiry, for both in a sense mediate the relation between individuals’ lived experiences and their social milieu. Therefore, the developmental narrative matrix in which cognitive mapping is mobilized operates on two deeply interrelated levels. The first level is that of the empirical position of the individual, that is, for our purposes, the existential level of lived experiences and of creative self-narratives. And the second level is that of the “unlived,” highly speculative/imaginative conception of the social whole in which the individual is ultimately situated and to the level of which their narratives, however partially, aspire.

What I am proposing, ultimately, is not a coherent system that claims to be capable of mapping the social totality. Rather, my aim is to propose and implement a set of methodological and pedagogical guidelines and practices that allow students to discern and register specific historical and social relations embedded in seemingly non-narrative, ahistorical categories, themes, imageries, motifs to set them in motion and uncover their temporal/historical core. To establish connections, in other words, between seemingly separate entities and social spheres: between the personal and the political, the private and the public, the psychological and the social, the economic and the aesthetic and, ultimately, the local and the global. One way to
accomplish this task would be, I argue, to develop students’ narrative competence, which now entails precisely establishing such connections through narrative-based inquiry.

This is also the point at which it has become clear that the notion of cognitive mapping is intimately connected to the crucial mechanism of ideology, one of the most pertinent and canonical formulations of which is Althusser’s (2014), for whom ideology represents the “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (p. 256). For Jameson (1991), Althusser’s definition has the advantage of emphasizing the “the gap between the local positioning of the individual subject and the totality of class structures in which he or she is situated, a gap between phenomenological perception and a reality that transcends all individual thinking or experience” (p. 415–16). We must note in Althusser’s definition an important concept, which constitutes a crucial dimension of this study as well, namely “representation.”

Ideology, in other words, is a system of representation, which can also misrepresent life. That is, it constitutes a representational form-giving and sense-making system that precisely mediates the gap between the subject and the object, the individual and the world. To the extent that it misrepresents, ideology is a distortion of reality; on the other hand, in so far as a critique of ideology seeks to confront the latter with its blind spots, repressive mechanisms, and repressed social content, such a critique represents our actual relations to that social totality and is thus demystifying, if not liberating.

From here it is only a small but crucial step to recognizing that ideology is always a narrative category: that is, it articulates its content in narrative forms. The concept of cognitive mapping then should be understood as the extension and application of “spatial analysis to the realm of social structure” on a global scale. An important corollary of this premise turns on “the incapacity to map socially,” which according to Jameson (1991), “is as crippling to political
experience as the analogous incapacity to map spatially is for urban experience” (p. 353). It is here that the key concepts of ideology, cognitive mapping, and narrative competence converge. For what is at stake here is a sort of unmasking, demystifying, process in opposition to the imaginary relations embedded in ideology, for this process aims at the development of subject’s capacity to map out, in however limited ways, their actual relationship to their real conditions of existence. This view then resonates with Luttrell’s (2011) illuminating insight that:

In a context of neoliberal policies that have had adverse effects on young people’s care worlds—whether immigration policy, welfare reform or a test-driven educational system that pushes out those who cannot measure up—these young people’s images and narratives provide a glimpse of the social connections that they see and value, if not fear may be at risk. Perhaps the children’s voices and concerns are ahead of social theorists and policy makers who ignored the centrality and intimacies of care giving and care taking, and we need to take heed. (p. 234)

Insofar as the narrative apparatus I have mobilized in this study helps develop this tendency on the part of the individual to cognitively map their milieu, we may also think of this project as a critique of (neoliberal) ideology: namely, enabling emergent bilinguals to cognitively represent and understand their individual lived experience vis-à-vis larger social relations which determine the former. In doing so, I take narrative competence as that epistemological horizon which constitutes the condition of possibility of and reveals the structural limits to cognition, meaning making, and self-affirmation on the part of students.

For the purposes of this study, the narrativization of experience on which narrative inquiry focuses foregrounds not only the lived experiences of emergent bilinguals but it also enables the narrativization of what is often repressed by the curriculum: namely, students’ multiple, heteroglossic identities (e.g., linguistic, ethnic), cultural diversity and pluralism as well as the students’ unique voices, which I explore below under the rubric of theories of curriculum.
Perspectives on Curriculum

Multicultural Education

The goal of Multicultural Education, Banks (2006) argues, is to make progress in “race relations” and to enable students to gain “the knowledge, attitudes and skills” necessary to take part in “cross-cultural interactions and in personal, social, and civic action that will help make our nation and world more democratic and just (p. 145).” Multicultural education should also “teach students to know, to care, and to act to promote democracy in the public interest (p. 145).” Lee (2004), likewise, emphasizes the importance of organizing curricula and pedagogical materials around students’ diverse cultural knowledge and argues that this approach leads to literacy practices that can be leveraged as profound academic resources.

One way to fully appreciate the implications of multicultural education for the specific situation of emergent bilinguals would be to trace the history of educational policies back to Lau v. Nicholas (1974). It was the decision established by the U.S. Supreme Court to institute the right of immigrant students to have “a meaningful opportunity to participate in the educational program” (Lau v. Nicholas, 1974). It is worth noting that this “educational program” did not necessarily include bilingual education. That same year, the New York City Board of Education and ASPIRA of New York (called the ASPIRA Consent Decree) reached an agreement that stipulated English language learners would be provided Bilingual Education: “As such, English language learners must be provided with equal access to all school programs and services offered to non-ELL students, including access to programs required for graduation” (Education Law §3204 and Part 154, NYSED). However, a quick look at the number of programs offered since then would testify to their marked decline. Although various bilingual programs⁹ are listed on the

---

⁹ For example, Transitional Bilingual Education Programs; Dual Language Programs; One-Way Dual Language Program.
website of NY State Department of Education, the reality is that the state’s bilingual and dual language programs have been shrinking and being replaced by English only programs (Nieto, 2009). Schools have been emphasizing English-only programs (NYSED). This tendency toward monolingualism is nothing less than “mainstreaming” immigrant students with the corollary that “non-English languages are spoken of as foreign, native, or indigenous languages, regardless of where the speakers live” (Santa Ana, 2002, p. 212).

The adverse pedagogical, and curricular, implications of this process of “mainstreaming” deserve a closer examination, especially when it systematically erodes the basic principles of multicultural education sketched out above. For Yildiz (2012), “mainstreaming” amounts to nothing less than a “monologic pedagogy” that ultimately leads to monolingualism. Recent empirical studies have voiced similar concerns about stripping students of a crucial aspect of their cultural identity by overlooking their first language resources (Calderón et al., 2011; Tienda & Haskins, 2011; Nieto, 2009). Campano et al. (2013) argue that educational curricula for immigrants are too often governed by assimilationist ideologies that do not take into account the rich linguistic, cultural, and epistemic resources immigrant students bring to schools. For example, many ESL classes encourage participants to downplay their first language(s) and culture(s) in favor of an uncritical allegiance to the rhetoric of “belonging” (Rivera & Lavan, 2012; Valdés, 1996).

In New York State, for example, English language learners’ “proficiency” level is evaluated and determined based on the following five categories defined by NYSED (CR Part 154-2): “entering, emerging, transitioning, expanding, and commanding.” These proficiency levels correlate with the devaluation and marginalization of the actual linguistic range of
racialized students. This is the structural consequence of what Rosa (2016) discusses under the raciolinguistics of “normative whiteness”:

the raciolinguistic construction of legitimate academic English in relation to normative whiteness perpetually positions various racialized populations as not yet having acquired these language abilities regardless of their actual linguistic repertoires or the amount of time they have spent in transitional educational language programming. (p. 171)

Similarly, in their quite illuminating discussion of the works of Dell Hymes vis-à-vis the emerging field of New Language Policy Studies, McCarty et al. (2011) view language policy “as a situated sociocultural process,” which is essentially heterogeneous. They argue that one of the principle ideological apparatuses in “structuring social and linguistic inequality” is precisely the “invisibilation of sociolinguistic heterogeneity” (p. 335). Put another way, this view not only amounts to the normalization of the ideological category of “standard” English, it perpetuates, I would argue, a form of metaphysics that naturalizes monolingualism as the human condition. But, as McCarty et al. compellingly demonstrate, the institutional devaluation and delegitimization of students’ (and teachers’) heterogenous sociolinguistic repertoires is fundamentally repressive, for it renders them effectively devoiced. Voice, they remind the reader, constitutes for Hymes, “a fundamental expression of human freedom” (p. 343). At this point, we may qualify Banks’s definition of multicultural education cited at the beginning of this section by foregrounding the crucial dimension of voice: Multicultural education is not merely cross-cultural diversity in service of promoting democracy and justice; doing justice to a genuine multicultural education requires democratic distribution and empowerment of diverse voices.

As discussed above, curricular considerations and pedagogical practices in U.S. K-12 public schools seem to be rarely tailored to the needs of minoritized, marginalized, yet linguistically and culturally diverse, students (Gillborn, 2010). Several scholars consider these practices “oppressive” and have called for their critical deconstruction (Freire, 2000; Gatimu,
Far from a descent into scholastic anarchy, which is often how such approaches are viewed from the more conservative quarters, such deconstructive rethinking and reevaluation of public education primarily aims at providing a safe space for the students in the margin to view and critique hegemonic structures as well as enabling them to find their own voice (Freire, 2000; Gatimu, 2009; Giroux, 2004; Campano, 2013).

If a true multicultural education offers a diagnosis of existing inequities and calls for an approach that embraces all students’ backgrounds, cultures, and voices in the development of curricula (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Joy and Poonamallee, 2013); then, culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), introduced by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2004), calls for the decolonization of pedagogies and curricula as an effective way of overcoming such inequities. Decolonizing the curriculum entails an emancipatory framework whereby the complicity of the curriculum in maintenance of unjust power relations can be revealed and dismantled. In the context of U.S. public school, Ladson-Billings (1998, 2009) has attempted to foreground the highly racialized dimensions of this process of dismantling. She therefore has called for “affirmative action and the re-creation of African Americans as ‘protected citizens’ to ensure that they were not systematically screened out of the system” (p. 18). This principle, she argues, is grounded in the premise that marginalized students should have equal access to the didactic opportunities and school resources (i.e., representation in the cannon, access to instruction, and funding) as do their counterparts, specifically, White, middle-, upper-class students. Furthermore, she calls attention to the crucial idea of “sameness” in this regard, for “equal treatment under law” constitutes the bedrock of elevation and emancipation from second-class status (pp. 17–18). CRP has three objectives: “produce students who can
achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order” (p. 474).

Another approach that seeks to bridge the gap between the curricular and the cultural is that of the Culturally Responsive Education (Cazden & Leggett, 2009; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gutierrez, et al., 1999). Building on Ladson-Billing’s CRP, Gay (2002) insists that teachers have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to create democratic classrooms/schools as well as cultivate a culture that is responsive to the needs of all students. Gutierrez et al. (2006), further develop this framework by proposing the idea of the “third place,” which designates the locus where “curriculum and its pedagogy are grounded in historical and current particulars of students’ everyday lives, while at the same time oriented towards an imagined possible future” (p. 154).

While culturally relevant and responsive frameworks offer invaluable resources for multicultural education, the latter still falls short of addressing the needs of pluralistic societies such as the United States. That is to say, insofar as multicultural education focuses only on addressing race relations, cultivating cross-cultural awareness and tolerance between white Americans and other racialized/ethnic group, then it overlooks to address the other equally consequential pole: namely, “cultural awareness, acceptance, and affirmation among the different non-White groups” (Grant, 2006). For it seems as though multicultural instruction is about how to help Whites better deal with the racial groups that were enslaved or subjugated during the early days in the nation’s history. Very little attention is given to teaching non-White groups about other minorities, intraminority group prejudice, and/or intergroup tensions among native-born and immigrant groups. Further, very little instruction in multicultural education is about how to accept and affirm the culture and history of non-White groups and to celebrate their contribution to American society. (pp. 166-67)
In other words, it appears that the more direct objective of “mainstream” multicultural education has been to accommodate White teachers and students, in order to prepare the former with various methods and techniques to teach and/or instill in the latter the ethos of a global citizenship or intercultural exchange, which has become little more than an empty slogan. Both culturally relevant and culturally responsive theories do not explicitly enough support the linguistic and cultural dexterity as well as the plurality of immigrant students (Paris, 2012; Paris and Alim, 2017).

As a case in point, Noguerón-Liu’s (2020) qualitative study draws attention to the epistemological efficacy of recentering ENL education in terms of biliteracy, translangaging skills, and their rich L1 repertoires such that students’ families can become more meaningfully involved in their children’s education in the U.S. Her findings suggest that “the strong knowledge base generated from studies examining the dynamic literacy practices of emergent bilingual students should also be included in reading curriculum, assessment, and teacher education decisions” (p. 307). Building on García and Kleifgen (2019), Noguerón-Liu’s clarifies that “Translanguaging goes beyond the alternation of languages (code-switching), capturing instead the full and complex repertoires of practices and semiotic resources that individuals mobilize in various contexts” (p. 314). It, therefore, posits a holistic, decompartmentalized approach to bilingual literacy. Her study highlights that through translanguaging emergent bilinguals, given the opportunity, can draw on their multiple literacies as a possible strategy in decoding and retelling while drawing attention to the limitations of a monolingual perspective.

Orosco and Klinger (2010), similarly, conducted a five-month case study from the standpoint of a social constructivist, multicultural framework at an urban elementary school to determine how a response-to-intervention (RTI) model was implemented in a setting where a
large percentage of Latino English language learners were having reading difficulties. The findings of the study, therefore, highlights the pitfalls of incorporating a one-size-fits-all pedagogical approach in multicultural settings: “Misalignment in Instruction and Assessment, Negative Schooling Culture, Inadequate Teacher Preparation, and Limited Resources” (p. 276). This, in turn, can be said to reproduce and perpetuate deficits perspectives in multicultural literacy. Their study suggests that

Assessment procedures and instructional methods found to be effective with mainstream, English-only students are not necessarily effective with English language learners. When generic approaches are applied, the possibility is heightened that there will be misunderstandings about the reasons for students’ lack of response to interventions” (p. 272).

In a similar vein, Shernaz and Ortiz (2008) have underscored the systemic inadequacy of RTI models in reaching out to and supporting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The findings of their empirical suggests ways in which a culturally and linguistically responsive implementation of RTI should take into account the sociopolitical, cultural, and linguistic contexts of diverse learners outside the space of classroom as well (pp. 34–36).

In my research and practitioner inquiry, therefore, I have endeavored to incorporate and further develop the progressive ethos of multicultural education, both conceptually and empirically. In particular, I have paid special attention to and attempted to re-center ENL students’ unique voices to offset the monological/monocultural discourses and practices I identified in my ethnographic inquiry. Moreover, in terms of developing cultural competence and diversity, I have taken my cue from CRP, whose ethos of social critique I have also sought to instill in my own pedagogy and students. Finally, the narrative tasks I have developed and implemented in this study resonate very strongly with Gutiérrez’s (2008) spatial metaphor of the “third space,” in which narrative inquiry—not to mention the space of classroom itself—
becomes an expressive vehicle for the recognition of the historical specificity and heterogeneity of emergent bilinguals’ lived experiences.

In the next section, I shall delineate the ways in which culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) emerges as a corrective to certain limitations of multicultural education, culturally relevant and responsive theories. Specifically, I explore the application and relevance of CSP in ENL education as well as the extent to which its pedagogical practices can restore agency to marginalized students whose heteroglossic voices have hitherto been repressed by the dominant monoglossic curricula.

**Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

As I indicated above, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) is only one of the more recent conceptual and empirical frameworks that evince a meaningful engagement with and development of the thematics of multicultural education, including culturally responsive and relevant modes. Paris (2012), for example, argues that “responsive” and “relevant” do not “guarantee in stance or meaning that one goal of an educational program is to maintain heritage ways and to value cultural and linguistic sharing across difference, to sustain and support bi- and multilingualism and bi- and multiculturalism” (p. 95). Thus, inspired by and building upon culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), Paris and Alim (2017) observe that Ladson-Billing’s seminal work “laid the groundwork for pedagogies that maintain the longstanding cultural practices of communities of color while students also learn to critique dominant power structures” (p. 5). They nevertheless argue that the rhetoric of “relevance” is not far-reaching enough; nor does it constitute a guarantee for meaningful pedagogical and educational changes. It overlooks the extent to which the dominant policies and practices, which are increasingly
creating a monocultural and monolingual society, fail to affirm the historical and cultural identities and heritage of non-White, and often, immigrant students. CSP, instead, seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of school for positive social transformation. CSP positions dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good, and sees the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits. Culturally sustaining pedagogy exists wherever education sustains the lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling. (p. 1)

CSP therefore posits a complex and emphatic form of cultural pluralism in tandem with a holistic understanding of education, in contradistinction to academic compartmentalization and isolation. It is also pedagogically committed to enriching and sustaining communal voices and forms of life. Paris and Alim (2017) articulate the core cultural and pedagogical components of CSP against oppressive and homogenizing tendencies in curriculum while valorizing equity and access. CSP therefore invites us to “reimagine schools as sites where diverse, heterogenous practices are not only valued but sustained” (p. 3). Asking for nothing less than a radical rethinking of the objectives of education, CPS “demands a critical, emancipatory vision of schooling that reframes the object of critique from our children to oppressive systems” (p. 3). Such a shift in perspective, that is, from the pathologization of individual students to an etiology of deep structures that maintain and reproduce educational inequity and othering has significant political implications, not least in terms of educational policies that have historically failed to accommodate marginalized groups in meaningful ways.

Thus implementing CSP opens up the categories of cultural pluralism and competence to include immigrant communities and communities of color. In doing so, CSP not only makes visible the ongoing colonial role of schools, but it responds by reimagining “schooling as a site for sustaining the cultural ways of being of communities of color rather than eradicating them”
(Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 2). CSP, therefore, aims to recuperate the agency of silenced and devoiced students and “disrupt anti-Indigeneity, anti-Blackness, and related anti-Brownness (from anti-Latinidad to Islamophobia) and model minority myths so foundational to schooling in the United States and many other colonial nation-states” (p. 2). Accordingly, CSP, for Paris and Alim (2017), attends to the ways in which race relations mediate issues of access and equity as well. CPS seeks to decenter Whiteness as the ideological core of equity: thus rather than asking ourselves “How can ‘we’ get ‘these’ working-class kids of color to speak/write/be more like middle-class White ones,” we need to interrogate and challenge the underlying assumptions that privilege the category of Whiteness as the ideological “norm” or the “standard” against which other groups count only as deviations. CSP therefore mounts a critique of the very “White gaze itself that sees, hears, and frames students of color in everywhichway as marginal and deficient” (p. 3).

Drawing on Paris and Alim (2017) and Paris (2021), similarly, Wissman (2021) explores the pedagogical implications of implementing a culturally sustaining approach to reading in a class for emergent bilinguals. In doing so, she finds that CSP can effectively and productively reframe the following practices and inquiries:

(a) incorporating texts across the curriculum reflective of linguistic and cultural diversity;
(b) engaging in inquiries arising from students’ cultural worlds and critical questions; (c) offering ongoing invitations for multilingual, intergenerational storytelling; and (d) creating embedded opportunities for multiple languages, literacies, and heritage practices to travel fluidly across home and school contexts. (p. 565)

Her findings, therefore, suggests “that more cohesive incorporation of culturally sustaining practices would require a (re)consideration of monolingualism and narrow definitions of literacy within interventions and assessments” (p. 563). In my practitioner inquiry, as I was developing and implementing my narrative tasks, I attempted to reconsider and rethink from a CSP
standpoint precisely those aspects of the eighth-grade ENL curriculum and classroom instructions that my ethnographic inquiry found to perpetuate narrow, if not monolingual, definitions and practices of literacy.

Furthermore, examining the efficacy of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies in terms of processes rather than isolated content/lessons, Keehne et al. (2018), emphasize the importance of developing thematic through lines to reinforce diverse literacies rather than isolated content/lessons (p. 161). This, they have argued, provides a meaningful alternative to assimilationist approaches in which “educators expect students to jump into mainstream academics from the start, and little or no attention is paid to cultural identity” (p. 160). From the standpoint of culturally sustaining pedagogy, this vision is aligned with the ways in which, in their empirical study, Ascenzi-Moreno and Quiñones (2020) have attempted to recenter bilingualism in guided readings:

we welcome a vision of literacy in which emergent bilinguals do not have to fracture their abilities into either English or another named language, in which emergent bilinguals learn to become strong readers using all their language resources while cultivating what it means for them to take hold of their bilingual abilities as readers. (p. 9)

In this study, I endeavor to demonstrate ways in which narrative inquiry is conducive to the pedagogical imperatives of culturally sustaining framework. For instance, Thomas and Stornaiuolo’s (2016) findings suggest that “when readers see themselves reflected in texts or read stories about people like them, they can more fully participate in the storying process” (p. 314). Furthermore, they argue that “This process of restorying, of reshaping narratives to better reflect a diversity of perspectives and experiences, is an act of asserting the importance of one’s existence in a world that tries to silence subaltern voices” (p. 314).

For the purposes of this study, what I find particularly productive and instructive in CSP is its uncompromising critical stance, as I have explored above, regarding specific unstated
assumptions central to multicultural education. It therefore constitutes the core component of my approach to rethinking eighth-grade ENL curriculum. CSP also guided my pedagogy regarding the structure and content of the narrative tasks I developed for the practitioner phase. Moreover, I have sought to incorporate in my pedagogy and research CSP’s deep investment in raising critical consciousness both for me and my students. This study therefore should be understood as a response to CSP’s call to re-center marginalized students in both the curriculum and pedagogy—students whose identities CPS reminds us are always already racialized, sexed, gendered, and classed.

A cursory glance at the foregoing discussion, however, will not have failed to appreciate the centrality of curriculum to any responsible and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Genuine democratization of education begins, arguably, at the key level of curriculum. In this study, not only did I explore the school’s enactment of eighth-grade ENL curriculum during the ethnography phase, but I also endeavored to trace the implications of narrative tasks in relations to envisioning an alternative ENL curriculum during the practitioner phrase. My intellectual and theoretical approach to the important category of curriculum was informed by several critical models that I explore below.

**Critical Curriculum Theory**

A critical imperative underlying this study demands that our empirical research into sociology of knowledge in general and the education of emergent bilinguals in particular be always coupled with a critique and demystification of the very categories that the entire field takes as axiomatic. Curriculum constitutes one such category. From an ideological standpoint, curriculum constantly calls attention to its unqualified academic status while rejecting its deeper social content by decoupling education from the vicissitudes of “social division of labor” in
which Bernstein (1971) situated the problematic of literacy above. In other words, predicated upon this social division of labor, the official school curriculum both emerges from and perpetuates the separation between manual and intellectual labor. Curriculum is conceived as that ideological terrain on which the class-specific, concrete lived experiences of students (emergent bilinguals, in particular) disappear only to reappear, quantitatively, under the rubric of Next Generation Learning Standards, as either the confirmation of latter’s academic vision or the constant reminder of the inadequacy of the former. A primary vocation of critical curriculum theory, therefore, is to restore to such an abstract conception of curriculum its missing sociocultural content.

We can discern the degree to which the construction of such abstract curricula is in fact the by-product of prevalent data driven models, mostly empirical and positivist in the bad sense. Bernstein (1971), similarly, rejects as circular and merely descriptive those social sciences that are built upon data collection, data analysis, and building of ad hoc inductive generalizations to explain the same data: that is, data that over the course of this process have radically been separated from their concrete, social referents (i.e., concrete human subjects in historically specific milieux). Such abstract, and often sweeping, generalizations as well as their circular logic Bernstein terms “naive empiricism.” Anyon (1982), on the other hand, observes that naive empiricism is “naive in its conception of what counts as fact or data, and in what counts as explanation” (p. 2). For Anyon, social sciences “should be empirically grounded, theoretically explanatory, and socially critical” (p. 2). “Socially critical,” that is, in the sense of “go[ing] beyond dominant ideology or ideologies, in one’s attempt to explain the social world” (p. 4). She further argues that to be socially explanatory, theory “must be systematic, and it should explain what is socially systemic.” It must, in other words, “situate social data in a theory of a society”;
that is to say, “in its relations to origins and changes in social matters” (p. 3). In Anyon’s view then critical curriculum theory in essence must lead to “transformative social strategies.” Curriculum, consequently, emerges not as an abstract, purely academic category, but as a *historical and socially-mediated (i.e., cultural and political) category, the progressive as well as retrogressive facets of which are revealed as functions of material and ideological contradictions in the social totality.*

Young (2014) views curriculum as both a social and epistemological category; it embodies, defines, and codifies specific forms of knowledge to which a particular pedagogy is oriented (p. 13). Yet curriculum transcends the consciousness, motives, or actions of individuals, for it has impersonal, structural dimensions that function in terms of possibilities and limits. In other words, knowledge and curriculum are understood to be “social facts”—or, “specialized institutions”—with specific purposes and forms, which generate progressive epistemological possibilities, while, at the same time, delimiting these possibilities for the learners (p. 7). The availability and achievement of these possibilities are, however, informed by a variety of considerations:

Some will be internal to the school, such as the approach to curriculum leadership of the headteacher and her/his team of senior teachers and the range of expertise of the whole staff; and some will be external such as the wider distribution of opportunities in the society as a whole and in the local catchment area of the school. (p. 8)

The central task of critical curriculum theory comprises the demystification of the ways in which these internal and external factors shape and mediate the form and content of the curriculum and the ways in which the curriculum privileges, actualizes and naturalizes particular knowledge as universal, but also, at the same time, excludes, marginalizes and renders illegitimate other knowledges. Consequently, for Young (2014), knowledge must constantly be confronted with its material base, for
All knowledge, however reliable, is always challengeable because it is no more than our best attempt to make sense of that which is external to us—the real world. Hence it is in the “domain of possibility” not the “domain of certainty.” (p. 10)

Rather than an abstraction from reality, then, Young is advocating for the kind of knowledge that is based in reality, while, at the same time, tracing in it the seeds of alternative forms of being and social organization that gesture beyond it.

The mechanisms of valorization and devalorization of knowledge underlying the curriculum are therefore matters of ideology as well. Recall Althusser’s canonical definition: “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (2014, p. 256). Ideology, that is to say, names those historically and class-specific representational, or semiotic, systems, that seek to fill in the epistemological gap between the subject(s) and the social totality—yet they do so by distorting that relationship. Hegemonic education/curriculum constitutes precisely such a system.10

Similar to Anyon (1982) and Young (2014), Apple (2018) identifies in school curricula the normative logic of what can be called a “positivist ideal” in which a sociopolitically “neutral,” and thus critically suspect, category of “objectivity” seems to predominate: “In our schools, scientific work is tacitly always linked with accepted standards of validity and is seen (and taught) as always subject to empirical verification with no outside influences, either personal or political.” Such a “false” consensus around the practice of “vulgar objectivity,” Apple argues, evacuates from the curricular knowledge meaningful challenges/debates and methodological disagreements inherent to the actual activity of scientists. This, in turn, “may often lead to a detachment from political commitment” (p. 91). Stripping science of its

10 It is worth noting that for Althusser education as such constitutes one of the components of what he theorizes under the rubric of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs).
“intellectual and interpersonal struggle,” therefore, generates a sanitized view of science and scholarship, which, for Apple, not only constitutes the ultimate paradox of such curricular models but is also symptomatic of “a rather deep fear of intellectual, moral and political conflict” (p. 91).

Considering the ideological functions of curriculum vis-à-vis social conformity and control, Apple (2018) observes that “the curriculum field has its roots in the soil of social control” and that schooling constitutes one of the mechanisms that secures social control (p. 48). He further remarks that the “commitment to maintaining a sense of community, one based on cultural homogeneity and valuative consensus has been and remains one of the primary, though tacit, legacies of the curriculum field” (p. 80). This is however, grounded in a tradition that “den[ies] the importance of both conflict and serious ideological difference” (p. 85). Apple stages his inquiry into the ideological function of the curriculum by taking as his object of critical analysis the ways in which specific norms, values and temperaments are implicitly taught at school. This view builds on what Philip Jackson (1990) has termed the “hidden curriculum,” which refers to “the norms and the values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools and that are not usually talked about in teachers’ statements of ends or goals” (p. 87). “The hidden curriculum in schools,” Apple explains, “serves to reinforce basic rules surrounding the nature of conflict and its uses. It posits a network of assumptions that, when internalized by students, establishes the boundaries of legitimacy” (p. 89). Drawing on Roberta Sigel’s insights, Apple elaborates that inasmuch as “hidden curriculum” constitutes a form of “incidental learning” it “contributes more to the political socialization of a student than do, say, civics classes or other forms of deliberate teaching of specific value orientations” (p. 87). As a result, from the perspective of critical curriculum studies, schools are revealed as (implicit) sites of
ideological struggles in which learning how to write, speak, think, and form judgments—that is, in essence, the mechanisms that transform students into specific kinds of social beings—take on explicit socioeconomic, political dimensions.

My conceptual and intellectual approach to curriculum therefore resonates with critical curriculum theory (Jackson, 1968; Anyon, 1982; Young, 2014; Apple, 2018), which understands “curriculum” as a class-specific, socio-cultural, and thus political, entity which both privileges and marginalizes not only teachers, but more importantly, the voices and lived experiences of students. Insofar as the social institution of education is understood to constitute a major Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser, 2014), my interrogation of concepts and categories underpinning curriculum as such, and the ENL specialization in particular, will address the extent to which the school’s enacted ENL curriculum bears the traces of dominant ideology.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology and Methods

This chapter provides an overview of my methodological approach in this qualitative study. Here, I elaborate on method and design as well as the conceptual apparatuses and intellectual frameworks that have guided the two phases of this research: namely, the ethnographic and the practitioner phases. In what follows, I explain the rationale for the two phases and explore the research site as well as the processes of recruitment and access in detail. Next, I present an overview of the ethnographic and practitioner phases respectively. For each phase, I describe the participants, data collection and analysis procedures as well as the researcher’s roles and positionality. Finally, I discuss in detail the considerations of and procedures to maintaining trustworthiness and validity of this study. This section is followed by some concluding remarks.

Methodological Approach

This qualitative study involves ethnographic immersion and participant observation combined with collaborative practitioner research. One major factor in deliberately choosing to conduct a qualitative study is that the majority of the existing research on language development of emergent bilinguals in U.S. public schools is quantitative in nature. Quantitative studies, to be sure, have their particular use and benefits, for example, in supplying schools with data in terms of students’ overall performance. It is nevertheless equally important to always couple such quantitative, abstract, explanations with rigorous qualitative inquiries into the specific social dimensions of language learning and observe educational and language practices in place. Spending time in the research site, accompanied by direct observation, can yield invaluable,
fresh insights into the current pedagogical practices for all students in general and emergent bilinguals in particular as well as call for reform in areas that have been systemically overlooked.

At research site, my study comprised two phases: (a) ethnographic inquiry and (b) practitioner inquiry. During the ethnographic phase, I conducted a rigorous observation of the eighth-grade curricular and pedagogical practices as well as the school’s climate/culture and discursive practices. During the practitioner inquiry phase, I spent two months researching and teaching emergent bilinguals. As I have already sketched out in Chapter One, these deeply interrelated phases constituted the methodological components of this study, which understands education and literacy as socially mediated. The practitioner inquiry and the ethnographic techniques, therefore, informed and complemented one another. Due to IRB COVID-19 protocols in effect at the time, I had to mobilize this phase remotely in the form of an after-school English Language support class. Table 3.1 provides a timeline for data collection specifying different phases of this study as well as the relevant research question(s) informing each phase.

**Table 3.1**

*Data Collection Timeline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Length</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>five months</td>
<td>Ethnographic Phase</td>
<td>(1a) In what ways does the eighth-grade ENL curriculum define and elicit language instruction and pedagogy? and (1b) How are these pedagogical practices shaped by the climate and culture of the school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two months</td>
<td>Practitioner Inquiry Phase</td>
<td>(2a) In what ways have emergent bilinguals been able to encode in their narratives key dimensions of cognitive mapping and narrative competence as conceptualized in this study? (2b) What are the emergent bilinguals’ reflections on their own process of narrative production?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Context

My study took place during the 2021–2022 school year in a middle school located within a suburban school district in New York State. According to the latest available data on the school website, the population of Highgate Middle School (a pseudonym) is predominantly White (72%), with the largest subgroup identified by the state being Asian/Pacific Islander (8%), Hispanic or Latino (9%), multiracial/biracial (6%) and African American (5%). Ten percent of Highgate Middle School are classified as emergent bilinguals, a percentage which is nearly identical to the corresponding figure nationwide (NYSED 2019; Ruiz Soto et al., 2015).

At the time of the study, the total student population of the middle school was 959 and it served grades 6–8. The student population was identified as 49 percent female and 51 percent male. The school enrolled 27% economically disadvantaged students. Average class size for content area classes is 25–29 and for ENL stand-alone classes, 15–20 students. There are over 400 students at eighth-grade level. Students’ daily schedule is divided into eight periods per each instruction day. Each period lasts for forty minutes with a five-minute interval between classes. Table 3.2 below provides a list of the course offerings specific to each grade level at Highgate Middle School.

Table 3.2
Student Course Offering at Highgate Middle School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>6th grade</th>
<th>7th grade</th>
<th>8th grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>ELA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Music/PE</td>
<td>Music/PE</td>
<td>Music/PE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Health/PE/FL</td>
<td>Health/PE/FL</td>
<td>Health/PE/FL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Art/ENL/SPED</td>
<td>Art/ENL/SEP</td>
<td>Art/ENL/SEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technology/Robotics</td>
<td>Technology/Robotics</td>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

68
Recruitment and Access

Access to research site was granted through three levels of permission: (a) the district and building administration within the school district; (b) the eighth grade ENL and ELA teachers in the building; and (c) the parents/guardians of the ENL students. Detailed information regarding conducting the research\textsuperscript{11} were sent to district administration, teachers, and parents (see Appendix B). Initial contact was made through the office of the assistant superintendent. Once permission was obtained solicitation went out to the ENL teacher through district’s ENL supervisor. Once teacher participants agreed to participate in the study, the I was able to gain access to students’ parents and explain to them the practitioner. This was accomplished via both email and mail. All students had permission from a parent/guardian to participate. Parents were asked to discuss the study with their child. Translated letters were sent to the families that had requested translation accommodations. Prior to the beginning of the practitioner inquiry, the students and their parents/guardians gave consent by signing the relevant documents. Below, I further explore the ethnographic and the practitioner phases in their totality.

Phase One: Ethnography

Methodological Approach

For phase one of this study, the methodological framework is based on the ethnographic research done by scholars in the field of Linguistic Anthropology (Hymes, 1978; Blommaert, 2009; Heath, 1982; Heath & Street, 2008; González et al., 2005; Agar, 1980). Regarding the nature and scope of ethnographic studies, Creswell (2013) observe that it “focuses on an entire culture-sharing group,” which can either include small (e.g., a handful of teachers or social workers) or larger groups, comprising many subjects who interact over the course of a specific

\textsuperscript{11} For instance, letters stating the researcher’s position; the research purpose; length and phases; careful consideration of risks and benefits to participants; as well as security measures to maintain confidentiality of data
period of time: for example, all the teachers in an entire school, or a whole community of social workers (p. 90). On the importance of conducting ethnographic studies in school settings, Agar (1980) notes that it is a way of studying a culture-sharing group as well as the final, written product of that research.

On that account, Blommaert, (2009) views ethnography as a democratic science and a “scientific apparatus that put communities, rather than humankind, on the map, focusing attention on the complexity of separate social units, the intricate relations between small features of a single system usually seen as in balance” (p. 261). He recognizes in Hymes what he characterizes as his “firm belief in the critical potential and the emancipatory value of ethnography” (p. 259; italics mine). He then goes on to discuss two main reasons for the “perennial importance” of good ethnography: first, the task of the ethnographer finds its vocation and assumes its relevance from the urgent needs of local communities facing problems vis-à-vis language, tradition, and schools. Second reason concerns the epistemological significance of good ethnography vis-à-vis social and political transformation in that the latter is contingent upon the former. Therefore, for Dell Hymes (1978), ethnography needs to be emancipated from the anthropologist’s silo, for it has considerable social and political implications beyond that limited community. As Blommaert and Jie (2010) further elucidate, ethnography has the potential and the capacity of challenging established views, not only of language but of symbolic capital in societies in general. It is capable of constructing a discourse on social uses of language and social dimensions of meaningful behaviour which differs strongly from established norms and expectations, indeed takes the concrete functioning of these norms and expectations as starting points for questioning them, in other words, it takes them as problems rather than as facts. (p. 10–11).

Regarding the status and role of language in ethnography and the epistemological significance and difference of the former from other sciences, Blommaert and Jie’s epistemology posits the inseparability of knowledge production from language and their concrete context.
As a discipline rooted in cultural anthropology, ethnography was developed as a study of people’s “ways of living” (Heath, 1982). Heath and Street (2008), similarly, define ethnography as “a theory-building enterprise constructed through detailed systematic observing, recording, and analyzing of human behavior in specifiable spaces and interactions” (p. 29) that “forces us to think consciously about ways to enter into the life of an individual, group, or institutional life of the ‘other’” (p. 31). Ethnography, then, is a self-conscious and reflexive technique that is capable of producing knowledge of cultural differences without reducing them to facile stereotypes; nor relegating the ethnographer to the role of a mere “cultural tourist.” On the relationship between the researcher and the participants, González et al. (2005) find that ethnographic research establishes relations that are “formed interpersonally, evocatively, and reciprocally” (p. 93).

**Participants**

During the ethnographic phase, I observed the classes, curricula and pedagogical practices of the only two eighth-grade ENL/ELA teachers at Highgate. Participants were selected using purposeful and convenient sampling techniques (Gentles, et al., 2015; Palys, 2008; Patton, 2002). Naturally, the teacher participants had to meet the following criteria: (a) an eighth-grade ENL teacher; and (b) an eighth-grade ELA content area teacher who was assigned a co-taught section. The samples for observations were homogenous (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014), thus allowing me to inquire concretely into the school’s climate and culture as well as the curriculum and pedagogies regarding the education of eighth-grade emergent bilinguals. The teacher participant demographic information is presented in Table 3.3. In the next section, I review the descriptive profiles of each teacher.
Table 3.3
Teacher Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years at Highgate</th>
<th>Bilingual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>B.A./M.A.</td>
<td>ELA Teacher</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>B.A./M.S.</td>
<td>ENL Teacher</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ELA Teacher: Jane.** The eighth-grade ELA teacher that participated in this phase was Jane. She was the only eighth-grade ELA teacher who had been assigned a co-taught section with an ENL teacher at Highgate. She had completed her graduate degree in Education/ELA about twenty-five years before. She was one of the senior teachers in this school. Jane did not speak any language other than English.

**ENL Teacher: Amanda.** The eighth-grade ENL teacher that participated in this study was Amanda. Amanda and I worked closely to recruit the participants in my study for the practitioner phase. Amanda had earned a graduate degree in TESOL six years before. Before deciding to teach ENL, Amanda, who holds a bachelor’s degree in Public Health. Amanda did not speak another language other than English.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Here, I describe the ways in which I have structured my ethnographic inquiry to integrate multiple layers of data, which in turn has allowed me to highlight the curricular and pedagogical complexities of ENL education at Highgate. In doing so, I have gone beyond the level of mere description/coding of what took place in the classroom, as I have collected five individual data sets (see below).

A methodological advantage of integrating multiple layers of context is that it allows for a holistic account of the processes under study; but it is also determined by the research question
guiding my inquiry in this section. Thus determined and inspired by the concrete demands of this inquiry, I was not contented with limiting my observation to delineating only the curricular and pedagogical aspects of eight-grade ENL education; that is, with only what takes place inside the space of the classroom. My methodological imperatives demanded that I supplement this account by observing and examining the school’s climate/culture as well. That is to say, the ethnographic context of the study had to extent to include the questions of (a) the distribution of access to various school and educational resources; (b) the school’s discursive and rhetorical patterns/practices regarding emergent bilingual; (c) the prevalent pedagogical ethos among teachers, derived from my interviews with teachers as well as organic conversations between and among teachers during faculty meetings.

I therefore collected five individual data sets for the ethnographic phase. The first set concerns the pedagogy, content, and curriculum of the eighth-grade ENL stand-alone and ENL/ELA co-taught classes. To accomplish all this, I observed all eighth-grade ENL stand-alone classes as well as ENL/ELA co-taught sections for five months—that is over 550 hours of instruction (5.5 hrs/day). In my observations, I took copious notes, which included analytical memos and journals. I subsequently carried out micro-analyses of the notes, analytical memos and journals using first-level and second-level of coding with NVivo 12. To ensure inter-coder reliability of measurement, 10 percent of the data were double coded by a second coder who was a doctoral student in the same field.

The second set consists of my observation, journal notes, and analytical memos at a different contextual level, that is, the distribution of school resources. The third data set concerns the school’s climate and culture in relation to emergent bilinguals. More specifically, this data set consists of over 80 hours of observations of various academic, professional, and disciplinary
meetings at the research site (e.g., faculty meetings, professional developments, disciplinary committee meetings, and student-committee meetings).

The fourth data set consists of my notes and analytical memos derived from my conversations/interviews with the eighth-grade ENL and ELA teachers as well as the students present in the classes I observed. My conversations with the teachers revolved around topics such as their curriculum, content, and pedagogical practices; individual students, their performance as well as systemic constraints and limitations impacting the teachers’ performance. My conversations with the students were mostly limited to topics such as teacher’s expectations, assignments and testing, content and materials, and school’s climate and culture in relation to marginalized populations; I also, sometimes, answered their questions, if I could.

The fifth and the final data set for this phase of the study concerns my observation notes and analytical memos on discursive patterns/practices I identified among the teachers, administrators, and staff in relation to emergent bilinguals. By discursive patterns/practices here I mean the specific body, if not system, of statements, which is mediated by the institutional context of the school, and which codes, addresses, talks about, and in so doing, defines and delimits the category ENL students (and its various linguistic and cultural cognates). It therefore constitutes the observable patterns of language while speaking of and/or addressing emergent bilinguals, their needs, and their families.

What this inquiry foregrounds, therefore, is the multilayered nature of the issue of ENL education as well as the complex ways, whether explicitly or implicitly, in which these levels interact with, determine, and mediate one another. In doing so, this study eschews approaches that tend to disengage and isolate a particular level (e.g., pedagogy) and stakes its claims in terms of a more holistic approach, which recognizes and considers the internal connections between
and among these multiple levels of analysis. It is precisely from the standpoint of such a highly contextualized and mediated methodological prism that, I argue, this research can provide a “thick explanation” of the issue under investigation. Table 3.4 summarizes the methods of data collection and analysis mobilized in the ethnographic phase of this study.

**Table 3.4**

*Overview of the Methods of Data Collection, Data Analysis and Research Questions for the Ethnographic Phase*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collection Methods</th>
<th>Data Analysis Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1a) In what ways does the eighth-grade ENL curriculum define and elicit language instruction and pedagogy? (1b) How are these pedagogical practices shaped by the climate and culture of the school?</td>
<td>field notes</td>
<td>- analyses of observations and analytical memos on:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observation notes</td>
<td>- school’s curriculum, pedagogical practices, and physical setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and analytical memos</td>
<td>- conversations with both students and teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- school’s climate and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- observable discourse patterns with regards to emergent bilinguals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- initial and focused coding with Nvivo program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observations**

The evidence for the ethnographic phase relies on observations. Observations of the participants, teachers, curricular and pedagogical practices, school’s climate and culture, discourse patterns with regards to emergent bilinguals and the site of the study were conducted from the perspective of an outsider (Creswell, 2013). For Creswell, ethnography as a process involves extended observations of the group, most often through participant observation, in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people and observes and interviews the group participants. Ethnographers study the meaning of the behavior, the language, and the interaction among members of the culture-sharing group. (p. 90)
The purpose of the observations in this study was to document the natural setting of the school environment (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the scope of the observations included: the setting and its various attributes; number of ENL stand-alone and co-taught service hours; ENL and ELA/ENL co-taught classroom instruction and materials; language learning activities; reading/writing assignments; the student-students and teacher-student interactions, school climate and culture and visible discourse patterns with regards to emergent bilinguals. Each classroom observation lasted for approximately 40 minutes (i.e., a whole class period). To provide more context, I spoke with the teachers about their pedagogies and practices after observations were completed. Sometimes, I spoke with the students after the class was dismissed, so I took notes of all the conversations.

During the observations, I usually sat in the back behind all the students to minimize any distractions. I would take notes of classroom instructions, pedagogical practices, and students’ interactions and responses. During the ethnographic phase of this study, my position varied from class to class depending on the kind of class and the teacher. For the first couple of weeks, I assumed the role of an external observer during the eighth-grade ELA co-taught and the eighth grade ENL stand-alone classes as well as staff/teacher meetings. During this time, my role was limited to that of a passive observer or what Geertz called, “deep hanging out” (2000, p. 107). After a few weeks into observing classes, I assumed a more active role in both ENL and ELA/ELA co-taught classes: mainly working in small-group activities or walking around the classroom to assist English language learners on classwork. I also made efforts to move around in and out of classrooms and attended almost all building-wide activities such as staff meetings, plays, student clubs, GSA meetings, and potlucks. I took detailed field notes throughout, which I then expanded after leaving the field site.
Roles and Positionalities

During the ethnographic phase, I collected data from a traditional perspective, that is, the perspective of an outsider (Creswell & Miller, 2000). However, due to my identity as a multilingual woman of color, I found myself switching between insider and outsider positionalities at times. There were times that I felt that my identity potentially affected the behavior of students. For instance, during my observation of an ENL/ENL co-taught class, I noted several instances where students were reticent toward discussion questions on their experiences of immigration. These questions often arose in the middle of the discussion that followed the reading of Kathreine Marsh’s *Nowhere Boy* (2018). My cultural identity came into play, on several occasions, when the eighth grade ELA teacher, Jane, asked me specifically about my personal experiences in the U.S. I felt uncomfortable and self-conscious about my responses and the way in which they may have been received or impacted my positionality. There were also those moments, in the ELA classroom, when a student asked my opinion on a particular topic raised by Jane about displacement and immigration. This made me uneasy because I felt that my presence might have disturbed the class dynamic.

While I initially set out to minimize the impact of my presence, I quickly learned that such an approach had its own pitfalls (Lather, 1998). There were instances that I had to become more engaged because a student would ask me a question or would talk to me. This sometimes created minimal distractions in the class. Students, mainly emergent bilinguals, would begin to talk to me while their teacher was explaining the lesson, or they would ask me personal questions. I remember the first time Amanda introduced me to her class: several emergent bilinguals immediately wanted to know about my religion, ethnicity, background, and educational trajectory, asking me questions such as, “Are you Muslim? What languages do you
speak? Where are you from? How long did you study English to be able to get into a graduate school here in the US?” These questions would mostly arise during my first week at Highgate while I was still observing or helping learners around. The conversations would take class time, and this created an uneasy moment for me. I later recognized that such “uneasy” moments were in fact the affective by-products of the topic of discussion, of cultural and identity displacement, all of which are of central importance in relation to classroom interactions with immigrant students as well as negotiating the pedagogy of a culturally diverse and sustaining classrooms.

**Data Analysis**

As I described earlier, I collected multiple layers of data during the ethnographic phase to provide a thick description of the issue under investigation. In doing so, I collected and analyzed the following texts: (a) field notes and journals on the eighth-grade ENL curriculum; (b) field notes and journals on the eighth-grade ENL/ELA co-taught curriculum; (c) analytical memos on school’s climate and culture; (d) field notes and analytical memos on distribution of school resources, and (e) field notes on discursive patterns/practices regarding emergent bilinguals. In response to this study’s research question, these observations, notes, memos, journals and their analyses clearly delineate the ways in which the eighth-grade ENL instruction is enacted at Highgate as well as the ways in which it is mediated by the school’s climate and culture.

To think through the relationship between the data collected and producing ways for collecting new ones, data analysis in this study was concurrent with the process of data collection. It is argued that this “can be a healthy corrective for built-in blind spots [as] it makes analysis an ongoing, lively enterprise that contributes to the energizing process of fieldwork” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 50).
The first step in data analysis was to review field notes, the researcher’s memos, the institutional/pedagogical texts that were collected from the research site, followed by coding with NVivo 12 (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The next step required me to member-check (Creswell, 2013) with the observed teachers the notes I had taken on their teaching practice and/or their conversations with the students. To ensure accuracy, I sent each teacher the copies of my notes and asked them whether they would like to add anything or, if need be, make any adjustments. Therefore, I double-checked all memos from class observations and re-read them in order to produce more detailed notes. What also proved quite helpful was data triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Anger & Machmes, 2005), for by that time the database had grown to be very large (including multiple classroom observation notes, classroom discussion notes, and field notes. The next step was “First and Second Cycle” of coding following Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) who argue that “First Cycle coding methods are codes initially assigned to the data chunks. Second Cycle coding methods generally work with the resulting First Cycle codes themselves” (p. 73). In the following sections, I will review how the data from the observations is analyzed through a First and Second Cycle of coding.

**Observations**

The Data Analysis Process Table (Table 3.5) provides a description of the steps taken in the first and second cycle of pattern coding (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014) during the observations. I discuss the results of this phase in Chapter 4 in detail.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Recording Field Notes - Reviewing field notes three times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Coding curricular and pedagogical practices. - Coding content of instruction, form of instruction, and the content of the form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Taking notes on classroom observations; schools’ climate and culture; discourse patterns and physical setting. - Highlighting environmental observations and structures (patterns).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Observations were sent to the teachers to member check. - Intercoder reliability was assessed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Determining emergent themes from observations and field notes. - Writing down emerging themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Emerging themes were analyzed and categorized. - Final themes were developed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below, I describe the second phase of this study: namely, my methodological approach during the practitioner inquiry.

**Phase Two: Practitioner Research**

**Methodological Approach**

The methodological basis for the second phase of this study derives from the scholarship in the field of education, mainly practitioner research (Habermas, 1987; Campano, 2007; Cochran-smith & Lytle, 1993, 2009). Practitioner research, as a form of action research, aims at emancipatory interests (Habermas, 1971). Practitioner research is said to be “an inquiry at stance” (Cochran-smith & Lytle, 2009) with a fluid and emergent nature which “continue[s] to evolve and be shaped by realities of [its] context” (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 17). Therefore, the researcher has a unique relationship to and plays a fundamental role in the creation of knowledge in the study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Practitioner research values local knowledge in classrooms through the theorization of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Campano et al.
(2013) maintain that the “fundamental idea behind practitioner research is the democratization of knowledge,” and that “those who participate in the context are in a unique position to systematically examine it” (p. 103). Moreover, practitioner research aims at breaking the patterns of inequity in education to liberate the full potential of students (Campano, 2009). It is argued that “practitioner researchers draw upon their identities and experiences to question established systems and create more equitable arrangements for student learning. Often, this involves theorising and teaching within and against inherited assumptions and structures” (Simon et al. (2012, p. 9).

The scholarship outlined above serves as a point of departure for my critical inquiry into the development of narrative, writing skills among eight-grade emergent bilinguals. In so doing, I draw on and develop the conceptual models of narrative competence and cognitive mapping. A major corollary of this approach, therefore, is that it positions students as active agential subjects of knowledge rather than passive consumers in classroom.

**Participants**

A total of 12 eighth-grade emergent bilinguals participated in the practitioner inquiry phase of the study. Participants were selected using purposeful and convenience sampling techniques (Gentles, et al., 2015; Palys, 2008; Patton, 2002). The purposeful method uses criterion sampling, which involves selecting cases that meet specific criteria crucial to the case (Patton, 2002). The predominant criteria for the student participants were: (1) English language proficiency level of transitioning or above; (2) age ranging from 11–13; and (3) their educational programing had to include ENL pull-out services. The samples for experiments and the interviews were homogenous (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014), thus allowing this study to take a deeper inquiry into the students’ narrative texts.
In order to receive their mandated services, the ENL students must take the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) at the end of each school year. The NYSESLAT is given to all students who are identified as English Language Learners (ELLs). The students who are new to the US educational system should first be screened by another test, i.e., the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL). This test verifies students’ “proficiency” level. Based on the results of NYSITELL, students are categorized into five “proficiency” levels: entering, emerging, transitioning, expanding, and commanding. Students who score below the Commanding level on the NYSITELL are mandated to receive bilingual education or English as a new language (ENL) instruction according to NY state guidelines.

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary and in accordance with the IRB standards. It was made clear to the students throughout the study that their responses had no bearing on their classroom grades, nor the dynamic of their relationship with their instructor so they could share the ideas, texts, concerns openly. The risks to this population were minimal as all participants fully understood their tasks and what was expected of them, and the practitioner inquiry phase was offered as an after-school support program via Zoom. Thus participants did not miss any class time. During this phase, students spent time reading, analyzing stories, and stimulating their imagination as they worked on their personal narratives (see Appendix A). I informed the participants that they were free to stop their engagement whenever they wanted without any consequences. The potential benefits to the participants included contributing to a growing body of research on English language pedagogies, narrative inquiry; and a host of

---

12 The New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL) serves as the State’s formal English language proficiency assessment in the process for initially identifying English Language Learners in New York State.
language skills such as reading comprehension, writing, speaking, and listening; developing reflexivity in terms of self-awareness and agency; and cultivating critical thinking. Table 3.6 lists the student participants’ names,\(^\text{13}\) gender, countries of origin, grade level, along with their language proficiency level. All students listed below participated in this phase of the study, yet given the depth and choice of my data analysis method (i.e., narrative analysis) and considerations of space, I discuss the narratives of four students in detail in Chapter 5. It is also worth noting that each of these four students represented different stages of language development and ran the gamut from transitioning to expanding. The following section provides more detailed information on the four participants.

**Table 3.6**

*Demographics of Student Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Years in Highgate</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Language Proficiency level per NYSITELL/NYESLTL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sama</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>expanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafe</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>transitioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>transitioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>transitioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tahira</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>transitioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hussein</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>transitioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zynah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>expanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>transitioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jitsuko</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>expanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahmood</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>expanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahid</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>transitioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>transitioning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{13}\) All students’ names are aliases.
**Student Participant: Sama.** The first participant was an eighth-grade female young learner from Pakistan. Sama’s English language proficiency level was at expanding (advanced) level. NY state guidelines suggest that “A student at the Expanding level shows great independence in advancing academic language skills and is approaching the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings)” (NYSED, 2019). By the time we met, Sama had been living in the U.S. for five years. Both her receptive and expressive language skills were developed. She was usually quiet in class and did not socialize much with other students.

Before migrating to the U.S., she had attended school in Islamabad, Pakistan, for three years. Sama had three siblings (one brother and two sisters) all younger than her. At home, Sama spoke only Urdu as it was the family’s first language. She was a voracious reader, and her oral and written language skills were strong; however, she shied away from participation in class in general and she mostly tended to be an observer—mostly quiet in her content area classes. She usually sat by herself during lunch time, where you could sometimes find her reading a book other than her school textbooks. According to her teacher, Sama was a very independent learner, and she rarely showed up to her classes unprepared.

**Student Participant: Rafe.** The second participant was an eighth-grade male learner from Oaxaca, Mexico. Rafe’s English language proficiency level was at transitioning (intermediate) level, in which, according to the state guidelines the student “shows some independence in advancing academic language skills but has yet to meet the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings)” (NYSED, 2019). Rafe had been identified as a SIFE student.
At that time, Rafe had been living in the U.S. for two years. When asked to introduce himself, Rafe responded “I am Rafe, I speak a dead language—Trique!” He spoke Trique with his parents and siblings. Rafe had four siblings: two younger sisters and two older brothers. It was their grandmother who raised them after the parents migrated to the U.S.—Rafe was only two years old at the time. Living apart for ten years, Rafe and his parents had reunited two years before when he finally arrived in the U.S. Rafe was mostly quiet and scarcely maintained eye contact with his teachers. His listening skills were more developed than those of his speaking, writing, and reading.

**Student Participant: Howin.** The third eighth grader who participated in this phase of the study was a male student from China. Howin had moved to the U.S. two years before the data was collected. He was an only child and only spoke Mandarin at home with his parents. Howin was raised by his grandmother in a provincial town east of Beijing. As for his social skills, Howin preferred to hang out with his teachers rather than his classmates. He also had time and again mentioned that some of his American peers did not understand his “accent.”

Howin was also at a transitioning (intermediate) level. His listening skills were more developed than his speaking, writing, and reading skills. His knowledge of vocabulary was fairly sufficient to understand classroom instructions; target vocabulary items (mainly Tier 3), however, needed to be pre-taught beforehand. Going over the essays he had written for his ELA class, I noted the prevalence of short and truncated sentences as well as a very basic use of conjunctions. His texts revealed scant evidence of figurative language as well as comparative forms.

**Student Participant: Sara.** The fourth participant was an eighth-grade female learner from Islamabad, Pakistan. Sara’s English language proficiency level was at transitioning
(intermediate) level, in which, according to the state guidelines the student “shows some independence in advancing academic language skills but has yet to meet the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings)” (NYSED, 2019).

At that time, Sara had been living in the U.S. for two years with two of her siblings and her parents. She was a very quiet and shy student. Her listening and reading skills were more developed than her writing and speaking skills. Her comprehension skill was fairly established so she understood classroom instructions. Also, she never raised her hand for any questions, nor did she volunteer to share her responses in the content area classrooms.

**Methods of Data Collection**

The data collection in the practitioner phase of this study was based on two crucial sources: (a) emergent bilinguals’ narratives, and (b) emergent bilinguals’ reflections on their narratives/narrativization process. In the following section, I will discuss the specifics of data collection as well as the protocols adopted in the process. Table 3.7 summarizes the methods of data collection and data analysis utilized for the research questions in this phase of this study.
Table 3.7
Overview of the Methods of Data Collection, Data Analysis and Research Questions for the Practitioner Inquiry Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collection Methods</th>
<th>Data Analysis Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2a) In what ways have emergent bilinguals been able to encode in their narratives key dimensions of cognitive mapping and narrative competence as conceptualized in this study</td>
<td>- students’ narrative during practitioner inquiry.</td>
<td>- transcription of participant’s narratives. -Analyzing students’ narratives through narrative inquiry (Clandinin &amp; Connelly, 2000; 2007) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995). - memoing -initial and focused coding with Nvivo program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| (2b) What are the emergent bilinguals’ reflections on their own process of narrative production? | -Researcher’s notes on semi-structured interviews and whole-class reflections at the end of each engagement. | -Audio recording; -Transcribing; - Memoing; -initial coding and focused coding with Nvivo program. |

Narrative Tasks and Narrative Inquiry

During the practitioner phase, I spent two months teaching English to emergent bilinguals via Zoom. I introduced four engagement/language tasks as part of my inquiry (see table 3.8 for the summary of the engagement tasks and Appendix A for the engagements tasks). As a result, I collected and analyzed forty-eight narratives overall. Central to my pedagogical philosophy and practice during this phase was a commitment to constructing and maintaining a collaborative, student-centered space where emergent bilinguals can feel included, respected, and valued.

Focusing on narrative inquiry, I developed the specific content of my curriculum and adjusted my pedagogical practices to acknowledge my students’ lived experience and histories. The idea was to empower them to draw on their own experiences, voices, and linguistic repertoires in their
narratives—to rediscover their sense of agency. To do so, I paid special attention to the contents of my lessons, the way I presented them as well as the specific texts we read in class to enable my emergent bilinguals to express—rather than repress—their rich, ethnic and cultural repertoires. Likewise, transforming the classroom into a safe space where students could reflect on, and if inclined to, share their “traumatic” experiences (e.g., migration, displacement, alienation) constituted an indispensable component of my pedagogy.

Table 3.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement Tasks</th>
<th>Language Modality Incorporated</th>
<th>Length of Inquiry</th>
<th>Narrative Prompt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Claude McKay’s “The Tropics in New York”</td>
<td>Reading/Writing/Listening/Speaking</td>
<td>Two weeks</td>
<td>Think about McKay’s poem and our discussions regarding the importance of stories in our lives. Compose your own story about home and what you miss most about it: What is home for you? What reminds you of home? What tastes/feels like home? What are some of your best memories?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia Stefanovic’s “Smells Like Home”</td>
<td>Reading/Writing/Listening/Speaking</td>
<td>Two weeks</td>
<td>To what extent do you, like Stefanovic, carry your home or the idea of home with you? If “home” suggests a sense of belonging, would it be possible for us to belong to more than just one place? two places? more? Is there a relation between home, time (past, present, future) and history (personal as well as collective)? How so? Explain. You see, the writing and subject of history does not always have to be about heroines, heroes, famous people, conquerors or inventors. Rather, you all have your own histories, your own unique voices, which are important and need to be heard. So if you could tell or write your own history or the history of your home, what would it look like? What would it sound like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiyun Li’s “Eat, Memory: Orange Crush”</td>
<td>Reading/Writing/Listening/Speaking</td>
<td>Two weeks</td>
<td>These days, perhaps more than ever before, companies rely on advertising to sell their products (from fast food and sneakers to smart phones and cloud storage). Everyday, we are constantly bombarded by dozens, if not hundreds, of ads—on our phones, on the Internet, on TV, on the radio, on the bus, on buildings, on our T-shirts and so many other places. They try to, in various subtle ways, convince us (but also to indirectly pressure us) to buy a certain product: the ads claim that this or that product is not only what we need but also what we desire: it will make us happy; and that without it our life is somehow incomplete! That to be successful, we should buy what they are selling. With that in mind, have you (or anyone you know) ever purchased a product because you thought it would change your life? Write about your experience with this particular product and discuss in detail whether or not it met your expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline Woodson’s “February 12, 1963”</td>
<td>Reading/Writing/Listening/Speaking</td>
<td>Two weeks</td>
<td>Write your own “I am born” story influenced by Woodson’s “February 12, 1963.” What was going on in the world when you were born?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consequently, I designed the first three engagement tasks to build on the emergent bilinguals’ “home,” lived experiences and histories. Likewise, the final task aimed at cultivating empathy and creating human connections. I chose global texts that would allow me to create a space “that welcomed multiple perspectives, valued a spirit of inquiry, and nurtured responsive and relational readings of the world (Wissman et al., 2016, p. 140). It was therefore crucial that I incorporate such multi-perspectival texts in my lessons as an attempt to re-center students’ perspectives and voices in class. As Campano et al. (2016, p. 64) remind us: “practitioner research entails asking critical questions, such as who decides what gets done and whose interests are served by a classroom interaction.” My classroom inquiry, therefore, involved direct instruction (i.e., teaching semantic and syntactic skills) because they seemed facilitative of the banking model of education (Freire, 1970). For the most part, however, it was the emergent bilinguals who were the dominant voices in class and the curriculum, in which they felt included along with their stories and their reflections (see Chapter Six).

The four engagement tasks I developed for the purposes of this study were based on the following texts: (a) Claude McKay’s “The Tropics in New York”; (b) Sofija Stefanovic’s “Smells Like Home”; (3) Yiyun Li’s “Eat, Memory: Orange Crush”; and (4) Jacqueline Woodson’s “February 12, 1963.” Each lesson consisted of several reading and writing tasks (see Appendix A), culminating in the main narrative writing task. Before each reading, I would pre-teach the target vocabulary items by providing the students with the definitions, word class, contextual examples and, if necessary, visual aids. Furthermore, each task involved two components: (a) a scaffolding inquiry; (b) a narrative inquiry. The first inquiry consisted almost entirely of a series of scaffolding questions devised to help students in close reading the texts, which involved a careful examination of their formal and thematic elements (e.g., point of view,
voice, metaphor, imagery, as well as main idea, affective and emotional elements, lived experience, historical context, etc.). I also made sure to adequately contextualize each text. For example, for the first engagement task, I reviewed the Harlem Renaissance period to contextualize Claude McKay’s lived experiences and aesthetic contribution as an immigrant in New York. We also watched videos in class on the art and music produced by the Harlem Renaissance artists as we discussed the importance of the movement.

In the second inquiry, each narrative task included a specific prompt followed by a series of scaffolding questions devised to help the emergent bilinguals navigate the prompt and approach it from different perspectives. These inquiries incorporated a bidirectional historical orientation: that is to say, emergent bilinguals were encouraged not only to attempt to close read the text in its own specific historical context (i.e., the time and place where it was produced) but also in relation to their own contemporary moment. This allowed the emergent bilinguals to appreciate the historical specificity of the text and to discern those transhistorical ideas and themes that were relevant to their own situation: That is, home, family, friendships, retrospection, introspection, displacement, alienation, biculturalism, bilingualism, sense of community, childhood, time, place, individual and collective histories. The narrative inquiry, among other things, constituted a vehicle of self-expression for the student as well as a medium of informal assessment for me, as the instructor.

I documented my pedagogy and teaching practices by way of keeping detailed records of the processes of designing my lesson plans; taking notes during and after class; journaling and collecting students’ personal narratives. In my field notes and memos, I have provided a detailed account of my procedure and teaching practices as well as several questions that emerged during this time, supplemented by my own reflections on the process.
Interviews

During the practitioner phase, I conducted forty-eight semi-structured interviews to elicit the emergent bilinguals’ perspectives and reflections (Creswell & Miller, 2000) on their narrativization process (see Appendix C). These conversations delved more deeply into the ways the participants understood the process of narrativization. The interviews served a twofold function: (1) cultivating reflexivity: it allowed the emergent bilinguals to reflect on the tasks they had just completed; (2) affective and intellectual development: it provided the emergent bilinguals an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about their personal narratives as well as the inquiry process. This last was driven by a comparative impulse: that is to say, the narratives they produced during the practitioner phase of this study would constitute an analogue for them to reflect on in relation to the non-narrative writing tasks they were assigned in other classes. This reflection step resonates with Brinkmann and Kvale’s (2015) rationale for such conversations in that they open up a subjective space for the student that afford her some deep insight into her lived experiences as well as giving meaning to the study in general. Yin (2017), too, understands such reflexivity as one of the “the most important sources” for the researcher, for they give her a richer glimpse into a remarkable sphere of influence which otherwise would have remained out of reach: where a host of social-cultural factors already discussed above jump out of these conversations and reveal themselves as constitutive of the students’ narratives.

Roles and Positionalities

During the practitioner inquiry phase, I assumed multiple positionalities as I was collecting data. For instance, while I was teaching the class as an insider, I was also, at the same time, conducting research as an outsider. I therefore collected data from multiple perspectives (Anderson 2005; Creswell & Miller, 2000). This helped me gain firsthand knowledge not only of
the emergent bilinguals’ linguistic abilities, but also of the challenges and barriers they faced at school, which had mostly to do with the degree to which they felt welcomed and affirmed there.

As Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 31) observe there is a continuum of action research positionalities: from insider’s research on their own practices, to the collaboration between the insider and the outsider; and from there to the other side of the continuum, which turns on the outsider studying and reflecting on the practices of the insider. During the practitioner phase, I adopted an “inquiry stance,” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) based on the two conceptual models (i.e., narrative competence and cognitive mapping). My primary aim was to turn my classroom into a site of reflexivity, discovery and production of knowledge for both the students and myself. As Campano (2007) reminds us, practitioner methodology underscores “the experiential and cultural resources of teachers and students,” and allows them to “imagine their own classrooms as collaborative sites of inquiry that may inform their practice and have general relevance to the larger educational community” (p. 5).

**Data Analysis**

Over the course of the practitioner phase, I collected two sets of data: (a) emergent bilinguals’ narratives; and (b) emergent bilinguals’ reflections on their narratives. My analysis of the narratives serves to demonstrate the ways in which the emergent bilinguals were able to cognitively map out and represent their lived experiences through developing narrative competence (Research Question 2a). The analyses of the semi-structured interviews served to unpack the participants’ reflections on their process of narrative production and inquiry (Research Question 2b).

Data collection and data analyses during the practitioner phase happened concurrently. This corresponds to the “spiral” model put forward by Creswell (2013) who argues that data
analysis is a process intermingled with data collection and report writing. That is to say, it is “moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach” (p. 182). To analyze the data on emergent bilinguals’ reflections, I used Nvivo software to code, sort, analyze, store, and retrieve data. Coding constitutes a crucial step in the process and provides the researcher with “a means of sorting the descriptive data you have collected . . . so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 161). Nvivo has the capacity of linking analytic memos to particular codes or segments of the text and of allowing the researcher to create concept maps of the categories they have generated, thus contributing to the development of theory. In the following sections, I review how the data from the semi-structured interviews was analyzed through a First and Second Cycle of coding.

**Interviews.** I audio recorded the semi-structured interviews with the participants during the practitioner phase and I transcribed the recordings into a Word document. I then uploaded the Word documents into NVivo 12, where the first and second cycles of coding were initiated (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). The Interview Data Analysis Process Table (Table 3.9) provides the steps I used in data analyses of the interviews. I discuss the results of this phase in detail in Chapter 6.

**Table 3.9**

*Interview Data Analysis Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reading each transcript.</td>
<td>- Re-reading each transcript three times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reading transcripts to look for emergent patterns and color-coding them.</td>
<td>- Taking notes and identifying commonalities and patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Themes were categorized based on the recurring patterns.</td>
<td>- Reorganization of themes and creation of final themes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Narrative Analysis.** This step consists of transcribing and analyzing students’ narratives through the model of narrative inquiry informed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), for whom
narrative is first and foremost a particular way of thinking about experience. Furthermore, I examined students’ narratives against the micro and macro indices of narrative competence and cognitive mapping. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry constitutes an interrelated conceptualization—that is, a “three-dimensional inquiry space” (p. xiv)—which entails the temporal, the personal and the social, and the place. Taking my cue from this conceptual constellation, my narrative analysis includes the following units:

**Temporal order.** On this level of analysis, I have paid attention to the specific ways in which time is represented (appears, figures) in the students’ narratives. Temporal dimensions and the ways in which the student has been able to connect the past to the present and the future are among the main focus of my analysis. I have considered the expression of time as history (both subjective and objective) in relation to its syntactic and semantic markers as well (e.g., verb tense, transitions, adverbs, etc.). As a result, my interest in the way in which time, or temporality, is represented in the narrative can scarcely be reduced to mere syntactic considerations, though they are crucial as well.

**The spatial, or the place.** But of course, temporal considerations are structurally coupled with spatial ones, that is, more concretely, the ways in which students represent place (e.g., home, hometown, country, a specific place, locale) and its associations. This is one way to gauge and develop students’ capacity for cognitive mapping. Place is thus to be understood as the more socially mediated iteration of space. The concrete materiality that the concept of place carries, and which is in turn disrupted by displacement and dislocation (characteristic of all my student participants), becomes the purview of narrative inquiry and cognitive mapping. The horizontal (metonymic) and vertical (metaphorical) operations of cognitive mapping encourage thinking in terms of resemblances, analogies, comparisons, and similarities as well as differences. A
cognitive territorialization of place whose narrative embodiment is expected to establish
connections between elements that, at first glance, appear to be spatiotemporally discontinuous,
yet intimately intertwined. Place, whether individual or collective, is then revealed to have
already been socioculturally mediated. In other words, at this level of analysis, then, what we can
describe as a spatial triangulation is revealed to be a social one as well.

*The personal and the social.* That the process of signification and sense making are
socially mediated is one of the basic assumptions of the present study. But rather than exploring
language as instrument of human sociality, that is, “the ways in which language is embedded in
society and social institutions” (Gee, 2015, p. 129), I propose that the more productive approach
would be to examine the ways in which historically specific social relations and institutions are
embedded in language and narratives, both at the micro-level of parole (individual utterances)
and the macro-level of langue (structural possibilities and limits). My conceptualization of
development and evaluation of narrative competence lies in the degree to which students can
establish connections between Gee’s micro-levels of syntax, semantic and pragmatics, and the
macro-level of social relations embedded in them. I thus examine the ways in which students'
personal narratives can be shown to already include transindividual dimensions. At this level of
inquiry, then, the movement is from the history of the individual to that of the collective. I am
particularly attentive to the ways in which students’ articulation of their lived experience can be
shown to resonate with a sense of community that enlarges the field of vision form the personal
to the social, and back.

*Voice and Agency.* Because, in the last analysis, it is not the social that constitutes my
unit of analysis, but rather the individual student whose narrative, discursive skills and cognition
are mediated by the social milieu. It is attention to the unique way in which individuals
internalize and work through (and thus modifies) the social imperatives of their lives that ultimately brings lived experience, voice and agency into self-reflexive consciousness and from there to meaningful action. For voice and agency to become more than empty discourse, we need to attend to their specific individual articulations as well as social mediations. For Fairclough (1992), the question of mediation between the textual and social world is indeed crucial:

It is important that the relationship between discourse and social structure should be seen dialectically if we are to avoid the pitfalls of overemphasizing, on the one hand, the social determination of discourse, and on the other hand, the construction of the social in discourse. The former turns discourse into a mere reflection of a deeper social reality, the latter idealistically represents discourse as the source of the social. (p. 62)

One is irreducible to the other, and yet each must be shown to exert a determining force on the other. This is a complex process that cannot be address by merely having students produce sentences in active voice, though that’s a start! Scholars in the field of Discourse Analysis often trace the construction of agency to using more active syntactic forms attributing agency to humans. Fowler et al. (1979), analyzing the phrasing of regulations concerning university applications, writes that “the passive structure, allowing agent-deletion, permits a discreet silence about who if anyone might refuse to admit the applicant” (p. 41).

With these considerations in mind, I have organized my narrative assignments arounds issues and forms that would encourage students to (a) reflect on and represent their own lived experience; (b) to acknowledge and affirm their own voice/identity—both literal and affective/psychological; (c) to articulate their own desires, intentions and dreams; (d) to recognize the ways in which their unique, personal voices, desires and visions have developed in unitary/contradictory relations to the larger social field. And, finally, (e) to cognize that there is nothing essentialist about their identity that would keep them locked up in sternal stasis. In other words, the narratives that explore individual desires and their social mediations are also
narratives of change. To affect real change, to make sense of it, perhaps, one must first imagine it, map it out, and put it into narrative.

The Narrative Data Analysis Process Table (Table 3.10) provides the steps used in this section. I discuss the results of this phase in detail in Chapter 5.

**Table 3.10**

_Narrative Data Analysis Process (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000 and Fairclough, 1992)_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reading each narrative and transcribing them into a word document.</td>
<td>- Re-reading each narrative three times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reading transcripts (narratives)</td>
<td>- Analyzing the narratives through Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) interrelated conceptualization of narrative inquiry as a “three-dimensional space and Fairclough (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Themes were categorized based on the recurring patterns.</td>
<td>- Reorganization of themes, and creation of final themes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quality Checks: Trustworthiness and Validity**

The quality of this study will be measured in terms of confirmability, reliability, internal validity, external validity, and application (Miles et al., 2014). Confirmability is addressed in the detailed design of this research study, in which explicit methods, inquiry phases, data collection and analysis have been provided. The reliability is achieved through detailed descriptions of the research and methodology providing clarity of the research question, process and procedures used to analyze data. Internal validity is reflected in the use of rich descriptions, triangulation of data sources, utilizing “critical friends,” methods and consideration of alternative explanations. With triangulation the researcher can guard against the accusation that a study’s findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator’s bias” (Patton, 1990 as cited in Angers & Machtmes 2005). External validity is obtained through detailed description of observation sessions, participants, feedback from teachers as well as the process of evidence collection to provide a thick description of the phenomenon through multiple sources of
data. Finally, the results of the study will be made available to the participating teachers in order to inform them of the findings regarding narrative inquiry.

The validity measures proposed for this study is informed by 13 tactics addressed by Miles et al. (2014). Their measure are as followed: (1) Checking for representativeness; (2) checking for researcher effects; (3) triangulating; (4) weighting the evidence; (5) checking the meaning of outliers; (6) using extreme cases; (7) following up surprises; (8) looking for negative evidence; (9) making if-then tests; (10) ruling out spurious relations; (11) replicating findings; (12) checking out rival explanations; and (13) getting feedback from participants.

For example, to check for representativeness, I utilized purposeful sampling in the pre-data collection phase. As for the post-data collection phase, I examined the results for contrasting sources to check for representativeness. Also, to minimize researcher’s effect, I took multiple measures. For instance, I clarified the purpose of the study with the participants, provided guided instruction and directives for the narrative writing process, and conducted personal/group interviews. I also triangulated data by conducting multiple observations both in classroom and in various settings at the site, collected participants’ narratives, and conducted interviews to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at stake. Herr and Anderson (2015) explain that action researchers “use many of the techniques popular with qualitative researcher such as triangulation of methods and data sources and member checking” (p.73). However, they argue that because of the unique positionality of action researchers, further measures are sometimes necessary to be established. For instance, I reviewed the field notes and analytical memos multiple times to weight the evidence during and after the data collection phase. Finally, to minimize rival explanations, I utilized critical friends (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Table 3.11
summarizes the tactics in the design of this research study before and after the data is collected and analyzed.

**Table 3.11**

*Validity and Trustworthiness Measures (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validity measures</th>
<th>Pre-data-collection/analysis</th>
<th>Post-data-collection/analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Checking for representatives</td>
<td>purposeful sampling to ensure representativeness</td>
<td>examining contrasting cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clarifying the purpose of the research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>study with participants, written directives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for the narrativization process,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conducting interviews after the narrativization process.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking for researcher effects</td>
<td>observations, interviews, students’ narratives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>observations, interviews, students’ narratives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighting the evidence</td>
<td>observations, interviews, students’ narratives</td>
<td>analytic memos, field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking out rival explanations</td>
<td>utilizing critical friends (Herr &amp; Anderson, 2014)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following up Surprises</td>
<td>reviewing field notes/memos.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sending documents/notes on class observations to the teachers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I provided a detailed account of the methodological specificities of this study, namely, the ethnography and practitioner research paradigms. I argued that the qualitative character and the methodological approach of this study were determined by and constituted a response to the following research questions: (1a) In what ways does the eighth-grade ENL curriculum define and elicit language instruction and pedagogy? and (1b) How are these pedagogical practices shaped by the climate and culture of the school? (2a) In what ways have emergent bilinguals been able to encode in their narratives key dimensions of cognitive mapping and narrative competence as conceptualized in this study? (2b) What are the emergent bilinguals’ reflections on their own process of narrative production?
Furthermore, the participants and boundaries of the study for the student participants were defined in terms of (a) English language proficiency level of transitioning or above; (b) age ranging from 11–13; and (c) their educational programing must include ENL pull-out services.

The criteria adopted for the teacher participants were: (1) eighth grade ENL teacher; and (2) eighth-grade ELA content area teachers assigned to the co-taught section. I also described in detail the recruitment and access to participants, all three engagement tasks, and data storage protocols (see Appendix A to D). I also provided a comprehensive account of my data collection procedures and protocols and of the data collection timeline, participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures (see Tables 3.1 to 3.10). I finally, discussed the ways in which considerations of trustworthiness and validity of this research were addressed (see Table 3.11).
A concrete goal of this study was to reframe, if not reimagine, classroom instruction for eighth-grade ENL students at Highgate middle school by implementing practitioner research methods. To do that, however, I needed to consider the established curriculum and literacy practices at the research site. Since this study understands education, literacy, and the construction of meaning as holistic, socially mediated, and embedded practices, it was essential that I explore the sociocultural grounds of education, curriculum, and instruction at Highgate as well. To grapple with and traverse the epistemological complexity, if not difficulties, of such multiple contexts, I therefore decided to engage in an ethnographic study of the research site. I made this decision because it seemed to me that ethnography’s rigorous qualitative methods—that is, participant observation, analytical description as well as its sociolinguistic research techniques—would allow me to document curriculum, instruction, and interactions both inside as well outside the classroom: namely, to explore the sociocultural, institutional, and discursive interactions taking place at the larger context of the research site.

In this chapter, I describe and analyze the study’s notable findings during the ethnographic phase, which was informed by the following research questions: (1a) In what ways does the eighth-grade ENL curriculum define and elicit language instruction and pedagogy? and (1b) How are these pedagogical practices shaped by the climate and culture of the school?

In the following sections, I explore four themes emerging from the ethnographic phase: namely, (1) the limitations of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) and phonics-based instruction in ENL stand-alone classes; (2) the ideological slant of the curriculum in ELA/ENL integrated class; (3) inequitable distribution of resources; and (4) institutionalization of
difference and discourses of “othering.” These themes have emerged from my analyses of field notes, interviews, and documents related to English language instruction in both ENL stand-alone and ELA/ENL co-taught eighth-grade classrooms, school’s climate/culture, teachers’ discursive patterns regarding emergent bilinguals, and the distribution of various resources (i.e., physical, spatial, educational). As I describe and explore each theme, I cite specific instances of classroom practices, content, and other recurring discourses concerning ENL students.

Throughout this chapter, I use the school’s dominant rhetoric and terminology in addressing and referring to emergent bilinguals: namely, ENL students. I conclude each section by further discussions of each theme considering the theoretical and empirical frameworks of this study (e.g., culturally sustaining pedagogy, perspectives on multicultural education, literacy as social practice, and critical curriculum theory). Table 4.1 summarizes the categories observed during the ethnographic phase along with their associated sub-categories as well as the four emerging themes.
### Table 4.1
*Categories, and Themes for the Ethnographic Phase of the study at Highgate.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories (with sub-categories in parentheses)</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• bottom-up approach to language teaching (focusing mainly on phonemic awareness, word/sound associations, words, phrases, and sentences)</td>
<td>Language Experience Approach and phonics-based instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• inductive teaching of syntax and correcting syntactical and pronunciation errors on the spot</td>
<td>ideological slant of the curriculum in ELA/ENL integrated class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• repetition as a form of language reinforcement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• view of writing as a set of prefabricated forms (i.e., sentence starters; poem scaffolds; Hamburger paragraph writing)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• focusing only on argumentative and persuasive essays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• view of reading as fluency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• scarcity of world and global literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• promoting monoculturalism and patriotic feelings via writing prompts (e.g., daily “creative” writings)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• viewing reading as entertainment and fun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• choice of assessments (no open-ended or project-based assessments; only multiple-choice questions and fill-in the blanks.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• classroom content being insulated from political processes and discussion of any conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• bringing <em>Change</em> is viewed as an extra burden and work for teachers. (i.e., school-sanctioned texts)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• superficial understandings of cultural competence (cultural attire day; food celebrations; flag representations)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ENL teachers being considered “auxiliary staff,” and being excluded from building-wide meetings with “content-area” teachers and administrators.</td>
<td>institutionalization of difference and discourses of “othering”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An assumption of ENL teachers as “homework police” (i.e., receiving constant emails from the “content area” teachers to make up time to work on the missing homework of their ENL students.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Labelling ENL students (i.e., “broken English,” “at risk,” “limited English proficient,” “low achieving”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of possessive adjectives with regards to ENL students (i.e., <em>your</em> students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Asking for permission to add ENL students to teachers’ rosters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• physical space challenges (i.e., shared ENL classrooms, no proper testing locations)</td>
<td>inequitable distribution of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• scarcity of multicultural resources (i.e., bilingual dictionaries, multicultural texts and literature)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First, I must make some clarifying remarks regarding the two classes that I observed at the school—namely, ENL stand alone and ENL/ELA co-taught classes. Public schools in the state of New York must follow state guidelines in providing ENL services for their English language learner population. According to the state guidelines (CR Part 154) English language learners who are at the entering and emerging levels, must receive “2 units of study” which consists of “360 minutes of ENL support per week.” The state guidelines, therefore, require that the students “receive 90 minutes of ENL stand-alone support and 180 minutes of ENL integrated/co-taught support per week.” Regarding students at the transitioning level, the state guidelines require that they receive “one unit of instruction which translates itself into 180 minutes of ENL instruction per week.” The guidelines also state that these “180 minutes must be divided to two sections, that is 90 minutes of standalone ENL and 90 minutes of integrated/co-taught ENL/ELA support.” Based on these guidelines, ENL students at the expanding level must “receive 180 minutes of ENL instruction per week; however, this should only be as an integrated/co-taught ENL/ELA support” (NYSED).

With that in mind, in this chapter, I describe and analyze my observations on classroom instruction in the context of these two ENL sections: namely, (1) the eighth-grade stand-alone, and (2) the ENL/ELA co-taught/integrated section. The *eighth-grade stand-alone section* itself was divided into two classes based on the proficiency level of the students: (1a) one for ENL students at the entering/emerging levels, and (1b) the other for ENL students at the transitioning/expanding levels. These two stand-alone classes were taught by the only eighth-grade ENL teacher at the school, Amanda. The *ENL/ELA co-taught class*, however, included all eighth-grade ENL students, regardless of their proficiency levels. This class was co-taught by the ELA teacher, Jane, and Amanda (see Theme Two below).
Drawing on my observations, I give an account of the ENL teacher’s pedagogical and classroom practices in her two stand-alone classes under Theme One. She characterized her overall pedagogical approaches to ENL instruction and curriculum in terms of Language Experience Approach (LEA) for the higher-level class and phonics-based instruction for the lower level.

**Theme One: The Limitations LEA and Phonics-based Instruction**

Here, I describe and analyze the data on the ENL teacher’s stand-alone classes. Amanda’s teaching philosophy and pedagogical approach for ENL eighth-graders was based on Language Experience Approach in her higher-level class, and phonics-based instruction in her lower-level stand-alone class. In a conversation I had with her, she explained that:

> the curriculum the district asked us to use is based on Language Experience Approach (LEA) and Phonics. I have been using this curriculum for over six years now and it really helps ENL students to express their experiences in an authentic way. The curriculum is meant to emphasize how students’ real-life events shape their reading comprehension. This makes the text more user-friendly and more comprehensible. I also think that this approach helps students get to know each other better. It builds a sense of community, you know, because they keep sharing their every-day activities. (04/28/2022, field notes)

The eighth-grade ENL curriculum, I thus noted, was scripted at Highgate. It nevertheless seemed flexible enough for the teacher to include or exclude certain sections/materials. Pedagogically, therefore, it was up to the teacher to use their discretion in supplementing their materials and classroom practices. Amanda’s pedagogy, therefore, informed by Language Experience Approach (LEA), was based on the integration of four language modalities: namely, listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Observing her class, I took note of the ways in which her instructional method aimed at the development and production of a “collectively” produced, written text based on the daily experiences of her ENL students (see the Halloween example below). For instance, the teacher
would typically start her class by sharing a personal experience (e.g., weekend plans, hiking trip, book shopping, going to movies). To provide more visual support for her students, she sometimes pulled images from her phone and projected them on the screen. This stage of her teaching often included showing the students a video with English subtitles (e.g., the trailer of the movie she had watched over the weekend, a video of her hiking in the mountains). She would sometimes follow this up by having her students participate in a role-playing or simulation activity. Amanda then would elicit students’ oral language production, which she always put on the board. The new text that gradually appeared on the board would then constitute the basis of the reading comprehension module of her lesson. Finally, the whole class would participate in a reading-aloud exercise, in which Amanda checked students’ pronunciation. Overall, I thought the teacher’s use of the board and scaffolding techniques were quite effective and productive; so was her energy in engaging the students in the lesson.

**LEA and a Lesson on Halloween**

In the following field notes, I describe a lesson on the topic of Halloween in the eighth-grade stand-alone, transitioning/expanding class. Prior to students’ arrival, Amanda had decorated her class with pumpkins and some other Halloween decorations (I thought she did a great job setting the scene and the mood). Here is a step-by-step description of the teacher’s pedagogical practices during this lesson:

1. **Discussing a personal experience:** After greeting the students and taking attendance, the teacher, addressing the whole class, asked whether they had ever heard of Halloween. This part was followed by a series of questions and answers on the topic. For instance, when Amanda asked if the students had ever seen or dressed up in Halloween costumes, Tabina
replied, “I don’t celebrate Halloween, but I like getting candies and seeing other kids in funny clothes.” In response, Amanda said:

So, you like their costumes, right? Well, I understand that different cultures have different celebrations, but my best childhood memories are from Halloween. That’s mainly why I teach this topic to my students every year because it still takes me back to my own childhood and memories.

Afterwards, Amanda wrote the word “costume” on the whiteboard and asked the class to repeat after her, first chorally, then followed by individual drilling. Next, Amanda put on the screen some of her own childhood photos showing her in Halloween costumes. Students were excited to see young Amanda in a lion or a dragon outfit. During this step, it was clear that the students were highly engaged in this activity.

2. **Verbalizing the experience:** As Amanda was eliciting oral input from the students on the experience and costumes of Halloween, she was, at the same time, creating a semantic map (i.e., a sort of word map) on the board, which I thought was a great touch. The objective, she later told me, was to provide her students with visual support for the new vocabularies (e.g., spooky, costume, pumpkin, witch, devil, skull, trick-or-treat). Finally, Amanda reinforced the correct use of the new words by modeling them in a few sentences for the class.

3. **Think, pair, share:** By this time, the teacher had had the students work in pairs by sharing their experiences of Halloween in the form of a sentence or two. While the students were talking to each other, Amanda walked around the class monitoring and occasionally making encouraging comments on each pair’s conversation, which I thought was quite effective. At one point, she addressed the class saying, “If you have never celebrated Halloween, it’s OK, then talk about your first experience seeing other children dress up in cool and spooky costumes as they go trick-or-treating.”
4. **Dictating and speaking:** While the students were working in pairs, Amanda used the board to write down and combine the sentences emerging from their conversations, which, again, I thought was an effective modelling practice. This, ultimately, created a wholly new text on the board. The idea, she later explained, was “to keep as much student language as possible on the board.” She then added that she found this aspect of her pedagogy very helpful because the students “can see their own words on the board. This boosts their confidence.”

5. **Asking questions:** At this point, Amanda prompted the class to ask any questions they might have had regarding the text on the board. There were no questions. Amanda followed up by asking some clarifying questions from the pairs to make sure that she had accurately written every pair’s idea on the board.

6. **Reading the text aloud (Teacher):** At this point, Amanda began to read out loud for the whole class the text on the board (i.e., the text she had put together on the board by combining the sentences her students had produced in pairs). As she was reading, she identified which student had produced which sentence, which was a nice touch. She also underscored the new vocabulary items she had already written on the board. Amanda carried out this task patiently and in a slow pace so that the students could follow along.

7. **Reading the text aloud (Students):** After Amanda finished reading the text, she had the whole class chorally read it out loud in sync with her. At this point, the teacher’s focus was primarily on the correct pronunciation of the new semantic items. Therefore, if a word was pronounced incorrectly, she would correct it on the spot.

8. **Chunking the text into phrases:** Subsequently, Amanda divided the text on the board into shorter phrases and marked them in different colors. Pointing at each phrase, she enunciated it aloud. Finally, she had the class repeat the phrases chorally one more time.
9. **Choosing a title:** At this point, addressing the whole class, the teacher remarked: “See? You have now become writers! You wrote your own text today. Now we are going to pick a good title for your text.” She then started and moderated a class discussion on this topic: a couple of students made some suggestions. In the end, Amanda proposed the following title and wrote it on the board: “Our First Halloween Experience at Highgate.”

10. **Reading the text (Partners):** In the last activity for this lesson, Amanda had the students work in pairs again and read the text to one another by taking turns. As the students were engaged in this task, she walked around the class monitoring and answering any questions students might have had. (04/28/2022, field notes)

    After class, during her prep-time, the teacher typed in a document the text that had emerged out of the students’ collective conversations during class. She later explained to me that she would use this text as part of her warm-up (fluency and reading practice) at the beginning of her next class. She gave each student a copy of the text as reading material as well (field note 10/28/2020).

    In her approach to developing writing skills, Amanda used various graphic organizers as a scaffolding technique (e.g., Venn diagrams, compare/contrast matrix, cycle maps, series chart, problem/solution charts). She almost always provided sentence starters for all the writing prompts. “Sentence starters,” she explained,

    provide the necessary scaffolding for the syntactic structures and the forms I expect; it gives the students a structure to think through because they cannot come up with them on their own yet. Most of my students struggle with diction or grammatical structures. By providing them the necessary scaffolds, I encourage them to write. (field note, 04/22/2022)

Table 4.2 lists a representative sample of the types of writing prompts Amanda used for her transitioning class. These prompts, along with their associated scaffolds, constituted her
everyday free-write writing practice. Another pedagogical technique the teacher utilized to develop the ENL students’ writing skills was to have them copy the prompts in their notebooks first and then write for five minutes every day. I did not observe any lessons dealing directly with teaching different forms of writing during my observation; however, the teacher used the scaffolding technique and sentence starters to structure and organize students’ writings. She would emphasize that “sentence starters are a way for you to shape your ideas. So it is important to use them as frequently as possible when writing” (field notes, 05/24/2022). As for feedback, the teacher used stickers and a quick check-in to make sure the tasks were completed. The teacher did not provide the students with any specific feedback, neither on the content nor the form of their responses to the writing prompts.

Table 4.2
List of Free-Write Prompts in Amanda’s Transitioning Level Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing prompt</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Sentence starters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write about a time you were depressed. How did you feel? What did you do to get through it? or describe the fall season.</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>The last time I felt stressed…I felt…because…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would the perfect dinner menu look like?</td>
<td>Persuasive</td>
<td>The perfect lunch menu for me would be …because… I also like… This makes me…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write from a pumpkin’s point of view. You are about to be carved!</td>
<td>Creative Story</td>
<td>I feel… This is because I am going to be… My last wish is…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is a smartphone different than a traditional telephone?</td>
<td>Compare and contrast</td>
<td>Graphic organizer/Venn diagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you plan to do when you become an adult? Explain why you want to make that choice.</td>
<td>Expository</td>
<td>When I grow up, I want to become a… The reason I want to be a …is…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe what it’s like being an 8th grader. Mention both the things you like and those you don’t.</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Being an 8th grader is… I usually feel… Sometimes, I like it because… Other times,…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is worth noting that these daily, five-minute quick-write activities seemed to constitute Amanda’s overall approach to teaching writing for her transitioning/expanding level students in her stand-alone ENL class. At Highgate, however, all ENL students, regardless of their proficiency levels, were required to write persuasive and argumentative essays in their co-taught ELA classes. These writing assignments were often based on a novel they had been reading in that class (I describe writing in the co-taught ENL/ELA class under Theme Two).

In the foregoing observations, I attempted to demonstrate Amanda’s method of instruction (i.e., LEA) in her stand-alone ENL class for students who were at the transitioning/expanding level. For the ENL students at lower levels (i.e., entering/emerging), however, she implemented a phonics-based approach, which I discuss next.

“I spy with my little eyes … something beginning with ‘b’”: A Lesson on Phonics

Above, I described the ENL teacher’s pedagogical and classroom practices for the transitioning/expanding level in the lesson on Halloween. Here, I describe a representative set of classroom instructions and curricula for her lower level, entering/emerging stand-alone class.

When I asked about her teaching philosophy and instructional method for her lower level, entering/emerging class, Amanda explained that

I am a big fan of phonics-based developmental sequence for ENL and SIFE students. At the end of the day, they need to learn their words and foundational skills to get credits for high school. I’ve seen great improvement using this approach, that’s why I have been using it for years now. (field notes, 04/11/2022)

In a typical class, after greeting the students and taking attendance, Amanda would begin her lesson on sounds and words. She would review the initial sounds of the words she had selected from her bank of high frequency sight words, which was on display on the wall. For example, alligator, ant, apple, axe for “/a/,” and bag, ball and banana for “/b/.” As an informal assessment, the teacher would then proceed to hand out some worksheets to each student, who
were then asked to trace specific letters (either a vowel or a consonant) and/or words; this activity was not usually timed. Once the students finished tracing the words, the teacher would ask them to put their worksheets in their binders, and then start to practice letter-sound correspondences by introducing a letter and modeling its sound. For example, she would show the students a card with the letter “m” on it and then enunciate “mmmm.” Following this whole-class practice, the teacher would perform an individual spot check on each student. Next, she would review all the letters from “a” to “m” as well as the words showcasing those sounds/letters. Finally, to reinforce the letters she had taught, the teacher would conclude each class by playing “I spy with my little eyes . . . something beginning with “b.” To guess the answer, the students looked around the class, at the walls, the board, and the furniture—they seemed to be actively engaged in this game (field notes, 04/13/2022).

During my observation of Amanda’s classes, she covered the following syntactical topics: a lesson on derivational affixes (i.e., prefixes, suffixes), a lesson on conjunctions (i.e., “and,” “but”), a lesson on transition words (e.g., “first,” “next,” “then”), and a lesson on adverbs of frequency (i.e., “always,” “sometimes,” “never”). When I asked for her opinion on teaching grammar deductively, Amanda commented that “this boosts their grammatical skills. I don’t usually teach grammar in isolation, but sometimes, I have to” (field notes, 25/11/2020). Moreover, one instructional technique the teacher frequently implemented was to have students copy classroom content in their notebooks—that is, the teacher wrote the material on the whiteboard and the students, following her, would copy the content onto their notebooks.

At the transitioning and expanding levels (described above), Amanda tapped into the students’ own ideas, words, and sentences as the main reading material/text, so that the focus was more on the sentence level and its pragmatic context. For her emerging/entering class,
however, the teacher’s phonic-based instruction primarily relied on word-letter association, sound patterns, phonological/phonemic awareness, and developing decoding skills to improve fluency.

When I inquired about how her pedagogy informed the choice and use of instructional materials in teaching reading skills at this level, the teacher made the following remark: “all my classroom posters are intentionally focused on the four language skills, and they are all aligned with my teaching philosophy” (field notes, 04/29/2022). One chart, on display on the wall behind the teacher’s desk, listed four “Active Reading Strategies”: (1) I pause to check my understanding; (2) I think about what is happening in the story/text; (3) I use the context (pictures and text) to figure out the meanings of new words; and (4) I use word attack strategies to help me decode words. She also added that she used this chart to guide and focus the students’ attention when they were practicing their reading comprehension skills (field notes, 04/29/2022).

When I asked Amanda to share with me her teaching philosophy in developing ENL students’ reading comprehension skills, she responded:

This is a very good question. Perhaps something all teachers need to consider when working with immigrants. These kids have no family support, so we should give them all the support we can. I think the first step is making sure that they can decode and then if they know their Tier One words. As almost all ENL students are SIFE, they really need to learn basic decoding skills first. Once they can decode, they can retain vocabulary items, and this is the first step towards gaining fluency in reading. The next step is reinforcement and practice. This rarely happens at home because ENL families mostly don’t speak English, or they may not be literate at all, so the process really slows down due to lack of home support. (field notes, 05/22/2022)

After observing multiple lessons in Amanda’s entering/emerging class, I would characterize her pedagogical approach to developing reading comprehension as primarily focused on the development of decoding skills, word-letter, and sound-letter associations. In other words, the students did not work on any “texts” as such, whether produced by themselves as in the
transition/expanding level, or any other reading materials. The lesson on phonics, word-letter, and sound-letter associations I described above constituted the reading component of the teacher’s pedagogy as well. Central to Amanda’s approach to writing in her entering/emerging class was the practice of having students copy words and their associated sounds in their notebooks (field notes, 05/22/2022).

**LEA and Phonics: A Discussion**

In this section, based on the foregoing observations and descriptions, I present my findings regarding the ways in which eighth-grade ENL curriculum and pedagogy seemed to shape classroom practices at the school. But first I must make a few points regarding the teacher’s general classroom presence and pedagogy in both stand-alone classes: (a) Amanda was always prepared for class and had a unique relationship with her students, whom she managed to keep engaged and always interested; for instance, the spelling game at the end of each entering/emerging class, and her practice of greeting *all* of her students by their name when they entered the classroom every day; (b) it was clear to me, as the observer, that she had worked hard on building great rapport with her students; (c) Amanda was quite observant in class and tried her best to be responsive to her students’ needs; that is, it was obvious that she cared much about her students; (d) she would always patiently clarify classroom instructions and model the activities to ensure that her students were able to follow her example; (e) she would make herself available after-school twice a week to support ENL students with their assignments in their content area classes; (f) she told me that it was crucial that she be in touch with her students’ families regarding the students’ needs; for example, she recounted how she once had gone out of her way to have the school, in consultation and cooperation with the student’s family, provide one of her students with prescription glasses as the student had extreme difficulty reading what
was on the board in class—it was very heartwarming to observe that Amanda was such a supportive and caring teacher.

As I was also actively thinking about and developing my own curriculum/pedagogy for the practitioner inquiry phase of this study, I endeavored to follow the model Amanda had set and the ethos she had created in terms of student support, rapport, and engagement. Considering the theoretical frameworks and pedagogical imperatives guiding this study, however, I needed to attend to those specific areas of the teacher’s pedagogy that I thought could benefit from a more serious engagement with the principles of multicultural education. For instance, regarding reading/speaking materials and pedagogical practices, the teacher seemed to often emphasize fluency as the main goal for building reading skills. This may be understandable when it comes to speaking, but emphasizing fluency in reading tasks often occurred at the expense of developing reading comprehension skills.

Furthermore, from a multicultural standpoint, the teacher’s practice of concentrating on fluency might be said to perpetuate a monocultural, monolingual model, since the texts covered scarcely reflected the culturally and linguistically diverse ENL students present in class (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018; Ascenzi-Moreno & Quiñones, 2020; Orosco & Klinger, 2010). Nor did it provide opportunities for the students to draw on their full bilingual and bicultural repertoires. Limiting pedagogy/curriculum to monolingual practices then might have (inadvertently) reinforced assimilationist ideologies, as “[b]ilingualism is an integral part of students’ identities and should be respected and valued in the classroom” (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018, p. 355).

Moreover, from the standpoint of culturally sustaining pedagogy, the teacher’s choice to center the lesson on an American holiday (i.e., Halloween) did not provide an opportunity for the ENL students to bring in their own cultural/ethnic celebrations as part of the lead-in activity.
Instead, in their speaking and writing activities, the students were prompted to work through the topic *in terms of other children’s experiences*—that is, presumably, White, middle-class “Americans” who presumably celebrate and enjoy Halloween—which can be said to position the ENL students as the “cultural other”\(^{14}\) of the teacher and/or mainstream students: “If you have never celebrated Halloween, it’s OK, then talk about your first experience seeing other children dress up in cool and spooky costumes as they go trick-or-treating” (field notes, 04/28/2022). As Paris (2012) notes, however, the ethos of culturally sustaining and responsive pedagogies requires that we “support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). Respecting and enabling students’ bilingualism/biculturalism, in this study, therefore, scarcely equates a “ban” on teaching English-centric materials, or developing “dominant cultural competence.” The point at stake here is not that one should not teach “monolingual” texts in ENL classes; nor is it that one should not discuss or introduce “American” holidays. Rather, the point I am trying to make is that one might, alternatively, consider including at least “some” texts/practices in one’s curriculum/pedagogy that reflect (and seek to activate) the linguistic and cultural diversity represented by ENL students.

The issue, therefore, turns on a crucial precept of culturally sustaining pedagogy: that is, *where the students come from* can have direct bearing on classroom pedagogy—and by extension, their literacies. Re-framing the assignment from this standpoint, therefore, might communicate to the students more emphatically that the teacher recognizes, values, and accommodates their culturally diverse identities, not merely as a form of tokenism but rather as a pedagogically legitimate practice that seeks to develop all the students’ linguistic repertoires:

\(^{14}\) See Theme Four.
As we consider the need for culturally sustaining pedagogies, we must once again ask ourselves that age-old question: What is the purpose of schooling in a pluralistic society? It is brutally clear that current policies are not interested in sustaining the languages and cultures of longstanding and newcomer communities of color in the United States….This climate, and the policies and teaching practices resulting from it, has the quite explicit goal of creating a monocultural and monolingual society based on White, middle-class norms of language and cultural being. Such a climate has created the need for equally explicit resistances that embrace cultural pluralism and cultural equality. (Paris, 2012, p. 95).

Finally, regarding the teacher’s approach to writing, the students, for the most part, were required to procedurally follow the instructions and copy onto their binders the words/phrases/sentences the teacher would put on the board and use the sentence starters to shape their thoughts. This approach may be said to treat writing less in terms of a creative process than a mechanical, if not scripted, activity, in which not much room was left for students’ autonomy.

Theme Two: Ideological Slant of the Curriculum in ELA/ENL Class

Under this theme, I describe and analyze the curriculum and pedagogical practices of the eighth-grade co-taught ELA/ENL class at the school. As I explained above, this integrated class was co-taught by the ENL and ELA teachers. There were twenty-two students on the roster, more than half of whom—that is, 12 to be exact—were ENL students.

Teaching Novels

Reading materials, assignments, and practices in the integrated class were divided into two groups: (a) a set of short stories and poems;15 and (2) several novels that served as the materials for further read-aloud activities, whole-class discussions, and homework assignments.

---

15 In the next section I explore in detail a specific lesson on a poem by Julia Alvarez as well as the writing assignment emerging from that lesson.
The short stories, for instance, included Aldo Leopold’s “Escudilla” (1949), Carol Farley’s “Lose Now, Pay Later” (1991), Langston Hughes’s “Thank you, M’am” (1958), Rona Maynard’s “The Fan Club” (2009), and Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery” (1948). Three novels included in the curriculum of the ENL/ELA integrated class consisted of Ben Mikaelsen’s *Touching Spirit Bear* (2000), Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild* (1903), and a few other sci-fi books.

The preliminary step in Jane and Amanda’s instructional approach to teaching novels involved reading the text aloud for the class (see Table 4.2). The teachers would take turns reading a chapter each. As a rule, most of the reading was done during class time when the teachers read the text out loud and the students listened. Occasionally, the students were expected to read specific sections at home. In this section, I describe a representative reading comprehension lesson as part of Jane and Amanda’s pedagogical approach to teaching the novel *Touching Spirit Bear*. Table 4.2 lists the essay prompts/scaffolds associated with each novel.

As a lead-in to teaching the novel, the teachers had prepared a full lesson (42 minutes) on “empathy” to set up the theme of the novel. This lesson, for the most part, revolved around a video, *The Lesson on Empathy* (Participant, 2017), in which a young man (an actor) in a lab uniform, presumably a “scientist,” defines empathy as “the ability to feel what others are feeling.” He then elucidates the distinction between empathy and sympathy by asserting that “sympathy is feeling for someone else, but empathy is feeling with someone else.” “Practicing empathy,” he goes on, “can make you more successful in interpersonal relationships,” which he intends to demonstrate by showing the audience “a little game!” Having described the rules of the activity, he then invites several couples in. The objective is to demonstrate that empathy would enable the couples to succeed in the activity: “these twenty dollars are yours, but you have
to offer some of them to your partner. If they don’t like your offer, then you walk away with nothing, but if they like your offer, then you both walk away with something.”

After the video ended, Amanda asked the students how much money they would keep for themselves if they were asked to do the activity. Most of the students said that they would give most of what they have to their friend or someone they knew, rather than giving it to a stranger. Some students then took turns sharing stories of their past experiences sharing money with friends/family. For instance, one student told the class that once her sister took $50 from her and bought two sweaters for herself—as she was telling her story, she suddenly burst into tears. The whole class started to laugh. The teachers tried to console the student and then initiated a role-playing card game, in which students assumed and acted out roles in the different scenarios written on the cards. As homework, the teachers asked the students to complete a survey of 14 agree/disagree questions about “forgiveness,” “fitting in,” “making big decisions,” “choice,” “learning from mistakes,” and “change” (Observation notes, 06/10/2022).

Next class, during a segment the teachers had designated “Book Talk”—that is, another lead-in to teaching the novel—Jane introduced the novel by reading out loud the title, the name of the author, and the blurb on the back cover. She then continued:

This book is about a boy your age, Cole Matthews. He is a troubled kid, basically an offender, born and raised by wealthy parents in Minneapolis. Cole has been convicted of viciously beating a classmate, Peter Driscoll, in ways that Peter ends up paralyzed. He now has a limp and a speech impediment as a result of his injuries. So Cole is given one more chance: he agrees to take part in a Circle Justice program away from family and friends. Soon Cole finds himself on a remote Alaskan island in Tlingit territory, banished for a year. He is overseen by a Tlingit parole officer and a traditional elder; he is also watched by an enormous white “spirit bear.” There, he resists, wrestles with, and ultimately comes to terms with what he has done and takes responsibility for what he’s done.

Amanda: So, perhaps one lesson from this novel is about responsibility; to be a more responsible person in life, and to recognize that our actions can have life-changing consequences for others, too. (field notes, 06/15/2022)
Next, the teachers took turns reading a few chapters for the whole class. During the read aloud segments, Jane would stop every now and then to pose some questions about a specific character or a moment of the novel.

**Teaching Poetry**

As I outlined above, in addition to novels and short stories, Jane and Amanda’s curriculum consisted of poetry as well. The poems ranged in a variety of types and genres such as Haikus, acrostic poems, rhyming poems, Name poems, and Shakespeare’s sonnets. The poems included Leslie Marmon Silko’s “The Time we climbed Snake Mountain” (1973), Julia Alvarez’s “I, Too, Sing America,” and Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 19,” “Sonnet 97,” and Bobbi Katz’s “October Saturday.”

Teaching poetry constituted a large portion of the second marking period, well over a month. The teachers’ pedagogical practices here consisted of (a) reading the poem out loud in the class; (b) discussing the form of the poem (e.g., haiku, acrostic, sonnet) and asking questions about it; (c) reviewing the graphic organizer they had prepared as a form of scaffold to guide students to finally (d) compose their own poems based on the graphic organizers. Below I briefly explore a specific poetry lesson as well as three poems written by two ENL students and a former ENL student. The lesson was on the poem “I, Too, Sing America” by the Dominican-American poet Julia Alvarez, which I thought was fascinating. The teachers had made copies of the poem for the whole class. As Amanda was distributing the copies among the students, Jane read aloud the poem, which was also being projected on the board:

I, Too, Sing América.

I know it’s been said before but not in this voice of the plátano and the mango,
marimba y bongó,
not in this sancocho
of inglés
con español.

Ay sí,
it’s my turn
to oh say
what I see,
I’m going to sing America!
with all América
inside me:
from the soles
of Tierra del Fuego
to the thin waist
of Chiriquí
up the spine of the Mississippi
through the heartland
of the Yanquis
to the great plain face of Canada --
all of us
singing America,
the whole hemispheric
familia
belting our canción,
singing our brown skin
into that white
and red and blue song --
the big song
that sings
all America,
el canto
que cuenta
con toda América:
un new song!

Ya llegó el momento,
our moment
under the sun --
ese sol that shines
on everyone.

So, hit it maestro!
give us that Latin beat,
¡Uno-dos-tres!
One-two-three!
Ay sí,
(y bilingually):
Yo también soy América
I, too, am America. (Alvarez)

Once the teacher finished reading the poem, she asked the class: “So, what do you think this poem is about? I personally think it is about love. What do you think?” The following describes the discussion component of the lesson between Jane and the students:

**Jane:** So what did you take away from this poem? What’s it saying?
**Jack:** The poet is an immigrant.
**Jane:** That’s true! How could you tell?
**Jack:** The sentences do not make sense. She also switched to Spanish and she doesn’t speak English well.
**Jane:** That’s partially right. Do you think it is an intentional move, switching to Spanish?
**Jack:** Maybe, but when immigrants cannot speak English, they usually switch to their first language.
**Jane:** That’s also true, but they should be treated with respect, right? So who can relate to this poem?
**Mansoor:** I can! Because I am from another country like Julia Alvarez and I have to learn a new language. It is not easy at all so the switching is … I mean sometimes words don’t come to us. We switch.
**Jane:** That’s right! She is an immigrant like you. Any other ideas?
**Djulia:** When I read the poem it reminded me of my own journey. It was tough. I speak English much better now, but the hardship is still there. But at the end of the day, it doesn’t matter if you speak another language, you can fit in.
**Jane:** Excellent! I like the idea of fitting in! (field notes, 05/15/2022)

After the discussion on Alvarez’s poem, Amanda distributed the scaffolding page, which included a set of guidelines and sentence starters on how to write an “I, Too, Sing América” poem. The writing assignment was the culminating project for the poem section. Below, I have included the poems written by three ENL students. The first poem was written by Ha-joon, a male Korean bilingual student:

I, too, sing America
I am from Korea
And it’s the reason
The reason that I am not good at English
And the reason why I can’t say my thoughts
But the moment I give up
I will never have the chance  
The moment I give up  
I will never express my thoughts  
Tomorrow, I will start a new life  
I am going to not worry, making mistakes  
I will say what I want to say  
I will be strong  
Besides, they will be surprised how I changed  
When I say strong  
And they will listen to what I say  
I, too am America.

The next poem was written by Alina, a Romanian-Russian ENL student:

I, too, sing America

I am a native speaker of 3 languages  
Who is closely attached and involved with each  
In life it brings several advantages  
To be so knowledgeable in speech  
But of all the languages I know  
I choose English over all  
Privet, Peace, and hello  
Three ways to greet my fellow citizens  
But I choose to speak American  
Tomorrow, come what may  
The questions and the criticism-fire away  
But no matter the obstacles and opinions  
I too sing America  
I’ll praise the colors of the flag  
Red, white and blue  
An item without a price tag  
One that represents the country belonging to me and you  
Besides, they will always have their hate to express  
But we can’t give them their success  
No matter what they think I am and I represent  
I, too am America. (field note 05/17/2022)

The third poem was written by Afsoon, who was formerly an ENL student:

I, too, sing America  
I am the person who people think can’t speak  
I am the person who has to play games while others learn how to read, write and spell.  
I can’t speak up,  
I can’t raise my hands,  
and I can’t show people that I can speak louder than all of them combined.
But I will.  
They will see it.  
Even those who bragged about how smart they were,  
How favored they were,  
And how many awards they got for being who they were.  
Tomorrow, I will show them.  
I’ll show them the words I can pronounce like introverted and vigorous  
Besides, they will know me from the day I stepped into the room successfully  
And be surprised from knowing that I’ve done it again with more success  
I, too am America. (Observation 05/20/2022).

Writing Tasks

Table 4.3 illustrates the writing prompts, along with their scaffolds, assigned as part of a culminating assessment of the novels. The generic forms the teachers had worked on and in which the students were required to write included argumentative/persuasive essays and claim paragraphs.
Table 4.3

*Essay Prompts, Formal Assessments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Novel</th>
<th>Scaffold/Sentence Starter</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does Cole’s story inform us about the ways people change, given their surroundings?</td>
<td><em>Touching Spirit Bear</em></td>
<td>KWL Chart</td>
<td>Argumentative Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the science fiction novel <em>The Giver</em>, Lois Lowry presents readers with a future community that may be viewed as a <em>utopia</em> or a <em>dystopia</em>. A <em>utopia</em> is an ideal society with perfect laws. A <em>dystopia</em> is a society that may begin as a utopia but becomes overly controlling, limiting individual rights and freedoms. Write a claim paragraph in which you prove that the community in <em>The Giver</em> is a <em>utopia</em> or a <em>dystopia</em>. Using several specific examples from <em>The Giver</em>, explain why the community in the novel is a utopia or a dystopia. You should have at least 3 good examples from the community in the science fiction novel <em>The Giver</em> by Lois Lowry is a good example of a</td>
<td>The Giver</td>
<td>Claim Paragraph</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare the roles of John Thornton and Judge Miller. Who, from the novel’s point of view, is the better master? Defend your answer.</td>
<td><em>The Call of the Wild</em></td>
<td>Venn diagram</td>
<td>Compare/contrast essay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessments and Teaching to the Tests**

Assessments, in both the eighth-grade ENL stand-alone classes and the ELA/ENL co-taught/integrated class were almost always formal, except for some occasional, informal in-class Qs and As. The teachers explained to me that the more tasks they assigned the students the more chances they would have to make up for the missing grades. It was also important to them that
students write several essays during the school year so that they can better prepare themselves for the ELA state testing. Formal assessments were done in the following formats:

1. **Multiple-Choice Questions:** This form of assessment was the dominant form of reading comprehension assessment in the ENL stand alone and ENL/ELA co-taught classes.

2. **Fill in the Blanks:** This mode of assessment was mostly used when Jane and Amanda were teaching a novel or a short story. They would start the reading sessions by putting a question up on Google Classroom to quickly get a sense of how well the students had read the required chapters: students would then answer the questions using their Chromebooks.

3. **Essays:** There were four marking periods at Highgate, at the end of which students had to write one essay (either argumentative or persuasive) based on the novel that they had been reading. Drafting was a necessary part of this assignment in that each student had to turn in a first draft, receive feedback from the teachers, revise the draft based on the feedback and resubmit a final draft. There were also writing sessions during class time where students worked on their essays.

   In the following section, I discuss and analyze the ideological and discursive content of the eighth-grade ENL curriculum and pedagogy.

**ELA/ENL Integrated Class**

**The Lesson on Empathy**

Since the teachers’ usual lead-in to teaching the novels would scarcely go beyond brief conversations about the plot or the author’s biography, I found this lesson on empathy interesting and productive in that it functioned to prime and elicit affective responses from the class in terms of a particular theme the teachers had identified. Exploring the power and capacity for empathy by having the students respond to the novel with compassion and understanding is a crucial step
in cultivating interpersonal relationships. The lead-in activity, however, seemed to be grounded in a number of unstated assumptions: namely, (a) The complex human relations represented by the novel were reduced to, if not dissected by, the impersonal pseudoscientific rhetoric of the game; (b) the activity seemed to downplay the complex, qualitative, and sociohistorical relations embedded in the concept of empathy in favor of the abstract, quantifying logic of numbers grounded in money economy; and (c) it reinforced the practice and necessity for empathy in terms of monetary value. Moreover, the game seemed to actively reinscribe human empathy—which is perhaps one of the last bastions against the consumerist tendency of money economy—in terms of the commodifying logic of the market. Was the irony lost on the participants who, during a lesson on human empathy, dissolved into laughter as their fellow student was quietly crying? I never asked.

The Novel: Touching Spirit Bear

During class discussions about novels, both teachers made a concerted effort to productively identify some common grounds between the events and the adventures of the protagonists represented in the novels and their students’ lives—that is, to make the novels relevant. This, I thought, was both helpful and effective. This was, however, done by (a) accentuating the role of the individual and deemphasizing that of the community and social context. For instance, discussing Touching Spirit Bear, it seemed that the teacher reinforced the tendency to downplay Cole’s personal history and lived experience (e.g., his parent’s negligence, their separation, his abusive and alcoholic father) and to, instead, underscore his free will and individual choices. In other words, at several points over the course of teaching this novel, she seemed to highlight personal responsibility while ignoring the circumstances and the situation to which Cole’s aggression and violence might have been understood as a response. For instance, as
she was reading the text, the ELA teacher would point out several times that: “Ultimately, it was Cole who decided to steal from the store; it was his choice to become violent at school. But he made the wrong choices. He was wrong. No matter what!”; (b) little attention was paid to the ways in which the novel represents the Tlingit, their culture, and history, which, both in the novel and the teachers’ pedagogical approach to it, was reduced to the backdrop against which the adventures and trials of the protagonist unfold. (Field notes, 06/21/2022).

Regarding Jane and Amanda’s pedagogical approach to reading comprehension, there are several points to consider: Reading of the text was accomplished more in terms of listening and speaking activities, the latter though primarily was carried out by the teachers. This has both advantages and disadvantages: the former concerns the teachers’ modeling the “correct” pronunciation and cadence, which also capitalizes on developing multiple skills rather than just the one. The drawbacks, on the other hand, include a higher Teacher Talk Time, and a more teacher-centered pedagogy, both of which can lead to the teachers dominating class discussion as well as asserting control over what a given text means or does not mean, could mean and perhaps even should mean. This last in turn can be said to reduce student autonomy and agency regarding the production of meaning and knowledge. Several studies have explored this pervasive tendency, mostly typical of teachers who run monolingual/monocultural classes, in terms of a “control over meaning” (Apple, 2018; Spring, 2016; Apple & Franklin, 2018; Young, 2014).

As I gestured at above, the teachers’ interpretive stance towards the protagonist’s life choices, by narrowing down, if not closing off, the multiple levels of meanings, may be viewed as creating an uncontested monoglossic environment whereby other competing interpretations emerging from the actual text of the novel were hardly acknowledged. For example, the teacher’s constant reminder that the students read and interpret Cole’s actions in purely individualistic
terms seems to close off the text from its social grounds. It tends to ignore the ways in which Cole’s actions can be shown to be socioculturally mediated, hence reducing the complexity and nuances involved into moralistic platitudes: “He was wrong, no matter what!” Apple (2018), addressing the social content of the curriculum, observes: “what is intriguing is the nearly complete lack of treatment of or even reference to conflict as a social concern” (Apple, 2018, p. 98). Spring (2016), likewise, has argued that public schools are institutions that highlight individual achievements and by extension, individual responsibility, thus discounting the structural and systemic issues (Spring, 2016). It seems to me that the more sophisticated, if not pedagogically responsible, approach would be to always demonstrate to the students the way in which individuals make their own choices and decisions over against a social field, or under circumstances and conditions of which they are not entirely in control—that is, individual choices are, ultimately, socially mediated.

“I, Too, Sing America”

The lesson on Alvarez was fascinating and filled with potential for an effective multicultural lesson. The “I, Too, Sing America” is a poem that traverses the cultural landscape of South, Central and North America; it embodies the pluralistic and multilingual ethos of a transnational poetics of migration and displacement, which challenges, as Alvarez herself put it, the “old assimilationist, mainstreaming model.” Regarding her own experience, the poet writes:

My sisters and I were caught between worlds, value systems, languages, customs. And this was our challenge, which is the challenge for many of us who are immigrants into a new world that is different from the old one of childhood: how to maintain a connection to our traditions, our roots, and also to grow and flourish in our new country? How to find creative ways to combine our different worlds, values, conflicting and sometimes warring parts of our selves so that we can become more expansive, not more diminished human beings? (Alvarez)
Alvarez’s perceptive observations and reflections on her journey were not addressed in class—namely, the two worlds, the two cultures and the in-between place of the “expansive” self. That day in class, the “I” in the poem was thought to be an immigrant because she did not speak English well—no one seemed to care how well they spoke Spanish or Portuguese, though. Can this be taken as an instance of perpetuating a deficit perspective towards ENL students and literacy? To what extent, I wonder, do ENL students internalize such views? I recall Jack’s initial remarks during the class discussion described above: “The sentences do not make sense. She also switched to Spanish and she doesn’t speak English well. . . . when immigrants cannot speak English, they usually switch to their first language.” How confidently Jack speaks for and represents the lived experiences of immigrants! I also recall the teacher’s response: “but they should be treated with respect, right?” Indeed. But perhaps we should also respect the heteroglossia, vitality, and the history embedded in this poem.

I say “history” because I wonder how differently the class might have reacted if they had been asked to read the first line of the poem more closely: “I know it’s been said before.” Who said it before? Could it be the echo of Langston Hughes’s “I, Too” (1926) which Alvarez picks up and amplifies in her poem? The lesson, however, did not contextualize the struggle of African Americans and other racial groups in the U.S.; nor did it endeavor to recognize the historical continuities between the disenfranchised voice of Hughes’s speaker and that of Alvarez. The conversation was not guided to consider the ways in which the poem articulates the capacity for a bi/multilingual mode of (collective) being, rather than moving, one might say too hastily, toward reading the speaker’s code-switching in negative/deficit terms (“cannot speak English well”). The students’ “I, Too, Sing” poems can also be said to index ways in which ENL students internalize such deficit views, since none of them were prompted or opted to incorporate their L1
or perform their bilingualism in the poems they composed—except for Alina, who managed to squeeze a word (“Privet”) but was quick to add: “But of all the languages I know / I choose English over all.”

“How can you become a good American?”

A helpful and accommodating aspect of Jane and Amanda’s approach to writing was a brainstorming activity: they would introduce the topic, pose questions, and elicit students’ responses, which they would put on the board. They would then walk them through the structure of the essay, its introduction, body, and conclusion. In one lesson, they put the following prompt on the board: How can you become a good American? As a scaffolding measure for this short writing assignment, Jane initiated a brainstorming activity on the topic by asking questions and having the students construct plausible responses to the question. The following ideas emerged during this process of co-construction between the ELA teacher and the students: “obeying the law,” “respecting the law,” “not doing anything illegal (e.g., drugs, stealing),” “respecting the police,” “not wasting time and becoming someone useful in life,” “having morals,” “respecting the troops.” I noted that only mainstream students were participating in this discussion, and the ENL students were silent. The teachers did not adjust/expand the scope of the prompt to elicit responses from the ENL students in class (field notes 04/26/2022).

Here I would like to discuss the content and the pedagogical form in which this lesson was presented. That is to say, the question, it seems to me, (a) flattened the complex category of American by ignoring its historico-culturally diverse and nuanced content; (b) rewrote the moral modifier (i.e., good) in terms of a specific, implicit ideology; (c) naturalized and normalized the class specific, ideologically mediated category of “good American” as a universal given; and finally, (d) might have drawn unnecessary attention to the status of students’ citizenship or lack
thereof. The fact of the matter is that the question (“How can you become a good American?”) was faced with a resounding silence on the part of the ENL students. At stake here then is the question of the standpoint of literacy, or what scholars arguing for literacy as social practice have long asserted: that educational and literacy practices should be examined by considering “whose knowledge counts” (Street, 1995; Campano et al., 2013).

**On Testing**

Among the various reasons why teachers have been using the traditional models of assessments described above is the pressures from the state testing, which constrain both pedagogical and learning processes. In other words, the New York State testing has been disproportionately defining the form and content of classroom instruction and assessments (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2002; Campano et al. 2013). Street (1995), for example, astutely remarks that diagnostic and evaluative tests can “create distance between the children and their own perception of their knowledge” (p. 116). That is what happens when, whether institutionally or pedagogically, we fetishize test scores, for the quantifying logic of the latter always stands in contrast to the qualitative character of the process of knowledge production, not to mention the diversity of human experience. As Campano et al. (2013) argue: “quantifications of individuals’ performances too often become symbolically violent ascriptions of their very beings; the threat is not that any one of us may score a zero, but we may become zeros” (p. 119). Furthermore, scholars have taken issue with the use of multiple choice and fill in the blanks assessment models (Banks & Banks, 1995), for they perpetuate the kind of mentality that there is only one right answer, thus narrowing down the cognitive abilities of the students. What is needed is “to generate multiple solutions and perspectives . . . to explore how problems arise and how they are
related to other problems, issues, and concepts . . . instead of looking for the single answer or a problem” (p. 153).

Name change

During my observation, I noted a common discursive practice among teachers to impose “American” names/nicknames on ENL students upon their arrival at the school. Jane and Amanda, for example, would routinely ask new entrants about their “American” names. In those cases that I personally observed, this made for uncomfortable, if not inscrutable, exchanges between the teacher and the student, especially the beginners who spoke very little English. The exchange between Amanda and Mihály, a new entrant from Hungary, is a case in point. In their first meeting, the teacher asked for Mihály’s American name and when he did not respond, Amanda suggested: “What would you like your American friends or teachers to call you? Maybe Michael? It’s close to Mihály, isn’t it? Do you like it?” While Mihály was standing there in silence, without in any ways giving consent to this identity-altering proposition, Amanda, taking his silence in the affirmative continued: “I will make sure to email all your teachers and let them know of your new name” (field notes, 07/11/2022).

“(Re)naming practices,” Souto-Manning (2007) warns, “constitute and represent the very precarious social and institutional relationships taking place in schools involving immigrant children” (p. 404). Likewise, there is a way in which Mihály’s silence, emblematic of his inability to understand and/or speak English, underscores the pragmatic dimension of that exchange: namely, the ways in which, by virtue of the institutional authority vested in her position, the teacher’s discursive intervention—compounded by the student’s alienation in the foreign environment—rendered Mihály silent. As Hymes (1974) observes, “There is a fundamental difference between what is not said because there is no occasion to say it, and what
is not said because one has not and does not find a way to say it” (p. 72). Mihály’s case reveals the extent to which even ENL instructors might have internalized assimilationist ideologies and practices regarding their students. As Gibson (1988) argues, pressures of assimilation “can have unintended and extremely negative consequences; children may feel forced to choose between their parents’ culture, the culture of the white mainstream majority, and their own need to express their evolving identities” (p. 245). It is true that any immigrant may eventually find themselves having to negotiate and work through the crisis of identity set off by the experience of geographic, linguistic, and cultural displacement. ENL Students, for instance, may find themselves stuck between the expectations of schools and their home cultures (Sarroub, 2005). But it is quite another thing to have a prominent aspect of one’s identity (one’s name) erased and re-written without one’s consent.

**Theme Three: Inequitable Distribution of Resources**

In this section, I describe and explore the distribution of educational resources (e.g., school facilities, instructional materials, etc.) at Highgate, especially regarding the eighth-grade ENL students.

**Shared instructional spaces**

Soon after I started the ethnographic phase of my study, I was struck by the fact that only two groups of students shared instructional spaces (e.g., classrooms) at Highgate: namely, ENL students and students with special needs. Whereas technology and science teachers had access to different, spacious, and newly decorated rooms, ENL teachers—across grade levels—shared instructional spaces. This had become a constant point of struggle between the teachers and the administrators. During one of my conversations with her, Amanda made the following remarks about instructional spaces:
The reality is literally no other students—other than students with special needs—experience school the way my kids do! As you have seen for yourself, I share a very small room with Bianca, who teaches the sixth-grade resource room. So when I am not scheduled to teach in this room, she is. This is totally unfair and inequitable because other teachers have access to their rooms during their prep and lunch time as well. I have to find a space in the building to prep for my classes on a daily basis. You know why? Because we belong to the basement and the rest of the school belong to nice, shiny rooms! (field notes, 05/27/2022)

When I asked Amanda whether she had shared her concerns with her supervisor, or the administration, she said:

O yeah, several times, though nothing happened! Once I sat with the building principal and went over all the space issues. Literally two days later, he came to me and asked if he could use my room for the new reading classes. It suddenly dawned on me that he didn’t even hear me that day—not that it surprises me! Of course, I refused, and he had to turn another room, much smaller, into a reading room. (field notes, 05/27/2022)

ENL students constituted about 10% of the student body at Highgate. I should also point out that at least half of Amanda’s ENL students were the majority of eighth-graders. Amanda’s room, which was barely big enough for 8 students in total, was hardly the appropriate space for a population of at least 20 students at a time.

**Inequitable Testing Locations**

During another conversation, Amanda told me that access to proper testing locations during state-wide testing had also become a serious issue for her and her ENL students. According to Amanda, at any time during the academic year, ENL teachers can expect to (and they do) receive new entrants, who upon arrival need to be tested for NYSITELL: “the NYSITELL test must be administered within ten school days of the student’s initial enrollment in a NYS school” (Commissioner’s Regulation Part 154). At Highgate, however, due to their full teaching schedule, ENL teachers were available to administer the NYSITELL only during their prep time or skip classes. And their classrooms were already being used by other teachers, they
were forced to find a space to test the new entrants on the spot. In another conversation, Amanda shared with me her testing experiences at Highgate:

**Amanda**: I received five new entrants last week, so I asked my supervisor to find me a room to administer NYSITELL. She gave me a few options and I literally had to walk to each room, from this side of the building to the other, and ask if I could use their room during their prep time. Mind you that these tests are at least three hours long, but I could only use their room, if available, only for 40 minutes. Besides, I also had to move the students as they were being tested.

**Sepideh**: So did you manage to find a room?

**Amanda**: Of course, not! I honestly don’t blame the teachers either, because they need their rooms for planning and prepping.

**Sepideh**: So what did you end up doing?

**Amanda**: I went back to my supervisor and let her know the rooms were unavailable. She looked into the schedule on her computer and wrote down two other room numbers for me. I had to go check out each room one more time and ask the teachers if I could use their room. They all either had meeting scheduled there, or something else. At that point, I was already thirty minutes into the third period, which is my prep time, so I decided not to test the new entrants that day. I remember the next day: I ended up having to ask one teacher if I could use one of her rooms for testing! Although she was using one room as her teaching space and the room as painting room, she said that I could use one of the smaller rooms and only if this was a temporary thing! (field notes, 04/30/2022)

I soon realized that the testing space shortage for ENL students was a focal point of struggle during other state-wide assessments as well. During the NY state testing, for example, I observed the same issue of unequal access to testing locations for ENL students (field notes, 04/05/2022). According to NY state mandates, ENL students at entering and emerging levels, must be tested at alternate locations without any time restrictions for all subject areas (Commissioner’s Regulation Part 154). At Highgate, however, the administration had scheduled the testing locations for all ENL students such that they were placed in the same location as their ENL teacher, who was to act as the proctor during the test. If they needed to use extra time, which they almost always did, the students had to be moved. This naturally caused quite a lot of disruptions as well as anxiety for the ENL students and their teachers.
In a conversation with Rafe, an eighth-grade ENL student, regarding NY state assessments, he told me that

testing locations are really funny here. For the ELA test, we have to stand in the hallways with our test booklets, pencils, glossaries, and heavy bookbags while everyone else is transitioning to their classrooms. Once everyone else moved to their classrooms, they moved us three or four times because all rooms were full. I remember during the ELA test last year; we ended up moving several times. So our ENL teacher and the school principal took us to a room in the basement to finish our test. (field note 05/25/2022)

**Inadequate L1 Resources**

Furthermore, there seems to be inadequate curricular and educational opportunities for ENL students to build on and practice their L1. There was also a noticeable lack of programs or opportunities aiming toward engaging emergent bilinguals’ families and creating a more culturally sustaining environment. ENL students’ family “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez et al., 2005), it is argued, must be seen as crucial components of inclusive, culturally sustaining and affirming, linguistic and literacy practices (Paris & Alim, 2017). In one of my conversations with Amanda early on, she mentioned that “according to state mandates, every student must receive a bilingual dictionary upon their arrival to any U.S. public schools. But this never happens at Highgate, and I am not going to pay for it out of pocket. The bureaucratic paperwork makes it almost impossible for teachers to apply for any funds” (field notes, 04/10/2022). Furthermore, during their ELA class, all students, including ENL students, are assigned what is called individual reading time, during which they can read any books they want; but not quite, for at Highgate, ENL students do not have access to reading materials in their L1.

All the issues described above (i.e., sharing instructional spaces, lack of a reasonable and equitable testing location, absence of productive home-school relations, and lack of sufficient funds to support students’ L1 repertoires) were sites of constant struggle and posed serious obstacles and challenges to ENL education at Highgate. All these issues raise considerable
concerns regarding the school’s mandate in providing an equitable learning environment for the marginalized population. Similarly, scholars in the field of multicultural education have extensively argued for the importance of providing equitable resources for ENL students by developing their L1 resources so that the students can “make sense of their bilingual world” through “translanguaing” (Garcia, 2009, p. 45; Garcia & Wei, 2014). Campano et al. (2013) have argued that “Inequitable access continues in current times with the under-resourcing of public schools and the high-stake testing paradigm,” which has resulted in what they characterize as “a near absence of literature in classrooms” (Campano et al., 2013, p. 116).

What I have described here has direct, concrete consequences for the ENL student groups at Highgate, who routinely found themselves at a disadvantage regarding access to school and educational resources. What I have previously explored and analyzed under the rubric of double marginalization found its empirical analogue at Highgate, where ENL students were literally spatially marginalized by the unequal distribution of school resources. Yet, what I have observed is scarcely limited to this school. On the contrary, it seems to be symptomatic of a larger more structural condition, to which many studies have already called attention. For instance, Bourdieu (1973) foregrounds the systematic nature of inequities by arguing that these issues are situated within larger processes of social reproduction in education systems. Traditionally, the classrooms for English language learners in K-12 U.S. public schools were located in the basement, in the library, or outside the building (Orfield, 2001; Olsen, 1997; Nieto, 2002; Garcia et al., 2008). This double standard regarding access to school resources obviously poses a significant challenge to providing equal learning opportunities for all students. It basically undermines access and equity and disrupts “affirming, safe, and just educational opportunities” for the marginalized population (Gorksi, 2016).
Theme Four: Institutionalization of Difference and Discourses of Othering

In this section, based on my observations during the ethnography phase, I explore the climate and culture of the site of this study. Whereas Theme Three provided a detailed account of the contingent nature of ENL students’ access to school resources, Theme Four considers the morphology of school’s climate and culture as a locus of institutionalized and discursive forms of othering.

While I was observing the site’s climate and culture, I noted several instances of disruptive behavior on the part of students, which, I later learned, had been an on-going issue for a while. For example, students’ behavior in the hallways and the school cafeteria had become issues of daily concern for the teachers and the staff: namely, frequent hallway fights (involving instances of racial slurs) and even some fist fights outside the building premises. On these occasions, teachers and staff would immediately call the police to intervene. At the beginning of the school year, the boys’ bathrooms had been vandalized quite a few times. The administrative team conducted an investigation, installed security cameras in the building and, finally, identified the culprits. It did not, however, put an end to vandalism in the building. Other serious behavioral issues discussed during the eighth-grade teachers’ block meetings included, but was not limited to, cases of vaping, selling vapes and marijuana.

I also noted several instances of serious racist conduct on the school premises. Teachers, in one occasion, were informed of an incident where swastikas had been drawn on the hallway wall. They were, of course, immediately removed by the custodial team. I also heard of several instances of students’ yelling racial slurs in the hallways (field notes, 12/04/2022). Unfortunately, the way the school operated, teachers were rarely informed of the consequences of student conduct hearings or specific disciplinary measures taken. Based on my observations
and conversations with the teachers and staff, such racist incidents were apparently very rare occurrences.

On the very first day of my observation at Highgate, I found out that only one out of three eighth-grade ELA teachers was scheduled to teach a co-taught ELA/ENL section. The rest had either never taught an ENL/ELA section and/or were unwilling to do so. (I noticed the same tendency among sixth- and seventh-grade teachers as well.) When I asked about it, Ms. Rogers, the district’s ENL supervisor, explained: “Before placing new entrants in their classes, we first need to receive permission from the teachers. It happens that some are more cooperative than others. Those who are mostly resistant have never worked with ENL students before, or they believe that new ENL entrants may negatively impact their end-of-the-year state test results” (field notes, 04/12/2022). Jane agreed with this sentiment: “I don’t want new entrants to bring my scores down. I have worked so hard this school year—this may impact my evaluations” (field notes, 04/12/2022).

This unfortunate situation is yet another symptom of deep structural issues that go far beyond the idiosyncrasies of individual teachers. When teaching to the test becomes the operating principle of any pedagogies, numbers, and statistics, rather than genuine human interaction in the process of knowledge production, become the end goal. The worth, identity, and destiny of a whole human being, an immigrant ENL student at that, gets locked up in and reduced to test scores. As Campano et al. (2013) remind us, “students are not statistics whose academic purpose is to fill out bubbles on accountability measures” (p. 119). ENL students were considered obstacles rather than resources to the culture, diversity, and identity of the school. Rejected, stigmatized and othered on account of testing considerations, these are the same students for whom, as I described under Theme Three, the school failed to provide proper testing
ENL students, therefore, were doubly marginalized at Highgate: both physically-spatially and, as I describe below, discursively.

During my observation at Highgate, I carefully documented the kind of language used to identify, address, talk about, evaluate, and interact with ENL students—that is, the specific language shaped and determined by the school, the administration, the staff and, most importantly, the teachers. This is what I mean when I speak about the discursive forms and practices involving eighth-grade ENL students. It is basically a language performance that is socioculturally and contextually regulated. The context, here, obviously is that of the culture and climate of the school.

The most salient example of such discursive practices was probably the one I have already discussed under Theme Two: namely, the teacher’s insistence that the new ENL student from Hungary, Mihály, who did not speak English at all, adopt the “American” name, Michael. Such discursive interpellations, as I explore below, have more profound and far-reaching implications than what might be suggested by the traditional assimilationist, mainstreaming model enacted at the school. For one thing, by imposing, policing, and enforcing a monolingual nomenclature, the teacher’s practice rewrote a salient dimension of the student’s identity thereby rendering him “other.” For what is more individual, personal, and identity forming than one’s own name?

This brings me to another issue I encountered: namely, that of labeling (i.e., “ENL”) and the discourse of othering it perpetuates. For at Highgate, there are students, and then there are ENL students. While sitting in on Amanda’s class, I took note of the following exchange between an ENL student, Sama, and Amanda: Sama was anxious to know why she was still being referred to as an ENL student even though she had taken the NYSESLAT test the year
before. Amanda then had to explain to her that although she taken the test, Sama was still at the expanding level, and thus technically she was still an ENL student. Upon hearing this, Sama burst into tears and said: “I hate being an ENL” (field notes, 12/05/2020). At stake here was the issue of identity and representation; that is to say, the degree to which Sama’s sense of self—how she appears to herself and to others, i.e., the larger school community—was tied up in these labels (ENL, ELL, etc.) as well as the very standardized tests (e.g., NYSESLAT), which can both enforce the label and set her free from it. As Shapiro (2014) rightly insists:

> it is crucial to recognize that the mainstream English classroom is seen by many ELLs as a site of power—a place that offers linguistic, social, and cultural capital. Being placed in ELL-only English classes may be interpreted, therefore, as a withholding of that capital. (p. 401)

This compellingly contextualizes Sama’s outburst and drives home the discursive impact of labels, not to mention their performative dimension in the process of identity formation.

It is also worth stating that the same discursive practices, which have arguably eclipsed students’ voices/subjectivities by articulating their identity only in terms of “learning a new language,” have also, by extension, relegated the ENL teachers’ identity to the “other.” Recall Amanda’s grievance in this matter: “they consider us auxiliary staff rather than teachers” (field notes, 07/12/2022). Mirroring ENL students’ predicament, at Highgate, there are teachers and then there are “auxiliary staff.”

For example, once as I was sitting in on Jane and Amanda’s co-taught section, I observed that neither of them would call on ENL students in class to share the views, answer questions and so forth. When I asked Jane about it, she said that, “I don’t really want to put them on the spot, or like alienate them. I know parts of the discussion may be difficult for them” (field notes, 07/19/2022). This case demonstrates the reciprocal ways in which issues of climate and culture permeated the space of instruction and again decentered ENL students from their literacies.
Zynah’s experience in her ELA class was another case in point of the ways in which pedagogical practices marginalized ENL students’ voices at the school. During a conversation with Amanda, I learned that one of her ENL students, Zynah, was not as active in her ELA class as she was in Amanda’s stand-alone. Apparently, when Amanda tried to address this issue by discussing it with the ELA instructor, the latter had said: “well, I never ask her to do anything because she is new and still getting to know the school environment.” And when Amanda informed her that Zynah was at a transitioning level (not a beginner), that she had maintained an *A*- in her other content area classes (e.g., history and science), and that she had been quite active and vocal in her stand-alone class, Jane, the ELA teacher responded by calling Zynah “stubborn” (field notes, 06/25/2022). Such an approach discursively transforms and displaces the teacher’s pedagogical practice into a matter of student’s personality, something the student supposedly *is* (i.e., “stubborn).

Such discursively produced, hierarchical treatments and practices naturally penetrated the space of the classroom as well. For instance, on more than one occasion, I heard the ELA instructor refer to the ENL students in her co-taught class in terms that would suggest she did not consider them “her” students, but rather Amanda’s. The following is the exchange I documented between Jane and Amanda:

**Amanda:** When are the grades due?
**Jane:** Next week, Tuesday by 9:00 AM. Are you going to grade your students?
**Amanda:** Yeah, I can take one of the other classes, too.
**Jane:** That is very nice of you. I believe I am good as long as your students are taken care of! (field notes, 04/18/2022)

Although ENL students spent as much time in Jane class (one period every day) as they did in Amanda’s, it is clear from this conversation that (a) Jane did not count the ENL students in her class among her own students; and that (b) Amanda, too, had internalized and affirmed such
othering discourses. Not only did such institutionally sanctioned, discursive demarcations created a pedagogical and affective distance between Jane and her ENL students (not to mention Amanda), but they also created an unequal division of labor between the two co-teachers.

Traditionally defined, co-teaching refers to the collaboration between general and special education (SPED) teachers encompassing all the teaching responsibilities for all the students assigned to a classroom (Gately & Gately, 2001). This definition has frequently been expanded to allow the collaborative partnership between a mainstream teacher and the ENL teacher. Sustained dialogue and collaboration between Amanda and Jane, however, only took place during the class time. There was no co-planning time built into their schedule, which often led to what Matsuda (1999) calls the “disciplinary division of labor,” which in turn institutionally and professionally silos the two groups. Research in the field of English as a Second Language, however, has highlighted the critical impact of collaboration between content area and ENL teachers to ensure that English language learners have access to the mainstream curriculum and language instruction that helps them stay in school and develop (a) socially by interacting with their peers in English and (b) academically by demonstrating adequate yearly progress in the various content areas. (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008, p.11)

Moreover, such discursive instances of othering were not limited to the space of classroom, but rather permeated the discourses of other teachers as well as the administration. During a staff meeting, for example, I overheard the following exchange between two social studies teachers as they were discussing the school’s mask mandate during the COVID-19 pandemic:

**Teacher (A):** I really cannot stand these masks. And tell you what, I don’t blame my students for not wearing them properly either.

**Teacher (B):** I know. Most of my students put their masks under their chins. What’s the point of the mandate anyways? You know what’s so interesting to me? Teacher (A): What?
Teacher (B): Amanda’s students all wear their masks properly.
Teacher (A): Well, I guess we know why! Probably not vaccinated!
(field notes, 05/02/2022)

What makes such exchanges sound cynical, if not ironic, is the way in which masking—as a responsible, health-related prophylactic measure—became the locus of competing political, ideological, xenophobic, and racist discourses during the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. This exchange, therefore, (re)produces the rhetoric of otherness surrounding the ENL students to say the least. Such views, based on specific ideological assumptions, are no less stigmatizing:

The United States has long had an articulated philosophy of providing free and compulsory education to all youngsters regardless of family background. In spite of this ideal, some students have not shared equally in the benefits that such an education might provide. Historically, both societal and school conditions in the United States have been consistently, systematically, and disproportionately unequal and unfair, and the major casualties have been those students who differ significantly in social class, gender, race, and ethnicity from what is considered the “mainstream.” (Rego & Nieto, 2000, p. 414)

Similarly, Austin (1975) draws attention to the performativity of language, or language as performance, a form of doing things with words. It further underscores the degree to which linguistic and discursive pronouncements and practices are indeed constitutive of ENL students’ identities. That Sama hates being labeled ENL, that Jane considers ENL students not her students, that Zynah’s alienation is rendered as stubbornness: all these linguistic and discursive practices contribute to the culture of otherness I have come to observe at Highgate. These mark similar tendencies to what Bourdieu’s (1986) calls “institutionalization of difference”.

Blommaert (2009) explains:

Every act of language use is an act that is assessed, weighed, measured socially, in terms of contrasts between this act and others. In fact, language becomes the social and culturally embedded thing it is because of the fact that it is socially and culturally consequential in use . . . speech is language in which people have made investments—social, cultural, political, individual-emotional ones. It is also language brought under social control—consequently language marked by sometimes extreme cleavages and inequalities in repertoires and opportunities. (p. 264)
Consequently, in contradistinction to the criteria of a genuine multicultural curriculum, the routinely institutionalized discourses of othering surrounding emergent bilinguals at Highgate were indeed concerning. They —consciously or unconsciously—contributed to what I have termed the “double marginalization” of emergent bilinguals.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I described and explained the ways in which I carried out my ethnographic study of the research site to frame and design my own pedagogy and classroom practices in the practitioner phase of this study more effectively. Ethnography’s analytical techniques, among other, allowed me to explore the educational as well as the sociocultural content of eighth-grade ENL curriculum and instruction at the school. The analyses of my data in this phase indicate so much that is sensible, desirable, and productive about the eighth-grade ENL curricular and pedagogical practices at the school: namely, the teachers’ interesting lessons, effective scaffolding and pedagogical techniques, devotion to their students, their genuine care for the students’ well-beings, the energetic and vibrant atmosphere they created in class, and their great rapport inside and outside class.

I also explored and noted certain (e.g., pedagogical, curricular, institutional) areas that could benefit from a more serious engagement with the ethos of multicultural education and culturally sustaining pedagogies. For example, there were times that the ENL stand-alone teacher seemed institutionally pressured into enacting certain pedagogical practices demanded by a scripted, one-size-fits-all curriculum (e.g., phonics), the efficacy of which she would seem to consider with some misgivings. Furthermore, from my conversations with her, I could readily recognize (and sympathize with) the teacher’s feeling of frustration in the school’s failure to include a common planning time for the ENL and ELA co-teachers to engage in a more
meaningful collaboration. This, in turn, led to a substantial curricular gap opening up between the stand-alone and integrated ENL classes.

Examined from the perspective of culturally sustaining pedagogy, the eighth-grade ENL curricula can be said to evince a certain tendency toward monolingualism/monoculturalism, both in terms of reading materials and classroom practices. This may be said to perpetuate the hegemonic place of the English language in the curricula, which, in turn, tends to downplay the role of emergent bilinguals’ L1 repertoires and creates a more teacher-centric atmosphere by deemphasizing students’ voices/autonomy. An important corollary of such practices lies arguably in the ways in which they may be shown to reinforce assimilationist ideologies.

Significantly, my ethnographic explorations flagged another area that can be said to be deeply intertwined with the foregoing issues: namely, the prevalent, discursive practices that might have perpetuated a sense of othering in relation to the ENL population at the school. Such discursive practices, however, I noted, were accompanied by a more concrete, material sense of othering in terms of an inequitable distribution of and access to educational resources at school.

As well-intentioned and caring as the teachers I observed were, there was only so much they could do to support their students, given the bureaucratic inadequacies of the school. It is crucial, therefore, to note that the issues I have described here would seem to be mainly indexical of the institutional and systemic realities mediating the education and literacies of emergent bilinguales in public schools.
CHAPTER FIVE

Cognitive Mapping and Narrative Competence:
Emergent Bilinguals’ Narratives of Home

In Chapter Four, my ethnographic approach at Highgate Middle School provided a detailed, qualitative description of the eighth-grade, ENL stand-alone and ENL/ELA co-taught classroom practices and pedagogies. Mediated by the theoretical and conceptual imperatives of literacy as social practice and critical curriculum theory, however, my ethnographic research method required that I go beyond mere descriptions of classroom practices to paint a more complex and nuanced picture of eighth-grade ENL education. Therefore, it was essential that I delineate the school’s climate and culture, discursive practices, and the distribution of various educational resources to elucidate the sociocultural context in which the education and literacies of ENL students were situated at the research site.

More specifically, in Chapter Four, I described and analyzed how the ENL instruction was at the eighth-grade level. My ethnographic study of eighth-grade ENL education revealed specific curricular, pedagogical, discursive instances that reinforced (a) a deficit model of literacy; (b) a monolingual/monocultural education; (c) stigmatizing/othering ideological practices; and (d) inequitable learning opportunities. This chapter, on the other hand, provides an account of ENL instruction mediated by the methodology of practitioner research—that is, here, I intend to demonstrate how an alternative mode of instruction in an ENL stand-alone class of transitioning and expanding students, informed by the principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017), could look like. In doing so, I endeavored not only to re-center the voices of students in my curriculum but also treat them as co-creators of knowledge in the process of their own education and literacies. Informed by the insights of multicultural education
and culturally sustaining pedagogy, I decided to implement a particular mode of narrative inquiry as a key component of my overall practitioner pedagogy. My pedagogical choices and practices, as specified in this chapter, do not claim to “solve” the curricular and instructional issues emerging from the ethnographic phase. Rather, I present a set of alternative approaches that may be said to be more aligned with the ethos and objectives of multicultural education and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Nor do I claim to “solve” the issues concerning inequitable distribution of resources by merely enacting a particular classroom pedagogy. I am therefore acutely aware of the limits of pedagogy, for there are to be sure systemic and structural inequities and disparities that require collective, community-based interventions as well as legislative/policy reforms.

This chapter then is a response to the following research question: In what ways were emergent bilinguals able to encode in their narratives key dimensions of cognitive mapping and narrative competence as conceptualized in this study? Therefore, in response to the cognitive mapping and narrative components of my research question, I provide my analyses of four students’ narratives, which were crafted during the practitioner inquiry phase. Given the depth and the choice of my data analysis methods—that is, narrative analysis—not to mention considerations of space, I first present my analyses of four out of 48 narratives crafted by emergent bilinguals during the practitioner phase. I next analyze four emergent themes across all 48 narratives created by the 12 emergent bilinguals. My findings tell a story of the ways in which and the extent to which the participants were able to cognitively map their lived histories and experiences through their personal narratives. Drawing on corroborating evidence from the students’ personal narratives, I frame and discuss narrative competence and cognitive mapping in terms of the four emerging themes of (a) perceiving and mapping spatial dimension, (b) perceiving and mapping temporal dimensions, (c) connecting the personal to the social, and (d)
regaining voice and agency. Finally, I discuss these themes in relation to cognitive mapping and narrative competence.

**Four Students’ Narratives and Analysis**

In this section, I first review each narrative prompt as well as my classroom pedagogies. Then I review and analyze the narratives themselves. It is worth noting that my participants (two male and two female students) are all at different stages of their language development process: Howin and Rafe were both at early stages of language development as they had only gone through one formal schooling experience here in the U.S. Sara had gone through two and Sama four years of formal schooling experience here in the U.S.

My analyses of students’ narratives are informed by the micro and macro indices of narrative competence and cognitive mapping as I have developed them in this study. Here, I also draw upon the model of narrative inquiry developed by Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), for whom narrative form, first and foremost, allows for a particular way of thinking about experience. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry constitutes an interrelated conceptualization, that is, a “three-dimensional space” that entails the temporal, the spatial, the personal and the social. I have also incorporated Fairclough’s (1992) “agentive syntactic structures” to analyze the fourth element of voice and agency.

During the practitioner inquiry phase, as part of my pedagogy, we read Claude McKay’s “The Tropics in New York” as a whole-class activity (see Appendix A). I devoted a couple of classes to pre-teaching blocking vocabulary, discussing Harlem Renaissance period, and close-reading the poem. We also discussed McKay’s own experience as an immigrant from Jamaica and his cultural impact during the Harlem Renaissance period. The poem depicts the social alienation

---

16 I use the more concrete concept of place in my analysis.
of a migrant (i.e., the speaker) in New York City. The speaker is standing outside a fruit and vegetable store looking at the display window, which showcases different varieties of tropical fruits. The speaker suddenly remembers, in a celebratory tone, the landscape, the farms and the “parish fairs” presumably in his home country/town, where the fruits are still accessible, not yet boxed and shipped off to be sold in the US, but here, in New York, avocados (“alligator pears”) are luxury fruits and expensive. The poem ends by evoking a sense of nostalgia (“hunger”) for the “the old, familiar ways”: the speaker, whose “hunger” we have come to sympathize with in both literal and figurative sense, turns away from this scene and begins to weep (see Table 5.1 for the summary of the engagement tasks).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement Tasks</th>
<th>Language Modality Incorporated</th>
<th>Length of Inquiry</th>
<th>Narrative Prompt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Claude McKay’s poem: “The Tropics in New York”</td>
<td>Reading/Writing/Listening/Speaking</td>
<td>Two weeks</td>
<td>Think about McKay’s poem (“The Tropics in New York”) and our discussions regarding the importance of stories in our lives. Try to compose your own story about home and what you miss most about it: What is home for you? What reminds you of home? What tastes like home? What feels like home? What are some of your best memories? (It does not have to be in the form of a poem!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia Stefanovic’s “Smells Like Home”</td>
<td>Reading/Writing/Listening/Speaking</td>
<td>Two weeks</td>
<td>To what extent do you, like Stefanovic, carry your home or the idea of home with you? If “home” suggests a sense of belonging, would it be possible for us to belong to more than just one place? two places? more? Is there a relation between home, time (past, present, future) and history (personal as well as collective)? How so? Explain. You see, the writing and subject of history does not always have to be about heroines, heroes, famous people, conquerors or inventors. Rather, you all have your own histories, your own unique voices, which are important and need to be heard. So if you could tell or write your own history or the history of your home, what would it look like? What would it sound like? (Wait! is that the word story hidden in the word history!) Go ahead: write it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiyun Li’s “Eat, Memory: Orange Crush”</td>
<td>Reading/Writing/Listening/Speaking</td>
<td>Two weeks</td>
<td>These days, perhaps more than ever before, companies rely on advertising to sell their products (from fast food and sneakers to smart phones and cloud storage). Everyday, we are constantly bombarded by dozens, if not hundreds, of ads—on our phones, on the Internet, on TV, on the radio, on the bus, on buildings, on our T-shirts and so many other places. They try to, in various subtle ways, convince us (but also to indirectly pressure us) to buy a certain product: the ads claim that this or that product is not only what we need but also what we desire: it will make us happy; and that without it our life is somehow incomplete! That to be successful, we should buy what they are selling. With that in mind, have you (or anyone you know) ever purchased a product because you thought it would change your life? Write about your experience with this particular product and discuss in detail whether or not it met your expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline Woodson’s poem: “February 12, 1963”</td>
<td>Reading/Writing/Listening/Speaking</td>
<td>Two weeks</td>
<td>Write your own “I am born” story influenced by Woodson’s “February 12, 1963.” What was going on in the world when you were born?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the scaffolding stage of my pedagogy, I showed the students an animated short video that effectively dramatizes the content of the poem while reciting it. Students found this visual representation of the poem quite exciting. Next, I conducted an informal assessment in the form of class discussion, scaffolding questions, higher-order thinking questions, followed by a written feedback for each individual participant. At the end of this engagement, I assigned the following narrative task:

**The prompt:** Think about McKay’s poem ("The Tropics in New York") and our discussions regarding the importance of stories in our lives. Try to compose your own story about home and what you miss most about it: What is home for you? What reminds you of home? What tastes like home? What feels like home? What are some of your best memories? (It does not have to be in the form of a poem!)

In what follows, I present and analyze the narratives of four emergent bilinguals.

**Howin: Grandmother and the Chickens**

The first narrative ("Grandmother and the Chickens") is crafted by Howin, a male student of Chinese heritage, who had gone to school in the US for only one academic year. My discussion of his narrative will follow.

Home is the place where I always want to be, where nowhere will fill my heart with comfort other than my sweet home and it’s not just about how big the house is or how nice it’s [sic] furniture inside.

My house in China is rudimentary with no upstairs and chicken pooping around my yard. I remember when I was chased by my chickens because I was collecting their eggs, it was my grandmother who I immediately jumped into. Even Though I broke the eggs I was collecting, my grandmother still was constantly asking if I was ok. I feel all the luxury was not what I desire so I had a lot of fun collecting eggs and dropping eggs on a daily basis. Nomatter what day I had in school or what attitude I was thrown at, I can always cry in my grandmother’s hug and get chased by the chickens.

I still miss my grandmother and miss my home in China, I’ve cried my way from China to America actually. Even though my parents in America are very nice to me and the house is now 2 stairs, it never feels like home. They all have to work for the most of the week and only at home after 10pm. I was left home with my ipad most of the time, numb myself with videos that have no meaning. I honestly wanted to go back to China for the first 1 year of my American life and I’ve never talked about it with my parents but they do constantly ask me if I like America or not. It was then that I realized my grandmother and the chickens are what’s really making my home home.
On November 22, 2021, I got a dog for my birthday. His [sic] name is George and he’s just like the world to me. When I come home, he’s always jumping on the dog fence and he has the best personality I like. I think that he’s the one who made my US home home.”

The influence of McKay in Howin’s narrative is clear, which, of course, was one of the objectives of the task. It is more pronounced in the ways in which Howin has expressed his own unique sense of nostalgia for home; but also in the fact that the assignment has allowed him to feel comfortable enough to represent his vulnerabilities, which interestingly defy certain normative gender roles as well (“I can always cry in my grandmother’s hug”; “I’ve cried my way from China to America actually”).

Howin organizes his narrative around the progression from an abstract idea of home (“the place where I always want to be, where nowhere will fill my heart with comfort”) to more concrete ones (e.g., the place where “I can always cry in my grandmother’s hug and get chased by the chickens”; or where the dog is “always jumping on the dog fence”). This transition, naturally, corresponds to his move from China to the U.S., where his parents “have to work for the most of the week and only at home after 10 pm.”; and where he is “left home with my ipad most of the time, numb myself with videos that have no meaning.” Luxury items such as iPad and a bigger house scarcely give his life “meaning.” It is the intimacy and love expressed by his grandmother’s embrace as well as the playfulness of the chickens that he longs for. That is where meaning resides, which constitutes, one of the main tasks of narrative competence in this study: namely, narrative inquiry as a sense-making, form-giving activity. Here in the U.S., the more genuine affective speech act of grandmother’s care (“constantly asking if I was ok”) has been

---

17 This move from the abstract to the concrete is a legitimate writing technique used mostly in argumentative essays. I have deliberately introduced such techniques in my pedagogy such that the students will have the option to implement them in narrative terms.
flatten into an empty rhetorical gesture of his parents, who “do constantly ask me if I like America or not.”

But, incredibly, in stark contrast to sheer nostalgia and longing for a “lost” past/home identifiable in McKay, Howin’s unique conception of cognitive mapping here allows him to imaginatively re-construct the essence of what home has meant to him here in the U.S. Howin accomplishes this not by destroying the past, but rather by way of a creative reconstruction such that his house of “2 stairs” becomes a house of two “stories” (pun intended): a complex spatiotemporal structure in which both the past and the present are coeval, and on which Howin’s two stories of home converge. This narrative inquiry, in other words, has allowed Howin to displace and condense his “grandmother’s hug and [getting] chased by the chickens” in the figure of the dog he has recently received on his birthday (for dogs both hug and chase, don’t they?)—the same dog who “has the best personality” and who has “made my US home home.” If the reader has any doubts about the compensatory human/home attributes my reading seems to project onto the figure of the dog, I can only remind them of the anthropomorphic name Howin has given him: “He’s name is George and he’s just like the world to me.”

Considering the syntactic organization of the narrative, we can see that Howin starts off in active voice (e.g., “I remember,” “I had a lot of fun”), the grammatical structure of which denotes agency (Fairclough, 1995). However, only once has he opted for passive voice: it occurs in the third paragraph and concerns his “American life” of isolation: “I was left home with my iPad most of the time, numb myself with videos that have no meaning.” Not even the desensitizing effects of videos he plays on his iPad can dispel this alienation, which speaks of a radical disjuncture of lived experience between Howin’s rural life and the support of extended

---

18 This ambivalent approach to what/where home is can be said to form the blessing and the predicament of all diasporic subjects.
family in China and his new situation here in the US. This existential crisis is symptomatic of a life that is no longer tethered to the readily mappable provincial community of his past.

It is worth noting that prior to Mckay’s poem, we had worked on another engagement task, Sofija Stefanovic’s “Smells Like Home,” where the protagonist comes to appreciate a more spatially fluid understanding of what/where constitutes home for her and her son. Howin’s narrative seems to culminate, albeit in a still inchoate way, in a similar understanding of home; though the geographic and affective gap—between home in China and home here in the US—that he cognitively maps out in his narrative is still quite fresh, for Howin had very recently moved to the US.

During the practitioner inquiry phase, I also learned that Howin only speaks Mandarin (L1) at home with his parents. Given the “proficiency” level of his English (L2) and the disjuncture in his education caused by migration, Howin’s narrative naturally contains several semantic and syntactic errors that are quite common for emergent bilinguals at this stage of language development. Even so, as I have argued, narrative competence constitutes an effective vehicle for students to reflect on, rehearse and practice isolated skills (semantic and syntactical rules) in the holistic, pragmatic context of narrative form. For example, Howin has been able to demonstrate a satisfying, albeit not perfect, range of syntactic (i.e., various tense use such as simple past, simple present, present perfect), semantic (i.e., incorporating tier 2 and 3 vocabulary items: “rudimentary,” “chase,” “luxury,” and “numb”), and pragmatic level (i.e., contextual awareness, establishing spatiotemporal connections between China and U.S.). Furthermore, narrative competence underscores areas that still need work, but, since it provides the students with an extended context and opportunity to demonstrate their pragmatic skills, it also allows the instructor to more effectively distinguish between and address mistakes (“He’s name”; “it’s
furniture”) and errors (“2 stairs”); his inaccurate diction (“My house in China is rudimentary”); his use of present perfect tense (“I’ve cried my way from China to America”) rather simple past/past continuous to refer to an action that was completed in the past.

Moreover, one can identify specific instances of run-on clausal forms in his narrative, which, on a closer look, turn out to be not below his level at all (e.g., “Home is the place where I always want to be, where nowhere will fill my heart with comfort other than my sweet home and it’s not just about how big the house is or how nice it’s furniture inside”). These semantic and syntactical issues are no doubt important; however, to solely focus on such errors at the cost of disregarding the heuristic and holistic quality of Howin’s narrative, his rhetorical moves, and the way in which he establishes conceptual and affective relations would be a huge mistake on the part of the instructor. Therefore, interlanguage/L1 transfer and morphosyntactic errors, among other, can be more productively identified and addressed, rather than stigmatized. Howin can further develop these areas through formal English language instruction, socialization with his American peers and teachers in the content area classes, as well as his interactions in English outside school (Cummins, 2000).

Sama’s Narrative: “A memory moment”

Next, I present and analyze the second narrative crafted by Sama, a female student of Pakistani heritage. Another text I assigned as part of the practitioner inquiry phase was an autobiographical essay by Sofija Stefanovic titled “Smells Like Home.” I had the students first read it individually and later we read it as a whole-class activity (see Appendix A). I devoted two classes to tackling blocking vocabulary and close reading the text. I then decided that a read-aloud exercise would make the students more interested in the specific section of the story where the protagonist speaks about the smells of her childhood: “‘The smells of your childhood,’
Stefanovic recalls her mother saying to her as a child on the eve of Balkan wars, ‘will always stay with you and will make you remember home.’” Her mother’s saying, then, coupled with the author’s mediation on olfactory-triggered involuntary rush of memories constitute the basic premise of the piece: namely, home “is a place that exists not on a map but in my mind.” It is this particular idea of home as a nodal point of existential and psychological associations that she is exploring in the text as she thinks about what home is going to mean to her son when he grows up. Next, I carried out an informal assessment in the form series of questions followed by written feedback for each participant (see Appendix A). I then concluded this section by assigning the following narrative task which called for the students to write their own version of “Smells Like Home”:

**The prompt:** To what extent do you, like Stefanovic, carry your home or the idea of home with you? If “home” suggests a sense of belonging, would it be possible for us to belong to more than just one place? two places? more? Is there a relation between home, time (past, present, future) and history (personal as well as collective)? How so? Explain. You see, the writing and subject of history does not always have to be about heroines, heroes, famous people, conquerors or inventors. Rather, you all have your own histories, your own unique voices, which are important and need to be heard. So if you could tell or write your own history or the history of your home, what would it look like? What would it sound like? (Wait! is that the word *story* hidden in the word *history*)! Go ahead: write it.

Participants, as I expected, used the text as an inspiration and a model to write their own stories.

Sama, wrote the following piece:

As we got closer and closer, I made out a whole picture of children swinging on swings and parents sliding on the slides with their little ones. There were kids who were on the monkey bars, their bodies twisting about, as they grasped one bar after the other. From the right window of the car to the left, I was peering outside overcome with so much joy. I looked all around eagerly and spot a small little area with cows. I couldn’t wait to hop out of the car and play in the park. A park full of happy colours.

We were now just a mile away when I sniffed a little and smelled a strange but at the same time, a familiar smell. I was about to ask my Mom what that smell was when it clicked.

“Moo, Moooo”, the smell arose from cow poop. After realizing this, I started to feel a weird sensation but then I relaxed within memories. I noticed myself shifting back
onto the seat and slowly closing my eyes. I felt these memories pumping through my veins all the way up to my brain. Now instead of sitting in the car, I felt myself being carried to green grassy fields with all types of farm animals. I saw chickens and goats and sheep, and what stood out the most, the smell of cow poop. I was running around like crazy, barefoot, letting the soles of my feet meet with the lush and tall bright green grass as I jumped freely in the air. I sometimes looked up and saw a bright blue sky laying right above me. And the hazy late-day sun that shone on the farm and made the whole scene look “perfect.” From all different parts of the huge green fields, feeding one chicken to the other. Riding on horses and playing in the hay, sneakily getting food from the barn and feeding it to the goats, even though my Grandfather had many times, told me not to unless I asked, but I paid no attention to what he said, It was all such an enjoyment. And the most fascinating part, every day waking up and watching Grandpa milk the cows, I pictured myself begging him to let me do what he had just done, but I expected the same reply every time, “When you get older” which meant, “Sweetie.”

I woke up from the daydream or you could call it “A memory moment” realizing I was dreaming about Pakistan, my homeland. A sort of sad feeling overcame me but then at once, I heard the “Moos” moo and this time, at a closer distance. I noticed my Dad had carried me from the car to the fence in front of all the animals. I wanted to get closer to the animals and touch them and feed them as I had in my Grandpa’s farm so, to the thought of this, a huge smile came upon my face as I swiftly took off my shoes and started to climb the fence—ready for some farm fun once again.

Sama’s highly evocative narrative employs active syntactical structures that indicate a sense of agency (Fairclough, 1995). For example, “I started to feel . . . but then I relaxed”; “I felt these memories pumping through my veins all the way up to my brain”; “I pictured myself . . . but I expected the same reply every time, ‘When you get older’” ; “I woke up from the daydream . . . realizing I was dreaming about Pakistan, my homeland”; and, more prominently, in the ending of her narrative.

Her narrative also echoes a few elements from Stefanovic’s “Smells like Home.” What at first glance appears as a linear narrative, 19 on a closer look, proves to be a complex structure charged with involuntary flooding of memories and affective investment that transgress the bounds of simple chronological storytelling. Sama’s story begins with a descriptive passage depicting children playing in the park in New York State: “children swinging on swings and

---

19There is a fairly straightforward temporal movement organized around a beginning, a middle and an end.
parents sliding on the slides with their little ones.” Yet, in the middle of the story, Sama takes us back to her home country of Pakistan by incorporating a deep flashback, in which the “Moos” of the cattle in New York evokes its repressed other in the “green grassy fields” of her grandparents’ farm. In the last paragraph, we are back in New York. This return to the narrative present, which is mediated by the overwhelming scent of nostalgia, is nevertheless affectively richer as the joy of relived experience and memories dissolves into that of the immediate present: “a huge smile came upon my face . . . ready for some farm fun once again.”

What is striking in Sama’s narrative is the gradual progression from a passive state of observation in the present (e.g., “I made out a whole picture of children”; “I was peering outside”; “I looked all around”) to the deep psychological time of retrospection and subjective recuperation of a past that seems distant, if not lost altogether (e.g., “I started to Feel”; “I felt these memories”; “I pictured myself”; “I felt myself being carried”). This ultimately culminates in the final moment of externalization of her retrospective reverie in the last scene, where her inward-looking nostalgic gaze at static images is transformed into actual movement, action, and participation in life: “I swiftly took off my shoes and started to climb the fence.”

But the production of this narrative movement, unfolding through time and expanding Sama’s interiority and sense of self, presupposes a movement from the past happy childhood experiences in “Grandpa’s farm” in Pakistan to the present moment of displacement in New York. The spatiotemporal matrix of Sama’s narrative is (unconsciously) informed by a geopolitical reality that is, at the same time, repressed by it: namely, the reality of migration. Sama’s narrative can now reveal itself as the story of migration, for Sama is an immigrant. The political substratum that, in a certain sense, defines diaspora, displacement and deracination is the experience of crossing of borders, which can have both disintegrating and liberating effects at
the same time. Perhaps one liminal figure in the narrative that best embodies this experience is the “fence.” By virtue of her practice of cognitive mapping (i.e., producing this narrative), the same fence that Sama climbs at the end of her narrative now becomes much more than just a literal fence in the park: it allegorically stands for any number of socio-cultural barriers and obstacles facing immigrants in the U.S. If the initial impulse to “climb the fence” and have “some farm fun once again” may have been motivated by some sort of Proustian rush of involuntary memories; the search for and construction of meaning nevertheless can only have been achieved through Sama’s retrospective narrativizing of her lived experience as well as her specific way of making affective, cognitive and geographical connections between Pakistan and the U.S.: namely, through the equally significant moment of imaginative reconstitution and narrative articulation (and doubling) of that happy memory in response to the writing assignment for our class.

Sama’s story foregrounds and salvages a portion of her history and lived experience in Pakistan that was rendered inaccessible by (the trauma of) migration. This makes her creation of vivid descriptions and images of the landscape and the farm even more noteworthy (e.g., “green grassy fields,” “bright blue sky,” “lush and tall bright green grass,” “hazy late-day sun”). Such descriptions of an idyllic past are, however, made temporally more immediate, especially when she shifts from the past tense (“looked up,” “saw,” “shone”) to the participle form that evokes a sense of present immediacy: for example, “riding on horse,” “playing in the hay,” “getting food from the barn,” “feeding” the goats, “waking up,” “watching Grandpa.” Yet what makes this moment still more significant is the way in which Sama attempts to give voice to cultural difference as well: “‘When you get older مینه’ which meant, ‘Sweetie.’” It is the assertion and acknowledgement of Urdu, her first language, shot through with her grandparent’s love and the
idea of home, that breaks through the narrative membrane. (A more accomplished writer might have resisted the temptation to readily translate the term of endearment to make the audience grapple with and appreciate this cipher of cultural difference.) Such interlanguage uses (or code-switchings), I argue, should be encouraged not censured, for the latter seeks to normalize repression and marginalization. This assignment, in contrast, opens up a space for Sama and others to explore their sense of self, history, and social setting through bilingual/bicultural code-switching.

Compared to Howin’s more straightforward narrative pattern, Sama’s narrative expresses the reality of migration gradually and artistically in a nonlinear manner. Whereas Sama’s “memory moment” seems to be organized around a specific isomorphism between the vitality of the natural landscape of the park in New York and that of his grandfather’s farm back in Pakistan; Howin’s narrative seems to be structured by way of a radical difference between life here in the U.S. and in rural China (i.e., the simplicity of his Chinese rural life back where extended family [grandparents] were still part of family life juxtaposed with the primacy and relative isolation of the nuclear family unit here in the US). While Sama’s dream narrative tells the story of how the memories of her childhood can reinvigorate her in the present, Howin’s narrative reflects the differences between life here in the US and back in China. His story symbolically compensates for a loss that his narrative, in his own unique way, both represents and seeks to overcome.20

20 At the time of the practitioner phase of this study, Sama had been living the US for 5 years while Howin had been living here for only 18 months. Hence, the radically different ways their narrative arguably function: Sama’s narrative establishes certain continuities between life in the US and life in Pakistan; while Howin’s functions so as to help him express his longing for a life that is no more at the same time that it helps him come to terms with his new situation.
Rafe’s Narrative: “The New Yeezys!”

In this section, I present and analyze the third narrative crafted by Rafe, a male student from Mexico. The third text we read during the practitioner research phase was a personal essay by the Chinese-American writer Yiyun Li titled “Eat, Memory, Orange Crush.” This piece portrays the complex relationship of a teenager (presumably the author herself) from a working class-family in China with a specific product, namely, the American drink mix Tang (see Appendix A). We read about her obsession with Tang, which specific TV advertising strategies have turned into a status symbol. Marketed in China as “Fruit Treasure” and transcending its commodity form, Tang, and the associations it conjures up, has become a site of emotional and libidinal investment (note the pun in the title of the text) for the protagonist as well as her family (with the exception of her father): “This would be the love I would seek, a boy unlike my father, a boy who would not blink to buy a bottle of Tang for me.” Tang therefore comes to stand for a host of (alternative) life experiences—from consumerism to American lifestyle, down to a life of luxury, teenage love and jealousy, if not the ultimate politico-economic divide between the capitalist US and communist China at the time: “To think,” the speaker announces at the end, “that all the dreams of my youth were once contained in this commercial drink!”

In order to make the text more accessible to all participants, I first devoted a couple of classes to reading the text aloud, tackling blocking vocabulary and close reading the text. Next, I carried out an informal assessment that included class discussion, scaffolding questions followed by written feedback on their responses. Finally, I assigned the following narrative task in which students were prompted to write their own narrative of obsession with a product:

*The prompt:* These days, perhaps more than ever before, companies rely on advertising to sell their products (from fast food and sneakers to smart phones and cloud storage). Everyday, we are constantly bombarded by dozens, if not hundreds, of ads—on our phones, on the Internet, on TV, on the radio, on the bus, on buildings, on our T-shirts and
so many other places. They try to, in various subtle ways, convince us (but also to indirectly pressure us) to buy a certain product: the ads claim that this or that product is not only what we need but also what we desire: it will make us happy; and that without it our life is somehow incomplete! That to be successful, we should buy what they are selling. With that in mind, have you (or anyone you know) ever purchased a product because you thought it would change your life? Write about your experience with this particular product and discuss in detail whether or not it met your expectations.

The following story was written by Rafe. From my conversations with him, I learned that Rafe only speaks Trique/Triqui at home because that is his first language and the only one that his parents, who never received formal education, understand. Rafe’s two younger siblings were emergent bilinguals as well. Therefore, formal language lessons, classroom experiences and socialization with teachers and peers seem to have been the only venue for Rafe to improve his English language skills. Here is Rafe’s story:

I was 15 and I really liked Adidas brand since I was a kid. I saw the advertisement back in Mexico before moving to US. One morning after I immigrated to US I woke up and went on my phone and I saw an advertisement of a product that caught my eye, it was a pair of a new Yeezy boost shoes that was just released by Adidas. And I was [sic] mind blowing because they were as shining as the sun. The Advertisement that was shown on my phone was really catchy because they were showing young and rich teenagers that are the same age like me, they were wearing expensive (supreme T-shirts, shoes that I really liked and cool accessories). When I saw the teenagers living a luxurious lives displayed in the ad, I wished I was one of them.

After the Advertisement ended, and then I saw a glimpse of a kid saying that the shoes were only on for a limited time. I quickly search up the video of the Advertisement (which you can still looked [sic] up on Youtube), when I found the video, I went downstairs and showed it to my father, after he watched the video that I showed him, he say “what is this, is this kind of a joke or something?!!!” I was so upset, I thought he was going to say “yes” because I knew my father had at least 500 dollars in his bank, I told him that it was only $230 and then he started laughing…

Days passed and in the meantime I was only on my bed watching more videos of the new Yeezys. I watched everything (from the unboxing to the reviews and then the on foot reviews). One week passed and I still dreamed about having those Yeezys. So it was my birthday as I turned 16, we ate the incredible food that my mom had prepared, and then after we ate the cake, it was present time. As I was opening all my presents, my father went outside because he wanted to bring something to me, when he came back, I opened his present and it was the new Yeezes!!! I was soooo shocked, not because I was happy to have them, but because the Yeezys weren’t as shiny as sun anymore.

---

21 That is to say, stand alone ENL classes, ENL/ELA co-taught and other content area classes.
The next day I woke up, I went right away to my closet and tried my new shoes on and to be honest they didn’t look like the ones on the Advertisement either. I just learned that everything you see in an Ad is fake. You just don’t know what’s behind it, you don’t know what’s the reality of it or how much effort was made to make it. I now know that I just wasted my father’s time and money just to get a pair of useless and catchy shoes. I know landscaping under sun for long hours is very difficult and that’s what my dad do [sic] for living. he works hard. I feel bad and my expectations were wrong.

Rafe’s narrative reveals something crucial about the three competencies at stake here: (a) the degree to which he is able to give form to his experiences by narrating them (narrative competence); (b) the extent to which his personal narrative connects seemingly disparate places/things/people (e.g., Mexico and the US; father’s hard work and the shoes) around the same phenomenon of commodity fetishism or marketing schemes (cognitive mapping); (c) the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic development. The diagnostic lens of this last signals to me, the instructor, that the student needs to work on his clause-forming skills. It has been argued that the ability to create complex and complex-compound clausal forms is a syntactic skill overdetermined by various factors and their development constitutes only one aspect of pragmatic competence (Miller, 1956; Chomsky & Miller, 1963.) Moreover, at early stages of language development, occasional errors at semantic and syntactic level is common among emergent bilinguals. We can identify this in various parts of Rafe’s story (e.g., “I was mind blowing”; “the same age like me”; “search up”; “that’s what my dad do for living”). Some of these errors, however, can be said to be the result of L1 transfer. There are also some punctuation issues, which is quite common among the writing samples of more advanced students or even among “native” speakers of English.

What I identify as the immediate problem here, however, is rather a particular form of wordiness: that is, Rafe seems to be struggling with conjunctions and clausal linkages to form more complex sentence structures. Hence his over-reliance on the coordinating conjunction and,
rather than conjunctive adverbs or more complex adverbial or adjectival clauses (e.g., “One morning after I immigrated to US I woke up and went on my phone and I saw an advertisement of a product that caught my eye, it was a pair of a new Yeezy boost shoes that was just released by Adidas”). The seven correct uses of adjectival clauses as well as passive structure in this sample tells me that Rafe is more than ready to improve these skills (e.g., “it was a pair of a new Yeezy boost shoes that was just released by Adidas”; “The Advertisement that was shown on my phone”; “young and rich teenagers that are the same age like me”; “T-shirts, shoes that I really liked”; “the video of the Advertisement (which you can still looked up on Youtube)”; “the video that I showed him”; “the incredible food that my mom had prepared” [emphasis added]).

Additionally on the semantic level, Rafe has successfully incorporated multiple vocabulary items that were introduced in the model narrative (e.g., catchy, luxurious, displayed and glimpse, to name but a few). What is also visible in Rafe’s story is his several successful attempts to incorporate descriptive passages and figurative language such as adjectives and similes: “The advertisement was catchy”; “supreme T-shirts;” “cool accessories;” “luxurious lives;” “incredible food;” “as shining as the sun;” “the Yeezys weren’t as shiny as sun anymore” (emphasis added).

We know from Hymes (1974) that pragmatic discourse coheres the ability to comprehend, construct, and convey meanings that are both accurate and appropriate for the social and cultural circumstances in which communication occurs. Similarly, Rafe has compellingly constructed meaningful speech acts that are appropriate both socially and cross-culturally by connecting the two contexts of Mexico and U.S. Although Rafe’s narrative is more or less chronological, the concrete aspects of his life in Mexico constitute very little of the

22 The word used in Li’s text is the noun luxury, of which Rafe here has appropriately used the adjective form.
narrative. Yiyun Li’s narrative frames her obsession with Tang from the perspective of an adult in the US reflecting on her teenage years in China, whereas Rafe’s narrative quickly skips over his life in Mexico in a couple of sentences and begins to recount his consuming passion for the shoes here in the US. What links Rafe’s lived experience of home in Mexico to his life here in the US, however, is not the longing for the (simpler) life or the relatives he has left behind (as was the case for Howin and perhaps Sama); nor is it a representation of a collective, global experience as we shall see in the next student’s narrative.

What does connect these two otherwise radically different existential experiences (i.e., life in Mexico and in the U.S.), however, is the homogenizing impact of an increasingly globalized consumer commodity market, which, regardless of one’s location, seems to be organizing and reassembling human desire (Youtube reviews and “unboxing” videos have played no small part in this;). Access to such commodities is as much a question of the availability of consumer goods in a given country as it is a function of one’s purchasing power or social class. This may explain Rafe’s revealing omission of describing in more details how his obsession with the “new Yeezy boost shoes” began and developed in Mexico. He, instead, devotes the entirety of his narrative to the American years, since the shoes were probably either not available in Mexico or the family could not afford them. It is only after migrating to the US that access to and therefore owning the shoes becomes a real, tangible possibility (regardless, that is, of how much money is there in his father’s bank account). This may explain the reason why Rafe deemphasizes his life in Mexico in favor of his American experiences.23

At stake here is the gravitational force of immigration and the way in which it restructures one’s (recollection of) past and present experiences. We see the specific way in

---

23 Another explanation, though less likely in my view, may be that the prompt of this assignment, in contrast to the previous ones, never explicitly asks the students to write about “home” or their life before immigration.
which Rafe’s narrative competence has allowed him a symbolic space to map out his experience of immigration. This experience, however, remains the repressed, albeit potent, social content of Rafe’s narrative, where it is treated in merely cursory terms: “One morning after I immigrated to US.” Therefore, Rafe’s narrative expresses not so much the nostalgia for a lost past as the meditation on a present moment shaped by it.

In this way, he draws upon the temporal progression inherent to narrative form that builds structurally towards moments of epiphany or realization. It is not merely the perception of the cliché\(^{24}\) that the reality of a product is much different than how it appears in a commercial (“they didn’t look like the ones on the Advertisement either. I just learned that everything you see in an Ad is fake”). Rather, more importantly, it is Rafe’s recognition of the connection between his father’s labor and family finances (“he works hard”; “I knew my father had at least 500 dollars in his bank”), on the one hand, to the structure of his desire for the shoes, on the other, that is underscored by the end of the narrative. For it is not just Rafe who is living as an immigrant now, but rather his entire family, including his father, whose job as a landscaper has paid for the shoes. It all culminates in the compelling, though implicit, analogy Rafe draws between these two deeply interrelated yet phenomenologically separate spheres of experience: namely, the romanticized visual rhetoric of the ad in which the shoes exist “as shiny as sun,” on the one hand, and the unglamorous, harsh manual labor of “landscaping under sun for long hours.” In the next section, I present and analyze Sara’s narrative, a student of Pakistani heritage.

**Sara’s Narrative: “I am born in Pakistan”**

Sara’s is the last narrative written during the practitioner research phase. The model for this assignment was Jacqueline Woodson’s narrative poem “February 12, 1963.” What is striking

\(^{24}\) Although, for a fifteen-year-old, it may hardly count as a cliché.
about Woodson’s poem is its deeply personal subject matter nevertheless evinces an acute attentiveness to history as the realm of collective human struggle. This last gives her poem especially political overtones against and through which she articulates a highly personal narrative of resistance. Woodson thus beautifully weaves the lyricism of her individual destiny into the collective struggle of the black and brown people for freedom from slavery, the right to vote and sovereign personhood. She effectively contextualizes these struggles against the backdrop of the antebellum deep south, the abolition of slavery and the civil rights movement in the 1960s, when the poet was born. This poem therefore seeks to foreground the historical continuity of human suffering and bondage, and at the same time, to underscore the necessity for resistance and struggle for freedom at all times. At its core is the presence of deeply connected web of human relations across time and geographic space, which at the micro syntactical level is signaled by the poet’s refrain of “I am born” in the present tense. Here is Jacqueline Woodson’s poem:

I am born on a Tuesday at University Hospital Columbus, Ohio, USA—
a country caught

between Black and White.

I am born not long from the time
or far from the place
where
my great-great-grandparents
worked the deep rich land
unfree
dawn till dusk
unpaid
drank cool water from scooped-out gourds
looked up and followed
the sky’s mirrored constellation
to freedom.
I am born as the South explodes,
too many people too many years
enslaved, then emancipated
but not free, the people
who look like me
keep fighting
and marching
and getting killed
so that today—
February 12, 1963
and every day from this moment on,
brown children like me can grow up
free. Can grow up
learning and voting and walking and riding
wherever we want.

I am born in Ohio but
the stories of South Carolina already run
like rivers
through my veins. (Woodson, 2016, p. 1–2)

My main objective in assigning this poem was to get my students to think through their
own personal histories, lived experiences at the same time as they attempt to go beyond the
limits of their individual perspective, in order to map out and trace the contours of a more global
structure of feeling (cognitive mapping). As usual, I preface the final writing task by first close
reading the poem in class, scaffolding and discussion. I then asked my students to model
Woodson’s poem as they think about and write their own poetic narratives. The following piece
“May 6, 2008” was written by Sara:

I am born on a Tuesday at Sihat hospital
Swat valley, Mingora
Pakistan
A country almost to be torn
Between Taliban and Education
I am born not far from the place
Or distant from the time
Where children as young as five
Sit in dark dim rooms
Forced to work
Weaving intricate designs into cloth
Pound on for the one mistake their tiny
Fingers will make
Unfree
Uneducated

I am born as crime attacks the world

Before the November terrorist attack in Mumbai
In between the time cyclone Nargis kills
More than 138,000 in Myanmar
Right after the South Ossetia war
And just as Malala Yousafzai is shot
For her love
Of
Education

The boom is echoed around the world
People realizing the conflict
Awareness uprising so that today—
May 6, 2008
And every day from this moment on,
Children like me will feel
The freedom to roam the school hallways,
To grasp a pencil, clench a book
And get the education we strive for

I am born in Pakistan
But the stories of the struggles
For freedom and education
Thud at my heart like raindrops
Dropping into a puddle.

Stylistically modeled after Woodson’s, Sara’s poem is profoundly personal and yet
global, situating the birth of the speaker in the larger context of South Asian, Middle Eastern and
East European experiences of war, poverty, child labor, unfreedom, disenfranchisement and
patriarchal subjugation of women. She charts her personal history in relation to those of children
her age living in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Georgia, and Myanmar: “Where children as young
as five / Sit in dark dim rooms / Forced to work.” Sara does not shy away from juxtaposing her
relatively privileged status with, for examples, children her age that are denied the right to
education under the Taliban regime: “just as Malala Yousfzai is shot / For her love / Of / Education”; children whose lives are torn by terrorist attacks, civil wars, or natural disasters:

Before the November terrorist attack in Mumbai
In between the time cyclone Nargis kills
More than 138,000 in Myanmar
Right after the South Ossetia war

As we have seen, Woodson’s articulation of her individual ethos is inseparable from the larger American history of slavery and Jim Crow apartheid. Likewise, Sara inserts her personal narrative in the collective stories of transindividual, transboundary and cross-cultural affinities and solidarity. From this perspective, Sara’s narrative, however, gives voice to cultural alterity, that is, to marginalized subjects that might not have been in the spotlight long enough, for they reside in the Global South. Sara’s heart-rending story nevertheless ends on a hopeful note, especially in the last two stanzas.

Influenced by Woodson’s effective use of present tense in her anaphoric “I am born,” Sara’s arrival in the world is also announced in a way that disrupts our facile conception of history as something belonging in the past: “I am born on a Tuesday at Sihat hospital.” For Sara, past history is present, but the present is also historical: in actively confronting past and present oppression, the poem manages to gesture at a more free, human future where

Children like me will feel
The freedom to roam the school hallways,
To grasp a pencil, clench a book
And get the education we strive for

What her poem dramatizes then is the sheer prevalence of violence: therefore, Sara is born and reborn anywhere where there is oppression, discrimination and unfreedom. This is the collective content of that present tense that contains a multitude of children. Her letter is to the world; its inception steeped in sheer local particularity (i.e., “I,” “Tuesday,” “Sihat hospital,”
“Swat valley,” “Mingora,” “Pakistan,”) spirals out to sheer global universality (e.g., “not far from the place / Or distant from the time”; “I am born as crime attacks the world”; “Children like me will feel / The freedom”); but it is a universality that never forgoes the particularity that flows in its veins:

I am born in Pakistan
But the stories of the struggles
For freedom and education
Thud at my heart like raindrops
Dropping into a puddle.

What seems to be a free verse poem at the first glance, through a deeper analysis, reveals itself as a visual narrative poem that expresses the stories of the multitude couched in the unique and particular narrative of the individual: it is both individual and transindividual at the same time; national and international; historically specific and yet universal. She sees a whole world in her home country of Pakistan, but she also sees Pakistan in the larger context of the world: “The boom is echoed around the world.” This “boom,” Sara shows us, is made up of the cries of struggle of millions of children “For freedom and education,” which “Thud at my heart like raindrops / Dropping into a puddle.”

Themes emerging from narrative analysis

The participants’ personal narratives during the practitioner inquiry phase provide a more robust description of the extent to which students have been able to incorporate key elements of cognitive mapping and narrative competence, as conceptualized in this study. Having carefully read and analyzed forty-eight narratives crafted by all 12 emergent bilinguals, I identified the following four themes across all of them: (a) perceiving and mapping spatial dimension; (b) perceiving and mapping temporal dimensions; (c) connecting the personal to the social; and (d)
regaining voice and agency. Table 5.2 summarizes the codes and their associated emerging themes for this section.

**Table 5.2**
*Codes, Categories, and Themes (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000 and Fairclough, 1992)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes (with subcodes in parenthesis)</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Connecting personal lives (lived experience) to the historical events (history of the world)</td>
<td>connecting the personal to the social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Differentiating between the time of the story and the narrative time.</td>
<td>perceiving and mapping temporal dimensions (narrative time; story time; gradual progression of time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Connecting past to the present, and present to future.</td>
<td>perceiving and mapping temporal dimensions (narrative time; story time; gradual progression of time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Showing gradual progression of time using various tenses (i.e., simple present, present progressive, simple past, and simple future tense)</td>
<td>perceiving and mapping temporal dimensions (narrative time; story time; gradual progression of time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Making geographical connections between US (the country they immigrated) to their home countries.</td>
<td>perceiving and mapping spatial dimension (cognitive mapping, geographical connection between home and US, mapping out their own social stance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Mapping out their own social stance.</td>
<td>perceiving and mapping spatial dimension (cognitive mapping, geographical connection between home and US, mapping out their own social stance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Using agentive structures (e.g., as I, myself)</td>
<td>regaining voice and agency (Structures denoting agency (Fairclough, 1995) (agentive structures and active voice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Choosing their own nuanced form of narrative (linear, non-linear, descriptive, visual)</td>
<td>regaining voice and agency Type of the narrative (linear; non-linear, visual, descriptive, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following sections, I describe each of the four emerging themes in detail.

**Theme One: Perceiving and Mapping Spatial Dimension**

In the writing tasks I have specifically developed for my emergent bilinguals, my aim, however obliquely, was to elicit a kind of narrative meditation on spatial displacement. Focusing on the associative concept of “home,” whether implicitly or explicitly, allowed the students to
cognitively map their complex perception of spatial discontinuities inherent to the experience of migration.

For example, Howin’s sense of “home,” as we have seen, is spatially inflected such that it becomes a global concept for him: it includes not only a sense of geographic dislocation from China to the US but also a specific sense of psychological and emotional displacement. This last nevertheless allows him to narratively explore and realize the various affective associations of home: it is the place where he can “cry in my grandmother’s hug and get chased by the chickens,” but also the place where his playful dog George lives. The perception of home at stake here is also mediated by Howin’s awareness of his social class: “it’s not just about how big the house is or how nice it’s [sic] furniture inside.”

Likewise, the assignment has allowed Sara to re-discover “Pakistan, my homeland” both spatially and emotionally in a park in New York: “A park full of happy colours.” The narratively couched process of cognitive mapping here allows Sara to vividly summon up and re-experience the affective structure of the rural milieu of her past life (“the most fascinating part, every day waking up and watching Grandpa milk the cows”) and its cascading personal associations (e.g., the landscape, her grandfather, visual and olfactory elements). What Sama’s narrative demonstrates is an astute, albeit implicit, reconceptualization of the notion of “home,” which is situated in but at the same time transcends its spatial coordinates. For Sama then home is not an essentialist category, but rather a relational if not a global one. Home is where she can “[run] around like crazy, barefoot, letting the soles of my feet meet with the lush and tall bright green grass as I jumped freely in the air.” It is this spatial dynamic forged in the unique temporal crucible of narrative form that enables Sama to reflect on, map and remap the outlines as well as the content of what home means to her.
Rafe’s personal narrative, similarly, doubles as a form of spatial mapping (his representation of displacement from Mexico to the US) that nevertheless seems to be interlocked with a nascent awareness of the global commodity market. Although the sociocultural content of immigration seems to present itself at first glance only in terms of access to commodities (“a pair of a new Yeezy boost shoes”), Rafe’s narrative reveals an emergent critical perception about the family finances. From a self-centered, if not callous, disregard for the needs of others (“I knew my father had at least 500 dollars in his bank, I told him that it was only $230”), Rafe manages to come to terms with the reality of migration. It is cognitively re-coded as a movement of international labor force across borders: “I know landscaping under sun for long hours is very difficult and that’s what my dad do [sic] for living. He works hard.”

Sara’s narrative poem rhythmically modulates from the national place of her birth (“Sihat hospital / Swat valley, Mingora / Pakistan”) into the transnational connections she compellingly explores (e.g., “Mumbai,” “Myanmar,” “Georgia”). Her increasingly global vision, therefore, soars from the local specificity of “Sihat hospital” to the national and, from there, international sites of devastation, violence, oppression, and resistance. Sara’s cognitive mapping then allows her to establish transboundary spatial affinities with several other nations. The specific narrative rhythm and sequence here is symmetrical in that the last stanza stands as the mirror image of the first. Except what emerges between the two is a certain sense of recognition and reversal. The former arises in the narrative awareness of transnational connections, build around trauma, that transcend local differences. And the latter appears in the narrative turn away from excessive emotional investment in the space of the regional towards an enlargement of the speaker’s spatial horizons by encompassing the whole world: “The boom is echoed around the world.” Therefore, while Woodson’s brilliant rhapsody of collective resistance remains trapped within the national
context of the U.S., Sara’s spatial perception—structured by the displacement inherent to the experience of migration—is necessarily global in perspective.

**Theme Two: Perceiving and Mapping Temporal dimensions**

Time and space are inextricably linked. Given such an intimate connection between narrative and time, I also explore the specific ways students have represented time and temporal (dis)continuities as such as well as the way in which they have embedded temporal markers in the narratives.

Howin, for example, clearly has a satisfactory grasp on the verb tenses; he knows how to use simple past to refer to past events. This is apparent, for instance, in the second paragraph, which nevertheless opens with, “My house in China *is* [emphasis added] rudimentary.” The past tense, however, seems to be the more appropriate choice here: “My house in China *was* [emphasis added] rudimentary.” Teachers would often chalk this mistake up to carelessness or a typo and move on. Considered more closely from the larger temporal matrix of narrative inquiry, however, this crucial verb in the present tense suggests an ambivalent meditation on time: from his present moment of writing in the U.S., for Howin, the notion of home oscillates between China and the U.S. This is where we can (and should) take seriously the selection of *is* (rather than *was*) as well as the deep spatial displacement with which it renders the combinational axis of *house* and *China* in temporal terms. What Howin’s narrative seems to suggest, therefore, would be that to all intents and purposes he still *has* a house in China—that is, he *might* go back.25 What this narrative demonstrates is that he is still working through and modulating his spatial displacement and indeterminacy by way of temporal representation and control. It is, I

---

25 A possibility that is further reinforced by his narratorial confession and parents’ revealing questions: “I honestly wanted to go back to China for the first 1 year of my American life and I’ve never talked about it with my parents but they do constantly ask me if I like America or not.”
would argue, pedagogically irresponsible if we read such moments merely as errors without paying attention to their repressed content.

Sama’s narrative is a stylistic depiction of multiple temporalities that resonate with spatial associations, which are, in turn, triggered by a sensory code: namely, cow dung, or, as she puts it, “cow poop.” This is the main idea of the lesson we had worked on in class: namely, a personal meditation on involuntary rush of memories about “home” triggered by a particular smell. Yet for Sama, it is more specifically a form of quasi-synesthesia (i.e., a blending of sound and smell) that telescopes and disjoints the temporal modality of her otherwise linear narrative: “‘Moo, Moooo,’ the smell arose from cow poop. . . . Now instead of sitting in the car, I felt myself being carried to green grassy fields with all types of farm animals.” Sama’s carefully organized “memory moment,” however, is the narrativization of her personal history and the development of her own individuality. The retrospective lens of her narrative evokes a particular scene from her childhood, which, in turn, reanimates her desire for what is none other than personal growth. In other words, written from the twilight of childhood, Sama’s narrative becomes a medium for her to work through and articulate her desire for growing up, for adolescence, at the core of which lies the ultimate encounter with time as becoming, i.e., change. Yet, the trauma of migration disarticulates the linear logic of such personal growth. Sama’s “memory moment,” then oscillates between the carefree childhood of “crazy, barefoot . . . jump[ing] freely in the air,” and a relentless desire for growing up: “When you get older . . .”

In contrast to Sama’s narrative, in which the past has a special hold on the present, for Rafe it is the present moment in terms of which the past is summoned up. Rafe’s life experiences in Mexico before migration are reduced to an adverbial phrase, if not evaporate completely: “back in Mexico before moving to US.” No sooner is this before enunciated than it is subsumed
under the *after* of migration: “One morning after I immigrated to US.” In other words, the causal, sequential progression of narrative time collapses into the atemporal presence and fetishization of the advertisement: “a pair of a new Yeezy boost shoes that was just released by Adidas.” Rafe’s retrospective narrative condenses a quasi-coming-of-age tale, which nevertheless eclipses his Mexican years in favor of the American ones. Yet Rafe soon turns back the spatial atemporality of the commercial into temporal progression, such that his life in the US reveals its proper causal relations. First is the ritualistic moment of temporal (and personal) transformation: namely, his sixteenth birthday. At that point in time, Rafe sees things anew: “the Yezys weren’t as shiny as sun anymore.” Yet, as I have previously discussed, narrative shares its etymological root with *knowing*. It is, therefore, the temporal progression toward the second moment of recognition that is crucial:

I now know that I just wasted my father’s time and money just to get a pair of useless and catchy shoes. I know landscaping under sun for long hours is very difficult and that’s what my dad do [sic] for living. he works hard.

In Sara’s narrative poem, historical development figures in terms of a synchronic simultaneity that demystifies the notion of history as simply past: “I am born not far from the place / Or distant from the time.” At stake is a specific form of archeology of time and micro narratives of oppression which nevertheless coalesce into the grand narrative of resistance and of freedom:

But the stories of the struggles  
For freedom and education  
Thud at my heart like raindrops  
Dropping into a puddle.

Her use of present tense adds significantly to the sense of urgency embedded in her poem.

In reprocessing these narratives, in a certain sense, home is no longer the distant, geographic locality my emergent bilinguals have left behind. Rather, it has a temporal core that
emphasizes a higher consciousness of the past as well as its presence. In this sense, an emergent bilingual’s “error” in using the present tense to refer to an event in the past must not be understood in only mechanical, syntactical terms. It is, however, the larger temporality of narrative form as such that endows such syntactical “mistakes” with meanings and requires that we restore to them the larger context and trauma of migration, which is far from merely past. It is nevertheless very much a present part of their lives. It is through the subjective reconstruction and reconstitution of the pastness of home and its presence that students can cognitively map and explore the reciprocal relation between time and space as they are imaginatively turned into one another.

Theme Three: Connecting the Personal to the Social

These narratives draw their power from the ways in which the participants chart a gradual recognition and interrelation of the existential level of individual lived experience with that of a social if not collective being. This level of sociality is either represented directly as in Sara’s eloquent suturing of the destiny of the unique individual to that of the social group best dramatized in the last stanza; or indirectly through representing the desire for sociality in terms of its absence. The glaring omission of the milieu in Howin’s description of his life in the US should be understood in this way. For the narrative is only populated by his grandmother, the chickens, George, and abstract references to his parents. School, as a crucial site of sociality, is mentioned only once in passing in regard to his home in China: there, other children are kept at bay behind the passive structure: “No matter what day I had in school or what attitude I was thrown at . . . .” Further emphasizing his alienation in the U.S., Howin completely precludes the site of the school from his narrative. The loneliness and alienation Howin experiences in the

---

26 Howin’s “My house in China is rudimentary”; Sama’s recourse to present participle in the temporal shifts in which she is describing her grandfather’s farm; and Sara’s “I am born on a Tuesday at University Hospital.”
U.S., for example, is more effectively captured in terms of his representation of sociality in absence. While he explores the idea of “home” in his narrative in terms of the associations of “My house in China,” “the house in the US” (note the lack of possessive modifier in the latter) scarcely feels like a home: at least, not until 10pm when his parents return “home” from work. Nor can he find traces of the sociality he is seeking by “numb[ing] myself with videos that have no meaning.” For it is the love, intimacy, and care of his grandmother that echoes in her absence.

Similarly, for Sama, the bliss of rural life and landscape is inseparable from its associations with family and personal growth, this last indicating and expansion of her sense of self, transcending the tight-knit threshold of family into the realm of the social with which her narrative opens:

As we got closer and closer, I made out a whole picture of children swinging on swings and parents sliding on the slides with their little ones. There were kids who were on the monkey bars, their bodies twisting about, as they grasped one bar after the other. From the right window of the car to the left, I was peering outside overcome with so much joy.

Here, in the “picture of children swinging” and “their bodies twisting about” we discover the manifest social content of the joy Sama relives in her “dream moment.” What animates her, way before she hears the cows mooing, is the spirit of sociality embodied in her description of the playground, of which we, along with her, catch a timely glimpse: “I was peering outside overcome with so much joy.” That she soon gets carried away by a dream-vision to a land far, far away; that she ends up exploring the farm rather than the playground; that is an imaginative detour to sociality experienced by perhaps every migrant child whose first language must henceforth be uttered socially through the defamiliarizing medium of translation: “ﮫﻨﯿﻣ” which meant, “Sweetie.”

---

27 See Theme Two above.
Similarly, only by the end of Claude McKay’s poem do we discern the affinity between the transplanted avocado in the shop window and the alienated Jamaican staring at it from the outside; likewise in Rafe’s narrative, we come to appreciate the ways in which the seemingly individual, if not private, consumption of a commodity is interlocked in the social network of production, circulation and marketing as well as the global movement of labor force form the Global South to the Global North. That is the exact direction from which avocados, coffee, Rafe, his father, and their family come to us in the U.S. as well.

Perhaps nowhere is the juxtaposition of the individual lived experience with the social totality more pronounced than in Sara’s imaginative adaptation of Woodson’s poem. The way in which, in a series of widening concentric circles, she traces the relation between the local place of her birth, Pakistan, and that of a global world is indeed productive of the kind of socio-spatial cognition in which the conceptual models of this study are invested. Not only has the dynamic of Sara’s narrative competence equipped her with the ability to map out certain aspects of her individual lived experience in relation to a social field that transcends it. Her narrative poem has also managed to build cross-cultural, transnational, and global forms of solidarity that would otherwise have been blotted out from the field of vision of the singular individual. Like Sara, who seems to be painfully aware of the extent to which one’s access to education is determined by one’s social class (“Where children as young as five / Sit in dark dim rooms / Forced to work”), the personal narratives of Howin, Sama and Rafe are all mediated by a heightened sense of their situatedness in a specific milieu.

**Theme Four: Regaining Voice and Agency**

It is true that, at level of the content of personal narrative, regaining voice and agency concerns the degree to which emergent bilinguals can initiate and/or determine the course of
their own action as well as express their own unique personality. But regaining voice and agency is also central to the level of narration, the kind of stories and the contexts in which they unfold. More importantly, from the standpoint of the narrative model of cognitive mapping adopted in this study, reclaiming voice here becomes an occasion to assert who gets to tell their stories. At stake here, however, is the double-burden of emergent bilinguals, for they need to work much harder than their “native” peers to reclaim the right to be heard in another, alien language, whose criteria of “proficiency” persistently reads them as deficient. This study, therefore, incorporates the crucial imperative of providing emergent bilinguals with opportunities to reflect on the narratives of other migrants and/or marginalized individuals as well as empowering them to develop and articulate their own unique voices. It emphasizes that they, too, have stories to tell (voice); and that it is crucial to tell them both to themselves and to others. Putting their comprehension of themselves and the world around them into narrative forms—and thus altering it—the emergent bilinguals can develop their capacity for new forms of identity and agency as well.28

For instance, Howin’s moving narrative of nostalgia and of loss becomes one of recapturing joy through forging an unlikely “friendship” with and affection for George. Thus, through the agency of narrative form, Howin not only reveals the spatio-temporal intertwinements between competing notions of what constitutes “home” for an immigrant, he also manages to craft a narrative of personal agency: “Home is the place where I always want to be” (emphasis added). Whether understood in stylistic or compensatory/therapeutic terms, one can readily recognize Howin’s conscious and unconscious preoccupation with reclaiming the idea of home even at the level of syntax: the subjective pronouns I and its possessive cognate my

28 This is one important sense in which I understand and have attempted to pedagogically adapt the process of narrativization in this study.
each appears in the narrative 23 and 19 times respectively. At syntactic level of the sentence, therefore, Howin uses a grammar that reveals a sense of agency and signals the assertion of his own active voice to the reader.

As I have demonstrated above, Sama’s nonchronological narrative functions specifically to revitalize her sense of self in the present moment by turning the symbolic signifiers of her daydream into concrete movements in life. Thus the narrative transforms the idle state of being carried by her father into self-possessed, agential participation in life:

I noticed my Dad had carried me from the car to the fence in front of all the animals. I wanted to get closer to the animals and touch them and feed them as I had in my Grandpa’s farm so, to the thought of this, a huge smile came upon my face as I swiftly took off my shoes and started to climb the fence—ready for some farm fun once again.

Moreover, embedded in Sama’s narrative, a polyphonous sensibility immediately makes its heteroglossic character felt: from the hubbub of children playing, to the noises the animals makes, onto the dialogic moment that summons the voice of her grandfather; Sama’s unique voice contains all of them. She has crafted her narrative as an assemblage of all these dispersed voices. The narrative articulation of her subjectivity, then, reasserts voice and agency as constitutive of her identity. The multiplicity of timelines in her narrative joins Sama’s heteroglossic encounter with and appreciation of her own specific situation as an emergent bilingual.

Likewise, Rafe re-discovers a version of himself that can rise above the fetishistic logic of the market, which relegates him to the role of a passive consumer. The pedagogical model of this exercise has allowed Rafe to reclaim agency through the process of narrativization—that is, he is able to ultimately recognize that the abstract level of finances is deeply connected to his father’s hard, manual labor. Thus, by way of a retrospective rearrangement of his lived experience through narrative, Rafe elicits a renewed sense of agency, which, interestingly
enough, breaks out of the prison house of the narcissistic ego in order to reflect on the needs of
the other people in his life. That is to say, Rafe’s narrativization of egotistical ownership\(^{29}\) (of the
sneakers) gives way to his owning to remorsefulness (“I feel bad”), which, acts as a precondition
for the possibility of self-conscious agency.

In her narrative poem, Sara symbolically regains and reasserts the agency she, and
children her age around the world, has been denied in the oppressive material world. This would
be one way of reading her effective refrains that reverberate throughout her poem: “I am born on
a Tuesday”; “I am born not far from the place”; “I am born as crime attacks the world”; “I am
born in Pakistan.” Sara, finds in her voice in the voices of millions of other children whose
destinies she sees as interconnected to her own. Such a subjective position assumes an
empowering sense of agency, which Sara nevertheless enacts by appealing to the element of
collective agency on a global scale:

And every day from this moment on,
Children like me will feel
The freedom to roam the school hallways,
To grasp a pencil, clench a book
And get the education we strive for

Following Woodson, Sara, too, astutely emphasizes the collective we in this stanza, for it
expresses both a sense of cross-cultural solidarity and alliance as well as a heteroglossic
worldview, which her poem seeks to dramatize. She is therefore able to universalize the social
imperatives of her unique intellectual and affective agency while developing a heteroglossic self,
who is unabashedly multivocal.

\(^{29}\) Rafe, at first, has no qualms about spending what to his mind comes to about half of his father’s savings on the
shoes.
Summary

In this chapter, I provided the rationale for the methodological shift from ethnography (Chapter Four) to practitioner research. Whereas the principal technique of ethnography—that is, analytical descriptions—allowed me to gather crucial data about the ways in which ENL education was carried out at the site of the study, the open-ended and transformative tendency of practitioner research, here mediated by the crucial insights of culturally sustaining pedagogy, enabled me to devise and enact a set of curricular and instructional choices and decisions revolving around narrative inquiry. In doing so, I analyzed 48 narratives crafted by emergent bilinguals, of which I have presented and discussed four in this chapter. Over the course of my analysis, four specific themes, which corresponded to different dimensions of cognitive mapping and narrative competence, emerged from the narratives of emergent bilinguals: (a) perceiving and mapping spatial dimension, (b) perceiving and mapping temporal dimensions, (c) connecting the personal to the social, and (d) regaining voice and agency.

Time, I would argue, is suspended in the synchronicity that is characteristic of analytical or argumentative writing. The narrative form, however, by virtue of its unique relationship with time, allows the latter to flow diachronically as well. This form of inquiry, therefore, presented an optimum medium for the emergent bilinguals to engage with time both at the level of sentence construction and syntax as well as the diachronic level of individual/collective history. The narrative tasks I designed and the personal narratives produced by the emergent bilinguals reveal a (un)conscious engagement with multiple temporalities in terms of retrospection of the past (home), their connection to their present situation of displacement, and anticipation of some future moment of reconciliation (e.g., Howin and Rafe’s narratives). This scarcely means that the participants produced narratives that were free from syntactical errors. Rather, what I found was
a heightened form of engagement with deep, psychological, and individual time as well as historical time (e.g., Sama and Sara’s narratives), of which the isolated syntactical slippages could be read as partial symptoms.

In addition to temporal markers, the findings foreground a nuanced, if not at times jarring, relation to space/place embedded in the narratives of the emergent bilinguals. I had developed the tasks in ways that elicited a critical engagement with multiple, discontinuous spatial perspectives. Almost all the students explored this disjunction in their narratives either under the thematics of “home,” or a cross cultural affinities. In the end, the findings suggest, the students were able to explore and express the temporal and spatial anchors of their multiple (linguistic and cultural) identities in these narratives. Tapping their rich cultural and linguistic repertoires, the students experimented with and reflected on the ways in which their liminal status as both insider/outsider might be indicative of the development of their voice and agency as nascent, emergent bilinguals. In retrospect, I could have done more to elicit and encourage a deeper, more meaningful engagement with their L1 repertoires, to be sure.

Finally, the students seem to have used their narratives as a vehicle to explore their relations not only with other times and places, but also with other people. That is to say, from Howin’s exploration of his relationship with his grandmother (not to mention his fowl-yard adventures) back in China and his struggle with alienation here in the U.S., to Rafe’s epiphany about his parents’ manual labor and family finances, all the way to Sama’s reconnection with her present mediated by her past, to finally Sana’s expression of collective pain and consciousness—it seems as though the emergent bilinguals managed to, more or less, express in their narratives specific dimensions of their unique individuality and identity in relation to the complex sphere of sociality of which they were a part and toward which they seem to advance.
CHAPTER SIX
“People in the Stories were Like Us”: Emergent Bilinguals’ Reflections

In Chapter Four, I described and analyzed the findings of the ethnographic phase of the study. In Chapter Five, I explored my findings in the first part of the practitioner inquiry, where I analyzed students’ narratives and the four themes that emerged from my analyses. In this chapter, I describe and discuss my findings in the reflection part of the practitioner inquiry, in which the emergent bilinguals engaged in sharing and discussing their thoughts on the engagement tasks and classroom inquiries.

Students’ Reflections and their Analyses

A major component of my practitioner research methodology was to provide a pedagogical space for the emergent bilinguals to articulate their rich cultural, linguistic, and literacy identities in narrative form. The holistic approach to literacy adopted in this study demanded that emergent bilinguals be given an opportunity to verbally reflect on their process of narrativization and yet again enact their voices and agency as they discussed the assignments, the subject matter, and their unique perspectives. I therefore made a conscious decision to include the verbal reflections of all emergent bilinguals who participated in practitioner inquiry phase of this study, so that the students whose narratives I did not present in the previous chapter would also have an opportunity to have their voices heard. This resonated with a core imperative of practitioner research which requires that pedagogical practice be informed by the reflections of participants, thus enabling them to become co-creators of knowledge and assume an active role in their own education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In this chapter, I describe and analyze the findings from emergent bilinguals’ verbal reflections on their narrative tasks during the practitioner phase of this study. The following research question guides my inquiry in this
chapter: What are the emergent bilinguals’ reflections on their own process of narrative production?

These reflections are based on corroborating evidence from the semi-structured interviews I conducted with the participants as well as my own notes on whole-class reflection and discussion. I carried out these steps after the participants had already turned in their narratives. Thus, I have been able to identify three themes emerging from their verbal reflections, which I discuss below: (a) “I felt important, not embarrassed”; (b) “People in the stories were like us; we are the stories!”; (c) “I wish this was all we did in all other classes.” Table 6 summarizes the codes and their associated emerging themes for this particular research question. I conclude this chapter with a further analysis of the emerging themes in relation to my theoretical framework.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes (with subcodes in parenthesis)</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergent bilinguals’ narratives as canon and the focus of class conversations</td>
<td>Centering emergent bilinguals’ narratives as canon</td>
<td>“I felt important, not embarrassed”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a space to talk about our immigration journey and its hardships (a space to listen to others’ stories)</td>
<td>Centering emergent bilinguals’ narratives as canon</td>
<td>“I felt important, not embarrassed”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a space to show our skills</td>
<td>Centering emergent bilinguals’ narratives as canon</td>
<td>“I felt important, not embarrassed”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validating emergent bilinguals’ home countries, cultures, linguistic and literacy skills</td>
<td>Affirming and welcoming students’ backgrounds (CSP)</td>
<td>“People in the stories were like us; we are the stories!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of belonging, respect and encouragement (not feeling judged)</td>
<td>Affirming and welcoming students’ backgrounds (CSP)</td>
<td>“People in the stories were like us; we are the stories!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being seen and validated</td>
<td>Affirming and welcoming students’ backgrounds (CSP)</td>
<td>“People in the stories were like us; we are the stories!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting to know the other cultures, languages and countries</td>
<td>Affirming and welcoming students’ backgrounds (CSP)</td>
<td>“People in the stories were like us; we are the stories!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing difficulties of displacement, schooling experiences here in US and learning a new language</td>
<td>Affirming and welcoming students’ backgrounds (CSP)</td>
<td>“People in the stories were like us; we are the stories!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical practices:</td>
<td>Pedagogy (negotiating relationships between CSP and existing language practices)</td>
<td>“I wish we did this in other classes, too.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing a text similar to our lives; (“People in the stories were like us!”)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wait-time/reflection time/ Multiple points of view on the topic/Questioning inquiry/Scaffolding/ Revising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme One: “I felt important, not embarrassed.”

A key component of my study during the practitioner inquiry phase was to elicit and examine the participants’ verbal reflections on the engagement tasks and the narratives they produced. Therefore, I engaged my students in two kinds of reflections, carried out after each narrative task: (a) whole-class reflection and discussion; (b) one-on-one semi-structured interviews. In doing so, we spent over 240 minutes engaging in whole-class reflection and discussion. I also conducted 48 interviews over the course of two months.

During the coding process, a theme that kept resurfacing (recurring over 12 times) was: “I felt important, not embarrassed.” After completing the first writing task, which was on Claude McKay’s poem “The Tropics in New York,” I had the students share their reflections on their experience of writing their personal narratives. The following conversation took place among four of the participants during whole-class discussion:

Rafe: I really enjoyed writing this story on home because it made me important, I was not ashamed of thinking about my past or my life here. I didn’t have to come up with big words or big ideas, it was just easy and pleasing (sic). I don’t enjoy writing about the character in The Giver.\(^{30}\) I actually hate the book right now. I don’t relate to Jonas\(^{31}\) at all. But this writing was different, like it was like reviewing my memories in a good way, not in an embarrassing way, in a cool relaxing way.

Sepideh: Well, I’m glad to hear that you enjoyed writing your story, Rafe! And I get what you mean about not relating to the character in the novel. By the way, when you say, “pleasing,” do you mean “pleasant,” or do you mean “pleasing”?

Rafe: Yes, pleasant. I enjoyed comparing my homes and hearing my friends’ stories. I feel kinda confident in sharing my life story which I am usually not that comfortable because it is not easy to talk about my past. I also heard my friends’ stories for the first time, it was kinda cool, I wish we did this in other classes.

Tahira: Yeah, me too. I don’t like talking about my previous homes because, you know, it’s kind of embarrassing. I feel ashamed to talk about it in other classes you know? White kids don’t get it at all, they just make fun of us, our hijabs or our outfits. But here, I didn’t feel embarrassed to write about Yemen, my mother and my siblings. I miss them.

\(^{30}\) The Giver is the title of the dystopian novel by Lois Lowry, which Rafe was reading in his ELA class.

\(^{31}\) The name of protagonist in the novel.
**Tabina** [Tahira’s sister]: I liked the topic but it was hard to start at first, so many memories to share. I don’t like to share my stories with other White kids. They always make fun of us. They give us that looks . . . You know? Like we don’t look good, but my father buys us new outfits every Eid but they keep looking at our hijabs like we are from another planet.

**Sepideh**: I am so sorry for what you’ve experienced. This is completely unacceptable, and you need to let a teacher/administrator know if this happens again. Every single one of you is an important and valuable member of the school community. You should never feel ashamed of who you are, where you come from or to make your voice heard. That is why your stories matter and one of the primary reasons why we all read McKay and I had you write your personal narratives: to make sure that you all have the opportunity to be heard. We also learned about our similar journeys as migrants, but also learned to appreciate the differences as well. We all have our own unique histories that need to be told and heard.

(04/30/2022, class transcript)

I had already provided each student written feedback in which I acknowledged their contributions, recognized their strengths, and made suggestions for improvements. After we wrapped up the reflection discussion for the day, Tahira and Tabina asked if they could stay a bit longer to ask some clarifying questions regarding the feedback they had received on their narratives. Throughout our discussion, they insisted that they would like to “get better” in writing, mostly regarding grammar and choice of words. They also discussed how it is sometimes difficult for them to think in English mainly because, at home, they speak with their siblings, father, and stepmother only in their L1 (i.e., Arabic). I also learned that their stepmother and father do not speak English at all. We had a constructive conversation on the process of learning English, but also of writing in English, especially after migration. I shared my own personal experiences of success and failure as well because I thought they might find it helpful to learn that I, too, had had my fair share of struggle with writing (I still do!). I also made a point of reminding them that writing is always a process for everyone regardless of their backgrounds; that one cannot get good at it overnight and it certainly takes some time to become a “good”
writer. We then talked about drafting and the importance of going through multiple drafts; that they should always seek feedback from teachers, and, finally, that learning, especially learning how to write well, can be a messy process, which is totally fine. The following conversation ensued as we were wrapping up our conversation that day:

**Tabina:** Thank you for sharing your stories with us. I feel better already. I’ll do my best for the next assignment.

**Tahira:** I feel excited for the next story. You know, I really liked hearing other students’ stories of home. It is better than Science, or Math. We learn about each-other’s culture. I didn’t know that my classmates are from nine different countries. That’s a lot of countries, and it’s great!

**Sepideh:** I am glad you enjoyed this narrative inquiry. It definitely is a learning experience for all of us. I am learning from all of you as well.

**Tahira:** yeah, I learned about Pakistani, Turkish, Iraqi cultures today more than I usually do in my Social Studies class. It is like traveling to other places. It’s actually fun. I didn’t know Zynah traveled to Malaysia. Miss, did you know we lived there for two years after we moved from Yemen? You know, because of the war in Yemen we couldn’t stay there any longer. It was not safe, but my mom and my two other sisters are still there.

(04/30/2022, class transcript)

What these reflections suggest is that the narrative task on “home” seems to have created a space for the students to engage in meaningful conversations with one another, in which they seem to have identified a common ground amid their different lived experiences. The reflection process also seems to have transformed my classroom into a safe space for the emergent bilinguals to talk about their experience of displacement, their vulnerabilities, and their experiences as marginalized students at Highgate. But learning from and of one another on these issues apparently does not have to be sad or depressing—it can be “fun.” More importantly, the narrativization of their experience seems to have encouraged the emergent bilinguals to express certain dimensions of their identities, and, as the put it, to no longer feel “embarrassed” by it. Painfully aware of the sensitivity of these reflections throughout, I made a conscious choice of
sharing my story of immigration with the students. Talking about my own “cultural identity” and expressing my own vulnerabilities and insecurities, I thought, might encourage my emergent bilinguals to see themselves, however minimally, in their teacher. This might have served the purpose of creating a special bond between us, which initiated a deeper, more meaningful discussion among us. As Tahira’s, Tabina’s, and Rafe’s reflections demonstrate, they found their narratives of home “comforting,” “pleasant,” and “enjoyable.”

To take a case in point, the following recounts the reflections of Zynah, an emergent bilingual from Turkey. This conversation took place as part of my one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Prior to our conversation, that is, during the ethnography phase, I had spoken to Zynah’s ELA teacher, Jane, and learned that Zynah had already been labeled as “passive” and “stubborn” by her teachers. This presumably meant that she did not usually talk in her content area classes. As a result, I was quite concerned about this interview for I feared that it might put Zynah on the spot and further alienate her. With that in mind, therefore, I translated all the interview questions into Turkish so that each question in English was now accompanied by its Turkish translation. I also decided that I would try to speak with Zynah in Turkish first, as a way to ease the tension and, perhaps, establish a personal rapport with her. Thus, I started the interview by greeting her in Turkish, but she did not respond. As I was placing the interview sheet on her desk, I said to her in Turkish that I had made a copy of the interview questions for her. Here is an excerpt of our conversation where we talk about her narrative:

**Sepideh:** So Zynah, what don’t you tell me a little bit about the experience of writing your narrative of home? What was it like?

**Zynah:** Yeniden yaşadığımı hissettim [I felt relieved].

**Sepideh:** Seni ne rahatlattı? [What made you feel relieved?]
Zynah: The topic. That I was not graded and I talked about Turkey and the smells of Karnıyarık. You know what is it? Karnıyarık?

Sepideh: Of course I do! It’s a kind of eggplant dish, right? I remember, my mom used to cook it back home, in Iran.

Zynah: Do you like it?

Sepideh: Oh, I love it. Now that I think about it, it reminds me of my mom. Back to your narrative, could you tell me what was relieving about Karnıyarık?

Zynah: I liked reviewing my childhood memories and their smells. It gives me nostalgic feeling in a good way not a depressing way. I didn’t feel ashamed of sharing them with you. I also learned about my friends’ stories and their childhood memories. Like Nahid, My family lived in a rural area, like in a village . . . my mom’s village.

(04/15/2022, interview transcript)

As expected, the whole-class reflection sessions and the interviews provided some revealing insights into the lived experiences of my emergent bilinguals’ at Highgate: namely, experiences that ranged from embarrassment (e.g., feeling shame, being judged in their ELA classes), to difficulties with learning a new language (e.g., Tabina and Tahira’s conversation after the class), to their struggles and personal histories (e.g., Zynah’s reflections on her mom’s village; Tabina’s and Tahira’s experiences as Muslim students), and finally, to their rich linguistic and cultural repertoires (i.e., Zynah’s code-switching).

Student reflections, I believe, underscore the practical implications of this study: namely, that the narrative inquiry as well as the reflection sessions can effectively re-center emergent bilinguals personal histories, acknowledge their lived experiences, and affirm their voices, which had hitherto been marginalized, if not suppressed, by the curriculum and various pedagogical practices in their content area classes. Moreover, the reflections illuminate the extent to which

32 From here on, Zynah switches to English for the rest of the conversation.
students’ literacy skills are intertwined with specific aspects of their personalities as well as their rich cultural and linguistic identities.

What has become clear to me is that the narrative of home, for instance, can provide students like Zynah, who are often labeled as “passive,” with the opportunity to assert their voices and prove themselves as extremely resourceful individuals. At first, Zynah was somewhat hesitant to speak English, thus opting to demonstrate her linguistic repertoire in Turkish (her L1). By acknowledging her L1 as legitimate (i.e., my practice of translanguaging) and providing her a safe, nonjudgmental space, however, I managed to have Zynah reveal her L2 (English) linguistic repertoires. Only then were we able to move toward a more dynamic and fluid communication. For García (2009), translanguaging refers to the complex, yet constructive discursive practices in which emergent bilinguals engage to make meaning. It has been argued that multicultural learning opportunities “allow teachers to observe, document, and learn about their students’ wide range of communicative practices” (Souto-Manning & Martel, 2016, p. 20). Likewise, I, as the inquirer, was able to gain a proper understanding of Zynah’s rich bilingual communicative skills and repertoires.

Theme Two: “People in the stories were like us; we are the stories!”

The second theme emerging from the reflection sessions (recurring over nine times) was: “people in the stories were like us; we are the stories.” Reviewing emergent bilinguals’ reflections, I realized that the process of crafting their personal narratives has created a validating learning space for them to be seen and accepted. For example, during a whole-class reflection session, following the second engagement (i.e., “Smells of Childhood”), Tahira and Tabina, the two emergent bilinguals from Yemen, decided to share with their classmates, for the first time,
parts of their displacement stories. The following conversation took place after I shared my own experience of migration from Iran to the United States:

**Tabina:** Do you have any family here?

**Sepideh:** No, I don’t. It is just me and my partner of 10 years.

**Hussein:** Do you miss your family?

**Sepideh:** Yes, I do, very much so. I have not seen them for eight years. I do miss them a lot!

**Tabina:** Do you talk to them every day?

**Sepideh:** Yes, I try to. We try audio and video calls but there is about eight hours time difference, which, sometimes, makes it difficult to get in touch every single day.

[Referring to the whole class] So, we just completed our personal narratives on “Smells of Childhood.” Why don’t you tell me about your writing process this time? How did you feel, what did you think about as you were crafting the story of the smells of your own childhood?

**Rafe:** I enjoyed writing it because it reminded me of my grandma’s smell. She always go out at the woods because we have to get woods to cook our food. She smelled like woods. My parents left me when I was young. At home my grandma always wakes up early in the morning at about 5 because she must cook for us to go to school. As I was writing my story, I even missed my grandma’s smell. She is the one that did lots of things that keeps me safe now.

**Tabina:** Rafe’s story is like mine somehow. I wrote about Yemen and our pink room which smelled like strawberry to me. I also wrote about the smells of our four different homes because we moved liked four times so far but for me, Yemen is still home.

**Tahira** [Tabina’s sister]: Not four! Five times!

**Tabina:** Oh, so you are counting Brooklyn, too?

**Tahira:** Yes, it was like a different country from here.

**Sepideh:** It must not have been easy, I mean, moving so many times. But, Tahira, what did you mean exactly when you said Brooklyn was like a different country from here? Could speak a little bit about the differences?

**Tahira:** It was so bad there. We were ashamed of ourselves at school because everyone made fun of us. My sisters and I were bullied a lot, you know because of our hijabs, but here people are like us, even in the stories. They are like us.
Tabina: That’s why we always skipped school a lot, like four times a week. So my father decided that we should move again. His friend lived here; they said there is a good school here so we moved.

Hussein: I liked the writing assignment because we are the stories and that’s different. It is not difficult. I wrote about the smells of my childhood in Iraq. I really miss Iraq. In my first story, I wrote about how I relate to Claude McKay. His story is like mine because pomegranates remind me of Iraq like McKay’s story of fruits from Jamaica. The thing is, the books we are reading in our ELA class now is just about White people. It makes no sense to me. Sometimes I am just lost, like this last novel, The Call of the Wild, is so difficult for me. Each page has like thirty new words.

Sepideh: “We are the stories.” What a lovely expression, Hussein! And so true! We certainly are. There are as many stories as there are people in the world, and every single one of them is important and counts . . . should count. I hear you, Hussein, and understand how frustrating it must be when you don’t know many of the words. But remember, as we have practiced before in class, we often don’t need to know the meaning of every single new word to understand the story, right? [Hussein nods, presumably, in affirmation.]

Mahmood: I enjoyed writing my story because I wrote about my anger. America makes us look bad. They make it look like all refugees are thieves and starving and poor but there are poor and starving people everywhere! They only show the bad parts and not the parts that I want to see. I learned the good parts today when Tahira shared her story of Yemen. Her story was like mine. When I went to school for the first time here in the U.S., the other kids thought I was weird because I have accent but I quickly learned how to hide it. But till today, my accent still isn’t perfect.

Sama: I think, for me, writing my story of “Smell of Childhood” helped me to work on my imagination. It also made it easy for me to travel back home to Pakistan through imagination without any stress. In reality, it is not that easy for us to travel because it is very expensive and risky. We kind of became the stories as we shared them in class. I was crying as I was writing my story because I was overwhelmed with happiness. It gives me hope.

Sepideh: I’m so happy to hear that, Sama! That you enjoyed writing your narrative and feel hopeful about it! Could you say a bit more on what made you feel more hopeful?

Sama: [She thinks about it for some time] I felt kind of respected. I was reviewing my good childhood memories. It made me hopeful because I learned that my classmates’ stories are like mine and I am not alone.

(05/05/22, class transcript)
This next conversation took place following the third engagement task (see Appendix A), “Orange Crush” by a Yiyun Li. Howin, a male Chinese student, shares his experience during an interview:

**Howin:** When I was writing my own story about a fake advertising, I noticed that I am not afraid of being judged. You know, my English is not so good, and I have an accent. This creates some problems for me in some classes, but this story was about a Chinese girl . . . like I am from China, too. . . . a Chinese girl who struggled with her desire of having this luxury drink, Tang. Not afraid to share her story . . . to write about it. She also writes really well. It makes sense to me, many families in China don’t waste money on luxury items such as Tang.

**Sepideh:** I understand, Howin. Allow me to share something with you: if you listen really carefully, you’ll see that everybody, regardless of where they come from, has a little bit of an accent; and that’s fine! I think that our accents are also part of who we are, and no matter what others say or think about, it is OK, we are OK. Now, can you tell me more about how this story, or the writing assignment, was different from other classes?

**Howin:** When I read in my ELA class, I have to repeat myself ten times because of my accent. That makes me feel embarrassed. I was not embarrassed to read my story here. Also nobody cares about our stories in China, we are just bringing Covid viruses to U.S. These things don’t matter in other classes. Usually in my ELA class, we read a novel. For example, we read *The Call of the Wild* awfully boring and then I write an essay. I don’t like writing essays. The story of Tang was like traveling back to China. The girl in the story was like me. When she said she was ashamed of her father because of being cheap, it reminded me of my own experiences.

(05/08/2022, interview transcript)

Something I had anticipated but scarcely thought would mark such a milestone in students’ reflections is the extent to which the discussion opened up a space for the emergent bilinguals to regain and assert their voices through the agency of the voices and reflections of their peers (that is, in addition to their own). Listening to and reviewing their reflections, I learned about their experiences of alienation (e.g., Mahmood, Tahira and Howin), of discrimination and being bullied (e.g., Tabina and Tahira), of poverty (e.g., Rafe and Sama); but also about their rich and multiple repertoires (i.e., linguistic, cultural and communicative), their desires for autonomy, dignity, and expressions of a shared humanity.
Moreover, incorporating these reflections in lesson plans and integrating them into our classes also serve concrete pedagogical objectives: namely, it shifts the focus and dynamics from the traditional, teacher-centered models to a more student-centered, all-embracing and culturally sustaining learning environment. Such a pedagogical-structural shift also has the advantage of positioning me, the instructor, in the place of a learner throughout the reflection sessions. This mode of inquiry created a Freirian (1990) pedagogy in which both students and the teacher were simultaneously learning from one another. That is to say, as emergent bilinguals were beginning to see themselves through the sympathetic lens of each other’s stories (i.e., “people in the stories are like us”), I was also gaining layered knowledge of their experiences both in the context of the U.S. as well as their “home” countries.

Theme Three: “I wish we did this in other classes, too.”

The third theme that emerged (recurring over eight times) from the emergent bilinguals’ reflections was: “I wish we did this in other classes, too.” This concerns my specific pedagogical approach and practice regarding various lessons. Specifically, during the reflection sessions, I was struck by the number of times my emergent bilinguals would emphasize that an important part of the learning process for them was the way I structured my lessons, incorporated scaffolding measures, contextualized the material, and made language input accessible. For instance, this is what Nahid, a female student from Mexico, had to say about the way in which I framed our lesson on Claude McKay’s poem, “The Tropics in New York”: “reviewing Harlem Renaissance period helped me understand the poem better. This is something that I need in other classes. I am lost because I don’t have the big picture” (06/04/2022, interview transcript). Sharing her reflections on Woodson’s poem as well as the process of writing her narrative, Sara said: “I think one thing that helped me write my narrative better was reading and discussing the
history of Jacqueline Woodson’s poem and the history of racism in the U.S. These big topics are discussed in my Social Studies class, but Mr. P assumes that we all know what racism is. Here, you described things in details for us like Harem Renaissance and the specific history of racism. I wish we did this in other classes, too. I want to do well in my Social Studies class, but I have a C now” (interview transcript 06/04/2022).

Sara’s and Nahid’s reflections reveal a crucial aspect of instruction: namely, the significance and practical implications of providing accessible and comprehensible input for emergent bilinguals while teaching content. Since these learners are primarily at different stages of language development, a key component of my lesson plans was to make the content rewarding, challenging, and yet accessible for them. The main objective of narrative inquiries, class discussions and students’ reflections was to affirm, build, and expand on their linguistic repertoires, their voice and sense of agency. I, therefore, paid specific attention to my own speech forms when modeling language use and/or conducting whole-class discussions. I made sure that my instructions and explanations were clear. I attempted to accomplished this by providing uncomplicated and accessible explanations, first, orally, and then visually in the form of guided practice. I also included translations whenever I thought they were needed. During the practitioner phase, I incorporated several different scaffolding questions into my pedagogy (see Appendix A). Furthermore, I made sure that each emergent bilingual was equipped with a bilingual dictionary at the beginning of the inquiry phase. We spent at least one class session reviewing various techniques of looking up words, identifying their word class, definitions, and locating examples in the dictionary.

Regarding my specific approach to teaching each engagement, I would always start with a lesson on target vocabulary items (building on/toward semantic competency) by pre-teaching
the blocking vocabularies and contextualizing them (building on/toward both semantic and pragmatic competencies). Another scaffolding technique I used was to provide meaningful, historical background knowledge on each text by bringing what is outside of the text in relation to the text (building on pragmatics competency). For example, before reading McKay’s poem, we devoted three class meetings (about three hours) to situating McKay’s life in its cultural, historical context. We studied McKay’s influence during the Harlem Renaissance; discussed the importance of this particular cultural movement; watched short videos on the art and music produced by Harlem Renaissance artists; reviewed McKay’s journey from Jamaica to New York and discussed the kind of hardships and struggles he might have faced living in the U.S. at the time.

Here is another excerpt of Nahid’s reflections in this regard: “It is great to hear stories of immigrant people like Claude McKay. I mean stories of hardships, but also of success. This makes me feel important because the media always says we are illegal or bad people. In my story, I wrote about this too” (06/04/2022 interview transcript). When I further inquired about Nahid’s own experience and the process of putting it into narrative form, she said: “Well, it was not easy at first. I wrote about my own nostalgic moment inspired by Claude McKay’s poem. It was an emotional moment for me. I wish this was all we did in other classes. Reading about McKay I now kind of understand his hardships as a Black man in the U.S. This helped me to get a fuller picture of his life. So when I wrote my own story, it was not only about missing Mexico or the fruits there. It was the story of our struggles, our living conditions back home. We lived in a small village without water. This is what I don’t usually discuss in my other classes” (06/24/2022, interview transcript).
Furthermore, in designing my tasks, I made a conscious effort to incorporate what I thought to be the most effective techniques from a host of various pedagogical approaches: namely, top-down and bottom-up processing skills (Fields, 2004) as well as culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017), among others. These approaches also informed my choices of reading materials and the process of designing the narrative and writing tasks. It was important to me to introduce “global texts” (Wissman et al., 2017) into the curriculum, in order to validate emergent bilinguals’ histories, cultural backgrounds, and multiple identities.

As I mentioned above, a key objective in refining my pedagogy was to help historically marginalized students regain their voice and agency: specifically, through their narratives and individual and collective reflection. At stake here is the kind of approach to instruction that enables students to see themselves as “knowledge generators” and “agents of change” (Freire, 1970)—that is, as active subjects who not only employ writing to generate critical ideas, but also write from a historical point of view, capable of reflecting on their narratives from multiple perspectives. Nahid’s reflection further foregrounds this crucial dimension: “So when I wrote my own story, it was not only about missing Mexico or the fruits there. It was the story of our struggles, our living conditions back home.”

Finally, my emergent bilinguals’ desire (“I wish we did this in other classes, too”) can scarcely be chalked up to deficiency or slacking—two common epithets they are readily labeled with. Rather, what this study demonstrates is that emergent bilinguals are primarily highly motivated individuals who, among other things, desire an inclusive curriculum that encourages them to make their personalities grow and their voices heard. Let Ana, a student from Mexico, have the last words here: “I am usually lost in my Social Studies because I am not good in it and
my English sucks, but here I understand history and the stories at the same time. I wish other teachers did the same” (05/11/2022, interview transcript).

Summary

A major pedagogical imperative of my practitioner inquiry rests on the necessity to transform the classroom into a space where emergent bilinguals could verbally reflect on their own language learning and lived experiences and narrative development. To do that, it was essential that I expand the scope of the semi-structured interviews to include all the eighth-grade emergent bilinguals who participated in this phase of the study, especially the ones whose narratives, for reasons of space, I was not able to include in my analysis (see Chapter Five). I wanted to ensure that all emergent bilinguals were represented, if only to have their voices projected and heard in this study. The findings of this phase, that is the participants’ reflections, highlight three emerging themes: (a) “I felt important, not embarrassed;” (b) “People in the stories were like us; we are the stories;” and (c) “I wish we did this in other classes, too.” The reflections illuminate the extent to which emergent bilinguals’ rich lived experiences and histories are intertwined with specific aspects of their personalities as well as their rich cultural and linguistic identities (i.e., “I felt important, not embarrassed”). Additionally, reflections of the emergent bilinguals helped them to see themselves through the sympathetic lens of each other’s stories (i.e., “people in the stories are like us”). This helped me as both the teacher and the researcher to gain layered knowledge of the participants in both contexts of the U.S. and their “home” countries. Finally, the reflections highlight the importance of providing comprehensible input for emergent bilinguals in content area classroom who are trying to make meaning of the knowledge and the content being presented in the “mainstream” classrooms (i.e., “I wish we did this in other classes, too”).

204
Before concluding this chapter, however, allow me to clear up certain confusions that might have arisen and put forward some clarifications about the nature of my practitioner inquiry. At no point over the course of the development and delivery of my narrative engagements did I intend to pit my own pedagogy against those of the ENL/ELA eighth-grade teachers at the school. My research questions in response to which I designed and implemented my practitioner inquiry should testify to this: namely, (2a) In what ways have emergent bilinguals encoded in their narratives key dimensions of cognitive mapping and narrative competence as conceptualized in this study? (2b) What are the emergent bilinguals’ reflections on their own process of narrative production? In other words, I wanted the students to focus on the tasks and the process of writing and narrativization. The point of the reflection segment was not to have my pedagogy critiqued by the students, even though I made sure that they felt free to do so if they wanted to. The point, however, was for them to reflect on their narratives. Nor was it ever a question of who is a “better” teacher, for in that case the winners would have to be Amanda, Jane, and all the other hardworking, caring, and dedicated teachers at the school.

Likewise, It would be academically irresponsible and pedagogically futile to compare, on the one hand, a mere two months of instruction in an after-school program with, on the other hand, the complexity, vicissitudes, and the onerous duties of a public school teacher over the course of a whole academic year. It is no doubt possible that own classroom practices would have been far more effective—and perhaps at times complicated—if I had the opportunity to attend content area teachers’ meetings and staff meetings several times a week, where teachers exchange notes and feedback about their students. Or, I might have been able to design and implement my narratives engagements more effectively had I had access to the school’s counselors, psychologists, and social workers, whose crucial insights into my students’ social
and emotional needs would have been invaluable. Recall Tahira’s comments above, who clearly asserted that she was not comfortable at all to talk or write about home. Such moments, no doubt, made for sobering reminders that I needed to constantly reassess and revise my curriculum and pedagogy to address the complex needs of my students more effectively.

Therefore, this study makes no pretense to have solved these issues or substituted the classroom practices of the eighth-grade ENL teachers at the school. Nor does it pretend to have achieved absolute objectivity in its findings either. By virtue of my position as a researcher, scholar, and observer as well as the theoretical and pedagogical imperatives of my study, I nevertheless was impelled to inquire into, identify, and interrogate those aspects of ENL pedagogy and curriculum that, based on my observation, could benefit from the insights of culturally sustaining pedagogy and multicultural education. That the curriculum and pedagogy in the ENL classes I observed were at times inconsistent with the ethos of culturally sustaining pedagogy is scarcely to be blamed on the individual teachers, but it is rather symptomatic of institutional and systemic framework of the public education in the U.S., which I discuss in Chapter Seven. I was not familiar with these alternative, counter-hegemonic pedagogies until well into my doctoral work, which is precisely another reason why I embarked on this research—that is, to raise awareness about these alternative pedagogies that may prove productive in the education and literacy of emergent bilinguals.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Discussion and Implications

One of the main empirical concerns of this study was to chart the curricular and pedagogical practices of eighth-grade ENL education at a public middle school in New York State. To do that, I needed to explore, document, and analyze how ENL/ELA teachers enacted the curriculum as well as how the ENL students worked through the demands such curricular and pedagogical requirements made on them as they negotiated the conflicting landscape of the school’s climate, culture, and discursive practices. Furthermore, given the historical marginalization of ENL students, I also wanted to design and implement a counter-hegemonic ENL curriculum that articulated its pedagogical priorities around the lived experiences, voice, and agency of eighth-grade emergent bilinguals. I wanted to find out, in other words, what a curriculum and pedagogy that seek to re-center the education and literacy of such marginalized groups could look like. Therefore, my classroom practices, framework, and challenges lay in creating a pedagogically safe and culturally affirming context in which the emergent bilinguals could not only read relevant, empowering texts, but also, by drawing on their rich linguistic and cultural repertoires, reimagine themselves and their worlds through narrative inquiry.

As a multilingual immigrant myself, I saw this study as a joint project with my students: one that seeks to rethink ENL education and literacy practices and hopes to bring about meaningful work towards “solidarity and coalition” (Paris, 2021, p. xv). The practitioner research methodology provided me with a unique, dialogic approach to work collectively with my students toward a more meaningful democratization of the curriculum and decolonization of knowledge. To do that, I chose the narrative form as the medium of inquiry, aiming to explore the ways in which this mode of writing would open a space for students to write by drawing on
what they know—i.e., what has been mostly erased from—to map out what they do not know. Just as narrative inquiry demanded that emergent bilinguals be attentive to the sociocultural, pragmatic context of their writing, I, too, had to consider in my analysis the social context in which these narratives were produced.

As I documented and analyzed their reflections, I learned about the participants’ lived experiences as well as their untold and buried stories. This was the phase that entailed a co-creating of knowledge with the emergent bilinguals. I learned that if students feel that they matter, that their voices and experiences matter; that if they are seen—in its emphatic sense—then their classroom interactions and overall performance would flourish: they may be more inclined to engage with the materials, participate in class conversations, and assume a more active role in the process of their own literacy and education.

In this chapter, I explore the three primary findings emerging from my research. I then propose and elucidate the practical, theoretical, and pedagogical implications of the study. I conclude this chapter by delineating some of the limitations of this study.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Curriculum and Instruction: An Ethnographic Analysis**

In the ethnographic phase of this study, I observed ENL instruction across all available eighth-grade sections at the school: (a1) an ENL stand-alone class for the entering/emerging level; (a2) an ENL stand-alone class for the transitioning/expanding level; (b) an ENL/ELA co-taught/integrated class for all eighth-grade ENL students, regardless of their proficiency levels. My findings indicate that in (a1) the teacher implemented a phonics-based curriculum; in (a2) the curriculum was based on Language Experience Approach (LEA). While the curricula in both (a1) and (a2) were scripted, the ENL/ELA integrated class followed a more autonomous, flexible
curriculum tailored to requirements of New York state standards. Therefore, the study’s findings during the ethnographic phase indicate that Highgate used a scripted curriculum for its eighth-grade ENL stand-alone classes. It has been argued that scripted practices promote a “one-size-fits-all” approach to literacy and that such “assumptions must be examined and questioned if we are to foster truly inclusive and equitable educational experiences” (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016, p. 28).

The study’s findings also suggest that the “one-size-fits-all” approach characteristic of the phonics and LEA instruction at Highgate bespoke a pedagogical and curricular tendency that was rooted in traditional and deficit-oriented approaches to literacy (Gutiérrez et al., 2009; Dyson, 2013; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016; Garcia et al., 2008; Paris & Alim, 2017). The findings indicate a marked disparity between the ways in which ENL eighth-graders were prompted to practice reading and writing in the stand-alone classes over against the co-taught/integrated class. For example, the same ENL eighth-graders who were prompted to practice, what is now considered outdated, basic phonics reading and writing skills (e.g., decoding, chunking, phonological awareness) in one class period were expected to read a complex novel (e.g., *The Giver*) and write an argument essay about it. Observing the lower-level stand-alone class, I found that phonics-based pedagogical practices tended to treat language in terms of isolated, decontextualized exercises, which revolved, in most cases, around spelling and word-letter associations at the expense of proper grade-level reading exercises. Even so, “[s]pelling should not be taught separately—it should be taught within the context of reading and writing” (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016, p. 134). For the higher-level stand-alone class, however, the findings suggest that reading instructions primarily focused on achieving
“fluency”—that is, reading was treated more as a pretext to practice speaking—rather than developing proper grade-level reading comprehension skills.

Moreover, the findings indicate that some of the curricular inconsistencies discussed above might have been more effectively addressed had the school schedule included a common planning time for the eighth-grade ENL and the ELA teachers to actually work together to modify and tailor their curriculum and instructions to the needs of their diverse students. This, I would argue, could have restored to the concept of “co-teaching” its genuine collaborative essence. Such a more meaningful understanding and practice of co-teaching, then, might go a long way in addressing one of Amanda’s (i.e., the ENL teacher) primary concerns—that is, the school viewed and treated the ENL teachers as auxiliary staff, rather than actual instructors.

The findings, therefore, seem to suggest a gap between the students’ proficiency levels and the curriculum and pedagogical practices in their stand-alone classes, which were not aligned with the curricular demands of the ENL/ELA integrated class. This curricular disjunction, I would argue, seems to be symptomatic of a larger, more structural inconsistency which positions the education of eighth-grade ENL learners at a crossroads of competing demands between NYSITELL/NYSESLAT state tests, the diverging pedagogies and curricula practiced at school, and the language requirements of the New York State Next Generation Learning Standards.

Furthermore, the findings seem to suggest that the eighth-grade ENL curricula at Highgate—in both stand-alone and integrated sections—tended to reinforce a more monolingual/monocultural approach and that they could have benefited from incorporating more global texts and literatures. This stands in contrast to the empirical research and pedagogical theories that understand reading as a social practice. For instance, Souto-Manning and Martell (2016) have noted that when they had students read books “that represent their interests,
expertise, and realities,” they were more likely to obtain a more accurate measure and fuller understanding of their reading” (p. 31). They also found that reading materials “about and by diverse minoritized people are beneficial for all children and are an imperative for all children as they develop as readers” (p. 31). For instance, informed by the ethos of transnational social practice and culturally sustaining pedagogy, Wissman et al. (2017) have developed a highly nuanced and effective model of “global literature,” which is highly relevant to the study’s findings. Wissman, speaking in the collective voice of herself and her co-authors, foregrounds the pedagogical relevance of the category of “global literature,” which, she observes, has the potential to “infuse teaching with a larger sense of purpose” (p. 1). Global literature, Wissman argues, must be understood as “a site of inquiry itself,” which is inclusive, contextual, and intentional (p. 7). But it has the pedagogical advantage of dispelling the “inaccurate view of a monocultural, monolingual United States as the only axis by which books could take on the mantle of ‘global.’” Crucially, she continues, global, multicultural literature seeks to demystify the “singular” model behind “what it means to be ‘American’” by, instead, restoring to it the plurality of voices emanating from “experiences, lives, and histories from other countries outside America’s borders” (p.8).

Likewise, the study found a particular ideological orientation in the curriculum, which closely intertwined with this monological approach to instruction. For instance, recall the ENL/ELA integrated class where the writing prompt “How can you become a good American?”—rather than exploring the diverse, multicultural, and heteroglossic category of “American,” as suggested by Wissman et al. (2017)—reverted to the singular model, if not class-specific, of what it means to be an American: that is, it implicitly reinforced a perspective and form of discussion that contained a host of unstated ideological contents, which Blommaert
(2005) underscores in terms of “underlying ‘deep structures’ of social behaviour” (p. 162). This is further emphasized by Van Dijk’s (1995) understanding of ideology as the “very specific basic frameworks of social cognition, with specific internal structures, and specific cognitive and social functions” (p. 21).

Furthermore, I found that the ENL pedagogical strategies tended to reinforce a more traditional teacher-centered model, in which control over meaning making, autonomy, and the production of knowledge remained primarily within the purview of the teacher. What is at stake here, I believe, is illuminated by critical curriculum theory in that it is not only the content of the curriculum but also its social structure (Young, 2014; Anyon, 1982; Bernstein, 1971; Apple, 2018), and the way knowledge is disseminated. The ideological dimension of the curriculum is further illustrated by Au (2007):

The concept of curriculum, therefore, also implicates the structure of knowledge embedded in curricular form—the form of how knowledge is organized and presented within a curriculum (Apple, 1995), as well as pedagogy—the intended form of communication of selected content. Thus the trilogy of (a) subject matter content knowledge, (b) structure or form of curricular knowledge, and (c) pedagogy are three defining aspects of “curriculum.” (p. 258)

The study’s findings also indicate that the content, form, and pedagogical aspects of the curriculum tended to downplay, if not devalorize, the ENL students’ linguistic and cultural repertoires. The consequence, as Ghiso et al. (2016) argue, is a pedagogy that reinforces the status of these learners as “perpetual foreigners”: “Educational curricula for immigrants are too often governed by assimilationist ideologies that do not consider the rich linguistic, cultural, and epistemic resources of students’ multilingual counterpublics” (p. 6). Equity pedagogy, therefore, can help reveal the nature of the hidden curriculum by encouraging teachers to raise questions about their own curricular practices and pedagogy.
Such views on and attitudes toward assimilation strategies are confirmed with what scholars have observed regarding literacy programs in U.S. public schools: namely that they strive to promote the dominant language, that is, English and its literacy practices through an ideological assimilation paradigm “whereby immigrants have to downplay their language(s) and cultural practices to ‘belong’ (Campano, et al., 2016, p. 57). A truly multicultural curriculum, however, is irreducible to a mere channel for assimilation. On the contrary, not only does it eschew such a rhetoric and practice, it seeks to empower students by tapping their individual and cultural resources as valuable, productive repertoires. Studies have shown that pedagogies that view students’ native culture and language as a resource, not an obstacle to overcome, can empower immigrant and refugee students (González et al., 2005; Nieto, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2010).

Perhaps one could trace the institutional analogues of these assimilationist, deficit-orientated, and monocultural tendencies of the curricula and pedagogy in what the study found to be inequitable distribution of school resources for the ENL students (e.g., lack of L1 resources, sharing instructional and testing spaces). As Banks & Banks (1995, p. 154) remind us, “The construction of equity in schools as well as the implementation of culturally-sensitive teaching methods are necessary to actualize equity pedagogy in classrooms and schools” (p. 154).

Therefore, a truly equitable educational setting is one in which all students, but historically marginalized students in particular, feel respected, affirmed, and welcomed. An important corollary involves the ways in which the school’s climate and culture as well as discursive practices frame ENL students’ identities. What I found at Highgate was a tendency to reinforce (alienating) discourses of othering. For example, ENL students were seen as “other” in ENL/ELA class (e.g., the ELA teacher’s rhetoric of “your students”). Such seemingly benign
rhetorical gestures, I believe, go a long way to produce and reproduce what this study found to be a form of institutionalization of difference at both pedagogical and administrative levels. The findings, similarly, indicate that the administration would often defer to the content area teachers—that is, would ask for their permission—whether they were open to accepting new ENL entrants in their classes. A crucial factor here, I found, was the teacher’s concern about how the new entrant might impact the class’s overall performance on state tests.

Finally, the study’s ethnographic findings demonstrate that the school could benefit from cultivating a more welcoming and affirmative cultural environment for its ENL population—that is, an educational setting where discourses of othering are not as prevalent. What is urgently needed, the study found, is a more genuine commitment to developing and enacting a multicultural curriculum that can provide emergent bilinguals with the opportunities to build on their rich cultural backgrounds, lived histories, and multiple identities; that demonstrates the schools’ commitment to racial, linguistic, cultural and social justice as a means to better understand the socio-cultural nature of literacy (Gutiérrez, 2008; Aukerman et al., 2017; Keehne et al., 2018). Creating such an environment has shown to support marginalized students socially, emotionally, and academically, hence resulting in a more equitable and just learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1996; Paris & Alim, 2017).

**Cognitive Mapping and Narrative Competence: Narratives of Home**

My findings in the practitioner phase of this study resonate with Jameson’s (1988) reminder that, “we have now come to be sophisticated enough to understand that aesthetic, formal, and narrative analyses have implications that far transcend those objects marked as fiction or as literature” (p. 351). The narratives of emergent bilinguals (See Chapter Five), therefore, seem to embody these real-life implications and significations. In this section,
therefore, I attempt to explore the study’s findings on student narratives in terms of the complex relationships among narrative competence, cognitive mapping, spatial and temporal coordinates of identity, discourse and meaning, and finally voice and agency.

The model of narrative competence I have attempted to develop in this study is closely intertwined with the conceptual model of cognitive mapping. Through their narrative organization of conscious and unconscious, spatial references, and figurations of “self” and “others,” the emergent bilinguals were able to, more or less, cognitively map their multiples identities—that is, to represent not only their spatial cognition but also their situatedness in a specific, geographic, and social milieu. At stake here, then, is a conception of identity that is both relational and spatially grounded—a kind of spatial cognition, however, that oscillates between the abstraction of “space” and the concretion of “place.” As Blommaert (2005) elucidates, “space can be filled will all kinds of social, cultural, epistemic, and affective attributes. It then becomes ‘place,’ a particular space on which senses of belonging, property rights, and authority can be projected.” He then goes on to observe that “identities often contain important references to space or incorporate spatial locations or trajectories as crucial ingredients” (p. 222). The findings seem to suggest ways in which emergent bilinguals’ narratives to some extent revealed the spatial coordinates of their identities. Furthermore, by cognitively mapping and tracing the perceptual and subjective field of their individual lived experiences against the larger, social thematics of displacement, the emergent bilinguals revealed their mutual mediations.

For Jameson (1988), like Blommaert, cognitive mapping has not only aesthetic and pedagogical implications, but it is also grounded in practical, revolutionary politics, a crucial barrier to which he diagnoses in terms of the emergence of the multidimensional space endemic to the process of globalization (or postmodern global space). The global spatial discontinuities
caused by this last, he argues, have made it virtually impossible for individuals to mentally map out the global social totality. Therefore, the dilemmas of “the enormous strategic and tactical difficulties of coordinating local and grassroots or neighborhood political actions with national or international ones,” Jameson argues, “are all immediately functions of the enormously complex new international space” (p. 351). The failure of our spatial representation of the social totality notwithstanding, successful cognitive mapping for Jameson is not a representation of some concrete utopia or revolutionary triumph, but rather it “may be equally inscribed in a narrative of defeat, which sometimes, even more effectively, causes the whole architectonic of postmodern global space to rise up in ghostly profile behind itself, as some ultimate dialectical barrier or invisible limit” (p. 352).

Therefore, in the ways I have adapted it, made it my own, and implemented it in this study, the process of cognitive mapping (a) is deeply intertwined with narrative competence—that is, the ways in which emergent bilinguals represent themselves to themselves and to others by exploring and expressing the spatio-temporal coordinates of their identities; (b) scarcely stipulates the presence of some positive, unproblematic, approach to identity in narrative terms, but rather leaves its marks, as described by Jameson, on those narratives of defeat, which nevertheless include what he calls the “play of figuration”:

an essentially allegorical concept that supposes the obvious, namely, that these new and enormous global realities are inaccessible to any individual subject or consciousness . . . which is to say that those fundamental realities are somehow ultimately unrepresentable or, to use the Althusserian phrase, are something like an absent cause, one that can never emerge into the presence of perception. Yet this absent cause can find figures through which to express itself in distorted and symbolic ways: indeed, one of our basic tasks as critics of literature is to track down and make conceptually available the ultimate realities and experiences designated by those figures, which the reading mind inevitably tends to reify and to read as primary contents in their own right. (p. 350)
In the narratives produced by my emergent bilinguals, the findings suggest that such symptomatic cognitive perception and “play of figuration” seem to have profoundly fused into, and were thus inseparable from, the spatial discontinuities generated by the experience of migration. Therefore, it is not so much a question of whether, for instance, Howin was able to “successfully” map his subjective position within the alienating structure of global social totality, as the fact that he has been able to successfully encode the experience of migration in certain spatial elements in his narrative. Embedded in Howin’s narrative, what we find is the condensation of the pragmatic context underpinning the reality of migration as well as the specter of some radically different organization of desire (e.g., the organic context of rural China vs alienation of New York) that turned his cognitive map into a profound signifying, identity-forming operation. That is to say, it is the way in which Howin’s narrative represented spatial displacement that makes George (i.e., his dog) a composite figure that evokes at once a sense of loss and plenitude (“he’s [sic] the one who made my US home home”) while recalling his affective framing of home back in China as a place where “I can always cry in my grandmother’s hug and get chased by the chickens.” Howin’s narrative, therefore, became a vehicle to work through his identity as an immigrant.

Although spatial considerations cannot pragmatically be de-coupled from temporal ones, the ways in which students conceptualized and represented time and temporal development/displacement in their narratives illustrate a crucial aspect of the narrative model I have tried to develop in this study. Narrative form, and by extrapolation narrative competence, presupposes temporality. Time, that is to say, or better yet, a particular perception of time (say, in terms of past, present, future) creates the condition of possibility of any narrative/story, but also of change. As Clandinin et al. (2016) insist “The dimension of temporality draws attention
to ways in which the past, present, and future of people, places, things, and events are interrelated—that is, always in temporal transition, always on the way, in the making” (p. 16).

For is it not the case that in creating a narrative we tend to represent past events from the standpoint of a present in time for a future audience? But time, just like space, constitutes a crucial component of our identities—that is, the unfolding of identity through history as well as the history of this unfolding.

But whereas in cognitive mapping it is the spatial dimension that predominates, developing narrative competence relies on recognition, representation of, and inquiry into multiple temporalities as well as the chains of temporal relationships and causality. Narrative competence, at its most basic level, figures in the way in which we give form to lived experience by representing temporal sequences and consequences. Temporalization of narrative and narrativization of temporality, I would argue, are two mutually constitutive operations. Time, or history can only appear in narrative forms, and narrative/history unfolds through time. Therefore, following Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I also recognize the temporal core of individual and collective human experience as such, but also the way in which narrative, reflection, and temporality are inextricably linked:

In narrative thinking, temporality is a central feature. We take for granted that locating things in time is the way to think about them. When we see an event, we think of it not as a thing happening at that moment but as an expression of something happening over time. Any event, or thing, has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future. (p. 29).

Therefore, my narrative engagements were designed to elicit and encode time on at least two levels: (a) time expressed at the level of syntax; (b) time expressed at the level of (individual/collective) history. The emergent bilinguals, therefore, responded to the ways in which the syntactic axis of associative linearity (i.e., sequences, verb/sentence tense), transcoded
in temporal terms of the narrative matrix, was always pregnant with multiple temporalities of history (i.e., consequences, past, present, future). As such, whereas the former can be said to be more a matter of mechanics and syntactical development, it was the dynamics, representation, and development of latter that constituted the core of narrative competence in this study. For example, the findings indicate that the particular narrative tasks that I introduced during the practitioner phase, coupled with my pedagogical practices in class, have encouraged the participants to cognitively, creatively, and imaginatively seize hold of and work through the trauma of displacement/migration by translating space back into time. Therefore, the development of narrative competence became a medium for the participants’ meaningful engagement with the thematics of space through time. This is precisely what Sama managed to accomplish by setting into motion spatial homologies—that is, between the park in New York and her grandfather’s farm in Pakistan. These spatial elements then were subsumed by the form-giving logic of her narrative, whose distinctively nonlinear mode of narration can now be seen as her attempt to make sense of the trauma of migration.

Sama’s exploration of her multi-layered identity in her narrative, at the same time, reveals the ways in which it is socially mediated. Likewise, exploring the identities and schooling experiences of working-class women, Wendy Luttrell (1997) makes specific observations about the power of storytelling that, I believe, are relevant to my discussion of emergent bilinguals’ narrative competence. Luttrell proposes the term “storied selves” to “delineate the processes by which the women arrived at their senses of selfhood and social identities” (p. 8). In other words, “insofar as the women’s stories are about the events and conditions of their lives, their stories are also part of their self understandings” (p. 8). She also underscores the profound connection between storytelling and the process of identity
formation—that is “how a story is told and how people define and defend their selves and identities promote each other” (p. 8). This last then allows her to recognize the “urgency” in women’s narratives as well as the centrality of retrospection in narrative reconstruction of how one’s past can account for one’s present social status. Finally, the notion of “storied selves” allows her “to highlight the emotional and psychological dimensions of selfhood and social identity” (Luttrell, 1997, p. 8).

Taking Dewey as their point of departure, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) elucidate the ways in which the categories of individuality, learning, and experience are socially mediated:

People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context. The term experience helps us think through such matters as an individual child’s learning while also understanding that learning takes place with other children, with a teacher, in a classroom, in a community. (p. 2)

Language and discourse, too, constitute key components of human social metabolism: “There is no such thing as a ‘non-social’ use of discourse,” argues Blommaert (2005), “just as there is no such thing as a ‘non-cultural’ or ‘non-historical’ use of it” (p. 4). Likewise, I would argue, there is no such thing as a “non-social” narrative—that is, even the most private and personal of narratives can articulate their individuality only against a backdrop of collective experience; otherwise, the concept of the personal would cease to exist. The emergent bilinguals’ narratives, therefore, acted as some kind of a laboratory, as it were, for experiments in which competing accounts of self, voice, identity, and their relations to societal structures were articulated and set into motion. The study suggests that the emergent bilinguals pursued, explored, and meaningfully engaged with the thematics of individual and the social in their narratives.

Furthermore, the model of cognitive mapping, too, involves a projection of spatial analysis to “the realm of social structure, that is to say, in our historical moment, to the totality of
class relations on a global (or should I say multinational) scale” (Jameson, 1988, p. 353). As stated above, Jameson’s conception of cognitive mapping has important implications for practical politics, which constituted a crucial dimension of my action research as well. An important component of my multicultural pedagogy was to provide emergent bilinguals with an opportunity to not only express their singular individualities, but also to see the connections between their individual lives and the collective destiny of humankind. Drawing on Barbara Johnstone’s (1990) astute analysis, Blommaert (2005) elaborates on the ways in which “spatial anchorings are crucial in the organization of senses of self and the definition of meaningful relations to others” (p. 222). This further illuminates the extent to which spatial components of cognitive mapping mobilized in this study can be said to have formed a centrifugal movement—that is, a narrative itinerary—that attempted to bridge the gap between the personal and the social.

I also found that the narratives participants produced, in one way or another, revealed a specific orientation toward sociality. This last can most visibly be seen in Sara’s narrative poem, but is more subtly represented in Howin’s, Rafe’s and perhaps even Sama’s narratives as well: Howin’s feeling of alienation in the U.S. expressed in the negative form the kind of sociality he desired. Sama’s heteroglossic narrative voice, her description of the children playing in the playground, and the affective state (“so much joy”) elicited by the thought of her absent extended family—they all reveal the social pole of her seemingly individualized emotional identity. Rafe’s narrative, similarly, foregrounds a nascent consciousness towards the way in which his highly individual consumption of the sneakers is bound up with the transindividual sphere of the market, his father’s labor, and the family’s finances.
Voice is highly complex concept whose genealogy, for the purposes of this study, reaches back to the notions of “dialogic” and “heteroglossia” (Bakhtin, 1981), voice and freedom (Hymes, 1996), and voice and power relations (Blommaert, 2005). For Blommaert (2005), voice represents “the way in which people manage to make themselves understood or fail to do so” (p. 4). This capacity, Blommaert does not fail to remind us, is socioculturally mediated in that voice becomes symptomatic of societal organization of power relations and distribution of resources: “An analysis of voice is an analysis of power effects—(not) being understood in terms of the set of sociocultural rules and norms specified—as well as of conditions for power—what it takes to make oneself understood” (p. 5). Similarly, Hymes understands voice as the synthesis of the freedom to overcome linguistic oppression as well as the expression of the freedom for an imaginative and satisfying use of language. The degree to which one can express one’s voice is therefore an index of the kind of society in which one lives: “freedom to have one’s voice heard, freedom to develop a voice worth hearing. One way to think of the society in which one would like to live is to think of the kinds of voices it would have” (p. 64).

Although Bakhtin was writing from the standpoint of literature in general and the novel form in particular, I believe (and I am not alone in this) that the concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia are fundamental to any understanding and development of the complex category of narrative competence. (What are novels but complex, artistic, and aesthetic narratives?) For Bakhtin (1981), voice is always plural (multi-voiced), heteroglot and dialogic, all of which are specific extensions of the concept of the internal dialogism of the word and language he has developed. The concept of heteroglossia, similarly, further complicates the facile and uncritical notion that assumes a monolithic, standard (national) language. For Bakhtin, however, heteroglossia is inherent to any language as such; it operates “within a language” and indexes
“the problem of internal differentiation, the stratification characteristic of any national language” (p. 67). Such multiplicity of voices, therefore, permeates the entire structure of language and signification, whether semantic, syntactic, or pragmatic, for language is socio-historically mediated: “This double-voicedness in prose is prefigured in language itself . . . in language as a social phenomenon that is becoming in history, socially stratified and weathered in this process of becoming” (p. 326). The findings of this study suggest that narrative inquiry can provide the students with a platform to express and explore voice, agency, dialogism, and heteroglossia as well as the ways in which these elements are socioculturally mediated, policed and regulated: here, I am specifically thinking of Sara’s narrative poem.

It is true that, at level of the content of the participants’ narratives, regaining voice and agency concerned the degree to which emergent bilinguals were able to initiate and/or determine the course of their own action as well as express their own unique personality. But regaining voice and agency was also central to the level of narration, the kinds of stories, and the contexts in which they unfolded. More importantly, from the standpoint of the narrative model of cognitive mapping adopted in this study, reclaiming voice became an occasion to assert who gets to tell their stories:

What things are said and can be said, how things are said and can be said, presumably is an integral part of the fabric of the community. If one wanted to maintain that fabric, one presumably would want to maintain certain whats and hows of saying. If one wanted to change that fabric, rend it or open it to a different orientation, one presumably would have to change certain whats and hows of saying. Saying, indeed, might be the aspect of life most within the power of persons in a community to change. (Hymes 2003, p. 98)

At stake here, however, was the double-burden of the emergent bilinguals, for they needed to work much harder than their “native” peers to reclaim the right to be heard in another, alien language, whose criteria of “proficiency” persistently read them as deficient. In the same way, Chase (2005) compellingly argues that
This combination of what, how, and where makes the narrator’s voice particular. Furthermore, when researchers treat narration as actively creative and the narrator’s voice as particular, they move away from questions about the factual nature of the narrator’s statements. Instead, they highlight the versions of self, reality, and experience that the storyteller produces through the telling. (p. 657)

The findings thus indicate that the emergent bilinguals, by reflecting on the experiences of other migrants and/or marginalized individuals encoded in my narrative engagements, managed to develop and articulate their own unique voices. Their narratives emphasizes that they, too, had stories to tell; and that it was crucial to tell them both to themselves and to others. Putting their comprehension of themselves and their conditions of existence into narrative forms—and thus aspiring to alter it—the emergent bilinguals, the study suggests, developed their capacity for new forms of identity and agency as well.

Sara’s narrative poem is an expression of a feverish individuality that is nevertheless punctuated and populated by a heteroglot discourse whose “boom is echoed around the world.” In every stanza the expressive “I” of the speaker is juxtaposed with the polyphony of voices whose inaudible cries nevertheless pierce through the narrative membrane: “children as young as five,” who “Sit in dark dim rooms / Forced to work”; the victims of crime; more than 138,000 in Myanmar,” who were killed in the cyclone, as well as Malala, to whose voices, struggles, and lives the speaker/Sara seems to have sutured her own:

I am born as crime attacks the world
Before the November terrorist attack in Mumbai
In between the time cyclone Nargis kills
More than 138,000 in Myanmar
Right after the South Ossetia war
And just as Malala Yousafzai is shot
For her love
Of
Education
In almost all the narratives produced by emergent bilinguals, there was a tendency to gesture at ways in which the affective life of the “I” can no longer be contained in the sheltering womb of the nuclear family. Examining the participants’ narrative, therefore, I found that there was a sense of enlargement both of the spatiotemporal boundaries of the self and of language. In Sara’s narrative, for instance, the individual agency of the “I” merges with collective history: the hour of Sara’s birth is announced on a world historical stage (“I am born as crime attacks the world”), before the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, in between the hurricane, right after the South Ossetia war and just as Malala is shot. Sara has temporally grafted her self onto the social, collective body. The leitmotif of “I am born” shows how society is constituted of individuals. Yet, under the staccato of the “I,” Sara managed to articulate the ways in which these very individuals are socially mediated, for the speaker carries in her chest “the stories of the struggles / For freedom and education.”

“People in the Stories were Like Us”: Reflections on Narratives

This study found that emergent bilinguals acknowledged the empowering potentials embedded in the narrative tasks I developed and implemented during the practitioner phrase (“I felt important, not embarrassed”). That is, these reflections underscore the necessity for recentering the emergent bilinguals’ voices and narratives in the canon to build a more inclusive, heteroglossic learning community (Paris & Alim, 2017). In addition, in their reflections, they expressed a tendency to recognize cross-cultural similarities, rather fixating on differences (“People in the stories were like us; we are the stories!”). This last also indicates that emergent bilinguals came to appreciate their identities in narrative terms, which resonates with Luttrell’s (1997) notion of “storied selves,” as discussed above. Furthermore, the emergent bilinguals’ reflections signaled the need for, perhaps, a more serious reconsideration of the pedagogical
potentials of narrative inquiry across disciplines and content area classes as well (“I wish we did this in other classes, too”).

The three themes I explore here are testaments, among other things, to the powerful and empowering medium of narrative, which throws into relief “what students can do” by “making sure that our teaching builds on their strength” (Souto-Manning & Martel, 2016, p. 21). These themes also speak to the importance of centering classroom practices around students’ “best interests, identities and experiences” (Souto-Manning & Martel, 2016, p. 39). They remind us of the degree to which our actions and interactions in classrooms matter if we are to have an emancipatory pedagogy (Freire, 2007), which aims at creating an affirming, welcoming, and all-embracing learning environment (Paris, 2012; Paris and Alim, 2017).

The students’ reflections, therefore, can be said to serve multiple immediate aims: (a) The reflections elucidated the ways in which the process of narrative inquiry became a productive vehicle for both practicing and experimenting with the new language (i.e., English) as well as expressing emergent bilinguals’ lived experiences; (b) they foregrounded the linguistic and content areas with which emergent bilinguals needed help; (c) the interpersonal and communicative nature of the reflection phase provided the emergent bilinguals with an opportunity to give insights into the complexity of their academic experiences at Highgate; (d) the reflections created a relational space where the emergent bilinguals further explored various dimensions of their own identities and those of their fellow students; (e) the reflections phase also served as an empowering communal space for the co-construction of literacy and knowledge, during which both the emergent bilinguals and I learned about each other’s lived histories. This also resonates with the insight that cultivating literacy skills is always a “dialogic and social” process (Souto-Manning & Martel, 2016); and finally, (f) the reflection sessions
created a sense of solidarity and compassion among and between us. As Campano et al. (2013) observe, “the common bond of participating in an inquiry community affords opportunities to build bridges across groups, from friendships, view those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds as individuals, and dispel negative stereotypes” (p. 324). They further argue that these reflexive communities “foster empathy and offer potential for positive cross-cultural interactions and relationship building through joint work for common community goals” (p. 324).

Moreover, narrative is argued to be a powerful medium for sharing, transferring, constructing, and reconstructing knowledge, experience, meaning, and memories (Bruner, 1990). Therefore, the reflection process served another integral role in my action-research, as I utilized emergent bilinguals’ actions (i.e., their narrative writings) as well as their reflections on their actions as a way of communicating meaning and processing language input (Polkinghorne, 1988) between myself (the inquirer) and the students. An important corollary of this point was that students like Zynah, who were labeled “passive” in other classes, here felt confident enough, if not empowered, to share their rich linguistic and cultural repertoires. That is to say, having realized that their cultural, linguistic, and racial practices were valued, the emergent bilinguals seem to have felt affirmed and began to engage in meaningful dialogues: “If students are not able to transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue as a process of learning and knowing” (Macede, 2007, p. 19). Likewise, Howin’s and Mahmood’s self-consciousness about their “accents,” Tabina’s and Tahira’s experiences of discrimination, Ana’s and Nahid’s stories of struggle with classroom content—that is, they all create compelling narratives that gesture to the necessity for meaningful, if not structural,
reforms of exclusionary linguistic practices pervasive in classrooms. These accounts seem to articulate the urgency of “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politely by cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitude” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 382).

The reflection segment of this study seems to have demonstrated that the emergent bilinguals were trying to re-discover their linguistic repertoires and their creative imagination through (symbolic) action (i.e., narrative inquiry and cognitive mapping): “the deepest intellectual resources in classrooms are the students themselves. And one of the most powerful ways students can share their knowledge, partake in their own education, and intervene on their own behalf is by telling their stories” (Campano, 2009, p. 244). At its core, therefore, the students’ inspired responses to the tasks and their re-articulation of that process were emblematic of a profound recognition on their part of the centrality of their own lived experiences, histories, and voices in their ENL literacies.

Based on my observations (as delineated in Chapter Four), the eighth-grade curriculum and pedagogy had scarcely anticipated nor incorporated such a communal module for the students to encourage a more genuine participation. The students’ reflections in this study seem to foreground a tendency on the part of the emergent bilinguals to claim their place at the center of their own education. Inspired by each other’s narratives/stories, therefore, I believe they evinced a more committed involvement in the process of meaning making and literacy, both of which were now shown to be socially grounded—that is, they transcended the four walls of the classroom and epistemologically charted the students’ journeys from their home countries to the U.S. In a certain sense, therefore, it may be said that these reflections both revealed and stressed
(in a more immediate way) the liberatory currents, epistemologies, and practices the emergent bilinguals had drawn from the narrative inquiries developed in this study.

Similarly, I believe the practitioner inquiry provided a space for me as a teacher-researcher to co-construct the emerging content/knowledge with the members of this learning community. If knowledge building is about creating and teaching meaningful knowledge, then, one could argue that the process of inquiry for the teacher–researcher is an on-going meaning making process. Campano (2003) understands this process as a form of “systematic improvisation” (p. 122). He further argues that “inquiry as a stance, as a type of spatial orientation, involves resisting the stifling urge to categorize in order to make room for the individual children themselves to more fully develop and articulate their own experiences so we can question our own, ingrained assumptions” (p. 117).

Significantly, then, the study’s reflections phase furnished an opportunity for the emergent bilinguals to learn about the unique historical background, racial and linguistic identities, and the journeys of their fellow students. This oral section, therefore, added another layer to the narrativization and cognitive mapping of the different individual lived experiences they had already explored in their narrative tasks; but it also highlighted the common grounds and points of similarity, through which it can be said to have raised awareness of the collective nature of not only individual experiences but also of literacy and education. This is also attested to by Campano et al. (2013): “the common bond of participating in an inquiry community affords opportunities to build bridges across groups, from friendships, view those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds as individuals, and dispel negative stereotypes (p. 324).

Furthermore, through these reflections, the emergent bilinguals placed their process of learning and knowledge production—here spurred on by narrative inquiry—under a special, comparative
lens whereby they evaluated and reassessed their performance and classroom practices in other classes, in which they might have been viewed from a deficit standpoint. Consequently, as we learn about emergent bilinguals’ complex and evolving epistemologies, we can better restructure our pedagogies and content choices to support them (Gutiérrez et al., 2009).

Crucially, though, these reflections foregrounded the ways in which the emergent bilinguals saw themselves as “readers, thinkers, citizens, and scholars” (Wissman et al., 2017). They also emphasize the necessity to listen to our students. That is to say, we as teachers, scholars and policy makers “need to listen to the desires and hopes of students to read and write texts that are socially meaningful and that support critical inquiries” (Wissman et al., 2017, p. 142).

**Implications**

The findings of this study suggest ways in which narrative inquiry, as developed in this research—that is, narrative competence and cognitive mapping—can create a more culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy and class environment for emergent bilinguals. This study also provides a perspective on the ways in which narrative inquiry can develop language skills in ENL stand-alone and co-taught classrooms. The data suggest that emergent bilinguals can productively develop semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic skills through the medium of narrative inquiry. In what follows, I consider the pedagogical, theoretical, and methodological implications of this study.

**Implications for Practice**

Central to the task of becoming a more reflective teacher involves becoming an educational activist, who seeks to effect meaningful change by amplifying the voices of students, and fighting inequality in any way, shape, or form. The pedagogy and classroom practices I have
developed in this study constitute but one way of moving closer towards these goals. As a counter-hegemonic practice, it articulates its vocation against the deficit and essentialist perspectives and discursive practices that tend to de-emphasize the socio-structural levels of inequities in ENL education by attributing systemic, societal failures to individual ones. Rather than (un)consciously reproducing them in pedagogical and curricular practices, recognizing and addressing such structural issues is crucial, I would argue, in transforming ENL education from an apologia for the status quo to a potential platform for action and meaningful change.

Teachers must constantly advocate for decolonizing the hegemonic processes of domination and control in education: that is, to reveal and dismantle the hidden dimensions of structures of power and the ideologies that reproduce and maintain exclusionary and marginalizing tendencies in the curriculum and pedagogy of ENL education. At the level of classroom practices, we can think of ways in which we can reimagine current pedagogies: to make them more inclusive of different cultures (represented by emergent bilinguals) and their multidimensional literacy identities; practices that strive to mold the collective identities of emergent bilinguals as agents of transformation and change, both of their own lives, those of others, and their social milieu. This constitutes a crucial component of the counter-hegemonic pedagogy mentioned above.

The practice of narrative inquiry, as developed in this study, is but a first step in this direction. An important component of this study posits that a narrative mode of inquiry can illuminate the contextual coordinates of seemingly self-contained, closed-off spaces, texts, and sociocultural entities. The hegemonic curriculum is therefore also the story of how it became hegemonic; one’s identity is also the story of its becoming; change as such is always the story of how it came to be and to what it leads; the social context and forms in which and through which
these “stories” unfold are also the histories of these social contexts and forms. As Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) put it: “The story of one’s condition leads to the realization of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated, thus allowing one to stop inflicting mental violence on oneself. And naming one’s own reality with stories can affect the oppressor” (p. 14). In this study, I tried to develop and implement narrative tasks with which students can engage on personal and sociocultural levels: to elicit, that is, a textualization of history as narrative and personal narratives as lived histories; to empower emergent bilinguals to develop their own unique voices through narrative inquiry as well as their reflections on the process of narrativization. The following describes the pedagogical implications this study suggests for the field of ENL education and literacy:

- **Decolonizing the curriculum:** Incorporating texts that help emergent bilinguals review their lived experiences through their rich linguistic and cultural repertoires and subjectivities has not only therapeutic implications but should also be viewed as a decolonizing project (Diversi & Moreira, 2016). This practice goes beyond the mere “inclusion” of more relevant texts; it rather entails a pedagogy that is interactive rather than prescriptive; fluid rather than fixed; inclusive, affirming, and dialogic rather than assimilative, monological, and ideological.

- **Narrative as critical inquiry:** Central to cognitive mapping as a pedagogical instrument is the process of activating emergent bilinguals’ imagination and critical thinking skills through narrative inquiry by encouraging them to recognize seemingly separate entities as part of a dynamic social whole. The specific pedagogical implications involve reframing education/literacy to be more inclusive of the seemingly discontinuous, L1 repertoires of emergent bilinguals. This can help them see and seek connections among
these spatial and cultural disconnections/displacements—that is, to understand education not as a thing that is either only “here” (i.e., the U.S.) or “there” (i.e., their “home” countries) but rather a process that encompasses both “here” and “there.” This way students are encouraged to map out their individual positions—however minimally or imperfectly—within the bigger social terrain of society. By enabling them to express/narrativize such internal and external relations—and effectively contextualizing them—narrative inquiry can foster more meaningful relationships among emergent bilinguals themselves and their teachers, transforming the classroom into a dialogical space for meaning making as well as the production of knowledge. This, I would argue, is yet another form of manifestation of the kind of “critical consciousness” that Ladson-Billings (1995) has sought to cultivate under the rubric of culturally relevant framework.

- **Recentering the marginalized voices and lived experiences of emergent bilinguals:**
  This involves rethinking our pedagogical models, practices, and spaces. The first step, then, would be to turn the classroom into an inclusive locus that demarginalizes students’ voices and their histories. An important implication of cognitive mapping, which is central to the process of narrative inquiry in this study, turns on the politics of representation. It seeks, I would argue, to situate emergent bilinguals (as well as other historically marginalized students) at the center of their own literacy and education. Bowell (2016) argues that because of the ways dominants have treated the dominated, the former are much more successfully placed to articulate their standpoints and voices. The process of cognitive mapping and narrative inquiry, therefore, attempts to equip the students with the necessary framework and skills to rearticulate their heteroglossic voices, thus accommodating their multiple identities and standpoints within the existing
hegemonic academic/education discourses in which they have traditionally been peripheralized. The deep-rooted hegemony in public school system constantly work against any civic and political attempt toward creating a just, humane, inclusive and all-encompassing system (Apple, 2018, 2019). I would argue that the implementation of the pedagogical practices suggested by this study not only raises consciousness about the hegemonic core of hidden curriculum, but also, as social praxis, aims to restore to emergent bilinguals their buried voices.

- **Narrative inquiry as intercultural mediation:** Another implication of developing narrative competence in the field of ENL education is that it can create a transcultural zone of contact and proximity between the teacher and the emergent bilinguals. Students’ narratives can give the researcher a glimpse into their lived experiences, multiple literacy identities, cultural and linguistic resources as well as their daily lives both in the U.S. and back in their “home” countries. The development of such narrative forms, inquiries, and skills, therefore, can serve the practical purpose of transforming “otherness” into meaningful intercultural exchange as well as cultivating transcultural sympathies. Hence, this should be understood in terms of a process of “becoming to know,” which serves the important purpose of reflection and praxis on the part of the teacher (Ukpokodu, 2009; Shannon-Baker, 2018; Freire, 1970).

- **Narrative as community catalyst:** Developing narrative competence in the field of ENL corresponds to what the anthropologist James Clifford (1997) calls a “diaspora consciousness” (p. 256), which necessitates a fluid understanding of one’s own identity as a practical way of creating a sense of community. When emergent bilinguals share their personal narratives, a transcultural sense of community can be forged between
students—one that is marked by shared experiences of displacement, diaspora, and alienation, but also consciousness of solidarity, empathy, and collectivity. This mode of instruction, which is based on critical inquiry of their own lives (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), creates opportunities for the emergent bilinguals to explore issues relevant to their lives via the medium of narrative form.

- **Narrative inquiry as bilingual code switching:** Developing narrative competence, grounded in the ethos of a genuine multicultural education and culturally sustaining pedagogy, can serve as an effective medium where code switching is not only made possible but also legitimized. This view recognizes and celebrates marginalized languages, linguistic repertoires, and discursive practices. But it can also cultivate a multilingual, transcultural approach to literacy/education. Narrative inquiry can provide a productive framework for such discursive practices of moving back and forth between two languages either at the level of words, phrases, or even sentences: it makes for a discursive “second space” (Campano, 2019) where emergent bilinguals can introduce their own sociolinguistic repertoires as well as experiment with hybrid forms of sociolinguistic identities. In tandem with the development of their L2 skills and in their interactions with both teachers and other students, emergent bilinguals then negotiate the process of meaning making through practice by creating new hybrid, discursive forms. This in turn builds on the pragmatic level of language learning skills, which has been recognized as an essential aspect of communicative competence (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Yasrebi, 2019).

- **Narrative inquiry as holistic language development approach:** The pedagogical model and practice of narrative inquiry this study proposes is best grasped in the form of
a constellation of various linguistic skills developed in tandem. That is to say, developing the narrative competence of emergent bilinguals is contingent upon and, at the same time, develops their receptive (listening and reading) as well as expressive skills (speaking and writing). In other words, each narrative task comprises a pedagogical constellation of reading, listening, speaking, and writing modalities, where emergent bilinguals recognize sequences as well as consequences; contextualize time and setting; frame sentences, recall referents, and identify through lines; articulate and shape lived experiences; represent and interact with the world in all its social, cultural, and political complexity, mediated through their own narratives. Such a holistic approach is therefore capable of helping emergent bilinguals work on their semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic skills at the same time.

- **Narrative as return of the repressed:** Another crucial, pragmatic implication of developing narrative competence in ENL classrooms is the way in which the repressed, the unvoiced, and the unsaid can leave their traces in narratives. Its flexible form allows the emergent bilinguals to not only express cultural difference, but also to critique the competing assumptions of different cultures; to attend to both what is said and what is left unsaid, the known and the unknown, the conditions of possibility of knowledge as well as its limits. For instance, as stated above, attention to this critical register of narrative inquiry can turn code switching into a genuine pedagogical instrument in multicultural education. It nevertheless can foreground the resounding absence of code switching as symptomatic of a hegemonic discourse that silences rather than empowers emergent bilinguals L1.
• **Cultivating empathy:** The study’s findings suggest that teachers in general, and ENL/ELA teachers in particular, should make an effort to develop a much deeper sense of empathy for their students’ unique situations as both learners and individuals. Emergent bilinguals should feel as though they are part of a community and that their teachers genuinely care about them and their education. This sense of empathy and understanding should serve as an important foundation for pedagogy and administrative decisions. To develop understanding and empathy, teachers should have an accurate sense of their students’ needs, histories, backgrounds, challenges, and expectations. Narrative inquiry, as developed in this study, in tandem with its scaffolding and reflection components, provides the teacher with such a pedagogical approach.

**Implications for Theory**

The field of ENL literacy and education currently suffers from inadequate research into the theoretical grounds of narrative inquiry as a productive framework to guide research in a culturally sustaining, equitable pedagogy. The existing body of knowledge treats narrative in either instrumental/generic (NGLS), ahistorical (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988), and/or postmodernist forms (Lyotard, 1984). Narrative is thought of as just one genre among others (often in close proximity to creative genres and equated with storytelling), or else it is considered an “intuitive” way of organizing “human experience” as such (Prince, 1982; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000); or in terms of fragmentary micro narratives detached from any coherent relation to the whole of human history. Furthermore, the focus of scholarship in this field is often on the education of either adults, or mainstream/native students. That is to say, one can see in the current theoretical frameworks the same tendency to decentering ENL students as is perceptible in the dominant classroom pedagogies which I have already discussed at length. This study,
therefore, takes its point of departure in conversation with theoretical models and approaches that tend to demystify the social-political grounds of not only education and literacy, but also of identity and epistemology (i.e., Literacy as Social Practice, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, Critical Curriculum Theory). In so doing, this study eschews monolithic and ideological models that turn these categories into abstractions, and seeks to restore to them their concrete, socio-historical multiplicity. It thus posits a plurality of narratives, literacies, identities, and modes of epistemological inquiries, which are then shown to be socially mediated. Therefore, by developing narrative competence and cognitive mapping as vehicles of staging such critical inquiries, this study may expand, if not enrich, the contemporary theoretical landscape informing the literacy and education of eighth-grade emergent bilinguals.

The findings of this study seem to suggest several points of possible intervention in this direction. That is to say, the process of narrative inquiry and the engagement tasks I have developed in this study seem to have elicited a critical and cognitive response to literacy and writing on the part of the emergent bilinguals, who consequently came to appreciate writing not only as a process but also a mode of inquiry in which they could express their multiple identities, voices, and enact their agency. This study suggests an alternative framework that diverges from the deficit perspectives embedded in and reinforced by monolingual and monocultural curriculum and instruction models, and the assimilationist and homogenizing tendencies of hidden curriculum—which seem to perpetuate the rhetoric and practice of achievement gaps. In contrast to viewing ENL education/literacy in such ideological terms, the theoretical implications of this study foreground the ways in which the eighth-grade emergent bilinguals’ narratives suggest a self-conscious, if not critical, approach to literacy, nuanced expressions of multiple, if not hybrid, identities, heteroglossic voices, and agency. These findings suggest that our
contemporary theoretical frameworks of ENL education need to be expanded and modified so that more equitable, democratic, and empowering models of education can emerge. This alternative theoretical standpoint, therefore, includes emergent bilinguals, along with other historically marginalized groups, not as afterthoughts but rather as crucial agents of a genuine multicultural education. Furthermore, this approach suggests that culturally relevant and culturally responsive theories (Paris, 2012; Paris and Alim, 2017) might also benefit from expanding their rhetoric of “relevance” and “responsive” to include the linguistic and cultural multiplicity of immigrant students (from the global south) as well. Eschewing, if not dismantling, the deficit models may encourage us to carve out an alternative, more inclusive, theoretical space where we can elicit and consider the (culturally diverse) range of meanings (e.g., “home,” “community,” “belonging”) contexts, and identities which emergent bilinguals associate with their literacies, and which this study seeks to crystallize.

In addition, the theoretical implications of this study may open up a space in which we can rethink the use of autobiographical narratives in ENL education/literacy. This alternative perspective turns on both the content of autobiographical narratives and their form. The former, this study suggests, has the theoretical advantage of recentering the lived experiences, culture, and linguistic repertoires of ENL students. The performative dimension of the latter—that is, the form of narrative/storytelling—cognitively situates the emergent bilinguals in a liminal position from whose standpoint they can express and explore their multiple, hybrid, if not contradictory, identities against the backdrop of their sociocultural and geographical displacement. Consequently, this study endeavors to suggest that, if framed properly, the narrative tasks can elicit a complex sense of history (both personal and collective) coursing through this hybrid, subjective positionality posited by the temporal structure of narrative form. As a result, the
emergent bilinguals may begin to recognize the social and historical grounds of their literacy/education as well as their identities. The results of this study then may contribute to a more pluralistic understanding of history in which it is the histories of the marginalized students as such—that is, the histories of inequality, inequity, oppression, discrimination, and colonialism—that mediate their expressions of home cultures, first languages, their multiple identities, and their complex sense of belonging as well as the academic conversation about these issues.

Additionally, the theoretical and epistemological implications of cognitive mapping posits narrative competence as a fluid, if not heuristic, device whose organizational frameworks need to be constantly practiced and revisited, both in theory and practice. The point of departure is validating what students bring to us—that is, their personal lived histories, or “epistemic cooperation” (Mohanty, 1997). This perspective resonates with what Gerald Campano (2019) formulates as

forms of collaborative ethical and political investigation that may enable us to critique unjust educational arrangements and dominant understandings in order to imagine and create other possibilities. This type of cooperation begins with respecting the local knowledge of the communities with whom we work. (p. 67)

What my theoretical investment in the process of cognitive mapping may add to Campano’s formulation is the importance it places on connecting students’ knowledge of their immediate locale and geography to that of a more, translocal, global context.

The study might also contribute to the theoretical conversation about reframing reading activities in a more meaningful relation to writing tasks, in which the former introduce, set up, and develop the themes as well as, for example, the instructor’s pedagogical priorities. That is to say, reading about events and experiences that do not position the emergent bilinguals as the text’s civilizational other may help students, in their narratives, to map out and work through the
traces, forms, and relations of alterity in terms of which they are constantly viewed and against which they struggle. Therefore, the study highlights the transformative power of narrative thinking and thinking through narratives.

Finally, re-framing (autobiographical) narratives in terms of their social, performative valence, this study suggests that the field of ENL education may benefit from theoretical perspectives that are more attentive to the social mediations of students’ identities on the one hand, and the curriculum, instruction, and literacy on the other. Therefore, by inquiring into the education and literacy of eighth-grade emergent bilinguals, the theoretical frameworks of this study may enrich our understanding of curriculum and pedagogy as social practice.

Implications for Research

This study contributes to the small number of qualitative research on narrative form in the field of second language acquisition at middle school level. Immigrant students constitute some of the most vulnerable populations in the U.S., K-12 public school system. These students routinely endure systemic disadvantage due to a combination of their racialized identities, first languages, poverty, and sometimes undocumented status. This study then calls for more action research that explores more equitable and affirming use of multicultural classroom materials, students’ multidimensional literacies, identities, cultures, and agency.

As both an academic and a teacher, I have endeavored to carry out a study that can accommodate the scholarly and pedagogical priorities of each respective arena. As a hybrid form of ethnographic and practitioner inquiry, therefore, this study aimed to contribute to research in the field of ENL education/literacy as well as pedagogy and classroom practices. That is to say, by situating itself in the in-between space through which research and practice are negotiated, this study aimed at demonstrating the methodological and pragmatic advantages of each and the
ways in which they both inform and shape one another. It is perhaps in a call for bridging the gap between research and practice that this study stakes its claim to contributing to the field—that is, to invite researchers and practitioners to break free from their respective disciplinary silos by attending to the reciprocal mediation of theory and practice, research, and pedagogy.

In other words, at no point during the practitioner phase did I intend to implement a neatly-packaged, fixed pedagogical instrument that was informed by pure research and supposed to transform ENL instruction. On the contrary, this study in fact positioned its research and pedagogical objectives in repudiation of mechanical and instrumental approaches to literacy as such, and writing in particular. Process-oriented model of narrative inquiry allowed me to eschew the reified thematics of the five-paragraph (or three-paragraph) essay. My own theoretical/research criteria surrounding narrative inquiry, however, did not turn the latter into a mechanical device. Rather, the unique space of class, the emergent bilinguals’ unique perspectives, experiences, repertoires, and voices, made me revisit, re-design, and re-evaluate my main theoretical frameworks and research models along the way—that is, narrative competence and cognitive mapping. As Pavlenko (2002) notes, narratives are co-constructed and shaped by sociocultural relations which are in turn mediated by history as well as by relationships between the storyteller and interlocutor.

Another potential contribution of this study to the field turns on the question of pragmatics. It was by foregrounding and inquiring into the pragmatic and contextual ground of knowledge production—that is, the social mediations of literacy/agency as well as eliciting the latter in narrative tasks—that this study endeavored to situate the emergent bilinguals in a position to articulate their unique, if not complex, sense of agency in their narratives. This is closely intertwined with another important research interest of this study: namely, the dialogic
engagement between the teacher researcher and the emergent bilinguals after the narrativization process. This engagement indexed the ways in which dialogic collaboration is crucial to the construction of agency and mediation of meanings, which, in turn, acted as an impetus for further developing narrative competence and cognitive mapping.

In addition, the implications of this study point out to the necessity of more research in the field of second language acquisition, curriculum, and instruction with an emphasis on the subject and practice of equity. It sought to explore and identify specific instances of ideological blind spots in both design and development of curricula as well as pedagogical models in the field of ENL literacy—that is, models that perpetuated deficit perspectives. The study therefore seems to indicate an urgent need to develop more critical perspectives attuned to the unique situation of emergent bilinguals within the research community to generate alternative programs/methods of research in higher Education in the fields of second language acquisition, bi/multilingual, and multicultural education.

I believe the study also foregrounds the potential of such hybrid research methodologies that understand and seek to approach ENL education in social, if not political, terms. This resonates with the kind of “critical meta-awareness” that Freire (1970) called for in relation to public school curriculum across various disciplines and content areas. It is through concrete praxis that the slogans of social change and emancipation in vogue in research methodologies can reveal both their transformative potentialities and limitations. The results of the study reveals, one more time, that (a) both the content and the form of the knowledge taught and produced at school is not neutral; (b) that the production of knowledge is always already situation in a matrix of power relations; (c) that knowledge of history requires, at the same time, a critical inquiry into the history of knowledge, of which the school system stands both as an
index and a barrier. This points to the necessity of more research to be done regarding not only the cultural role of the institution of school but also its political and economic function, especially regarding ENL education. The political economy of the school system constitutes one of the most entrenched barriers to emancipatory pedagogy that finds its limits against such systemic and structural factors.

As it is probably the case with most research projects, this study, too, seems to have produced more questions than answers, which may be said to generate their own implications for future research in the field of ENL education and literacy. In particular, how to pedagogically traverse and address issues of access and equity given their underlying systemic and structural power dynamics; how to successfully advocate for and pursue the academic interests of emergent bilinguals when ENL teachers themselves are struggling for agency and risk being relegated to “auxiliary staff”; how to genuinely, efficiently, and fairly collaborate in integrated classes where it is the ELA teacher’s pedagogy and instruction which nevertheless seem to dominate, even when the ENL students constitute the majority of the students in class; how to empower the emergent bilinguals to assert their own voice and identities while the pedagogical practices as well as the discursive practices shaped by the school’s climate/culture seem to perpetuate deficit models and cultural stereotypes. One conclusion, however, was inescapable: namely, that research must develop its insights and models in conversation with the participants for whom (or about whom) it is being carried out. Some of the most revealing and consequential insights of this study emerged from my conversations with the emergent bilinguals as well as their lateral exchanges among themselves during the reflection segment of the practitioner inquiry. A research and pedagogy that claims to respond to the academic needs of emergent bilinguals
should perhaps carve out a space in its arsenal of research methodologies for them to articulate their needs and concerns. Sometimes, the most productive thing one can do is to listen.

Therefore, I would argue that the field of second language acquisition and ENL education could benefit from more methodologically hybrid studies carried out from the standpoint of school- and university-based teacher researchers. In other words, the field needs more richly articulated, theoretically rigorous and refined studies whose interventions are also informed by the practically sophisticated methods of ethnography and practitioner inquiry. This study then advocates for a recentering of the interests of emergent bilinguals in university-based research as well; for this study suggests that research has been lagging behind the increasingly shifting terrain and diverse body of ENL literacy at public school system in the U.S.

Limitations

Although I have tried to present a compelling account of the components and the two phases of this study, there are no doubt some limitations to the findings due to study design. Because of various external restrictions (e.g., considerations of time and space, school’s scheduling conflicts, extraordinary situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic) the sample size of the study was relatively small in the ethnographic phase. Furthermore, the findings focused on the curricular and pedagogical practices in eighth-grade ENL stand-alone and ELA/ENL co-taught classes. Consequently, the findings of the study are not generalizable to the curricular and pedagogical practices of the middle school’s entire ENL population across three grade levels.

Another factor recognized in considering the limitations of this study was the participant sample size in the practitioner inquiry phase. For example, if this study had been conducted in a more diverse school, the demographic composition of the student body would have been more diverse and the sample size of ENL/immigrant students would have probably been relatively
much larger. The study’s sample size nevertheless does not detract from or discount the validity of the findings since my primary focus was to explore and chart the curriculum, classroom practices, and climate/culture in precisely such a demographically homogeneous community, where ENL students constitute a smaller segment of the overall student body. Moreover, a key research question this study endeavored to respond entailed delineating and exploring the eighth-grade ENL stand-alone and ENL/ELA co-taught curriculum, in which the size of the ENL population seems to have scarcely been a determining factor.

As I have already explained, the practitioner phase of this study (Chapter Five), which specifically focused on the development of an alternative curriculum and pedagogy, was never intended to remedy, nor “solve,” all the complex issues that emerged from the ethnographic phase of the study (Chapter Four), including the school’s climate, culture, and discursive practices. Likewise, my design and implementation of four engagement tasks over the course of two months of practitioner inquiry can scarcely be said to have recentered the voice and agency of historically marginalized students in a meaningful way in such a short period. In other words, I acknowledge that such a transformative process is part of much larger project that, in addition to rethinking curricular/pedagogical priorities, entails institutional, ideological, and systemic dimensions as well. The latter constitutes the structural and epistemological limits of this study, which from the very beginning never ceased to emphasize the ways in which education/literacy is socially mediated. Therefore, neither this study, nor any other school- or academic-based research, can claim to address or rectify on its own such systemic issues, which require meaningful action at the level of decision-making, allocation of resources, and policy: for example, meaningful reform in educational policies, substantial investment in the public school system, administrative will, auditing and revising the curricula (or the canon) in place at schools.
Nevertheless, the least of what such studies can do—in which I hope my research can play a part, however small—is to raise awareness about the issues impacting the education and literacy of the students who have been historically marginalized; and to perhaps gesture at what an alternative set of classroom practices might look like.

**Conclusion**

At the beginning of this research, my focus was more on the practitioner, teaching side. But I soon realized that classroom pedagogy was structurally mediated by institutional and systemic relations that transcended the space of classroom per se. Only then did ethnography present itself as a viable option. That is, when I began to conceive of pedagogy more holistically in terms of *education*, rather than mere instruction. My conceptualization and development of narrative competence and cognitive mapping, therefore, was a way of emphasizing this contextual and holistic approach to second language acquisition.

Along the way, this study generated certain key questions, not all of which I can claim to have responded to: What does a process-oriented approach to writing look like? What would a culturally sustaining pedagogy committed to the values of multicultural education look like? How can one empower emergent bilinguals to draw on their linguistic and cultural resources in the process of literacy? How can one re-center students’ needs/literacy in a competitive test- and data-driven atmosphere? How can an ENL curriculum and pedagogy centered around narrative inquiry achieve these goals?

A key point of departure in this study concerned the ENL pedagogy regarding writing, in particular, what I thought was a predominance of mechanical/procedural approach to writing codified under the New York State’s NGLS and practiced in classrooms across grade levels. Therefore, the narrative engagements I developed and implemented during the practitioner phase
intended to propose an alternative approach to writing, which, first and foremost, understood it to be a process and mode of inquiry, rather than an instrumental channel of communication. But over the course of this study, it soon became apparent what I had suspected all along: that a holistic, pragmatic approach to education cannot conceive of writing in isolation; and that writing as a mode of inquiry required reading as a mode of inquiry as well. Therefore, rather than isolating and compartmentalizing language skills (as it is done in phonics), I attempted to implement a more contextual approach to literacy. Consequently, I tried to create a more culturally diverse curriculum the content of which sought to recenter the lived experiences and histories of marginalized students. Reading comprehension, writing, and class discussions were all oriented to achieving these goals. As attested to by students’ reflections, it seems like this approach managed to amplify and reinforce their sense of voice and agency. Soon, therefore, what had initially started as a project to rethink writing in ENL classes turned into a thoroughgoing process aiming to reimagine eighth-grade ENL curriculum and pedagogy, especially in those areas where I believed a deficit perspectives to literacy prevailed.

This is the point where my unit of analysis shifted—that is, rather than solely focusing on teaching writing, I began to focus on education and literacy as the more higher order categories in my study, in ways that might even be said to challenge certain aspects of NGLS guidelines as well as the tendency to “teaching to the test” that is increasingly becoming the standard mode of instruction in the U.S. Even so, as I have already explained, the specific form of narrative inquiry expounded in this study was never meant to replace other forms/genres of writing (e.g., creative, argumentative, persuasive, informative). Rather, I have been trying to demonstrate the pedagogical implications of working through the ways in which developing narrative competence, coupled with cognitive mapping, is capable of coding temporal and spatial
relationships, coherence, and meanings, whereby the issues of voice and agency are revealed to
be individual, and at the same time, socially contextualized and mediated processes. Exploring
these dimensions in the writings and reflections of the emergent bilinguals, therefore, made me
question specific categories and practices that we often take for granted in the field of ENL
education: namely, academic success and failure, achievement, proficiency, production of
knowledge, literacy, and education.

Nevertheless, as discussed in this chapter, from the standpoint of culturally sustaining
pedagogy, this study may be said to propose some exploratory and tentative claims regarding the
academic potential of a more serious pedagogical engagement with the narrative form as a mode
of critical inquiry in ENL education. The exploratory and heuristic nature of this project means
that, as I pointed out above, it naturally must come to terms with its limitations, which, in turn,
can be quite illuminating.

Furthermore, over the course of this project, I learned a great deal from both the
hardworking teachers at the school as well as the emergent bilinguals with whom I worked. The
teachers’ dedication to their craft as well as supporting their students both inside and outside
class, their tirelessness, and their excellent rapport with their students were exemplary. But my
students, too, had such a rich, meaningful impact on my pedagogy (and consciousness even
beyond class) that I have come away from this research with a more nuanced understanding of
not only the complexities of ENL education at the middle school level in the U.S., but also the
lived experiences and histories of these emergent bilinguals. I learned that emergent bilinguals,
regardless of their proficiency levels, can be quite observant, and that if they do not speak as
often as their fellow, mainstream students, it scarcely means that they do not have anything
meaningful to say—quite the contrary. I, therefore, learned to listen more carefully and to cultivate a space where they would feel comfortable sharing their brilliant ideas.

Similarly, given the trauma of migration, if I previously had any strong misgivings about assigning readings and writing tasks where the students are prompted to reflect on and write about “home,” this study suggests that ENL students can be quite responsive to such sensitive topics, if, that is, the tasks are carefully and thoughtfully framed and delivered. My own approach to this topic evolved even during such a short period where I had the opportunity to work with them. Furthermore, in the future, I must work harder to cultivate a more pedagogically productive space where emergent bilinguals can feel at ease drawing on and using their L1 linguist repertoires.

This last foreground another insight I gained from this study, one that perhaps has been there in embryo all along. That is, the necessity to take more seriously the slogan of emergent bilinguals espoused in this study by rethinking our curricula and pedagogies toward a more genuine mode of bi- and multi-lingual education across all language skills. In other words, rather than thinking of and treating students’ L1 as a vestigial appendage, so to speak, that must disappear or be replaced by English, we need to provide curricular and pedagogical opportunities in which the objective would be the development of all of students’ linguistic repertoires. This naturally was an aspirational project whose concrete realization could scarcely be contained in the pages of this dissertation. As a result, even though there is much that I have learned over the course of this study—which I hope contributes a thing or two to the field as well—from this standpoint, it can be said to have failed. For there is only so much one can do at the level of classroom pedagogy and practice to make meaningful changes before one notices the telltale traces of unwieldy systemic and structural limitations.
References


https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1922


https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/1.1.1


https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X060270010301


https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0091732X024001249


https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039909524733


https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2012.0205


https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X18767226


https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0013189X035007003


https://doi.org/10.1080/095183998236863


https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/468908


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2012.715500


https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12116


Santiago Cohen. (2012, April 11). *Tropics in NY designed by Santiago Cohen HBO child's garden of poetry* [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICY0jR1cdQI


https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2016.1159100


https://doi.org/10.9741/2161-2978.1003


culturally and linguistically minoritized children and youth: Counter-possibilities.


https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124510375598


https://www.jstor.org/stable/23238754


Appendices

Appendix A: List of All Engagement Tasks

Engagement 1

Presented, read, and discussed McKay’s “The Tropics in New York.”

Target Vocabulary Items: Defined, contextualized, and reinforced through visual referents

Alligator pear, benediction, climate, dawn, gaze, isolation, laden, longing, mystical, nostalgia, nun, parish, pod, rill, weep

Background knowledge on the poet

“Claude McKay, (born September 15, 1889, Nairne Castle, Jamaica, British West Indies—died May 22, 1948, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.), Jamaican-born poet and novelist whose *Home to Harlem* (1928) was the most popular novel written by an American black to that time. Before going to the U.S. in 1912, he wrote two volumes of Jamaican dialect verse, *Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads* (1912). After attending Tuskegee Institute (1912) and Kansas State Teachers College (1912–14), McKay went to New York in 1914, where he contributed regularly to *The Liberator*, then a leading journal of avant-garde politics and art. The shock of American racism turned him from the conservatism of his youth. With the publication of two volumes of poetry, *Spring in New Hampshire* (1920) and *Harlem Shadows* (1922), McKay emerged as the first and most militant voice of the Harlem Renaissance. After 1922 McKay lived successively in the Soviet Union, France, Spain, and Morocco. In both *Home to Harlem and Banjo* (1929), he attempted to capture the vitality and essential health of the uprooted black vagabonds of urban America and Europe. There followed a collection of short stories, *Gingertown* (1932), and another novel, *Banana Bottom* (1933). In all these works McKay searched among the common folk for a distinctive black identity” (Britannica, 2022).

Harlem Renaissance Period:

“name given to the period of artistic flourishment from Black writers in New York’s Harlem neighborhood in the 1920s and 1930s. The origins of the Harlem Renaissance, contemporaneously referred to as the Awakening and the New Negro Movement, can be traced to the great migration of Black Americans from the rural South to the urban North, where they quickly became the majority demographic in places like Harlem. The teachings of W. E. B. Du Bois stressed that African Americans, as a racial group, uniquely adapted to life in America, remaking and creating their own cultural identity. Organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) grew in numbers, as did Black literacy rates, and their members began to recognize works such as Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) as distinctly African American literature. In 1918, UNIA’s weekly newspaper *Negro World*, which celebrated racial pride, began publishing pieces from Black writers that ranged from poems to theater and book reviews. When Howard University professor Alain Locke published *The New Negro* (1925) to acclaim and financial success, the movement was definitively underway. Authors brought different perspectives to the Black experience, with writers such as Jean Toomer juxtaposing Black life in the North and South in his modernist novel *Cane* (1923) and Claude McKay exploring the life of the modern African American in World War I and Harlem in *Home to Harlem* (1928). The Harlem Renaissance was also known for its
proliferation of Black poetry, notably from jazz poet Langston Hughes, whose poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (1921) was published in the NAACP’s magazine _The Crisis_, and Countee Cullen, who wrote about racial injustice and identity in poems including “Yet I Do Marvel” and “Heritage.” Other major works of the Harlem Renaissance include Nella Larsen’s novel _Passing_ (1928), Hughes’s collection _The Weary Blues_ (1926), Rudolf Fisher’s novel _The Conjure-Man Dies_ (1932), and Wallace Thurman’s novel _The Blacker the Berry_ (1929). The Great Depression significantly restricted the output of published work, and the movement was effectively over by the end of the 1930s. Generally, the end of the Harlem Renaissance is associated with the publication of Zora Neale Hurston’s novel _Their Eyes Were Watching God_ in 1937 or Richard Wright’s novel _Native Son_ in 1940” (Hart et al., 2021).

**Task 1:** What do you see in this poem? (Here the objective is to help students understand and explore word associations.)

**Task 2:** Context
- Who is speaking? Where? When? Why? Describe how the speaker feels in each stanza?
- I will have the students narrativize this poem, that is, re-tell the story the poem tells in their own words. Then we watch the video _Tropics in NY_ (Santiago Cohen, 2012).

**What figurative device does McKay use in this poem?**
- Claude McKay uses metaphors to convey a sense of sadness and nostalgia in “The Tropics of New York.” (Metaphor is an analogy where one object, action, or idea is identified with another by a word or expression that suggests some common quality shared by the two.)

**Narrative Task Prompt:**
- Write your own personal narrative. Where/what is home? What reminds you of home? What tastes like home? What smells like home? What looks like home? What are some of your pleasant memories of home?

**Engagement 2**
- Read and discussed Sofija Stefanovic’s personal narrative “Smells Like Home” (Stefanovic, 2018).
- Presented background Information on Yugoslavia (Allcock et al, 2022).

**Target Vocabulary Items: Defined, contextualized, and reinforced through visual referents**
- Embark, dissolve, involuntary, flooding, whiff, relieve, stinky, augment, brim, ambivalent, grating,

**Scaffolding Questions**

In “Smells Like Home,” Stefanovic recollects and explores the smells of her childhood. Read the questions below carefully and try to answer them.

1. What do you think the author means when she quotes her mother saying: “The smells of your childhood will always stay with you and will make you remember home.” In what new and interesting way does Stefanovic understand “home”?
2. “It is well documented that our senses can cause an involuntary flooding of memory; Some call it the “Proust phenomenon.” What is the Proust effect?

3. What is the relationship between home, time, and place? “To me, the Belgrade of my childhood smelled like the Marlboro cigarettes my mother smoked — even while I was in utero (it was the ’80s) — and the perfume my aunt wore and chestnuts roasting in the winter, which sellers scooped into a paper cone and we ate on our way to my grandma’s place.” What rhetorical device does the author use here?

4. Specify some aspects of the sense of loss the author is exploring; what is the relation between human (involuntary) displacement and Stefanovic’s idea of home: “For me, the Belgrade of today is not home. We left there a long time ago, and I rarely visit. When I do, I often get lost, and the slang of young people is unfamiliar.”

5. According to Stefanovic, what is the relationship between memory, desire, and home? “People who have been parted from the smells and tastes of their homes, who I assume are, like me, jolted back when a long-forgotten piece of music blares from a passing car, or a childhood spice enters their nostrils on a windy street in Queens. Do their memories make them feel nostalgia, or love, or are they ambivalent, terrified, heartbroken?”

6. How many “homes” has Sofia Stefanovic experienced in her life?

7. To what extent does the idea of home mean something fixed and permanent for the author? To what extent is it something more flexible, fluid? Explain your answers.

8. Go back to the text; read carefully and reflect on the events in Stefanovic’s life: those bits and pieces of her life she briefly mentions. Can you put them in order in terms of time, from way in the past up to the moment of her speaking to you (i.e., the reader)? In other words, can you piece together her life story up to the moment of writing this text? (For example, think about when she was five; how about the 1980s! when they moved to Australia, and so on.)

Narrative Task Prompt:

- What are the smells of your childhood? What smells like home? tastes like home? feels like home? To what extent do you, like Stefanovic, carry your “home,” or the idea of home, with you? If home suggests a sense of belonging, can we belong to only one place? two places? more? What is the relation between home, time, and history (past, present, future)? (Your personal as well as collective histories.) The writing of History doesn’t always have to be about heroes, famous people, conquerors or inventors: YOU all have your own histories, your own voices, which are important and need to be heard. So if you could tell your history (wait! is that the word story hidden in history?!) or the history of your home, what would it look like? How would it sound? Go ahead: write it!

Engagement 3: Orange Crush

Presented and discussed Yiyun Li’s “Eat, Memory: Orange Crush” (Li, 2006).

Background on the Author

- Yiyun Li (b. 1972) is a Chinese American writer who grew up in Beijing, China. In 1996, after attending Peking University, Li moved to the United States to study medicine at the University of Iowa, earning master’s degrees in both immunology and the writing of creative nonfiction. Li’s first collection of short stories, A Thousand Years of Good Prayers (2005), won numerous literary awards, and in 2009 she published her first novel, The Vagrants, followed by Gold Boy, Emerald
Target Vocabulary Items: Defined, contextualized, and reinforced through visual referents

Tangerine, peel, thrift, jar, rusty, insist, provision, condense, seductive, glimpse, spacious, cube, persuasive, authoritative, catchy, luxury, capitalism, soar, coveted, melancholy, agony, glamor

Scaffolding Questions

In “Orange Crush,” Yiyun Li writes about the time when she was sixteen and first heard about Tang, the American drink mix which was marketed in Beijing and all over China as “Fruit Treasure” in 1959.

Read the following questions carefully and try to answer them:

1. (a) Why does Li begin her story with a description of the orange and tangerine peels and water that her father saves to treat family coughs and colds; (b) What role does this “orange peel water” play throughout her story?

2. (a) What are some of the reasons why Li’s father is against Tang? (b) To what extent, do you think, is his position justified? (Explain in detail.)

3. Describe how Li feels when she first tastes Tang? Does she like it, or not? How does she react?

4. (a) Does Li still desire Tang today? Explain your answer; (b) If not, what made Li change her view of Tang? How does she feel about it now?

5. What life lesson does Li take from her early experience with Tang? Explain.

6. What is the effect of the TV commercial in Li’s story? Why does she describe it in such details?

7. Explain the double meaning in Li’s reference to a “Tangy life.”

8. How effective is Li’s choice of a powdery American drink as a metaphor for the changes in her life and in the lifestyle in China? Explain. (Cooley, 2018 pp. 155–56)

Narrative Task Prompt:

- These days, perhaps more than ever before, companies rely on advertising to sell their products (from fast food and sneakers to smart phones and cloud storage). Every day, we are constantly bombarded by dozens, if not hundreds, of ads—on our phones, on the Internet, on TV, on the radio, on the bus, on buildings, on our T-shirts and so many other places—which try to, in various subtle ways, convince us (but perhaps also to pressure us) to buy a certain product: the ads claim that this or that product is not only what we need but also what we desire: it will make us happy; and that without it, our life is somehow incomplete! That to be successful, we should buy what they are selling. With that in mind, have you (or anyone you know) ever purchased a product because you thought it would change your life? In three paragraphs, write about your experience with this particular product and discuss in detail whether or not it met your expectations.
Engagement 4

Presented and discussed Woodson’s “February, 12, 1963.”

Background on the Author

Jacqueline Woodson is an American writer of books for adults, children, and adolescents. She is best known for her National Book Award-Winning memoir Brown Girl Dreaming, and her Newbery Honor-winning titles After Tupac and D Foster, Feathers, and Show Way. Her picture books The Day You Begin and The Year We Learned to Fly were NY Times Bestsellers. After serving as the Young People’s Poet Laureate from 2015 to 2017, she was named the National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature by the Library of Congress for 2018–19. She was awarded the Hans Christian Andersen Medal in 2020. Later that same year, she was named a MacArthur Fellow. (Woodson, 2022)

Target Vocabulary Items: Defined, contextualized, and reinforced through visual referents

Dawn, dusk, scoop, gourd, constellation, emancipate

Narrative Task Prompt:

- Consider Woodson’s poem: craft either a prose narrative or a narrative poem where you explore your own individual (hi)story in relation to the world at large.
Appendix B: Parent Informed Consent Information for Research Participation

My name is Sepideh Yasrebi and I am a PhD candidate at the University at Albany, in the School of Education. I am planning to conduct a research study, which I invite your child/children to take part in. This form has important information about the reason for doing this study, what I will ask you to do if you decide your child to be in this study, and the way we would like to use information about her/him if you choose to be in the study.

Why are you doing this study?
You are being asked to participate in a research study about developing story writing skills. The purpose of this research is to provide direct instruction to students who speak English as a new language, focusing specifically on developing storytelling techniques to enhance content mastery through thinking and writing stories and help develop mastery in the writing. The focus for English language learners at this age-group, in their usual classrooms is mostly on essay writing skills. However, this research is implementing the use of and the importance of creating stories as a way to help English language development. Your child will be receiving constructive feedback on how to make their stories better in terms of the form of their writing and the content.

What will my child do if I choose to be in this study?
Your child will be participating in this research via Zoom as an extra help after-school activity, and they will read a poem and two short stories about home for 8 weeks. Each virtual class will be one hour long. Once you and your child give consent to be a part of this research, a Zoom link will be sent to your email address and it can be used to log into our virtual class. As we read the stories, we will do a close reading of the text and they will be asked to answer some questions about the stories. Finally, your child will be asked to write three short stories. No personal information of any students will be collected. Each assignment may take 30 minutes and they will be done during the class time online.

Study location:
All study procedures and activities will take place online via Zoom.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?
To the best of my knowledge, I do not anticipate any risk in your child’s participation. As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information we collect from your child could be breached – we will take the following steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

What are the possible benefits for my child?
I anticipate that your child is likely to have direct benefit from being in this research study. This study is designed to help English language learners find their own voice through reading multicultural texts and writing their own stories. The study results may be used to help other ENL teachers and students in the filed in the future as well. The tasks designed for this study are aligned with New York State ELA Next Generation Learning Standards. Developing storytelling and story writing skills, is equal to development of a new mode of thinking and writing—based on the pilot study that I have conducted last year—which was published on a peer reviewed journal. This ability has proven to increase the language skills of learners to a great extent. Further, implementing stories in classrooms can make for a culturally responsive space, that is an atmosphere which will welcome and affirm all cultures. This can all positively impact your child’s performance on their state tests as well as their overall writing skills.

How will you protect the information you collect about me, and how will that information be shared?
Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations. The study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are to be published or presented, individual names and
other personally identifiable information will not be used. Your child’s writing products will be destroyed once the study is completed.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, I will give pseudonyms in the data collection process for all individuals in this study. Documents that link the pseudonyms to individuals' identifying information will be stored on password-protected computers and destroyed after the completion of data analysis. All materials that could be linked to individuals will be destroyed after the completion of this study. I may share the data I collect from your child for use in future research studies or with other researchers — if we share the data that I collect about him/her, I will remove any information that could identify them before I share it.

**Study Time**

Study participation will take a maximum of 8 hours total in total of 8 weeks. 1/hr per week.

**Financial Information**

Participation in this study will involve no cost to you.

**What are my child’s rights as a research participant?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not wish for your child to participate, please sign and return this form. Your child does not have to answer any question he/she does not want to answer or participate if they are not willing to do. If at any time and for any reason, she/he would prefer not to participate in this study, they can withdraw. If at any time she/he would like to stop participating, please let me know via email or call me. We can take a break, stop, and continue later, or stop altogether. She/he may withdraw from this study at any time and will not be penalized in any way for deciding to stop participation.

If she/he decides to withdraw from this study, the researchers will ask her/him if the information already collected from him/her can be used. If she/he doesn’t wish to include her/his information in the data analysis, the researcher will destroy the information to protect his/her confidentiality.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns about this research study?**

If you have questions, you are free to ask them now. If you have any questions later, you may contact the researcher at:

Sepideh Yasrebi, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Educational Theory and Practice
State University of New York, Albany
1400 Washington Ave
Albany, NY 12222

**Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns about this research study?**

If you have questions, you are free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher at syasrebi@albany.edu, or

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you can contact the following office at the University at Albany:

**Institutional Review Board**

University at Albany
Office of Regulatory and Research Compliance
1400 Washington Ave, MSC 100E
Albany, NY 12222
Phone: 1-866-857-5459
Email: reco@albany.edu
Consent
I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree that my child participates in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form.
I have read, or been informed of, the information about this study.
I do not wish for ____________________________ (student’s name) to be included in this study.
I do wish for ____________________________ (student’s name) to be included in this study.

Parent/guardian signature: ________________________ Date: ______________
Print parent/guardian name: __________________________
Student signature: __________________________ Date: ______________
Print student name: __________________________________________

University at Albany Oral Script Draft for Child Assent
Hi, my name is Sepideh Yasrebi. I am doing a study to learn more about younger learners like you who are learning English and speak English as their second/or third language. I, myself, am an English language learner. In fact, English is my third language. I am interested to see how writing stories help learners’ language development. If you agree to be in this study, we will learn to write three different stories in English throughout this study.
You do not have to be in the study. You can say no. Or you can say yes and still change your mind later. No one will be mad at you if you do not want to be in the study at any time. You can also talk to your friends and family before you decide.
Would you like to be a part of this study?

To be completed by person obtaining verbal assent from the participant:

Child’s/Participant’s response:  □ Yes  □ No

____________________________________
Child’s/Participant’s Name (printed)

____________________________________
Name of Person Obtaining Assent (printed)

____________________________________  Date
Signature of Person Obtaining Assent
Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Research Participation

Interview Questions (post-narrativization process)

1. What do you think about the narrative you just wrote?
2. What do you think about our classroom practices in general?
3. Did you like/dislike the text we read in this task? Explain why?
4. Are there any specific things you liked/disliked about the reading process?
5. Are there any specific things you liked/disliked about the writing process?
6. What was your experience with narrative writing before this class? Can you provide specific examples?

Conversation Protocol

- How are you?
- How is your day going?
- What are you up to after school?
- What are you doing over the weekend?
Appendix D: Data Storage

To ensure confidentiality of the participants and the site of the study specific steps were taken to secure all data collected. The identity of the school district in which the research study was conducted is given as an alias. Generalities of the district (e.g., population, demographics) are discussed but all identifying evidence is omitted. Similarly, students and teachers who participated in this study are referred to under aliases to maintain confidentiality. All data was de-identified during data collection. For data analysis, all participants received a number identification to ensure privacy. No personal information (i.e., names and addresses) is relevant to the study and therefore none were collected. Transcripts and the students’ narratives were de-identified and are only accessible to the researcher. Hard copies of consent forms are stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office only accessible to the researcher. Upon completion of the doctoral dissertation project, all data will be transferred to an external hard drive and stored in a locked file cabinet for five years. All data and associated documents will be permanently destroyed or deleted five years after completion of the study.