

THE CANON REVISITED:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF
AMERICAN LITERATURE TO U.S.-MEXICAN STUDENTS
AT MACARIO GARCÍA HIGH SCHOOL

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B.A., Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, 1997

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the

University of Connecticut

2001

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2001

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

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Presented by

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Associate Advisor _____
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University of Connecticut

2001

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my mother, Rita Guadalupe Reséndez Rodríguez (1940-2000). My mother was born in Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, México, to the late Eleno Reséndez and Rosa Meza Reséndez. My mother was a first-grade teacher at Dominguez Elementary School in Río Bravo, Tamaulipas, México.

My mother's light has not ended. She was goodness, gentleness, and dignity. Even today, I am flooded with memories upon my visits to the Community Cemetery in Waelder, Texas. Memories of my mother fill me, and I am enriched by her fierce faith and spirit. *Te llevo en mi corazón, Mami.*

Acknowledgements

Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros reminds me, "There is no such thing as coincidence." I am infinitely blessed by the unswerving faith and commitment of Dr. Liliana Minaya-Rowe, my major advisor, whose warm quilt became a familiar hand blessing in my pursuit of academic success. After each dialogue, whether through a meeting, phone call, letter, greeting card, or electronic message, I was pirouetting inside because of her belief in me. Who would have thought that I would have to leave Texas to find a generous spirit like Dr. Minaya-Rowe in the Northeastern United States? Hearing her voice on the telephone, congratulating me on my acceptance, drew me closer to New England. Indeed, there is no such thing as coincidence. Moreover, Dr. Minaya-Rowe understood my need to work in my native Texas among familiar Texas Mexican folk. Most importantly, she understood that, for many of us, Latin America begins in Houston, Texas.

Dr. Patricia Weibust, an associate advisor and former teacher, was a boon for my growth and development as an emerging writer, thinker, and scholar. I appreciate her generous spirit and critical consciousness. Her warmth and loving-kindness enriched me during moments of intense aloneness while I was in the Northeastern United States. During my first semester at the University of Connecticut during the Fall of 1999, I looked forward to her active instruction. She rearranged my academic journey. Because of the classroom culture she fostered from the initial class day, I felt that I was in a familiar space of relearning and rethinking throughout my residence.

Dr. Thomas Goodkind, an associate advisor and former teacher, was generous with his knowledge and time. I appreciate his patience and steady support. My interests in media literacy have grown immensely, and I am a fierce proponent of media and power literacy.

I owe a special acknowledgement to Drs. Signithia Fordham, Xaé Alicia Reyes, and Kimberley Ann Woo for their generous spirit and critical and empowering work. Dr. Alexinia Young Baldwin shared the workings of the Neag School of Education with me on the telephone while I was in New York City's LaGuardia Airport. Thank you for your offering and kindness—then and *now*.

This research was made possible because of the permission granted by the Assistant Superintendent of the Schools, the School Board, and the Principal of Macario García High School in the Southwestern United States. I appreciate their utmost confidence in this emerging ethnographer and critical thinker. I am also grateful to the educators and students who participated with so much enthusiasm.

When I was surrounded by moments of aloneness, when the sky was gray, when the earth was frozen with snow, when nothing in the texts spoke to me, the Donnellan family of Westwood, Massachusetts, welcomed me to their warm home on Dover Road. I am grateful for their open arms, open door policy, and unconditional love. *Ay, doña Kathleen, muchísimas gracias.* And Daniel Donnellan was one of the greatest cheers for a new Yankee.

My friends, colleagues, and mentors at various institutions—within and beyond Connecticut—offered their open arms and guided me in my academic pursuit. These include: Alianza Dominicana, Incorporated of New York City, M.D. Anderson Library at the University of Houston, Asian American Cultural Center at the University of Connecticut, Brooklyn Correctional Institution of Connecticut, Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Houston, Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, Coalition for Juvenile Justice, Curbstone Press, Flyway Literary Magazine, Greater East End Management District, Hispanic Magazine, Hispanic Scholarship Fund, Houston Chronicle, Houston Independent School District, Houston Public Library System, HoustonWorks USA, HoustonWorks USA Academy, Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús en Windham, Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church in Houston, Institute for Recruitment of Teachers at Phillips Academy, Kenyon College, Latina Political Action Committee of Houston, Long River Review, LULAC National Educational Service Center of Houston, Incorporated, Neighborhood Centers Inc. at Ripley House in Houston, Neighborhood Centers Inc. Area Service Providers, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Our Lady of the Lake University, Phi Kappa Sigma, Plaza de Magnolia Apartments, Puerto Rican/Latin American Cultural Center at the University of

Connecticut, Project 1000, Ripley House Poets' Club, Society of Jesus, St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Chapel in Storrs, Superneighborhood of Magnolia Park, Teach for America, The Tejano Democrats, University of Connecticut, University of Houston, University of Texas at Austin, Windham Area Poetry Project, and The WorkSource Gulf Coast Careers of Houston, among others.

Martha Cecilia Marín was such wonderful cheer while I was a doctoral student at the University of Connecticut. Her stories from Perú warm my life.

A number of thinkers and scholars who inspired me include: Margaret Walker Alexander, Sherman Alexie, Verónica Almanza, Miraida Almazan, Pedro Almódovar, Rose Mary Almonaci, Claudia Álvarez, Julia Álvarez, Jorge Luis Arredondo, Sylvia Aviles, Edith Balboa, James Baldwin, Toni Cade Bambara, Joy Banks, Jaime Bayly, Richard Beck, Michael Brian Becknell, Janice Bernal, Angela Blanchard, Roseann Blanco, Andrea Bocelli, Melissa Booker, Charles Borski, Amine Bouguerra, Robert Bradley, Gwendolyn Brooks Blakely, Ruby June Bruton, Rani Burd, Sarah Louise Bush, Johnny Charles Carrabba, Rose Marie Mandola Carrabba, Debra Barrera Carrizal, Rebecca Castillo, María Chavarría, Sandra Cisneros, Lucille Clifton, Judith Ortíz Cofer, David Contreras, Sarah Cortez, George Sylvester Counts, Atanacio Dávila, María Luisa Dávila, Miriam Dean-Otting, Francine DeFranco, Thomas DeFranco, Oscar De La Hoya, Lisa Delpit, Jeh Dopson, James Dressman, Barbara Dupee, Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer, Norio Endo, Marcela Esqueda, Eric Delgado Esquibel, Roberta Fernández, María Carolina Flores, Mike Florez, Paulo Freire, Ana Gabriel, Juan Gabriel, Ernesto Galarza, Lisa Ramírez Galvez, Winnie Gilbert, Elisa García, Alice Rodríguez Gómez, Cecilia Gonzáles, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzáles, Enrique González, Irmalinda González, Rigoberto

González, Roseann Dueñas González, Lois Goodman, Paula Gorham, Albert Joseph Griffith, Elizabeth Griffith, Richard Gross, Ernesto Gutiérrez, Margo Gutiérrez, Edward Hall, Barbara Hamilton, Lorraine Helton, Frederick Michael Hemker IV, Juanita Henderson, Joe Herrera, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, Paul Holland, Linda Holt, Xiang Huang, Terrance Hudson, Langston Hughes, John Josiah, Archna Khattar, Jamaica Kincaid, Benjamin Adams Kleinerman, Ramji Krishnasamy, Gloria Ladson-Billings, John Leach, Dale Nicole Leiva, Suzanne Jill Levine, José Eduardo Limón, Kim Phuong Lin, George Lipsitz, Juan Carlos Llanes, Federico García Lorca, Dennelle Lyon, Andrea Maldonado, Sharon Malveaux, Rubén Mamani-Paco, Corrie Martin, Rosemary Martin, Glenn Martínez, Herlinda Martínez, Michael René Martínez, Óscar Javier Martínez, John McKane, Linda Michaels, Peter Michaels, James Miller, Georgetta Mitchell, Pablo Montero, Pat Mora, Roy Morgan, Toni Morrison, Nancy Muldoon, Mary García Muñoz, Paul Murdock, Laura González Murillo, Sonia Nieto, Vantrice Oates, Lennie Otuemhobe, Dayna Marie Rodríguez Owens, John David Owens, Víctor Pallares, Richard Palmer, Consuelo Páramo, Brian Payne, Leo Pérez, Anthony Pittman, Américo Paredes, Barbara Pavarnik, Everardo Pedraza, Margie Peña, María Peña, Sterling Pennington, Ruth Pettyjohn, Charles Piano, Christal Pradia, Josephine Quintero, Janice Quiroz, Manuel Puig, Frances Rodríguez Ramírez, Marisela Jiménez Ramos, Dahlia Ravikovitch, Thomas Recchio, Morgan Reeves, Lisa Reyna, Royal Rhodes, Rainer María Rilke, Isnoel Ríos, Mercè Rodoreda, Anthony Rodríguez, Jaime Rodríguez, Juan José Rodríguez, Maribel Rodríguez, Olga Llamas Rodríguez, Pedro Nava Rodríguez, Pete Rodríguez, Richard Rodríguez, Ron Rodríguez, Donald Rogan, Roberto Díaz Rohena, Gail Rollins, Clara Román-Odio, Rolando Romo, Jeffrey Ralph Romph, Renato Rosaldo,

Judith Rosenberg, Barbara Samuels, Jane Sanders, Juana Sandoval, Leslie Marmon Silko, Raúl Siller, Jon Spano, Ilan Stavans, Alberta Surowiec, Lorenzo Thompson, Albert Tijerina, Tracy Tinsley, Karen Tomlin, Russell Tomlin, Deotis Tucker, Ángela Valenzuela, Alberto Vargas Vela, Tino Villanueva, Alice Walker, Benjamin Hopkins Weaver, Eudora Welty, Robert Penn Warren, Brien West, Sammie Wiggins, Kenneth Kelly Wise, Brian Wolfe, Vincent Maurice Woodard, LezLee Young, Thomas Hartley Young, Lei Yu, Emilio Zamora, Ofelia Zepeda, Howard Zinn, *et al.* I am enriched by the hearts, minds, and spirits of each of these.

Every now and then someone arrives at a moment of intense thought, and a life is rearranged before your eyes. Such happened to me. My *amigo* and conscious *colega* Brian Wolfe arrived with illuminating language and falling confetti, and I had to remind him that I knew him—even before I knew him. Amazing *amigas* and *amigos* arrive in my life each spring, especially during the holy week of Easter. Here's another offering of spring—a season of rebirth and renewal. Hope.

While I was a first-year undergraduate student at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas, I met Dr. Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer. In the Spring of 1994, I called her and interrupted her lesson at Thomas C. Clark High School. She received my call with enthusiasm, and she offered to meet with me at her home. I found a mentor to drive me to her home. With warmth and enthusiasm, she welcomed me and shared her special collection library. I found rare editions of Quinto Sol publications and other independent U.S. presses that believed in the work of Mexican-origin writers of the *Movimiento*. Dr. Dwyer's anthology, Chicano Voices, opened another literary world for me.

Dr. Dwyer and I shared many stories about the world of Chicana, Chicano, Latina, and Latino writing in the United States. Furthermore, our discussion included the Southern Fugitives, or the Agrarians, such as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren. Mr. Dwyer and Dr. Dwyer offered me a ride back to my dormitory hall, Providence Hall, at Our Lady of the Lake University. I remember feeling the generosity and humanity of the Dwyers. I witnessed their commitment to young learners and thinkers. I am grateful to Dr. Dwyer for her work as an educator and scholar. Most importantly, I found U.S.-Mexican writings that spoke to me because of her work as an editor and curriculum specialist with Houghton Mifflin Company and Scott Foresman and Company. *Gracias, profesora Dwyer, muchísimas gracias por haber dedicado su tiempo a nuestra literatura.*

While I was a first-year student at Our Lady of the Lake University, my English professor, Dr. Albert Griffith, encouraged me many times. He was the first professor to ever call me a young poet and a writer. Dr. Griffith encourages many young writers and thinkers, and I am blessed to have his hand blessing. *¡Qué profesor tan ilustre!*

Dr. Roberto Díaz Rohena sent me an electronic message in late 1999 after reading my personal essay, “The Meaning of Work,” in the October issue of Hispanic Magazine. His amazing story from Puerto Rico to Harvard University to the world of South Texas Mexicans enlightened me while I lived in New England. Even today, I am enriched by his sense of story, mission, and selfhood; each one of these is filled with amazement. Who would have thought that I would meet a fan and reader from Mercedes, Texas? There is no such thing as coincidence, since he lives on a street named Esperanza. Dr.

Rohena, you are the star ophthalmologist on the South Texas border. *Sigue abriendo más ojitos, mi amigo y colega de consciencia.*

My cousin, Jaime Rodríguez, leaped and somersaulted from Moulton, Texas, to Austin, Texas, to pursue higher education in the late 1980s. As a young boy, I remember pausing to hear more about his academic journey. I paused to rest my paws. At that moment, I knew I wanted to follow him to University Avenue. Indeed, the familiar acknowledgement begins with him—always, all ways. Jaime was the first victor in the pursuit of higher education and independence. The family salutes him every year as we walk across the stage to receive our diploma. *Ay, thank you for opening the camino for each of us. We continue to honor you in each step. Nos iluminas.*

My sister, Alice Rodríguez Gómez, encouraged me through every page I drafted. I am glad I read many of her library books through high school and university study, because she has been my soul model and mentor for the longest time that a younger brother can remember. Even when I frowned through my studies or refused to cut my hair, she nudged me along more times than I would like to admit—even yesterday. My *hermano-in-law*, Álvaro José Gómez, brought laughter on many weekends. He is the epitome of brother-in-law-hood. (Thank you for the barbecue and *tostones*!) Their children remind me that there is life and love beyond the push and pound of the academy. My nieces and nephews, including Álvaro Enrique, Victoria Isabella, Tatiana Alexandria, and Cristián Nicolás, fill me with love and laughter every time we meet and spin our eyes and bodies 'round and 'round. *¡Qué corazones!*

My father, Pedro Nava Rodríguez, made trips from his home in Weimar, Texas, to make sure I was safe and healthy as I completed the dissertation in Houston's

Magnolia Park barrio. When the pantry was empty, when the freezer held only a few cubes of ice, when the refrigerator had only a box of Arm and Hammer, *Papi* made a few trips to the neighborhood *supermercado*. Next, he worked his usual magic in the kitchen with a *puño* of this and that, including spices and herbs, and served me a bowl of fish and vegetable soup. *Papi* served me a kind of bouillabaisse. *Ay, gracias, Papi, por tu cariño y amor incondicional.*

I am indebted to Jorge Luis Arredondo, Eric Delgado Esquibel, Andrea Maldonado, and Dayna Marie Owens for their sincere *amistad*. Moreover, Jorge has been my faithful mentor for the past seven years. I appreciate his candor, brotherhood, and generous spirit. I honor our *amistad* immensely. Thank you for meeting me halfway as I slew dragons and entered more academic spaces.

Eric offered his sincere support and *amistad* since our meeting in 1993 while we were first-year students at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas. Thank you for believing in me.

Since our meeting in 1997, Andrea reminded me of my positive leadership and entrusting *amistad*. Her light and beacon rescued me many times.

There is nothing greater than the bond of sincere *amistad*. Dayna reminds me of this daily, and I am enriched by her vision and light. For the nourishing dosage of positive energy and light on many occasions, I thank you. The meals I had at your *casita* on Forest Hill Drive and the warm company of your *perritos* gave me the nourishment I needed on long days of (re)writing and (re)thinking. I thank your husband, John David Owens, for stepping up to the home plate when I needed some help on the arrangement of these pages.

Each of these dear friends reminds me of my blessings in one lifetime.



In the Fall of 1992, while I was a senior student in high school, I visited the local LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) National Educational Service Center, Incorporated (LNESEC) located at 2220 Broadway in Houston, Texas. Riding the MTA Harrisburg line bus allowed me to look out of the window, and I saw the center nestled in a church area with wild grass and weeds growing. A sign, having suffered from vandalism, announced the educational center's home. I knocked on the door. My knock brought a warm voice to the door, and a woman named Consuelo welcomed me. To my surprise, I belonged to the nouveau riche upon my entrance: a wealth of information to pursue higher education as well as financing my dream of academic success was displayed before my gaze in my search.

The year 1992 brought many surprises and joys for me. Discovering the LNESEC office led to more treasures and successes. Since then, I have studied in numerous universities throughout the United States, including Texas, New York, Ohio, and Connecticut. My counselor and mentor, Roseann Blanco, guided me in my pursuit of academic success. Moreover, she assisted me with financial aid forms and scholarships. Her steady support and hand blessing became a familiar quilt in my life every academic year. I joined the Talent Search program; I witnessed the fostering of one's talents and gifts in the company of Mrs. Blanco and her singing staff. Indeed, young student learners are gifted and full of potential and opportunity. However, positive guidance, discipline, and leadership are essential for achievement. In the presence of soul models such as Mrs.

Blanco, I recognized the value of my own sense of self in my pursuit of higher education. I knew I was not alone in my intellectual journey.

LNESC saved and blessed me with the active counselors I hoped to finally find one day, but rarely encountered in my schooling experience. Indeed, I was a migrant student learner in search of a harvest. My high school counselors only dedicated their time to course scheduling, so they failed to meet with me during the semester other than to put me in someone else's classroom. And all I wanted, all *I* wanted was to be heard and guided. With whom could I speak to share my goals, my longing, my life? And, above all, who cared? I wondered.

As a young migrant learner in pursuit of academic success, I found myself in the presence of caring believers—Mrs. Blanco and her staff of advisers. I know that more youth with similar stories will follow and you will be there to receive them with open arms and familiar hand blessing. Theirs shall be a gentle communion as mine has been thus far.

The spring season is a time of rebirth, renewal, and hope, too. Nevertheless, the fall season reminds me of my treasure—the LULAC National Educational Service Center, Incorporated, in Houston, Texas. Even today, more than eight years later, I remember the center as the blessing on Broadway Boulevard.



For many of us, blessings fall from the sky, and our lives are rearranged forever. Certainly, this proved true when I found the writings by Pat Mora and Sandra Cisneros. Joined by my high school science teacher, Ruby June Bruton, and Roseann Blanco, these women are my heroines. I am enriched by the life and thought they offer me.

I would like to acknowledge the generosity and heartfelt kindness I received from Enrique “Henry” González, Karen Tomlin, and Russell Tomlin while employed by HoustonWorks USA. Henry allowed me the freedom to work independently, and I thank him for believing in my work as a youth development specialist and then as a community relations specialist. I am grateful for his coming and care. I also appreciate his attentive ear during moments of intense isolation.

Karen Tomlin received me with open arms on many occasions when I returned as a summer field representative and SCANS facilitator with HoustonWorks USA. Thank you for possessing the spirit to make me feel at home when I entered your offices.

Russell Tomlin believed in my work as a multi-tasking worker who fell from the sky and landed at HoustonWorks USA. Who would not like to work with a believer? It is true that I expressed my gratitude to Eula Butler, when it was clear that I gained strength from many believers and community workers. Russell Tomlin believes in my sense of self and mission, and I thank him for allowing me to carve my own space with conviction. He is a person who listens, thinks, cares, and believes.

While working at HoustonWorks USA’s The WorkSource, Gulf Coast Careers Youth Center @ Ripley House, I had the privilege of learning more about the world of work from Mike Florez. At the age of fourteen, I was drawn to his kindness and generosity when I applied for a special school-to-work program led by Eula Butler. Since then, his mentorship enriches my everyday life, especially in workforce planning and ascent. I appreciate his hand blessing and open arms. Most recently, the open door to his *casita* and garage on Crestview Street flexed my muscles into a mightier force.

Because of his coaching and training, I am becoming a heavyweight lightweight.

Gracias, mil gracias.

As a Multicultural Scholars Award Fellow at the University of Connecticut, I thank the Neag School of Education's Office of the Dean and the Dean of the Graduate School for offering me the equal opportunity and access to pursue my dream of academic success.

Participation in the American Anthropological Association's 99th Annual Meeting held in San Francisco, California, in November, 2000, guided my research interests, especially with a firm, public voice. I am grateful to Dr. Signithia Fordham for welcoming my research project titled "'Whose Body Is It, Anyway?': A Critical and Literary Study on the Politics of Hair and Beauty in the U.S. Imagination." Her panel of emerging scholars contributed to my presentation's success.

The sixth conference of the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project, "Recovering the Past, Charting the Future: Archives, Canons, and Questions of Identity," held at the University of Houston in early December, 2000, offered many questions about colonial and contemporary literatures from the Américas. During the conference, I had the pleasure of meeting four young scholars who addressed the construction of cultural identities in the Mexican-American Southwest. Jennifer Nájera, Laura Padilla, Vincent Pérez, and Michael Trujillo were four promising scholars who shared their work. Furthermore, Dr. John-Michael Rivera's presentation on pedagogy and U.S. Hispanic colonial texts informed me of another body of literature I should consider in my present and future teaching and research. Indeed, I am empowered in the presence of these dedicated scholars.

In late January, 2001, I attended the public forum “Latinos and Educational Equity: High-stakes Testing and Percent Plans,” sponsored by University of Texas at Austin’s Center for Mexican American Studies. The topics addressed, such as the quality of education for historically underprivileged youth in Texas, who are mostly African American and U.S. Latina/o, led me to more critical inquiry. Furthermore, discussions on the effectiveness of Texas’ Top Ten Percent Law and the current system of accountability for public school students, teachers, and administrators in grades three through twelve reminded me of the schooling transactions and banking systems in the name of educational reform. This gathering of thinkers and scholars further empowered me to conduct my dissertation project in a timely and thorough manner, hoping that my critical analysis and reflection would lead to curriculum reform and empowerment.

Texas State Representative Irma Rangel’s speech was empowering for this emerging educator, and I admired her compelling voice and integrity. Texas State Senator Gonzalo Barrientos affirmed my need to raise my voice for our youngest thinkers and scholars across the country.

In early February, 2001, Russell Tomlin from The WorkSource Gulf Coast Careers of Houston, Texas, asked me to participate in the conference “*¡Esperanza!*: Hope for Latino Youth in the Juvenile Justice System,” held at the Wilshire Grand Hotel in Los Angeles, California. Deotis Tucker and I gained a greater sense of self and mission toward Latina and Latino youth. Among our youngest members of society, these youth merit our attention and positive community work in both urban and rural spaces across the country. I am grateful to the Coalition for Juvenile Justice for planning their Sixth Annual Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Conference with a Latino theme. My visits to a

number of community and youth centers in East Los Angeles' Boyle Heights neighborhood gave me a greater sense of vision and mission.

In March, 2001, Russell Tomlin and Jeh Dopson from the The WorkSource Gulf Coast Careers of Houston, Texas, led a group of operations team members to Alianza Dominicana, Incorporated in New York City's Washington Heights. The director, Moises Pérez, received us with open arms. His open door policy and his fine staff contributed to our feeling of joy and success in the community. *Les deseo mucho más éxito.*

Everardo Pedraza, my fierce *amigo* and colleague and conscious reader, offered this manuscript his editorial eye. Everardo understood that his reading and editorial pen had to be precise and delicate, knowing that something could dislodge, could unravel the intricacy of an emerging writer's thoughts. He, too, has the ear and heart of a poet, and I thank him for his sincere offering. Indeed, I appreciate his meticulous *ojitos* and the questions he offered my labor this past year. Everardo did this as a favor and gift, and I am conscious of this. I anticipate many more collaborative efforts in our shared sense of mission. *Ojalá que nuestro sol sea más brillante.*

The entire project could not have been possible without the support of my family, friends, colleagues, mentors, and believers. *Gracias a Dios.* I appreciate the solidarity and hope offered by each of these aforementioned spirits. I am blessed many times in one lifetime, and I thank each of these for coming and for the illuminating vision and light. Unnamed family members and friends are recorded in my heart.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The researcher finds it necessary to include the author's autobiography, because of the themes and topics that surround the research: study of literature, schooling and education, race and ethnicity, canon keepers and warriors, cultural studies, the hidden curriculum, etc. Readers will find a degree of knowledge about the author, including his lived experiences through public schooling and the pursuit of higher education.

I am the son of a Mexican American (Texas Mexican) father, Pedro Nava Rodríguez (born in 1941), and a Mexican mother, Rita Guadalupe Reséndez Rodríguez (1940-2000). I was born and raised in Houston, Texas, and I am the youngest in a family of five children.

All of my public schooling took place in Houston, Texas. In the Fall of 1980, I entered the bilingual education program at Benjamin Franklin Elementary School on Canal Street. Prior to the end of my second grade academic year, I was sent home with a letter to my parents that declared that I could enter a mainstream English classroom in the Fall of 1983 for third grade instruction. My father asked me if I wanted to be in an English-only classroom, and I could not think of anything else to say other than, "*Sí, sí, sí, Papi.*" My father accepted my decision and signed the form for my entrance to the mainstream English classroom.

In the Spring of 1986, I graduated from Franklin Elementary School, and later in the fall I entered Thomas Alva Edison Middle School on Avenue I. My siblings attended both of these schools, and I followed them with great enthusiasm. Overjoyed, I had some of their teachers. A few of these teachers became my mentors, too.

I graduated from Edison Middle School in the Spring of 1989, and later in the fall I entered a magnet high school of the Houston Independent School District named High School for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice (Legal Careers). For my senior year, however, I attended a neighborhood school named Stephen Fuller Austin High School; I graduated from Austin High School in May, 1993.



Although I had a few counselors in my public schooling, they rarely expressed any interest in my academic future. They believed I would become a good manual laborer or perhaps someone's assistant or secretary. My counselors hardly had any time for me, even though I was a student with goals and ambition. In addition, most of my public school teachers trained me through the banking system—a model of instruction that involves regurgitating information as knowledge. Every week, I read passages from texts and answered the questions or problems that followed. Obedience to such assignments was applauded and rewarded every grading period. In opposition to learning by rote, I challenged this curricula and instruction, and I found *my* voice. I refused to be silenced through lifeless curricula and instruction. I spoke from my space and asserted my sense of self and place, even if this meant encountering moments of both danger and possibility.

If my public school counselors or teachers knew that I found my way to University Avenue, I am not too sure what they would say. Perhaps a few would weep. Maybe most of them would sigh and offer a slight swaggering of the hand or maybe they would raise an eyebrow, but I am still not too sure. Who's to know? I am the boy who earned **Cs** and **Ds** on his high school report cards and eventually graduated in 1993 with a

2.89 grade point average. In 1991, I failed the writing section of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and finally passed the following year on my second trial. Through each Joban trial, I was living inside a story. One of my high school counselors refused to offer me a fee waiver to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and he discouraged me from thinking about college. “Go do something else, son,” he said. Then again, he believed I would become someone’s manual laborer, porter, or young father. Did he hold these standards for all of my Mexican-origin peers? To make matters more unsettling, however, I received the lowest scores on the SAT on two separate occasions.

In contrast, I do not remember being as stupid as these measurement systems pronounced to educators and university admissions officers across the United States. There had to be another way to succeed, and I hoped to one day find it. Surprisingly, I did. I survived: I am a survivor. In my journey, I have managed to overcome many challenges of which I did not think I was capable and of which many others did not think me capable either. This is especially true because I am young and from a family of manual laborers.

Peers and colleagues speak of financial successes in their careers, while I have the privilege to name the people who believed in me, including Mami and Papi. At the same time, my public schooling brought many moments of aloneness. Yet, I do not remember being lonely. Aloneness was necessary for a young learner, thinker, and writer yearning to break loose. At times, I felt like a common weed in the city’s sidewalk cracks, hoping to one day make a way out of no way.

When I am invited to speak in the public schools, I bring more questions than answers. I often share a question that tugs my psyche at the moment of my visit. Although my public schooling began nearly twenty years ago, I remember my earliest peers and friends. There is one question that keeps haunting me from my schooling experience. Perhaps this is due to the psychic violence and withdrawal I endured in my schooling. I ask myself, What happened to Bernardo, Orfa, Charles, Cynthia, Robert, Jacqueline, María, Alejandro, Mónica, Juan, Demitrius, Luis, Ruby, Antonio, and Wanda? I know that schooling failed many of them. However, I hope that they found their voice. I believe they are sharing their gifts and what is yearning deep within their hearts.



In the Fall of 1993, I enrolled in Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas. During the Summer of 1994, I attended Eugene Lang College (New School for Social Research) in New York, New York. During the summers of 1994 and 1995, I attended the University of Houston in Houston, Texas. I received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, in May, 1997. In August, 1997, I was admitted to The Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin. In May, 1999, I received the degree of Master of Arts from the University of Texas at Austin.

In August, 1999, I was admitted to The Graduate School and Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut. While pursuing graduate study, I have been employed by the University of Texas at Austin, University of Houston, Goodwill Industries of Central Texas in Austin, Austin Independent School District, and HoustonWorks USA, among other employers.



After arriving in New England for the first time, I asked myself, “What is a native of the Southwestern United States doing in the rural quiet of Northeastern Connecticut?” I reminded myself that I was doing what many young Latinos and Latinas are doing in this country: going as far as our courage and knowledge allow. While pursuing doctoral study at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, having made a diagonal move across the country from the Southwest to the Northeast, I found myself revisiting my earliest encounters with the public school system. In the early 1980s, I entered an elementary school in Houston’s east side where my family lived. Mine was a not a hobbled beginning, since I entered kindergarten already speaking English and Spanish. (My mother, though, had asked that I be placed in a bilingual classroom. She wanted me to come to literacy and culture through two languages.) Like my peers, I benefitted from numerous programs created for equity in the U.S. schooling process.

Through the intercession and active instruction of my bilingual teachers and mentors, I was enriched by two languages that coexisted side by side: *inglés y español*. This dual perspective enabled me to see more clearly the strengths and weaknesses of two cultures. Moreover, literacy does not only take place in English, but in world (not foreign) languages. Because both English and Spanish were part of my public and private life, I had a passport with which to enter academic spaces that, like my home, demanded learning and thinking in two languages. As educators, parents, and the public struggle to understand the value and impact of bilingual and multilingual programs, perhaps the lived experiences of those who have grown up in them, in turn, can offer a more fruitful ethnography that can enrich the debate over the development of literacy

skills and the language acquisition process. The multicultural United States must recognize its true mirror—a country being transformed by the knowledge and values of its diverse citizens, many of whom are natives.

Thinking of my earliest schooling experience, the first grade looms in the front room of my memory. Early in the academic year, I remember my first grade teacher, Ms. Eloise Selke, sitting me in the front of the classroom. I stared at the blackboard as she wrote her name in script. Drawn to the art of penmanship, I carved her handwriting in my Red Chief tablet over and over again, delighted by my pencil marks on the lined page. As she read from our first grade primer, I studied how sounds shaped her mouth. I enunciated her words when asked to do so. In my own thoughts, I silently repeated words to myself. From our basal reader, I learned about characters named Buffy and Mr. Fig. With enthusiasm, she introduced us to new words and worlds in English and Spanish. Through Ms. Selke's active instruction, my ways of reading and seeing the world were unfolding. At the same time, I beamed with confidence when she offered approval as I shaped my thoughts into form. As my teacher encouraged me, I was becoming—growing into a whole person—as I heard my own voice in two languages. As a learner, I was not forced to choose one language over another. Two languages—equally rich, equally valid—could be used to read and name my universe.

Coming to languages meant witnessing teachers' expectations for a select number of students. Even in the classroom, students experience segregation as teachers categorize students and schools, marking some for success and others for failure. Later in the fall of first grade, I was placed in another area of the classroom. At first, I believed that I had misbehaved, and I feared my mother's disciplinary actions. With fear, I obeyed

Ms. Selke's instruction to move to the opposite side of the classroom. I sat in a different desk and faced another blackboard. At first I did not know what was happening, but I then noticed, after my peers received their lesson, that she had opened a large notebook tablet with pictures and vocabulary words. I came to realize that this other side of the room was a space reserved for students like me—students who were nudged farther ahead. Ms. Selke dictated words to me, and I offered these words sound. Through repetition and careful study, I entered more worlds of learning.

I like to think that the circumstance that led me to teaching was the art of interpreting and translating for my mother. Two languages served my immediate reality in both private and public spaces of communication. As young as three and four years old, my mother asked me to interpret when the department store attendants raised their voices when she did not respond in English. I raised my voice in English for Mami at the Three Sisters department store on Main Street in downtown Houston, Texas. Down the block, at the McDonald's, I placed our lunch order. As I grew older, I realized that I was tirelessly performing the same exercise over and over again as an interpreter and translator.

Finally, after leaving downtown Houston on the Metropolitan Transit Authority bus, we were safer in the company of people who spoke Spanish, even though the bus driver was deaf to the sounds and cries of Spanish. It was not until I attended a magnet high school that specialized in legal careers—more than ten years later—that I realized there were students who were products of elective bilingualism. They did not speak Spanish because they *had* to; they spoke Spanish because they *chose* to do so.

Nevertheless, I secretly clung to the idea of mastering and teaching two languages side by side.



I am often asked when I first entered the teaching profession. I like to think I first became a teacher thinking about my childhood reminiscences. In the late 1970s, I was one of the youngest thinkers and educators on the 7200 block of Avenue K in Houston, Texas. For my initial teaching endeavor, my classroom was the utility room for the washer and dryer we did not yet own. Eventually, after my father saved enough money from his job as a pipe fitter, we bought our first Kenmore washing machine from the Sears department store. Because the washing machine made so much noise, competing with my teaching to an imaginary class of students, I expressed my disapproval to my mother. With skepticism, my two older sisters and my older brother observed my active instruction. My oldest sister, Alice, supported my teaching strategies, and I listened to her as she shared her ideas for improvement.

As a young(er) teacher, I was imaginative. The wooden screen door to the backyard had a piece of plywood that I used as a chalkboard. Because I wished to write on the plywood, I locked the door. With a piece of broken plasterboard, I wrote the words I had learned in English and Spanish. Who would have thought? This was my imagined world far from the public school classroom. I could imagine many worlds that were uniquely mine and no one else's in the whole universe. My mind was open, free. I like to think there was a fleeting gazelle in my imagination. There was also a phoenix in flight, entrusting his life on his wings alone.

I believed in my pedagogy, even though I did not know this word back then. Indeed, I prepared my lessons with enthusiasm and conviction.



Was I the apple of my first grade teacher's eye? I ask myself today. And if so, why? Did she hold higher expectations for me that did not extend to the other young learners and thinkers—my peers? Questions such as these continue to surface as I prepare my lifelong journey as a learner, educator, and thinker. As active agents of power in “educating” their students, teachers' expectations can form the overall equation for either the success or failure of students. Teachers do not stand alone as autonomous individuals, unshaped by social contexts. They, like parents, contribute to the equation for the schooling process and its overall affect on the young(est) learners and thinkers.

In 1996, I was introduced to the writings by the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire. Rather than opt for pre-packaged teacher education that fails to acknowledge relearning as one teaches, Freire's writings about people coming into literacy guided me toward the goal that students learn to read not only words, but to study, read, observe, and recognize the relationship between objects in the world, too.

Also true to Freire's framework, which the insurgent African-American intellectual known under the pseudonym of Bell Hooks and many other scholars have endorsed, literacy leads to empowerment when individuals move from being objects to subjects through a naming of their social reality. Through such learning, education becomes a practice of freedom as the student moves against and beyond social boundaries. In his posthumous book entitled Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach (1998), Freire writes about “growing” as an epistemological

curiosity: “Knowing has everything to do with growing. But the knowing of dominant minorities absolutely must not prohibit, must not asphyxiate, must not castrate the growing of the immense dominated majorities” (p. 95). If we are to see and know beyond our education and experience, we must leap to spaces that teach and remove us from our comfort and privilege.

In another letter, for instance, Freire reminds us: “Educators need to know what happens in the world of the children with whom they work. They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language with which they skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of the school, and how they know it” (pp. 72-73).

Speaking of the apple of discord in education, is it possible as a nation, or even locally, to come to a consensus on bilingual and multicultural education and accountability in the public schools? Although I am a native of the Southwest, I am finding, even in the Northeastern United States—a historical space of (im)migration—that the struggle for equity in the schools can begin with the teaching of native languages and cultures of the United States as well as others that contribute to global learning. Multicultural education challenges variables such as race, gender, ethnicity, and social class to articulate diverse lived experiences and foster academic success.

In regard to the function of language, active teachers and learners of languages must realize that foreign languages do not exist, that to think of another language as “foreign” assumes a central language of authority and identity from which other languages appear “exotic,” “foreign,” and “Other.” Again, we must ask ourselves, foreign to whom? World languages and cultures enrich our perception and naming of the

world. Who has the power to determine which tongue is accented and which is “pure”?

The self-proclaimed language police, indeed, must resolve its irrational fear, because bilinguals and multilinguals are raising their voices, regardless of the monolingual English movement across the country.

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CHAPTER I

General Background

Introduction

If we may now assume that the child will be imposed upon some fashion by the various elements of his (sic) environment, the real question is not whether the imposition will take place, but rather from what source it will come. If we are to answer this question in terms of the past, there could, I think, be but one answer: on all genuinely crucial matters the school follows the wishes of the groups or classes that actually rule society; on minor matters the school is sometimes allowed a certain measure of freedom. But the future may be unlike the past. Or perhaps I should say that teachers, if they could increase sufficiently their stock of courage, intelligence, and vision, might become a social force of some magnitude.

—George S. Counts (1932, p. 25)

Border Town: 1938

She counts cement cracks
little Esperanza with the long brown braids,
counts so as not to hear
the girls in the playground singing,
 “the farmer’s in the dell
 the farmer’s in the dell”
laughing and running round-round
while little Esperanza walks head down
eyes full of tears.
 “The nurse takes the child”
but Esperanza walks alone across the loud
street, through the graveyard gates
down the dirt path, walks faster,
faster . . . away
from ghosts with long arms,
no “hi-ho the dairy-o” here,
runs to that other school
for Mexicans
every day wanting to stay close to home,
every day wanting to be the farmer in the dell,
little Esperzana in the long brown braids
counts cement cracks

ocho, nueve, diez.

—Pat Mora, (1986, p. 16)

Major publications and critical studies continue to document the growing disenfranchisement of U.S.-Mexican and Latino youth in the secondary public school system (Rodríguez, 1999; San Miguel & Valencia, 1991; Valdés, 1998). Dramatic increases of Latino immigrants are seen as changing the sociocultural imperatives of the country, including its national ethnic composition and imaginary (González, 2000; Macedo & Bartolomé, 1999; Warren 1996). The U.S. Bureau of the Census predicts that in the near future one in every four Americans will be of Latino ancestry (August & McArthur, 1996; Rong & Preissle, 1998). In 1995, the Latino-origin population of the United States was 26.6 million, or 10 percent of all residents, excluding Puerto Rico's population of 3.8 million, thus totaling to a swelling 30.4 million (González, 2000). By the year 2035, 50 percent of the population under eighteen years of age will be children of color (Gillette, 1996).

The massive U.S. demographic shift challenges educators in every segment of the country (Sizer, 1996). Statistics also indicate that the current U.S. teacher population is approximately 90 percent White American, and monolingual female (Grant & Secada, 1990; Grant & Sleeter, 1998). Researchers predict no significant changes in the percentage despite education reform efforts (Grant & Sleeter, 1998). The curriculum reflects the monocultural and monolingual circumstances of teachers, especially in daily instructional practices and canon ideology (Ogbu, 1992; Valdés, 1995, 1999). For example, Goodlad (1984) and Delpit (1995) describe the operation of schools (the textbooks, instructional practices, and the policies) as not substantially different from the Anglo-American student teachers' own experience.

Recent studies document the poor and invalid integration of works by women and ethnic writers in the U.S. public school English curriculum (Athanases, 1993; Finn, 1999; Tatum, 1997). In her ethnographic case study of high school urban Mexican-American students in the Southwestern United States, Valenzuela (1999) describes a “subtractive” type of sociocultural contextualization and educational experience for these students. No one has done an investigation as described in this proposal: an ethnographic case study based on the sociocultural contexts of a high school American literature program, which has been historically taught in the eleventh grade in U.S. schools. Conceivably, a close-up investigation could indicate how sociocultural factors intersect in American literature instruction of U.S.-Mexican students at MGHS.

In defining the nation-state and its embodiment of knowledge, the nation-state’s cultural, political, and literary hegemony becomes its democratic standard in the schooling process. Advocates of an “engaged pedagogy,” Freire (1993/1970) and Hooks (1994b) consider this practice involving critical learning, action, and reflection for self-actualization and empowerment. Rather than opt for pre-packaged teacher education that fails to acknowledge relearning as one teaches, Freire’s (1993/1970) writings address the challenges of marginal individuals coming into literacy toward the goal that they learn to read not only words, but study, read, observe, and recognize the relationship between objects in the world. Also true to Freire’s framework, which Hooks (1994b) and Yagelski (2000), among others, have endorsed, literacy leads to empowerment when individuals move from being objects to subjects through a naming of their social reality (Applebee, 1996; Leistyna, 1999; Stuckey, 1991). Through such learning, education

becomes a practice of freedom as the student moves against and beyond social boundaries (Freire, 1993/1970; Hooks, 1994b; Irwin, 1996).

Although there are ethnographic case studies on the teaching of literature, more studies are needed that explore the sociocultural contexts of the existing canon and the teaching of American literature in the eleventh grade classroom. The findings of this study are intended to provide information regarding the American literature to be included in the program and the sociocultural factors brought by teachers to the school.

Statement of the Problem

Despite efforts to improve English curriculum and instruction to high school U.S.-Mexican students, the problem of teaching American literature without the sociocultural context persists (Milner & Milner, 1999). A gap in the literature exists with respect to a complete, in-depth sociocultural description of the contexts of teaching American literature to U.S.-Mexican youth. This description is needed for the understanding of the dynamic role of teachers in the classroom. Moreover, researchers of pedagogy must “examine the nature of teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and other such constructs in relation to learning to teach, teachers’ classroom actions, and changes in practice” (Richardson, 1994, p. 5). Therefore, this study will examine how MGHS teacher participants recognize the strengths U.S.-Mexican eleventh grade students bring to the American literature classroom context. The results of this study would (a) add to the existing knowledge base concerning the schooling of U.S.-Mexican youth, (b) improve current teaching American literature practices for these students, and (c) provide

useful information for secondary schools in the planning and organizing of programs for students of U.S.-Mexican background.

Theoretical Framework

Statistical social indicators continue to account the negative public schooling practices, experiences, and circumstances of Latinos in the United States (Chapa, 1990; García, 1999, Valenzuela, 1999). The graduation rate remains varied between 50 and 60 percent (Census, 1993; Valencia, 1991). By the age 25, about 25 percent of Latinos have completed high school compared to 79 percent for Whites (Carnevale, 1999; Census, 1993; Valencia, 1991). Recent research confirms that Latinos continue to enter school later, leave earlier, and receive proportionately fewer high school diplomas and college degrees than other U.S. students (Galindo & Escamilla, 1995; Okagaki, Frensch, & Gordon, 1995; Ortíz & Gonzalez, 2000).

As early as the 1970s and to the present, ethnographic researchers employ this methodology for studying the sociocultural contexts surrounding the education of urban and students (Foley, 1990; Ogbu, 1974; Valenzuela, 1999). These scholars also identify the curricula and instructional strategies—both overt and covert—in articulating ideology and culturally hegemonic imperatives in the classroom (Delpit, 1995; Fordham, 1996). The debates abound in traditional Western and multicultural education, since all knowledge reflects the values and interests of its creators and teachers, “illustrat[ing] how the debate between the multiculturalists and the Western traditionalists is rooted in their

conflicting conceptions about the nature of knowledge and their divergent political and social interests” (Banks, 1993, p. 4).

Efforts in multicultural education have led to reform and liberatory pedagogy, challenging monocultural and culturally irrelevant curriculum and instruction (Hooks, 1994b; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Mora, 1993, 1998). Liberatory pedagogy refers to Paulo Freire’s (1970) process of learning and relearning. Liberatory pedagogy is the reexamination of old practices and established beliefs of educational institution and behaviors. Inquiries are made about equality and justice. The student is liberated as s/he gains equal access to power. Moreover, liberatory pedagogy is a theoretical framework that asks students and educators to reexamine issues of power and its relationship to the greater societal forces that affect learning and schools.

What is the social construction of knowledge? Within the classroom, what are the embedded contexts? The cultural attributes of teachers, students, and peers enter the classroom, and many contexts come into play when each one of these interacts. García (1999) explains,

The importance of sociocultural theory and constructivism for education is their proposal that individual learning and social interaction are inextricably connected. . . . [T]he psychology of the individual learner is deeply shaped by social interaction—in essence, that both student and teacher are engaged in the process of constructing their minds through social activity. In this view, knowledge is not a given set of fixed ideas that are passed from teacher to student. Rather, knowledge is created in the interaction between teacher and student. High-order mental processes, the tendency to look at things in certain ways, and values themselves are produced by shared activity and dialogue. . . . [O]ur social lives, often considered to be the major products of culture, are also the major ingredients of cognition. (p. 217)

The review of the literature interrogates the schooling of U.S.-Mexican students who too often reject ethnic group cultural capital, since the dominant group invests in the

“production and reproduction of ‘legitimate culture’” (Apple, 1986, p. 20; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). In Subtractive Schooling: U.S-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring (1999), Valenzuela explains,

School subtracts resources from youth in two major ways. First, it dismisses their definition of education which is not only thoroughly grounded in Mexican culture, but also approximates the optimal definition of education advanced by Noddings (1984) and other caring theorists. Second, subtractive schooling encompasses subtractively assimilationist policies and practices that are designed to divest Mexican students of their culture and language. A key consequence of these subtractive elements of schooling is the erosion of students’ social capital evident in the presence and absence of academically oriented networks among immigrant and U.S.-born youth, respectively. In other words, within a span of two generations, the “social de-capitalization” of Mexican youth becomes apparent (Putnam 1993, 1995). (p. 20-21)

The overall objective of this project is to provide pertinent information and data about significant social themes from literary instruction and history that influence the implementation and design of American literature instruction in the high school. The themes are as diverse as New England writers, the American Dream, a house divided and restored by the Civil War, and modern and postmodern American poetry. The researcher believes that the findings from this study will prove helpful to teachers, curricularists, parents, and educators. Furthermore, the researcher hopes that the findings will influence future models for effective American literature instruction.

Research Questions

The overall purpose of this study is to explore sociocultural phenomena that surround the program and teaching of American literature at Macario García High School. Guiding this project are the following specific research questions:

1. How can one describe the sociocultural community in MGHS: history, physical setting, economic, political and aesthetic contexts, relations, beliefs, etc.?
2. What are eleventh grade English teacher participants' perceptions of their U.S.-Mexican students and the American literature curriculum?
 - a. What factors influence their perceptions?
 - b. How do participants perceive themselves as teachers of American literature?
3. How can the process of curriculum selection of American literature for the eleventh grade be described?
 - a. Are there specific selection criteria?
 - b. Do criteria differ from the ones mandated by the school district?
4. How do teacher participants perceive intermediality in the schooling process related to literary study? How do students perceive it?
5. What theoretical explanation emerges in the findings of this study?

Research Design and Methodology

This ethnographic study intends to examine the sociocultural contexts of Macario García High School's (MGHS, pseudonym) eleventh grade American literature program located in an inner city in the Southwestern United States. A review of the literature has failed to locate studies fitting this description. The few existent case studies deal with American literary canon formation and generally focus on Western curriculum standards and, most recently, critical and multicultural pedagogy and reform efforts (Sleeter, 1996; Torres, 2000).

Ethnographic data will be gathered from documents, observations, interviews (informal and semi-structured), and researcher-developed questionnaires. Interpretation of data will follow a constant interactive, exploratory, and explanatory process (Moll, 2000; Spradley, 1979). The findings of the study are intended to further our understanding of the sociocultural contexts surrounding American literature pedagogical standards of high school U.S.-Mexican students (Dalton, 1998). They may also help build a knowledge base potentially useful in the design and development of literature selection, national identity, and literacy instruction that meet the needs of Mexican and Latino-origin high schoolers.

The purpose of this study is to examine the sociocultural contexts of the eleventh grade American literature program at MGHS. The study will be conducted using a critical ethnographic case study design that includes techniques such as observation, informal, open-ended interviewing, focus group sessions, and literature and document analysis (Spradley, 1979; Valenzuela, 1999; Wolf, 1992). These techniques are means of collection of data. The main premise in this approach is that it is possible to identify and describe the set of understandings and specific knowledge in the participants' perceptions that are shared among them and that guide their behavior in the specific context under consideration (Pelto & Pelto, 1978; Tai, 2000).

The five research questions will be answered by analyzing the data obtained through various different sources: interview questionnaire, observation, focus groups, and literature and document analysis. Wolf (1992) holds that ethnographic responsibility is "including an effort to make sense of what [the investigator] saw, was told, or read—first for [oneself] and then for [her/his] readers" (pp. 4-5). The researcher will transcribe

the audiotapes of interviews for analysis. Continual rethinking of data will extend my understanding of the teaching of American literature and sociocultural factors. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue, “[D]iscovery of theory from data—which [they] call grounded theory—is a major task confronting sociology today” (p. 1).

Since the purpose of the research is to understand the nature of the phenomena at the school site, the researcher will use outlined techniques that include “prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, reflexive journal, thick description, purposive sampling, and audit trial” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 161). In addition, he will identify his “assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation” (Merriam, 1988, p. 170). It is reasonable to assume that under similar conditions a repeat of this study should provide similar outcomes.

Significance of the Study

A principal goal of this ethnographic research case study is to examine the sociocultural contexts of Macario García High School’s (MGHS, pseudonym) eleventh grade American literature program located in an inner city in the Southwestern United States. A review of the literature has failed to locate studies fitting this description. The few existent case studies deal with American literary canon formation and generally focus on Western curriculum standards and, most recently, critical and multicultural pedagogy and reform efforts (Sleeter, 1996; Torres, 2000). Ethnographic data will be gathered from documents, observations, interviews (informal and semi-structured), and

researcher-developed questionnaires. Interpretation of data will follow a constant interactive, exploratory, and explanatory process (Moll, 2000; Spradley, 1979). The findings of the study are intended to further our understanding of the sociocultural contexts surrounding American literature pedagogical standards of high school U.S.-Mexican students (Dalton, 1998). They may also help build a knowledge base potentially useful in the design and development of literature selection, national identity, and literacy instruction that meet the needs of Mexican and Latino-origin high schoolers.

The researcher's interest in this study dates to an experience he had with a eleventh grade teacher when he was a high school student. The teacher insisted in an American literature that did not include the voices of *all* Americans, but a singular voice that he found unifying the melting pot theory. The researcher told him he was puzzled by his view as a reader. By then, the melting pot paradigm had become a boiling pot full of ever after for both parties.

Definition of Terms

1. **American:** After the War of 1812, the term *American* no longer referred to Native Americans. Instead, after 1815, it was used in reference to the English-speaking White European Americans. Recent usage refers to a resident or inhabitant of the United States. Of all the bodies dwelling in the intercontinental Americas, the power of naming allows U.S. superstructure citizens to name themselves *Americans*. However, the term *American*, especially in texts, remains as a norm “inevitably

- almost exclusively White.” The quintessential question is: “What does it mean to be an American?” [Loewen, 1995; Mora, 1993; Nieto, 2000]
2. **At-risk:** “Through no fault of their own, many students of low socioeconomic status are at risk of failing to learn and of failing to complete high school. Other risk factors commonly associated with school dropouts include low achievement, retention in grade, behavior problems, poor attendance, and attendance at school with large numbers of poor students.” [Roe, Stoodt, & Burns, 2001]
 3. **American literature:** A body of texts that traditionally included only male Anglo Americans, but in recent years was reconstructed to render a more inclusive literary experience through multiple voices of the United States, including ethnic and women’s voices. [Gates, 1992; Maitino & Peck, 1996]
 4. **Anglo American:** Term refers to White Americans, including those who have “profited from their investment in whiteness,” such as peoples in the United States of German, Irish, Jewish, Polish, and Russian ancestry, among other Europeans, who never acknowledge themselves as belonging to a group with supreme organizing principles in social and cultural relations. [Giroux, 1997; Lipsitz, 1998]
 5. **Canon:** “Those works generally considered by scholars, critics, and teachers to be the most important to read and study, which collectively constitute the ‘masterpieces’ of literature. Since the 1960s, the traditional English and American literary canon, consisting mostly of works by [W]hite male writers, has been rapidly expanding to include many female writers and writers of varying ethnic backgrounds.”
[Meyer, 1995]

6. **Chicana and Chicano:** Term used to identify U.S.-born Mexican-origin people. Chicana is used for females, while Chicano is used for males. The term connotes critical, political consciousness and self-affirmation. [Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999]
7. **Cultural capital:** The knowledge, language practices, power, control, values, and modes of style associated with the dominant group that exerts more status in a society. It represents certain forms of speaking, acting, moving, dressing, and socializing that are institutionalized and sanctioned by schools. [Giroux, 1988]
8. **Cultural hegemony:** “[C]ulture is viewed not only as an ideological expression of the dominant society, but also refers to the form and structure of the technology that communicates the messages that ‘lay the psychological and moral foundations for the economic and political system.’” [Giroux, 1988]
9. **Cultural relevance:** “The notion of ‘cultural relevance’ moves beyond language to include other aspects of student and school culture. Thus culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture. The negative effects are brought about, for example, by not seeing one’s history, culture, or background represented in the textbook or curriculum or by seeing that history, culture, or background distorted.” [Ladson-Billings, 1994]
10. **Culturally relevant teaching:** “A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right.” [Ladson-Billings, 1994]

11. **Hidden curriculum:** Term used to refer to the “unstated norms, values, and beliefs transmitted to students through the underlying structures of meaning and in both the formal content the social relations of school and classroom life.” Recognizing the contradictions between the official, formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum present the possibility of dialogue and social action for liberatory education.
- [Giroux, 1988]
12. **Intermediality:** “The concept of intermediality has intrinsic value for advancing our thinking on the use of multiple texts, especially those represented on videos, the Internet, and CD-ROM materials, to develop dynamic learning environments. . . . Intermediality requires expertise in understanding and generating not only print media but also visual, oral, popular, and electronic resources; student-generated texts; life experiences; cultural/social events; and combinations of media.” [Semaili & Pailliotet, 1999]
13. **Latina and Latino:** “[R]efers to people of Latin American and Caribbean heritage. [I]ts connotation includes the African and indigenous heritage as well as the Spanish heritage of these groups. *Latino* has the disadvantage of having a sexist meaning when used to refer to groups that include both genders.” [Nieto, 2000]
14. **Magnet teacher education:** School specialization in exposing selected secondary students to the teaching profession. [Houston Independent School District, 1999-2000]
15. **Master texts:** Refers to the learning, knowledge, and tools that inscribe the dominant culture’s narrative. [Fordham, 1996; Gates, 1992; Saldívar, 1990]

16. **Sociocultural:** A term denoting social and cultural factors/features such as values, language, customs, class, institutions, etc. [Dardner, 1997; Hooks, 1994b]

17. **U.S.-Mexican students:** A term used to refer to the students of Mexican origin living in the United States and pursuing public schooling in the United States. [Valenzuela, 1999]

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter I consists of the background of the study, theoretical framework, statement of the problem, definition of terms, research questions, methodology, and the significance of the study.

Chapter II contains a review of related literature and research surrounding the research problem: relevant curriculum history and forces pertaining to the teaching of Language Arts, English, and American literature in the secondary school. The review includes sociopolitical relationships. The review also incorporates a theoretical rationale for examining the sociocultural contexts that encircle the study within a theoretical framework that includes critical pedagogical theory and social constructivism.

Chapter III describes details of the methods and procedures used to conduct the research including collection procedures, data analyses, instruments used, and focus group procedures.

Chapter IV presents the analyses of the data as they pertain to the research questions, teacher interview questionnaire, student focus group, and a description of the site.

Chapter V comprises a summary of the study, the findings, conclusions, limitations of the study, implications for educational purposes, and recommendations for future research. The references and appendices follow Chapter V.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature of the Study

Introduction

I cannot tell you how angry it makes me to hear people from North America tell me how much they love England, how beautiful England is, with its traditions. All they see is some frumpy, wrinkled-up person passing by in a carriage waving at a crowd. But what I see is the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: no motherland, no fatherland, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground, no excess of love which might lead to the things that an excess of love sometimes brings, and worst and most painful of all, no tongue. For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what can that really mean? For the language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal's deed. The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal's point of view. It cannot contain the horror of the deed, the injustice of the deed, the agony, the humiliation inflicted on me.

—Jamaica Kincaid (1988, pp. 31-32)

University Avenue

We are the first
of our people to walk this path.
We most cautiously
unfamiliar with the sounds,
guides for those who follow.
Our people prepared us
with gifts from the land
fire
herbs and song
hierbabuena soothes us into morning
rhythms hum in our blood
abrazos linger round our bodies
cuentos whisper lessons *en español*
We do not travel alone.
Our people burn deep within us.

—Pat Mora, (1986, p. 19)

In this chapter, the review of the relevant literature and research is presented as a developing rationale for examining the sociocultural contexts of the American literature

program at Macario García High School. The researcher examines his own identity and implications involved at the site and for data collection. Moreover, the researcher describes sociocultural forces and mechanisms that have affected the teaching of English the secondary school.

The review of the literature identifies a number of sociocultural issues with historical roots that circumscribe and explain the varying schooling experiences of Latino and Mexican-origin students in the United States. Mainstream power-laden social forces continue to affect social, cultural, economic, and political values of U.S. Latinos/Mexicans who are viewed as “other” and marginal (Henry, 1971; Paechter, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999).

The Native Ethnographer

Although I strive to live between two spaces—the university community and the broader civic community, I witness daily the demands and conflicts within these two parameters of interaction and (mis)communication. Even as a doctoral student in a School of Education, the provincialism and academic elitism of the theorists toward the practitioners are keenly present and namable. However, some active professors foster a dialogue between critical theory and social action within and beyond the classroom. Indeed, the classroom need not be removed from society, but present *in* society’s dangers and possibilities.

Daily, the national and local newspapers announce the failings of public schooling and the student learners’ low scoring on standardized examinations. Children and young

adults hear the news about the schools they attend and shrug their shoulders. I often wonder how often the news reporters enter the classrooms of the schools they fiercely critique, as if no education *can* take place in the most impoverished neighborhoods in the United States. The articles indicate that most of the U.S. education news reporters are far removed from the classroom and its everyday. Instead, these journalists enter the classrooms and schools as tourists for the mythic “objective” stories.

However, critical scholars and radical organic intellectuals are transforming the dialogue and equation on education for critical consciousness and self-actualization. These thinkers are not self-removed from society, basking in their own spotlight and leisure with a surge of intellectual caliber, but engaged in educational reform for the twenty-first century. Critical anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1993) declares that educational reform in respect to culture can be the following: “Do not ask what multiculturalism can do for you. Volunteer, get active, take initiative, and work to make anthropology an integral, indispensable part of multiculturalism. Learn about and follow the examples of anthropologists who already have contributed to institutional change” (p. xvi). To question, to rethink traditional and present educational practices is essential for reform and success.

Most recently, many teachers are raising their voices and writing what they witness in the company of their youngest learners and thinkers such as Gregory Michie’s critical ethnographic case study entitled Holler If You Hear Me: The Education of a Teacher and His Students (1999). Teachers such as Michie believe in the work of their students. In opposition to the daily news stories, critical teachers are present in the universe of their students and not alone.

Because I am interested in the intricacy and literacy of power, I reread Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) as a doctoral student. As I reread Freire's work, I recorded one of his critical reflections on the teacher's position of power and thinking and the dissemination of each of these. Freire writes, "The teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students' thinking. The teacher cannot think for her (sic) students, nor can she impose her thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication" (p. 58). Where does the teacher stand and whose interest does her/his teaching and everyday instruction serve?

In the critical essay "The Colonizer/Colonized Chicana Ethnographer: Identity, Marginalization, and Co-optation in the Field" (1996), Villenas asks, "What happens when members of low-status and marginalized groups become university-sanctioned 'native' ethnographers of their own communities?" (p. 712). Native researchers and ethnographers must rethink the political and personal (inter)subjectivity as they theorize culture encounters and identity formation through their privilege and power. Rather than objectifying human lives through ethnographic implications, native and critical ethnographers or positioned observers must question their own identities and privileged positions as they inscribe and ascribe people and culture.

Villenas argues, "Unveiling the ways in which the ethnographer is situated in oppressive structures is a critical task for qualitative researchers in the field of education. Even in new positions of privilege, the Chicana (sic) ethnographer cannot escape a history of her (sic) own marginalization nor her guilt of complicity" (p. 716). As an ethnographer with credentials, am I offering an insider/outsider discourse of "Othering,"

since I am conscious of the learning, teaching, signs, and symbols present the school setting and classroom culture? While researching through a qualitative approach, I choose to articulate my positions as an emerging critical ethnographer and U.S. Latino insider. If I am writing culture to which I belong, I must, like Villenas, acknowledge:

I am the colonizer because I am the educated, “marginalized” researcher, recruited and sanctioned by privileged dominant institutions to write for and about . . . communities. I am a walking contradiction with a foot in both worlds—in the dominant privileged institutions *and* in the marginalized communities. Yet, I possess my own agency and will to promote my own and the collective agendas[.] (p. 714)

An autonomous ethnographer I am not. The multiplicity of self and power-laden institutions merit acknowledgment and articulation. The hermeneutics of power, privilege, race, ethnicity, religion, class, and gender illuminate my ways of seeing and reading the community’s behavior and response to schooling and education.

Rossmann and Rallis (1998) explain the emergent nature of qualitative research as a labor of field notes and “snippets of interview transcriptions [that] do not speak for themselves; they must be interpreted in ways that are thoughtful, ethical, and politically astute” (p. 10). Hence, my labor must constantly involve interpretation and rethinking.

Attitudes in the Teaching of Secondary English

Nineteenth-Century Dominating Model. McEwan (1992) believes that a confusing “multitude of institutional and cultural demands” are placed on the English teacher (McEwan, 1992, p. 107). Applebee (1993) recognizes, for example, the dominating models that have marked the English history of teaching. Rooted in the works of Victorian Matthew Arnold, the study of literature was legitimized during the

nineteenth century to emphasize the “importance of a common cultural heritage to both the growth of the individual and the preservation of national values and traditions” (Applebee, 1993, p. 3).

Toward Reader-Response Instruction. Reader-response is a teaching model proposed by Rosenblatt (1938) for U.S. literary instruction. Rosenblatt proposed that reading is a transaction between the reader and the text. She also established the belief that readers have the right to, and do, establish or construct their own meanings. For Rosenblatt, literature was a medium for democracy and student self-actualization (as cited by Willinsky, 1991). Rosenblatt emphasized the “transaction” between the student reader—her or his background of experiences—and the text—the printed words on the page, referring to this response instruction as a “quiet conversation” (Applebee, 1993, p. 117; Applebee, 1996).

The Great Books and Hegemony. The value of the “liberal education” led by Progressive Education during the 1950s was rejected and instead the “great books” were sanctioned. The presence of cultural hegemony dictates Gramsci’s (1971) insight that “every relationship of ‘hegemony’ is necessarily an educational relationship” (Giroux, 1999, p. 3). Apple (1990) challenged the hegemonic practices within the selective and sanctioned monocultural curriculum. In Ideology and Curriculum, he states:

Whose knowledge is it? Who selected it? Why is it organized and taught this way? To this particular group? The mere act of asking these questions is not sufficient, however. One is guided, as well, by attempting to link these investigations to competing conceptions of social and economic power and ideologies. In this way, one can begin to get a more concrete appraisal of the linkages between economic and political power and the knowledge *made available* (and *not made available*) to students. (Apple, 1990, p. 7) (italics in original)

A young discipline, English as taught in today's schools arose toward the end of the nineteenth century (Milner & Milner, 1999). College entrance exams and Harvard's 1873-1874 requirements list led the evolution of the high school canon and English as a field of study (Applebee, 1974).

The Founding of "English" and "American Literature" Instruction. Since the founding of the National Council of Teachers of English in 1917, questions of defining and establishing boundaries in "English" continue to challenge its direction. Not until the early 1920s did American literature become a standard in curricula (Lewis & Sisk, 1963; Meyer, 1995). Graff (1992) explains how the teaching of American literature became an instrument for political action. In the wake of cultural nationalism through hidden curriculum, American literature:

received a decisive boost from the xenophobia unleashed by World War I, which in the words of Fred Lewis Pattee, a leading Americanist from Pennsylvania State University, "a kind of educational Monroe doctrine, for Americans American literature." Adhering to this doctrine himself in a school textbook, Pattee wrote that "more and more clearly it is seen now that the American soul, the American conception of democracy,— Americanism should be made prominent in our school and college curriculums, as a guard against the rising spirit of experimental lawlessness that has followed the great war[.]" (Graff, 1992, p. 153)

An ecclesiastical term used during the Middle Ages to define the Roman Catholic Church's sacred and master texts, canon has come to embody the knowledge by which the "educated" maintain the status quo of colonialist Western consciousness. By restricting American literature within the secondary classroom, the canon speaks to only a portion of this country's student readers and thinkers and addresses "subordinated forms of knowledge" through their rule or measurement appropriated by mainstream teachers and curricularists (Giroux, 1999, p. 17).

The Canon and Curricula. Curricularists present norms, values, and beliefs that are transmitted to students through formal content and social relations of the school and classroom life. Most recently, across disciplines, however, active readers, learners, educators, writers, critics, and thinkers seek the reading and teaching of *American literatures*—a larger body of literature that speaks broadly to the citizens of this country and includes the thoughts that have preoccupied U.S. writers and pedagogues through the centuries (Purves, 1993, Shaheen, 1999; Sutherland, 1993). Acknowledging the power of naming involved within this nation’s literary establishment both within and beyond academic and schooling practices, Bambara (1996) advocates a more pluralistic approach to the national literary canon and states:

There is no American literature; there are American literatures. There are those who have their roots in the most ancient civilizations—African, Asian, or Mexican—and there are those that have the most ancient roots in this place, that mouth-to-ear tradition of the indigenous peoples that were here thousands and thousands of years before it was called America, thousands of years before it was even called Turtle Island. And there is too the literature of the European settlement regime that calls itself American literature. (p. 140)

Ball (2000) acknowledges the cultural capital appropriated by teachers:

“American public schools have had relatively little success in educating students who are poor, members of racially and ethnically marginalized groups, and speakers of first languages other than mainstream or academic English” (p. 227). Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes the social world where learning and literacy emerge, and that “more knowledgeable members of a group engage in social mediation to bring others into the cultural practices” (as cited by Pérez, 1998, p. 4).

(Re)Production. The political and ideological dimensions of culture reflect a restricted status and definition in relation to “ethnic culture,” rather than the more

comprehensive and informative definition of culture as “the representation of lived experiences, material artifacts and practices *forged within the unequal and dialectical relations* that different groups establish in a given society at a particular point in historical time” (Bartolomé, 1998, p. 19) (italics in original). Social reproduction, especially in the classroom, fosters capitalist economics, and members of the marginal group must critically act for survival in the schooling and dominant culture process (Apple, 1990, Gándara, 1999; Orbe, 1998). Moreover, Bartolomé (1998) explains,

[I]f a particular ethnic group has (1) been historical stigmatized and perceived as low-status, (2) developed, in the process, antagonistic relations with members of the dominant cultural group in society, and (3) been prevented (either consciously or unconsciously) from participating in practices that promote the acquisition of language and literacy knowledge and skills valued by the dominant society, the group often develops alternative language and literacy practices that help its members survive. (pp. 19-20)

Saldívar (1990) recognizes that what has been defined as American literature only reinforces the sanctions of an “ideological consensus,” while the “antagonistic resistance literatures,” such as those written by Mexican and African Americans, among others, are never sanctioned in the Eurocentric American literary tradition and curricula (p. 218). Similar to the narrative from African America and Asian America, the literary production from Mexican America integrates a discursive dialectic within the U.S. literary canon as Saldívar’s critical study concludes, “placing the masterworks in different frameworks that include the voices to which the master texts were covertly opposed, voices that were and continue to be silenced by the hegemonic culture” (p. 214).

Canon Builders and Keepers. The determinants of “canon-building” lists in regard to form and content are often based on aesthetic value and representation, and teachers have upheld their selections through aestheticism (Applebee, 1993). The

Western tradition—as a White male model of measurement and evaluation—remains the instrument to model difference, civilization, and barbarity (Gates, 1992; Purves, 1993, Schlesinger, 1998). Derrida (1978) recognizes the “decentering” of the European cultural hegemony, which was literally “dislocated, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference” (1978, p. 282).

The humanities and literary criticism postulated by Harold Bloom (1994), among other “Keepers of the Master’s Pieces,” reflects blatant provincialism and ethnocentrism in “canon-building” such as the most recent lists that declare the “Best American Essays or Poetry” or the “Best Modern Library Books of the Century,” which systematically exclude women and U.S. ethnic writers and thinkers in the name of literary aesthetics and the preservation of genius (Gates, 1992; Lauter, 1991; Maitino & Peck, 1996). Bloom (1994) further argues,

The Canon (sic), once we view it as the relation of an individual reader and writer to what has been preserved out of what has been written, and forget the canon as a list of books for required study, will be seen as identical with the literary Art of Memory, not with the religious sense of canon. (p. 17)

Meyer (1995) explains, “The conservatives are also portrayed as ideologues; in their efforts to preserve what they regard as the best from the past, they refuse to admit that Western classics, mostly written by [W]hite male Europeans, represent only a portion of human experience” (p. 97). Morrison (1989) asserts, “Canon building is Empire building. Canon defense is national defense” (p. 8). As these comments declare, canon building imposes and maintains cultural hegemony, and the canon wars continue to challenge traditional practices of English instruction. The history of English education in

the United States confirms the nationalist agenda and curricula in the teaching of a monocultural American literature (Milner & Milner, 1999; Morrison, 1992).

Toward the Rhetoric of Whiteness. Far beyond the Mississippi River, to fulfill what some critical historians, writers, and thinkers such as Zinn (1980), Loewen (1995), and Silko (1996) call the arrogance and treacherousness of Manifest Destiny, Anglo (im)migrants, settlers, and colonizers dominated the territories and imposed cultural hegemony. In the Southwestern United States, for example, the Spanish fulfilled their genocidal practices of native peoples through the cross and sword (Limón, 1998; Saldívar, 1990). As an internal form of control and domination, the hegemonic forces perpetuated a ruling order (Giroux, 1997; Rosaldo, 1989; Schlesinger, 1998). In exploring the unquestioned privilege of Whiteness in the United States, which can apply to the U.S. education system especially to the mainstream White-American teachers, Lipsitz (1998) recognizes, “Whiteness is everywhere in U.S. culture, but it is very hard to see[.] As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, [W]hiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations” (p. 1). Because this cultural hegemony of power and domination cannot easily be seen, it maintains its veiled sociohistorical innocence without any interrogation (Hollins, 1999; Rodríguez, 1998; Semali, 1999). Many White-American teachers adopt and maintain an autonomous, conspiratorial identity that, according to them, is unshaped by racial and ethnic identity politics (Canning, 1995; Hodgden, 1990; Howard, 1999).

The Scripted Classroom Text. In the U.S. high school English classroom during the 1950s, however, literary works were studied primarily for their aesthetic value, and

teachers and students' motives often conflicted in the scripted classroom (Burton, 1965; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sauer, 1961). At the same time, educators advocated for a more pluralistic approach to literature beyond the traditional American and British paradigms that ignored the presence of world and women's literature (Applebee, 1993; Probst, 1988; Sasse, 1988). Critics addressed reform in English education as "completely mindless acceptance of whatever the pupils want to do: a sort of tepid deschooling movement *within the school,*" while other critics acknowledge that pragmatic, socially useful knowledge and reading of the world are relevant forms of teaching and learning (Abbs, 1976, p. 5) (*italics in original*).

The Teaching of Writing. A second tradition in the history of English education emphasized the "development of essential language skills, . . . including an emphasis on 'functional' skills, on 'minimal essentials,' on 'minimum competencies,' and on 'the basics'" (Applebee, 1993, p. 3). This particular skills orientation ignored the "great works" and favored "practical reading." Grammar and usage exercises were intended to teach writing, while comprehension questions were a way to teach reading and literature (Probst, 1988; Simmons and Deluzain, 1992).

The Appreciation of Literature. The third "long-standing" tradition emphasized the student readers' interest and appeal, rather than their common culture or the subject (Applebee, 1993; Gonzales, 1993). The need for "appreciation" and "engagement" were emphasized by teachers over essential skills and cultural heritage. John Dewey (1902) led reform movements that emphasized "learning through experience and students' involvement in appropriate and interesting tasks" (as cited by Applebee, 1993, p. 4). This vision of democracy and community follows Dewey's notion of interdependence,

that each, in effect, constitute the other, to interplay with forms of association leading to growth through freedom, creativity, and dialogue of a democratically-constituted society (Counts, 1959; Dewey, 1990/1902; DeStiger, 1998).

Diversity in the Age of Multicultural Pedagogy. In recent years, critical pedagogy and multicultural education have led to a widespread reexamination of curriculum and materials in the teaching of English language arts. For example, teachers' literary selections for study reflect their students' varying ethnic heritages and cultures (Burke, 1999; Langer 1995; Maher & Thompson Tetreault, 1997). Furthermore, Dalton (1998) identifies five standards of pedagogy that are applicable across grade levels, student populations and cultures, and content areas: joint productive activity, language and literacy development, making meaning, complex thinking, and instructional conversation. These pedagogical standards reveal continuous "interaction and activity in the ongoing social events of the classroom [and beyond]" (Dalton, 1998, p. 3). Furthermore, Dalton (1998) explains, "American education is learning from its considerable successes and egregious failures," but at the same time the five proposed "standards provide opportunities for every student to participate, to receive close teacher attention and interaction, and to live in a classroom where their experiences, ways of speaking, and cultures are respected and included" (p. 33).

Power and Media Literacy. Media literacy for critical education empowers students toward intermediality to engage in powerful pedagogical examination of the new technological and visual culture (Giroux, 1999; Semali, 1999; Semali & Pailliotet, 1999). Intermediality is the way in which individuals or groups make connections among various media within a given media message and how these media interact with one

another to create unique individual or collective group meanings” (p.5). Teachers of secondary English recognize the cultural shifts that affect literature and reading selection: publishing market, mass entertainment, and technology (Kernan, 1990). In the 1990s, recognizing the absence of popular media—“undertheorized and underresearched topic in the field of literacy instruction”—critical educators implemented media literacy curricula and instruction to interrogate the hidden power of popular media (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999, pp. 140-141). Through the critical examination model, both literary and media texts are analyzed in regard to the complex, interrelated political, economic, and cultural factors that enter the classroom (Michie, 1999).

The foregoing discussion paints a landscape of significant complex and interrelated issues found in cultural conflict studies over secondary school American literature curricula and instruction between contending canon-keepers and U.S.-Mexican/Latino communities. However, no one has ever conducted an ethnographic study of sociocultural factors involved in the perceptions of teachers of an American literature program in one school, which would afford the opportunity to examine the complexities beyond the stereotypes and prejudices of “majority and minority” in the literature (Vela, 2000)

CHAPTER III

Methods and Procedures

Introduction

When I was in high school, I admitted to my mother that I planned to become a teacher someday. That seemed to please her. But I never tried to explain that it was not the occupation of teaching that I yearned for as much as it was something more elusive: I wanted to *be* like my teachers, to possess their knowledge, to assume their authority, their confidence, even to assume a teacher's persona.

—Richard Rodriguez (1982, p. 55)

In this chapter, the rationale, methods, and procedures used are explained and discussed. Descriptions of the research site, the survey instruments administered, the sample, and data collection procedures are provided. The methods used for data screening and analysis are also outlined. The researcher addresses moments of critical reflection during immersion at the site and the collection of data.

Description of the Site. MGHS was located within a metropolitan city of the Southwestern United States. MGHS was an inner city school with more than 2,000 students from a diversity of ethnic groups, the majority being of Hispanic American or U.S. Latino heritages. At MGHS, students from Latino backgrounds came from different geographic locations such as the broader United States, Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. However, more than 80 percent of the Latino student population in the high school was of Mexican heritage. In the School Improvement Plan, 2000-2001, the mission statement of MGHS is presented. The mission is to “provide students with

academic and technological excellence as well as social and emotional support in preparation as Americans in the twenty-first century” (p. 1).

Data from the school district’s administration office indicated that during the 1999-2000 academic year, Hispanic American students constituted 96 percent of the population. Moreover, more than three-fourths of the student population was identified as “at-risk” of academic failure. The teachers were from diverse backgrounds with a 46 percent majority identified as White, while 33 percent identified as African American and 19 percent identified as Hispanic. MGHS has been in operation for about 65 years, and originated in 1936 as part of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration program. The school was built to relieve the overcrowding in neighboring high schools.

Since its initial opening, MGHS’s administration, staff, and student body was predominantly White and middle class. During the 1949-1950 academic year, close to half of the graduates had enrolled in colleges and universities to pursue a bachelor’s degree (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 37). The expanding Mexican-origin population that moved to the area led to the flight of many Anglo Americans to the suburbs. Low-skill employment led many Mexican-origin people to the greater MGHS area, and the previous all-White community became a working-class ethnic minority community. By the 1983-1984 academic year, MGHS’s student body had become “all Mexican,” leading to a massive district demographic change.

Conflict between the U.S.-Latino/Mexican community and the school district surfaced in 1989 when one third of the student body responded to the culturally insensitive teachers and administration. The drop out rate escalated. The students took

action by engaging in massive non-violent walkouts, exercising non-violent, civil disobedience. MGHS was a four-year comprehensive school offering career and technology education, special education, multilingual education, and magnet teacher education. At MGHS, magnet teacher education referred to the specialization of this school in exposing selected high school students to the teaching profession.

Instrumentation

Arguments as to how much preplanning and structuring of instrumentation is desirable in qualitative studies can range from little prior instrumentation, a great deal of instrumentation, to those which stress the amount of prior instrumentation based on the type of inquiry. Students' essays added to teachers' voices, lending a more authentic and relevant approach to the reciprocal relationship between teaching and learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), it is wise to use some type of front-end instrumentation. This adds a degree of structure to the qualitative study, so that concepts may be clarified and priorities for actual data collection may be set. The following instruments were used to collect the multiple data sources needed to investigate the research questions posed in this study.

The Researcher-Made Teacher Interview Questionnaire. The purpose of the interview questionnaire for teacher participants, based on Ladson-Billings investigation on culturally relevant teaching, was to learn teachers' beliefs, feelings, and perceptions about the American literature program [Appendix A; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1999, Rogers & McLean, 1994]. Moreover, the goal of this instrument was to better examine

and understand the micro-level sociocultural attitudes, values, and perceptions toward U.S.-Mexican students in the eleventh grade American literature program at MGHS.

The researcher likewise utilized the data from the grand tour interviews in designing and testing interview protocols for the semi-structured interviews. The staff members selected for the study identified themselves as the following:

Teacher 1, Mr. Sargan Cossetini: White American (Swiss-origin) male

Teacher 2, Ms. Karla Lulling: White American female

Teacher 3, Ms. Brenda Thompson: African American female

Teacher 4, Ms. Cindy Cárdenas: Mexican American female

School Principal, Mr. Miguel Tovar, Mexican American male

The Student Focus Group. With the approval of eleventh grade English teachers, the researcher piloted a journal assignment in the Spring of 2001 [Appendix B]. Some students voiced an interest in an open-ended journal assignment that allowed a more broad definition of American literature based on the individual student's knowledge and experience. Hence, the researcher revised the instrument in its entirety, similar to that of Benard's (1995) gathering of data, and format an alternate instrument.

Procedures for Data Collection

Site Entry. In the Spring of 2001, the researcher obtained formal permission to conduct the study at MGHS from both the Assistant Superintendent and the Principal [Appendices C, D, E]. The researcher explained the nature of the investigation during and informal conversation with the Principal who later approved a letter to the staff

members, announcing and describing the study [Appendix F]. Copies of the letter were placed in the eleventh grade English teachers' mailboxes. After revising the Teacher Interview Questionnaire (TIQ), the researcher placed copies of the TIQ in mailboxes.

The participants of the study came from the community of MGHS. They included two Anglo American and two non-Anglo American teachers of eleventh grade American literature, the English chairperson, a student focus group, and the school principal. The choice of methodological strategies for this study was directly affected generalizability in two ways. First, the study was limited by its small sample size due to the number of secondary American literature teachers at the high school. Second, due to the nature of the project, the best way to insure willing participants was to solicit volunteers. At the same time, the researcher did not want "disingenuous" volunteers. Instead, the researcher favored participants who were not motivated solely by incentives, but by the merits of the study.

The willingness to participate from volunteers as well as their cooperation far outweighed the potential disadvantages that result from self-selection. The researcher-made interview questionnaire for teacher participants, piloted in 2000, indicated an interest from the teachers. The act of volunteering also signaled a pronounced desire on the part of teachers to be heard. At an informational meeting, the purposes of this study were explained. Selection of key informants and construction of ethnographic study questions depended on the knowledge and insights gained from the participants while at the site. Data contributed to the understanding (1) of conceptualizations about American literature instruction, (2) cultural differences, and (3) the participants' ways of relating to diverse sociocultural groups.

Interview Procedures. Teachers were informed of the research study in the Fall of 2000. In choosing staff, the researcher tried to achieve gender and race/ethnic group balance of teachers representing the eleventh grade English classroom.

In the interview, the researcher routinely began by asking teachers to read and sign the Informed Consent Form [Appendix I] which explained the purpose of the study. Teacher participants were informed of their rights to refuse to answer any question they chose and/or to withdraw from the interview at any given moment. The researcher also asked for permission to audiotape and take notes, telling teacher participants that these were important ways of assuring the acknowledgement of their voices.

Anonymity. Anonymity and confidentiality of teachers and school personnel participants were insured through the assignment of pseudonyms by which informants were identified and referred to throughout the research. For the most part, the interviews were scheduled during the teacher's conference or study period.

Grand Tour Interviews: Rationale. Ethnographic interviews report numerous situations that involve practices, rules, categories, and beliefs. In ethnographic studies, the "researcher is inseparable from the research problem, [so] he or she is always a part of the resulting analyses" (Fordham, 1996, p. 24). For purposes of this study, the researcher preferred grand tour (informal) interviews and semi-structured interviews. These two interviews further informed the Teacher Interview Questionnaire.

Advantages of Informal and Semi-Structured Interviewing. "No method of data collection is perfect" (Bernard, 1995, p. 287). Therefore, the researcher used informal and semi-structured interviews. Seidman (1998) explains that interviews are a tool in "understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that

experience. To observe a teacher, student, principal, or counselor provides access to their behavior. Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action” (Seidman, 1998, pp. 3-4).

While informal interviews may lack structure, control, and direction, and are used when time is not critical, in contrast, semi-structured interviews are preferred when time is limited or exhausted. The strengths of semi-structured interviews lie in their versatility in allowing the informant and researcher the opportunity to follow new leads, give the informant some measure of control, and provide the researcher with flexibility in creating rapport (Seidman, 1998). Audiotapes were analyzed for categories following each interview. The researcher collected and analyzed primary documents such as photographs, newspaper articles, textbooks, agendas, brochures, and pamphlets (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). However, teacher instruction yielded insights to the literary selection and sociocultural factors that affect teacher perceptions. Each of these contributed to the point of saturation.

Participant Observation

As an observer, the investigator immersed himself at the site over a period of six months in a variety of settings and times to learn the everyday regularities of the eleventh grade English classroom at MGHS (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Rossman & Rallis, 1998; Seidman, 1998). Examples of diverse settings were classrooms, hallways, library, meetings, and teachers’ lounges. He also attended off-site functions including meetings and informal teacher gatherings on the teaching of eleventh grade American literature.

Informants provided an emic view, or insider, perspective of “direct access” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 42).

The Sample

Purposive Sampling. Key informants were identified through “community nomination,” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 147). This identifying technique “means that researchers rely upon community members and community-sanctioned vehicles (for example, community newspapers and [school] organizations) to judge people, places, and things within their own settings” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp. 147-149). These nominations were then cross-checked by the researcher with similar criteria to understand the “underlying logic of teacher sentiments,” among other participants (Lortie, 1975, p. 163). Hence, the school community of co-learning students, teachers, and the administrators, such as the principal, associate principals, dean of instruction, counselors, and department heads, facilitated important information (Applebee, 1993; Richardson, 1994).

The researcher considered a representative subgroup of the total eleventh grade American literature teachers at MGHS. The rationale for using qualitative techniques is based on the need to capture the insiders’ or “emic” point of view, including “the norms, attitudes, constructions, processes, and culture that characterize the local setting” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Data Analyses

Data Analysis of Interviews. The five research questions were answered by analyzing the data obtained through various different sources: interview questionnaire, observation, focus groups, and literature and document analysis. Wolf (1992) holds that ethnographic responsibility is “including an effort to make sense of what [the investigator] saw, was told, or read—first for [oneself] and then for [her/his] readers” (pp. 4-5).

The researcher transcribed the audiotapes of interviews for analysis. Computer software was not used to analyze the data. Instead, field notes and interview transcripts were read a number of times. Coding of words and brief descriptive phrases were discerned. As field notes and interview transcripts were reread, colored markers were used to highlight repeated words or phrases. When words or phrases were repeated at least ten times in the transcripts, they were considered as preliminary themes. As far as categories, related themes were grouped together to form tentative categories. Key themes were highlighted and marginal notations were included in the final narrative.

Triangulation. As new data were amassed, they were compared with previously coded data and broader categories that are created to regroup and further organize themes and categories. This led to the establishing of categories from the data. Continual rethinking of data extended my understanding of the teaching of American literature and sociocultural factors. Glaser and Straus (1967) argue, “[D]iscovery of theory from data—which [they] call grounded theory—is a major task confronting sociology today” (p. 1).

Data displays answered the research questions, while an interactive analysis built the emergent model. The researcher engaged in the help of an outside researcher for debriefing and asked informants to read initial reports (member checking) for accuracy. Moreover, he opened the negative evidence that did not seem to fit initial theories of the research.

Since the purpose of the research was to understand the nature of the phenomena at the school site, the researcher used outlined techniques that include “prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, reflexive journal, thick description, purposive sampling, and audit trial” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 161). In addition, he identified his “assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation” (Merriam, 1988, p. 170). It is reasonable to assume that under similar conditions a repeat of this study would provide similar outcomes.

Delimitations

Researcher and Participant Bias. To address a claim of bias as a native ethnographer of Mexican ancestry and former literature teacher, the researcher collected as much data as possible that represented the perspectives of eleventh grade English teacher participants and students. Informants were followed up to clarify key issues or to build on the data collected. In addition, the researcher recorded questions, described challenging situations, moments of exploration and discovery, etc. in a reflective journal. The researcher was aware of the impact of elite informants (sampling bias) and looked

for extreme or negative evidence (outliers) to “test or strengthen findings [and thus] build a better explanation” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 269). Furthermore, his engagement was sufficiently long enough to arrive at redundancy of data.

Trustworthiness. Some scholars use trustworthiness to convey the atmospheres and culture they fostered to gain entrance to the world of emic and etic life and thought (Baumann, 1996; Villenas, 1996). Trustworthy, ethical practices (verisimilitude/plausibility) address the questions about credibility, since it shall “contribute in some way to understanding and action to improve social circumstances. . . . It must have credibility to users, whether these are other researchers, policymakers, practitioners, or the participants themselves” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 43). The “truth value,” rigor of the findings, and significance of the research concern themselves with qualitative research and fieldwork. The credibility of this study was maintained through accurate and detailed reporting of all methods and procedures employed (Sarason, 1996). In studying the data collected from multiple sources, the researcher analyzed and identified categories and naming in the data (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamuchi, 2000). He pilot tested interview questions and adjusted accordingly and identified basic assumptions, including significant and relevant biographical experiences that he brings into the research (Apple, 1986; Banks, 1998).

Peer Debriefing and Member Checking. The researcher believed that it was important for his points of view to be reviewed, so he depended upon peer debriefing. The researcher asked three staff members to critically read the findings in Chapter IV and communicate biases and inaccuracies in the investigation (Appendix J). One person

wondered why I would choose to share so much about myself in the process of gathering the data (Villenas, 1996). The first-person point of view surprised this person.

Summary

Chapter III provided a broad overview of the methods and procedures by which the investigator collected and analyzed data for the study. Participant observation, document analyses, interviewing, and the use of teacher and student instruments were procedures used for a holistic ethnographic study. Also presented in this chapter were strategic measures to guard the researcher against bias.

CHAPTER IV

Analyses and Results

‘Anyway, I get to the city, but then I have to run thirty blocks to get to the private high school where they’re giving the test, because I had enough money for lunch or a bus, but not both, and sometimes you have to make hard choices.

And then, once I got to the private school, I had to convince the security guard, who looked suspiciously like a member of the Seventh Cavalry, that I was there to take the test, and not to vandalize the place. And hey, thank God I wasn’t wearing my grass-dance outfit yet because he might have shot me down on the spot.

Anyway, once I got past him, I was, as you observed, twenty minutes late. So I ran into the bathroom, changed into my grass-dance outfit, then sat down with your little test, realizing belatedly that I was definitely the only Injun in the room, and aside from the [B]lack kid in the front row and the ambiguously ethnic chick in the back, I was the only so-called minority in the room, and that frightened me more than you will ever know.

But I crack open the test anyway, and launch into some three-dimensional calculus problem, which is written in French translated from the Latin translated from the Phoenician or some other God-awful language that only [W]hite people seem to find relevant or useful, and I’m thinking, I am Crazy Horse, I am Geronimo, I am Sitting Bull, and I’m thinking the required number-two pencil is a bow and arrow, that every math question is Columbus, that every essay question is Custer, and I’m going to kill them dead.

So, anyway, I’m sure I’ll flunk the damn test, because I’m an Indian from the reservation, and I can’t be that smart, right? I mean, I’m the first person in my family to ever graduate from high school, so who the hell do I think I am, trying to go to college, right? So, I take the test and I did kill it. I killed it, I killed it, I killed it.

And now, you want to take my score away from me, a poor, disadvantaged, orphaned minority who only wants to go to the best college possible and receive and excellent Catholic, liberal arts education, improve his life, and provide for his elderly, diabetic grandmother who has heroically taken care of him in Third World conditions.

And, now, after all that, you want to take my score away from me? You want to change the rules after I learned them and beat them? Is that what you really want to do?

I didn’t think so.’

—Sherman Alexie (2000, pp. 170-171)

[S]chooling is largely a system that reinforces the norms sponsored by the dominant group in American society. In the process of reinforcing the values and norms of the larger society, schooling—perhaps unwittingly, alters and negates the values and beliefs that children of subordinate cultural groups bring with them to school, and thereby grafting onto their presumed naked bodies a lacking imagery. One of the primary goals of schools and schooling is to implant the values and cultural norms of the dominant Other. . . . Schools transmit existing cultural norms; therefore, in attempting to teach the children of nondominant peoples, schools inevitably deconstruct racial and cultural identities.

—Signithia Fordham, (1996, p. 21)

Introduction

This chapter focuses on how the data from the study were analyzed and the results achieved from these analyses. The chapter begins with a description of the researcher's entrance to the high school and the school space. The field notes underwent inscription, transcription, and description. The interview and focus group instruments for each subgroup, teachers and students, are outlined. This is followed by a discussion of interviews held with staff members.

Entrance and Welcome. Having gained access to the school from the area superintendent and high school principal as well as a welcome from the Language Arts chairperson via telephone, I was confident about meeting the staff and students and witnessing the culture of the high school. I rose early in the morning to begin my day. I knew that I wanted to be on time, so I planned the night before to have a compelling entrance to the school.

Part of my wrestling with my sense of selfhood as a native ethnographer meant that I would reexamine my researcher role throughout my residence at MGHS.

Furthermore, ethnographic research demands constant questioning of the self and the gathering of data. Brady (2000) explains,

In older, more traditional ethnographies, the researcher was not “present” in the text and the subjects of the research were themselves barely present, often physically described but stripped of the things that made them real and tangible as human beings. There was also a difference in the attitude or ethics of the researcher. The books I was drawn to were written by people who saw themselves as intimately tied in one way or another to the people they researched. (Mahmood & Brady, 2001, p. 4)

As I approached the school in my car, I noticed the colors and mascot displayed in front of the main building area. Unlike other years in the past, the lawn was covered in green without patches of dry grass. To my surprise, however, the entire schoolyard was protected by a black, wrought iron fence. The staff parking lot was gated as well with a sign that indicated that the parking was reserved for faculty and staff members. I decided to park in the student area in the back of the school building.

At 7:35 A.M., many students were present and lingering by the back door of the building. (The first morning bell rings at 8:20 A.M.) They watched me as I crossed the street. The fact that I had business attire may have startled a few of them, since they did not recognize me as a staff member. Also, I chose to park in the student parking lot, even though I was not a student.

As I walked the hallways, I remembered my previous high school years during the 1990s. I could not name what I felt as I entered the old building. A mixture of scents and sounds lingered in the air. Had I felt a cold draft, a chilling sense of displacement? Rather than feeling that “automatic *escalofrío* [shiver or chill]” that Chicana author Sandra Cisneros says she too often feels when she enters some “turn-of-the-century [school] buildings resembling a penitentiary—big, hulky, and authoritarian, the kind of

architecture meant to instill terror,” I entered a school building filled with a diverse group of students (Michie, 1999, p. x). Most importantly, a pedagogy of hope filled each corridor and classroom that I visited, I would later learn through my interaction.

I heard the students’ voices and their aches as they entered the cafeteria for breakfast. “Whew! I’m tired,” one Hispanic female explained. “He don’t like me,” she responded, referring to their previous conversation. As I walked past them, they turned toward me and held their gaze on me.

Two school district police officers—armed—saw me in the cafeteria hallway, but they did not stop me. I exited the building to enter the adjoining building. As I walked down a cement sidewalk, I noticed two persons in the private parking lot area of the school grounds. Dressed in formal business attire, the principal, Mr. Miguel Tovar, spoke with an African-American custodian in uniform, and I walked under the breezeway and toward them.

Mr. Tovar, turned toward me as I approached and said, “Good morning, good morning, Joseph.” The custodian nodded. I was not too sure of what I should have been feeling, but I gained my confidence when the principal remembered my name. He also remembered me from my middle school days as a student. He was an administrator at my middle school during the late 1980s. With a mixture of awe and calamity, I managed to find my way to the main office to register.

The administration declared and monitored the culture of the school through the document titled “MGHS Standardized Dress Code For School Year, 2000-2001.” I hardly remembered any of the posted rules. Moreover, the colors and demands placed on the twenty-first century student were somewhat shocking and lifeless. The

implementation of these rules seemed to foster the absence of self-expression through attire, limiting the student body culture.

1. ALL STUDENTS MUST WEAR STANDARDIZED DRESS ON THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL AND ON EVERY DAY OF THE SCHOOL YEAR.
2. Students must wear either white, light/dark green, or light/dark gray shirts. Shirts must have collars. Collars with stripes or color on the inside must be buttoned up. Small logos on shirts are permitted. Shirts must be “polo” or button-down style. All shirts must be tucked-in.
3. Pants must be either “dickie” or “docker” style. Pants must be of khaki material and of khaki brown, gray, or green color. Students must wear black or brown belts. **NO JEANS OF ANY COLOR WILL BE PERMITTED. NO BAGGY PANTS WILL BE PERMITTED. STUDENTS MUST WEAR CORRECT SIZES.**
4. Female students will be permitted to wear skirts or dresses no more than 3 inches from the top of the knee. Skirts and dresses must be of khaki color and material, either khaki brown, gray, or green.
5. Students will be permitted to wear khaki material/color (brown/green/gray) docker or dickie style shorts. (NO CUTOFFS WILL BE ALLOWED). Shorts must be no more than 3 inches from the top of the knee (female or male).
6. Students must wear either white tennis shoes with white laces or dark brown/black dress shoes or boots.
7. Students may wear WHITE undershirts. No other colors for undershirts will be permitted. Polo style shirts must be worn over the undershirts and both must be tucked-in.
8. Students must wear socks. Colors permitted are white, light/dark green and gray.
9. On cold days, students may wear white, dark/light green, gray, brown, or black sweaters, jackets, or coats. No plaids or stripes will be permitted. MGHS logo jackets or coats will be permitted.
10. NO LOCKERS WILL BE ISSUED TO STUDENTS THIS SCHOOL YEAR. ONLY CLEAR OR MESH BACKPACKS WILL BE PERMITTED.

NO CAPS, NO FACIAL JEWELRY, NO CHAINS, SPIKED BELTS, ETC. NO PARTICIPATION IN COATS/JACKETS/SWEATERS OR ANY ATTIRE THAT SIGNIFY GANGS AND/OR OCCULTS WILL BE PERMITTED.

Students are subject to DRESS CODE INSPECTION at any time of the school day.

Mr. Tovar, Principal

In the main office, I found a bookmark that read, “Many Members: One Family, *Muchos miembros: Una familia*. Through the cultural events we host, the stories we tell, and the books we read, we gain knowledge of our past and future in order to share it with others. Hispanic Heritage Month.”

Another bookmark included the following: “Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities, Title IV.” “Safety is Our Mission—Prevention is our Business.”

The secretary asked me to sign in as a guest, and one teacher offered to show me the way to the classroom where the meeting would be held. I was especially drawn to Ms. Rojas for her kindness. She and I walked toward the Language Arts Department meeting area. She explained that she was a teacher’s aide. Ms. Rojas entered her classroom, and she offered to show me the language arts computer lab. The room had new Compaq computers. Moreover, the room was equipped with necessary tools for a writing laboratory, including a comfortable sofa and large tables. Ms. Rojas offered her computer lab rules handout titled “L.A. Computer lab Rules and Contract.”

Rules:

ALWAYS SIGN IN FIRST

USE THE SAME ASSIGNED COMPUTER ALL YEAR

NO FOOD WHAT SO EVER (sic)

NO DRINKS

NO WRITING ON COMPUTERS

CLEAN HANDS

NO GUM IN MOUTH

STAY ON TASK!! NO MISBEHAVIOR ALLOWED

ALWAYS INFORM THE TEACHER OR AIDE WHEN READY TO
PRINT or IF THERE IS A PROBLEM!

Print your name on line

I _____ have read the rules of the L.A.
Computer lab and I am responsible for the care and working order of my
computer while in my use.

Teacher:

Period:

Sign:

Computer #

Ms. Rojas beamed with joy as she shared her trials in finding the furniture and equipment for the room. Ms. Rojas explained that the process was worth every minute spent. By far, this was one of the cleanest computer laboratories I visited at a school. The classroom was arranged for active instruction among students. At the same time, however, some students had to share their computers.

The Department of Language Arts/English Meeting. Ms. Rojas and I walked down the hall toward the Language Arts chairperson's classroom. As I entered the room, Ms. Rojas called my name, and I turned to be greeted by the chairperson, Ms. Carraway. She offered her hand, and I shook her hand. "Ouch!" she stammered, stating that my handshake was much too firm.

Teachers began to arrive for the meeting, and most of them turned toward my direction. The teachers sat in the students' desks toward the back of the classroom.

Hardly any sat near me. Ms. Carraway offered me a copy of the agenda. I noticed that I was the third topic on the agenda. “Mr. Joseph Rodriguez . . . former [MGHS] student.”

Ms. Carraway began the meeting promptly at 7:45 A.M. with seven Language Arts teachers present. The classroom had many phrases and thoughts of encouragement for the students. For example, the room had the following poster ideas:

What is popular is not always right; what is right is not always popular.

If you thought being a student was hard . . . try to be a teacher.

Never fully dressed without a smile.

Tomorrow’s success begins today.

U Booze, U Cruise, U Lose.

Ms. Carraway discussed career technology training plans. A few other teachers arrived a few minutes late, and they greeted me before finding their seats. Ms. Carraway introduced me to the teachers and asked me to address them.

I mentioned my research interest at MGHS, and I also stated that I was a former student at the school. When I mentioned that I was interested in eleventh grade Language Arts/English/American literature instruction, a few teachers groaned with disappointment that they would not be part of the study.

A few teachers, however, interrupted me and asked if I remembered them from my MGHS years. One teacher in particular kept staring at me as I spoke, and then she finally blurted aloud, “I know you, Joseph. Why, you were in my middle school reading class! Don’t you remember me?”

“Well, you must be Ms. O’Brien [pseudonym],” I responded.

“And you remembered my name? Wow!” she stammered.

“I was in reading improvement, and now I have improved in my reading and writing,” I explained.

“You sure have, Joseph. My, oh, my. Well, just look at you,” she added.

From this exchange, I seemed to have gained a degree of credibility from the other staff members present, and I did not feel like a full outsider, but perhaps more like a native ethnographer of the University of Connecticut and former student of MGHS. In a sense, I had come home again to the arms of teachers waiting to know more about the MGHS graduate who came back as a researcher and doctoral candidate.

A teacher was congratulated for being selected as the English as a Second Language teacher of the year for the school district area.

Ms. Carraway announced that Holt, Rinehart and Winston grammar textbooks had been adopted for the next academic year.

Ms. Rojas stated that the computer lab would be available should I decide to have the focus group meet after school. Again, my confidence intensified, because I was in the company of caring teachers willing to add more to their everyday trials and affairs.

Three eleventh grade English teachers approached me and expressed interest in my research area. They were enthusiastic and generally concerned that I would speak with all of the eleventh grade English teachers. They were presented with consent forms (Appendix I) and a letter (Appendix F) describing my work. They offered to meet with me during their conference periods. The genuine interest and flexible schedule further motivated me in my research. Hence, I arranged to meet with them during my residence as a researcher.

Profiles: Teachers' Responses to Interview Questionnaire on the Teaching of American Literature to U.S.-Mexican Students

The profiles focus on the construction of the teachers' lesson plans and classroom instruction. As I reviewed my field notes, I acknowledged my own critical readings that affected the response to the culture of the school. Freire's critical reflections often reflect the teacher's position of power and thinking and the dissemination of each of these. Freire (1993) explains, "The teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students' thinking. The teacher cannot think for her (sic) students, nor can she impose her thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication" (p. 58).

Ms. Carraway, the chairperson of the Department of Language Arts/English at MGHS, explained that there were only four teachers that had courses in eleventh grade with the American literature theme. Although there were a few other teachers with eleventh grade students, their students were tracked toward exam preparation that involved the state's standardized examination theme.

Hence, the movement of the pendulum was within each exchange with staff members and rested on the following question: Where do teachers stand and whose interest does their teaching and everyday instruction serve?

Profile #1: Mr. Sargan Cossetini, "*I try to be the model [teacher], but I would not say that I am.*"

Mr. Cossetini taught advanced placement English at MGHS. He started teaching in a suburb of San Diego, California. He pursued his studies at San Francisco State University in journalism in 1991. He worked in Europe for a few years, and then he moved to Houston, Texas, where he gained his secondary English teaching certificate from the University of Houston in 2000. The 2000-2001 academic year at MGHS was his fourth year of teaching.

Mr. Cossetini was in his thirties and about six feet tall. He had a medium build, and his height conveyed a particular presence upon meeting him. He had fair skin and curly brown hair. He mentioned his Swiss ancestry and that one of his ancestors migrated to the United States in 1859. The family settled in New York City.

Mr. Cossetini dressed like many teachers at MGHS. He wore an Oxford shirt with pressed khaki slacks and a belt. He had facial hair that was lending itself to a goatee, but no mustache.

I arrived at the classroom a few minutes late, since I had spent too much time in the hallways in observation. Frankly, I watched, rather than observed. Fordham (1996) addresses the difference between observation and watching, explaining,

[T]his representation—this imaging—is based primarily on written and visual portraits, on watching as a kind of violence imposed on the watched. I am, therefore, self-consciously using the word *watch* rather than *observe* in talking about ethnographic observations, because *watch* is a more stronger verb, suggesting scrutiny or surveillance rather than merely noticing. (p. 1)

Ms. O'Brien entered Mr. Cossetini's classroom. She asked for his permission to speak with me, and he agreed.

"I want you to talk to my students, Joseph. When do you think you'll have some time? How long you gonna be here, in other words?"

“Oh, sure, I will meet with them. Right now, though, I scheduled this visit and later an interview, but maybe I can meet with your students on a Friday later this month,” I explained.

“Perfect, oh, just perfect. I’ve been telling them lots about you that they’re eager to meet you,” she added.

“Great! I will leave you a note in your mailbox, so you may contact me.”

“Thanks, Joseph. See you soon, then.”

I entered Mr. Cossetini’s classroom again, and I made a 360-degree turn to view the room in its entirety. He was seated at the podium near the classroom door entrance. Mr. Cossetini asked me to sit wherever I would like. I sat near the chalkboard where three Hispanic female students were seated.

The room was set up with large wooden tables with at least four chairs per table. Hardly any of the tables matched each other. A trophy that was hardly recognizable was on file cabinet. Later, I learned that Mr. Cossetini rearranged and redecorated the room, so it would be more appealing to the students. Many students fell asleep, so he decided to change the atmosphere and classroom environment with a more lively tone and approach.

Each classroom table had a dictionary and thesaurus. Students also had copies of the assigned novel, Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the D’Urbervilles. Because of the seating arrangement, the students faced each other.

On a file cabinet, there were copies of J.D. Salinger’s The Catcher and the Rye. The classroom was adorned with a few street signs and license plates. One of the signs read:

No Shoes
 No Standard Dress
 No Service

The walls were also displayed with movie posters based on novels. The television, bolted to the wall, was dusty with hardly any indication of usage. Photos of students at work or at play adorned the top alignment of the chalkboard. A stereo was in the classroom above a file cabinet. A literary map, which I recognized from the Harcourt Brace Jovanovich's Adventures in American Literature (1989) program, was displayed on a cabinet. I recognized the map, since I used the textbook while I had been a student at MGHS.

Two poems I had memorized, written by Sandra Cisneros, were transcribed on two separate poster board with student artwork. I was surprised to find the poems from Cisneros' volume Loose Woman (1994). One poster board poem was displayed on top of the classroom entrance doorway, while the other one adorned a file cabinet facing the classroom. The poems were entitled "Black Lace Bra Kind of Woman" and "Fan of a Floating Woman." The first poem, "Black Lace Bra Kind of Woman" reads,

¡Wáchale! [Beware!] She's a black lace bra
 kind of woman, the kind who serves
 up suicide with every kamikaze
 poured in the neon blue of evening.
 A tease and a twirl. I've seen that
 Two-step girl in action. I've gambled bad
 odds and sat shotgun when she rambled
 her '59 Pontiac between the blurred
 lines dividing sense from senselessness.

Ruin your clothes, she will.
 Get you home way after hours.
 Drive her '59 seventy-five on 35
 like there is no tomorrow.
 Woman zydeco-ing into her own decade.
 Thirty years pleated behind her like

wail of a San Antonio accordion.
 And now the good times are coming. Girl,
 I tell you, the good times are here. (p. 78)

All of the student artwork conveyed that the classroom belonged to active student learners. Moreover, the artwork meant that students created as they read literary selections. Visual images and representations confirmed the learning exchange. A student artwork poster about Emily Dickinson was displayed on one of the walls. Also, there was a mural of a diverse group of people. An old air conditioner rattled every now and then as the class progressed.

A set of posters, which described the stages of writing, began with examples of prewriting: picture writing, brainstorming, idea mapping, and outlining. The other stages that followed were drafting, conferencing, and editing.

The classroom was filled with books overflowing from the bookshelves. Many boxes with books were within the room, too. A magazine rack displayed diverse titles of periodicals.

A long sheet of paper announced the following lesson about the novel The Crucible.

Major Themes in The Crucible

People who claim to be motivated by principle may actually be motivated by greed or revenge! => In a climate of fear, basic human rights are endangered. => Moral courage is the mark of a hero. => A good reputation is more precious than life itself.

One particular poster presented a furtive voice in Spanish: “*Pst . . . Pst . . . Ven a leer.*”

The room was lit by the overhead projector with the following analogy assignment on a transparency:

Purist: correctness::
A miser: generosity
B saint: elevation
C nomad: refuge
D judge: accuracy
E martinet: discipline
Difficulty Level: Hard

The students worked independently. They wrote the assignment in their notebooks, while Mr. Cossetini spent time in other parts of the room gathering materials for the class.

The discussion between students was as diverse as the classroom setting and instruments. Nineteen students were present. Fourteen females and four males. One female was African American, while the other eighteen students were of Hispanic origin. Mr. Cossetini explained that three students were absent, since they were attending a career day event.

“Are you a substitute teacher?” asked a Hispanic male student.

“Oh, no, I am just visiting your famous class,” I explained.

A few minutes later. Another Hispanic male student said aloud, “I speak four languages. Wanna know which ones?” He directed his thoughts to the others seated at his table.

“I speak Spanglish, English, Spanish, and Ebonics,” he explained in a loud voice. Mr. Cossetini was taking attendance, so he did not hear him.

One of the Hispanic females seated at the table we shared, confided the following with the female student sitting across from her, “Guys are stupid. I don’t know why I deal with them.”

Someone in another part of the room asked, “How do you spell HOBBY?”

One female told another student, “*Ya!*”—asking him to leave her alone.

As the class progressed, Mr. Cossetini presented a copy of his class syllabus for the Spring, 2001. The course outline demonstrated the positive results that the teacher expected from his advanced placement students. Moreover, his outline mirrored that of The College Board’s (2000) Advanced Placement Program. The College Board’s outline reflects the following:

Preparing for either of the AP Examinations in English is a cooperative venture between students and their teachers. Students should read widely and reflect on their reading through extensive discussion, writing, and rewriting. Although they may do so independently to supplement the work of a conventional course, ideally they should work with a teacher in small class or tutorial session. In any case, students should assume considerable responsibility for the amount of reading and writing they do. Teachers of courses in AP English can complement the efforts of their students by guiding them in their choice of reading, by leading discussions, and by providing assignments that help students develop critical standards in their reading and writing. Because the Bible and Greek and Roman mythology are central to much Western literature, students should have some familiarity with them. These religious concepts and stories have influenced and informed Western literary creation since the Middle Ages, and they continue to provide material for modern writers in their attempts to give literary form to human experience. Additionally, the growing body of works in English reflecting non-Western cultures may require students to have some familiarity with other traditions. (p. 3)

Similarly, the outline for the course I attended reflected the AP model as well as reciprocal learning and engagement with the students and teacher. The outlined course objective for Mr. Cossetini’s class described the following:

By the end of this course, the student shall be able to communicate personal experience vividly and coherently, to present ideas and issues clearly, to respond intelligently to the ideas of other writers, and to present arguments logically and persuasively. The student should be able to frame a clear and significant thesis statement and choose appropriate means for its development. The student will gain an understanding of the SAT and English Language Advanced Placement examinations and acquire relevant test-taking strategies.

Daily Required Materials: Two pens, one pencil, composition book, paper, copy of Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles, notebook.

Grading Scale: Everything has a point value. If a vocabulary quiz has 13 questions, there are 13 possible points for you. If a section test has 20 questions, there are 20 possible points for you. An exam may offer 75 questions for 75 points, and a literature unit as a whole may offer 250 points. Simply divide the points you receive by the number of possible points to get your percentage.

Attendance and Participation: Attendance and participation are required; more than three absences will lower your grade. If you average for the class straddles two grades, your class participation, attendance, and work in your composition book (journal) will decide the matter.

Deadlines: A deadline will be established for the initial and final stages of each assignment. These are true deadlines and not casual target dates. The logic behind this is simple:

- (1) The course is arranged according to strict time constraints, and there is little time for the luxury of lateness;
- (2) In the interest of fairness, all students should be held to the same requirements; and
- (3) Deadlines are a simple fact of anyone's life.

This is an advanced placement class—**late submissions will not be accepted**. The course outline is a skeleton figure only, and does not reflect all assignments in the class (i.e. journal assignments are not listed).

The interview session took place between two class periods. Mr. Cossetini and I met during his hall monitor duty. He gave me permission to use the tape recorder. The session was stopped a few times, since a number of students were roaming the halls. Mr. Cossetini approached the students and asked them for their hall passes. The interaction contributed to our focus, since the interview involved students, discipline, and curriculum standards.

Ethno: How would you describe your philosophy of teaching? What do you believe “works?”

Mr. Cossetini: I generally try to do as much planning as possible during the summer or Christmas vacation and make modification as the semester progresses.

Classroom management must be maintained, or no instruction can take place. There are rules in the room, and we must create a society in the classroom that would be motivational for the students and for learning.

I would say that I get a positive reaction from my students. I have nine simple rules that we go over in the first weeks of school and that sets the stage for the rest of the quarter or semester. The rules are integrated into the classroom on a daily basis. When there is a violation made, I identify it for the students and the problem is solved right there.

With the AP class, we have covered a lot of American literature. My purpose in modeling the passages and pointing out the literary elements is my hope that they are able to pick up on it. Then, they can identify conflict and metaphor.

Ethno: Can you think of any characteristics that eleventh grade U.S.-Mexican students as a group bring to the classroom?

Mr. Cossetini: The students are interesting for a variety of reasons—some are U.S. citizens and some are not, some are waiting for U.S. citizenship and some are not sure if they will be in the country next year. The future, as far as they are concerned, is unique by these qualities they have.

Vocabulary and context is important with the students. If they learn how to use words, the denotation of the word in the context, [it] greatly increases their chances for success in society.

My students bring an unusual group of characteristics by the nature that so many of them come from homes with parents who do not possess a high school diploma. The whole high school experience is new to them. The students are learning study skills and timeliness.

Ethno: Tell me something about your thoughts on teaching American literature in the eleventh grade classroom.

Mr. Cossetini: The literary experience for the students is that I am teaching history from an American literature perspective. I did like the Adventures in American Literature [1989] for its chronological approach.

The new book falls in a more loose form [*The Language of Literature: American Literature* (Evanston, Illinois: McDougal Littell, A Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000)]. It is not structured in the

chronological order, so I have to do more impromptu teaching and adding my knowledge to make it relevant for the students.

Personally, I enjoy teaching American literature in the eleventh grade classroom. I hope to convey to the students the sense of history American literature provides. I hope to increase their appreciation for the works.

Ethno: How much of what you know about teaching U.S.-Mexican students did you learn as a result of teacher training, either pre-service or in-service?

Ms. Cossetini: Honestly, I did not learn much about U.S.-Mexican or U.S. Hispanic students in pre-service instruction.

Through in-services I have a hard time recalling anything that was geared toward the U.S.-Mexican or U.S.-Hispanic student. A lot of that, 99 percent, comes from my experience in the classroom.

Ethno: What texts do you think belong in the eleventh grade American literature classroom?

Mr. Cossetini: The new book is great, because it is so colorful. There are so many activities in it, but it is almost overwhelming for the students because there is so much in it. It's almost like a puzzle to them.

Through the years, it is going to take me more time to get familiar with that book since it's our first year [using it]. There [are] a lot of great things that can be done with it. [Teachers] really do not have the time to familiarize ourselves with the text. It was thrown upon us this year without any preparation time. I think next year we'll be more effective with the text.

Ethno: How do you handle the possible mismatch between what American literature you want to teach and what the administration (district superintendent or school principal) wants (for example, curricular mandates, philosophies) or what you have to teach with (for example, materials or supplies)?

Mr. Cossetini: I am pretty free to teach the American literature I want. They're quite concerned about us meeting the Project CLEAR [Project CLEAR Curriculum 2000—Clarifying Learning to Enhance Achievement Results] objectives, and that's my only particular constraint. If you're teaching, you're really doing all those things anyway.

Unfortunately, there is so much pressure from the administration in regard to the [standardized state examination]. A lot of teachers feel that they must teach toward the exam or there's no point in doing anything else. The [state education agency] pressures us, too.

The school has not been too concerned in the past for a more well-rounded development in the literary arts. The Stanford Nine scores and SAT scores don't compare to the magnitude of the importance to the [standardized state examination].

There's also a money issue and threatening situations toward teachers if they do not perform on the [standardized state examination]. This produces an undo and unfair amount of pressure on the people.

Ethno: How much access do you think your U.S.-Mexican students have to American literature?

Mr. Cossetini: I think that my students have all the access they want to American literature. I think it's more about the effort they want to make.

In particular, we have studied Richard Rodriguez, Sandra Cisneros, Gary Soto, and there are a few others of great prominence, including journal[ists]. There has been—on occasion—the call from the students for literature that's [by] Hispanic writers, so I made the effort to try and integrate that into the classroom.

I found the tools that I needed to teach these texts, too. I do not rely on anyone else's lesson plans.

I enjoy reading and writing, and I try to not only model the reading and writing experience, but I also try to show them my pleasure in reading and writing through my enthusiasm for the subject in the classroom.

I definitely feel that students are very sharp and bright. They pick up on little nuances of the teachers. [If a teacher] is feeling down that day or feeling down all the time, the students know this. And they also know if that teacher is inspired by the subject matter also. So, I simply, through my everyday routine, try to convey my sense of appreciation for the literature, and I hope they pick up on that.

I try to be the model [teacher], but I would not say that I am. One valuable lesson that I learned in college is that once you think that you are the model teacher that's the beginning of your downfall right there. You never know it *all* as a high school teacher, and times are changing. I try my best to be that model teacher.

Ethno: How do you think the schooling experience of the students you teach differs from that of Anglo American students in middle class, suburban communities?

Mr. Cossetini: First of all, the difference in the culture from mainstream students is great. I think you can probably see that in the home life.

Looking at the school on the surface level you see teenagers and you don't see much more beyond that until you get to these [U.S.-Latino] students. I would guess that it would differ probably in reading and background. We are still working on integrating more Hispanic literature into the mainstream.

As a whole, [however], a lot of literature has come from the Anglo perspective and, even more so, the Anglo male perspective. That's changing and that's obvious in the new literature book. It's good to reflect on the literature that our culture presents. Here, at this school, it is 97 or 98 percent Hispanic population, so they definitely have a heightened interest in Hispanic literature.

Nobody has questioned the readability or literary value of the Hispanic literature.

When we are in the formal whole class session, the subject matter is in English. For the occasional ESL transitional student, it has to be in English. That's the subject matter. You're right that there's a lot of code-switching among the students, and I don't discourage that at all. The students here have a great advantage over students perhaps in the suburban Anglo schools, since so many of them speak two languages fluently. I don't want them to forget their Spanish tongue, if it's the first one. They'll find later in life that it's a great advantage for them. (Interview, Spring, 2001)

Analysis

My observation of Mr. Cossetini's classroom confirmed the dynamic shift in pedagogical practices. The classroom belonged to the students, and he created an environment conducive for their growth and creative expression. Although some teachers may argue about the circumstances of school buildings, Mr. Cossetini managed

to carve a space for his students, and the students contributed to the sense of place within the classroom. The sense of belonging and identification is essential to name a place to study. In a sense, the classroom becomes a dwelling space, since students dare to name the world anew as independent, critical thinkers.

Society is not removed from Mr. Cossetini's classroom, but within society's challenges and possibilities, including the literary texts selected for critical study. The effective teaching practices allow students to be in the learning process, rather than on the margin with little interaction as passive listeners who later regurgitate information as knowledge. Dalton (1998) explains,

Since at least the Civil War, the common tradition of American education has been the "recitation script," in which teachers assign texts and seat-work, assess students' learning, then make the next assignment, producing short recurrent sequences of assign-assess, assign-assess in classrooms led firmly by the teacher with little or no student interaction. (p. 2)

Instead, Mr. Cossetini's lesson plans and classroom culture engage the students toward intellectual curiosity without silencing them. The teacher as creative learner must act and interact, "assist[ing] students continuously through interaction and activity in the ongoing social events of the classroom" (Dalton, 1998, p. 3). The classroom discipline established from the first week of classes shapes the overall environment for learning without disruption. Mr. Cossetini stated that he "get[s] a positive reaction from the students." Similarly, his performance readings of literary passages inspire the students into a lively interaction. He described the exchange as the following: "I simply, through my everyday routine, try to convey my sense of appreciation for the literature, and I hope they pick up on that."

The teacher as model challenges Mr. Cossetini. In the classroom, Mr. Cossetini conveys the need to read critically and to examine the role of society in literature. Moreover, the teacher recognizes the students as migratory with the possibility of moving South from the United States or remaining in the United States. The conflicting circumstances of U.S. residency and U.S. citizenship dictate the presence of his U.S.-Mexican students. For first-generation Mexican-origin students in the U.S. public school system, the Mexican-born parents experience the dynamics of schooling.

In the teaching of American literature, the English teacher also performs the role of a historian by presenting the moments in history that shaped literary production and the literary establishment. Mr. Cossetini favors the pedagogy of “appreciation” for literature, but this need not mean that sociopolitical imperatives are absent. Students requested that more Hispanic-origin U.S. authors be taught in their classroom. Such request demands that the teacher be a researcher and reader as well. The teacher’s effort to listen to his students further confirms the dialogue fostered through critical pedagogical approaches.

Profile #2: Ms. Karla Lulling, “*The Hispanic students bring family into the classroom.*”

Ms. Lulling taught regular eleventh grade English students at MGHS. She was a fourteen-year veteran teacher. She was Anglo American with shoulder-length blonde hair. On the day of the interview, she wore a long skirt with a patterned blouse.

In 1982, she graduated from Westbury High School in Houston, Texas. For two years, she attended Stephen F. Austin University, and the following three years she attended Sam Houston State University. In 1986, she graduated from Sam Houston State

University with bachelor's degrees in sociology, English, and earth science. Prior to teaching at MGHS, she taught for two years at a suburban secondary school. She was a twelve-year veteran at MGHS.

Meeting with Ms. Lulling was a challenge. We decided to have the interview on a Friday, and I realized Fridays, along with Mondays, were difficult days to meet with teachers. Many teachers were absent on these two days, as were students, and substitute teachers were difficult to find in the school district.

I arrived early to meet with Ms. Lulling in her classroom—a temporary building on the North wing of MGHS. The buildings reminded me of the shacks at my elementary school. The shacks were in the playground area of my elementary school, lined up like shot-gun houses—next to each other in a tight, sequential order. The temporary buildings housed students assigned to special education and alternative education programs. Students who could not read at their grade level attended the reading laboratory located on the temporary building wing of the school grounds.

An eyesore for the school grounds, the temporary buildings, or shacks, housed students who were on the margin. This area of the elementary school was hardly visited by mainstream teachers and students. The temporary buildings were associated as the place that stood “over there—all the way over *there*, and far from here, now.” Two separate gates kept the area off limits. Because of appearance and first impressions, the temporary buildings became associated with the disposable trailer park in the immediate neighborhood. Indeed, language alone could convey the displacement and absence from the mainstream world. Students and this researcher could recognize the differences of

how alike clearly became unlike in schooling practices and arrangements. At the same time, I witnessed the politics of space and location.

Ms. Lulling's classroom was in a temporary building. It was no coincidence that my psychology class was in her classroom in the early 1990s. I climbed the steps to enter her classroom. The paneled classroom with varying furniture pieces reminded me of the past encounters in the world of public schooling. Ms. Lulling, however, fostered student ownership of the classroom. Student work was displayed throughout the classroom, and pastel colors brightened the dark paneled classroom that resembled a stuffy office.

I waited by the door, since Ms. Lulling was not in the classroom. A few minutes later, she arrived. She entered the room attempting to catch her breath. With difficulty, she climbed up the steps.

"You made it," she said.

"Yes, I did," I responded.

"Well, we're outta here," she explained. "Too many teachers are out today. It's a Friday, you know. So, I gotta be a substitute on my off period. We can still talk, though. We gotta go to the other side of the school. I'll just give them (the students) something to do, and you can interview me. Are you ready?"

"Sure," I added.

We walked through a number of areas of the school. Some students, mostly males, walked the school hallways with hardly any notion of where they were going. They roamed the halls, peering into the pebbled glass doors and sometimes knocking on classroom doors. In the hallways, their gaze was fixed on the eyes of a few Hispanic

females who also walked the halls. Their eyes locked and then quickly diverted elsewhere—either toward the wall or the floor.

In the outdoor courtyard area, a Hispanic gentleman sported a felt hat with a feather in the wind. He wore gray polyester pants that gripped his thighs. He wore a leather belt with his surname embroidered, declaring the family name. His black shirt was a *guayabera*, a lightweight shirt worn by many males in Latin America. He also wore black roper boots. A pair of male students walked beside him. After they passed him, they chuckled and then snickered at him.

“Weirdo, man,” one of the guys added, conveying his indifference to the style of dress of his peer. The other student quipped, “Damn kicker.” The students’ comments challenged the style of dress they had just seen. Although there was a standardized dress code at MGHS, the encounter only indicated that each student chose to remake his attire to *his* standards of fashion. The critical students who examined their peer, who wore the *vaquero* attire, looked as though they had just stepped out of a J. Crew catalogue. Their style could be described as “preppy” or like that of a college preparatory student’s. One student had a sweater tied around his waist. He wore khaki shorts with a matching belt that was coordinated with his deck shoes. His white polo shirt was neatly pressed. His black hair was spiked toward the sky.

As I watched this exchange between diverse students, I recognized what Valenzuela (1999) described as the “politics of difference” (p. 161). Valenzuela argues that schools participate in these practices “whenever youth are deprived of the opportunity to openly evaluate and discuss the differences in social identities reflected among them” (p. 225). These differences include boundaries and barriers marked by

U.S.-born youth and immigrant peers, which can extend to the “recency of arrival” (p. 181). Outdoor spaces convey the difference among students as they move from one space to another.

Ms. Lulling and I found the classroom that needed a substitute teacher. The room was locked, and no students were present. Ms. Lulling used her cellular phone and reached the main office coordinator of substitute assignments. The coordinator asked that she wait a few more minutes to see if any students arrived late. We waited by the door for about five minutes.

“It helps having a phone, you know,” Ms. Lulling explained. “I use it all the time to call students. I need it if I’m in my classroom.”

“Do you communicate with parents, too?” I asked.

“Oh, yeah. All the time.”

One male Hispanic student finally showed up, and Ms. Lulling called the office again. As she spoke with the coordinator, however, the student managed to sneak away and disappeared toward the cafeteria area.

“Alright, let’s just go,” Ms. Lulling said.

She and I decided to meet later in the day after we had lunch. When we met again in her classroom, she was enthusiastic to meet with me again. She agreed to my using the tape recorder.

Ethno: How would you describe your philosophy of teaching? What do you believe “works?”

Ms. Lulling: Hands-on experience works. CRISS works [Project CRISS (Creating Independence through Student-owned Strategies)]. Of all the training, the CRISS training was the best. Student-centered learning is the best. My classroom looks elementary school-ish, but the art media works with students. The focus is now on creativity.

Ethno: Can you think of any characteristics that eleventh grade U.S.-Mexican students as a group bring to the classroom?

Ms. Lulling: Eleventh graders mature quickly. For someone who's taught tenth graders for a long time, it's like they're adults. They're mature persons.

The Hispanic students bring family into the classroom. Family is important to Hispanic students. It wasn't that way in the White school. I hated being at that [suburban] school. The Hispanic students are more creative and artistic. They like hands-on experience. "Just gimme a worksheet. I don't want to do all this stuff," some kids said at that other school.

The quality of the students is wonderful. They have different values. Work, work, work. Not sitting behind a desk with a pencil, but using your hands and making a product. The Hispanic family has different values like work, work, work—than education at this point. At home, the Hispanic students are told to go to work and not to college. Well, most of them. So, we're having to fight against that. They're getting pressure from here to go to college, but I think most of them are not hearing this at home.

There aren't any students in my class that can't speak English, because then that would be an ESL class. All of my students are proficient. Some are high level and some just got out of ESL.

Ethno: What kind of work have you done in the classroom that facilitated the literary experience of U.S.-Mexican students?

Ms. Lulling: We've done a family tree. We read a story by N. Scott Momaday, *A Way to Rainy Mountain*, by a Native American author. We make visual aids. That's a good place to begin the family tree with this literary work. They like this project every year. They bring pictures and recipes. They also bring things from their country.

Ethno: Tell me something about your thoughts on teaching American literature in the eleventh grade classroom.

Ms. Lulling: I'm not thrilled with the literature in the new book. They're all American writers. I like to select lots of American writers.

I think we should have more selections by Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Italian Americans. The classics are

old guys and about White people. The stories are relevant today, but the culture is not.

Ethno: How much of what you know about teaching U.S.-Mexican students did you learn as a result of teacher training, either pre-service or in-service?

Ms. Lulling: Zero. None. I received zero training about Hispanic American students in the 1980s. We just learned how to teach. I might have had something in sociology, but I don't think it was related to teaching. I can't remember.

Ethno: What texts do you think belong in the eleventh grade American literature classroom?

Ms. Lulling: I think more multicultural literature, along with the classics, is needed in the American literature classroom. Something more reflective of today's society.

Ethno: How do you handle the possible mismatch between what American literature you want to teach and what the administration (district superintendent or school principal) wants (for example, curricular mandates, philosophies) or what you have to teach with (for example, materials or supplies)?

Ms. Lulling: Well, actually, you know, the administration is very flexible here as far as the curriculum is concerned. They trust us. We have flexibility in that. The [standardized state examination], the Stanford Nine, and SAT affect us. We used to do Macbeth with the eleventh graders, but now we read excerpts and answer questions for the Stanford Nine. Much has been replaced with test preparation.

Ethno: How much access do you think your U.S.-Mexican students have to American literature?

Ms. Lulling: At school, students have lots of exposure to American literature. At home, I'm not sure. I don't know. Maybe not too much. They don't like to read.

Ethno: How do you think the schooling experience of the students you teach differs from that of Anglo American students in middle class, suburban communities?

Ms. Lulling: I think the schooling experience is the same at suburban schools and here. They're getting a good education here, but the facilities of course are not that good. They don't give them good things to eat in the

cafeteria. The cafeteria is not that good. I know that at other schools it's like Luby's [a chain cafeteria]. So, I think that they are getting a quality education here, but as far as the money spent, the facilities and the materials are probably better in the suburbs. (Interview, Spring, 2001)

Analysis

Ms. Lulling encouraged her students to make use of their creative talents. For her, literature does not mean a passive act of reading—an action between reader and text, but instead a moment of creative expression. Students engaged in diverse media to demonstrate interdisciplinary exchanges of learning and thought. A reading selection, such as Momaday's text, led to many critical activities that fostered prolonged engagement with the objectives and lesson plan. The lesson plan also fostered the students' shaping of their identity and family's sense of story, their sense of belonging to a familiar narrative.

The lesson planning reflects the principles and philosophy of Project CRISS. The Project CRISS employs several concepts drawn from cognitive psychology. Texts are interpreted with prior knowledge and background and integrated further with a new comprehension. This occurs when more is valued and shared with the reading situation. The students are actively involved in "making sense of their reading." Content is learned more effectively, since teachers are hardly on stage presenting lectures or asking questions. Students discuss with one another what they are learning. Student-centered discussion fosters the conversation and dialogue model, rather than the authoritarian teacher directing students toward the recitation model. The critical dialogue model develops higher level reading skills to refine understanding. The Project's strategies

create an environment to cultivate the exchange of ideas (Santa, 1996). Teachers model their own learning processes, and students become aware of how learning and comprehending take place. Writing exercises allow students to make personal sense of what they are reading. They write to understand and organize their thoughts. Students decipher “clusters of information and hierarchies of ideas.”

The Project CRISS strategies also help students become aware of the author’s intuitive craft, or style of presentation. Learning and memory depend upon the organization of information. Cognitive psychology approaches in the Project CRISS help students learn flexible ways to organize information from both narrative and expository text. Examples cited include main idea strategies such as power thinking, selective underlining, two column notes, and concept mapping. The process of active learning is stressed through explanation and modeling.

Some of the lessons that Ms. Lulling described indicated her “reeducation” and “anti-racist” practices in the classroom (Howard, 1999, p. 15, p. 53). Although she did not have any prior knowledge of teaching Mexican-origin students, she managed to educate herself in the process. Some researchers argue that stereotypes continue to foster a detrimental perception of Hispanic Americans (Nieto, 2000). For example, the preconception that higher education standards are absent in Hispanic-origin families concludes that perhaps the possibility is unattainable, which is not the case. Academic performance varies and should not be solely based on racial or ethnic group classifications. Nieto (2000) explains,

[T]he policies and practices of schools, and the hopes and expectations they have for students, are also key variables in explaining student academic achievement. . . . When teachers and schools believe their students are capable learners and they create appropriate learning

environments for them, young people are given a clear and positive message about their worth and abilities. (pp. 244-245)

Ms. Lulling's classroom practices challenge the notion that "schools inevitably deconstruct racial and cultural identities" (Fordham, 1996, p. 21). However, possible implication and interference from cultural dominance practices affect practices in lesson planning. The indication that Ms. Lulling strives for a multicultural approach to the teaching of American literature confirms her commitment to diversity and the possibility of critical consciousness through cultural encounters and dialogue.

Profile #3: Ms. Brenda Thompson, "The teacher helps to mold minds."

Ms. Thompson taught regular eleventh grade English students at MGHS. She was African American and a twenty-year veteran teacher. She taught at MGHS for over ten years. She had shoulder-length black hair. Ms. Thompson wore a long skirt and a patterned blouse. She was raised by her grandparents in a Louisiana town near Shreveport. Through her college years, she was a caregiver for a few families. She attended a four-year college in Louisiana, and earned a bachelor's degree in English. The interview took place in the Spring, 2001.

As a young girl, Ms. Thompson became interested in the teaching profession. As she grew older, she realized that teachers were viewed as "people of worth," and she decided that she "wanted to possess this respectable career." Our interview session was transcribed through handwritten notes. Ms. Thompson discouraged me from using the tape recorder. However, at the end of the interview, she stated, "You know, when I now think about it, you could have used the tape recorder. Oh, well."

Ms. Thompson's reflections on teaching indicated her commitment to students and their positive growth. She spoke with depth and clarity. She explained, "A teacher should understand that any student is capable of learning. A teacher is someone who enjoys people and teaching. Teachers help mold minds. A teacher can be a guide and must never give up on a student. A teacher never quits."

She explained that students bring a diversity of personalities and levels of accomplishment and knowledge. Moreover, she addressed the realities of U.S.-Mexican and Latino students by adding, "They're typical teenagers with their differences and responses. And they're respectable."

"I try to include multicultural literature, but not as much as I should," she said. "I do incorporate Mexican American literature. In the future, I would like to improve on this. After all, students would like to be introduced to outstanding writers of their culture such as Asian and Chinese, rather than only Anglo Saxon."

"There should be a variety of books for the American literature student. The literature book that was adopted this year is good, and it has a lot for students at their fingertips. It has the definitions right on the page, and it moves them through lots of activities," Ms. Thompson added.

"Hispanic students have American literature books in the school library. Various bookstores carry books by Hispanic authors. Also, the computer has lots of reading material, too. Certain parents in suburban areas start their children by focusing on education at a very early age. These students may be a little more advanced," she stated.

“American literature is one of the courses I enjoy teaching the most,” Ms. Thompson stated. “I have taught it for quite a few years. I have favorite authors such as Emily Dickinson.”

“Most of my learning about Hispanic students comes working with them. They’re a talented people and not only in the arts. I am spellbound by the dances full of grace, poise, and enthusiasm,” Ms. Thompson explained.

Our exchange was interrupted by the bell for the next class period. The interview took place during Ms. Thompson’s class period.

Analysis

McEwan (1992) argues that a confusing “multitude of institutional and cultural demands” are placed on the [secondary] English teacher (p. 102). A multiplicity of areas and core beliefs have entered the English classroom, and teachers have had to assert guiding principles in the teaching of English through overall curriculum and daily instructional planning. The search for foundational principles have led teachers to diverse programs and projects.

While interviewing Ms. Thompson, I recognized her sincere commitment and care toward students and literary selection. She considered the needs of her students. Moreover, she acknowledged that she need to continue her research to have more diverse literary texts in her daily instructional planning. According to Birkerts (1994), literature is “a way of talking about important and difficult aspects of our universal experience” (p.

191). Ms. Thompson attempted to make the experience of her students relevant to the classroom.

She shared that her learning about Hispanic students occurred while in service. Although teacher training programs are beginning to address cultural diversity and the need to create a classroom that is more inclusive and holistic for the needs of students, teachers continue to be uninformed about their role in non-Anglo communities. Freire (1998) argues, “Teachers first learn how to teach, but they learn how to teach as they teach something that is relearned as it is being taught” (p. 17). Ms. Thompson felt prepared as a teacher, but she knew little about U.S.-Mexican students. As she spoke, I recognized what Mora (1998) attempts to deconstruct in her labor as a writer and cultural worker.

Teachers who struggle to respect and understand their diverse students often state the desire for professional development opportunities. Seeking to develop multicultural competencies should merit investment as did developing computer competencies, not superficial treatment of cultural groups through the *4 F theory of sensitivity*—food, folklore, fashion, and festival—but substantive presentations that confront how culture and ideology affect our assessment of literature and its authors. Mini-writing retreats can also be an effective way to explore our own past, and then to enter books from a different psychological place. (p. 287) (my emphasis)

Teachers’ commitment to cultural awareness need not mean reductionist cultural appendages for student consumption. The student is within sociocultural ideologies that inform and disrupt instruction from multiple spaces. Hence, the teacher examines the imperatives that inform diverse cultural competencies and responds in a way that invests on the capital the student brings to the classroom. Literature offers the possibility to cross multiple borders to build more conscious communities.

Summary

The researcher conducted five interviews of staff members. In each case, the researcher did follow-up interviews. Teachers interviewed were mainstream classroom teachers of eleventh grade. Various departments were represented such as advanced placement, honors, and regular assignments.

In conducting the semi-structured interviews, the researcher asked the interviews to present some biographical information such as when and where they were educated, when and where they began teaching, and their motivation to teach. Then, he led them into more items from the Teacher Interview Questionnaire (TIQ), especially those related to U.S.-Mexican students, the American literary canon, literary selection, sociocultural perceptions, and aspects of hidden curriculum. These interviews created moments of intense reflection for the interviewees, while at other times they held their conviction in maintaining their perceptions and ways of seeing.

The researcher selected from the interviews what he believed to be the most typical and atypical representative samples of perspectives based on the TIQ. The researcher edited the transcribed interviews and deleted repetitive phrases and filler words such as *Umm* and *Yeah*. The speakers were anonymous and were identified by a number and pseudonym. The researcher was identified as *Ethno*.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

blessing the boats

(at St. Mary's)

may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that

—Lucille Clifton (2000, p. 82)

Introduction

This chapter presents concluding voices from MGHS, including revealing text from the student focus group. The significant themes and findings of the investigation are also presented. This is followed by conclusions based on some of the major findings from the research. The delimitations are discussed. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

The purpose of this study was to examine the social and cultural contexts that intersect in the eleventh grade American literature classroom for Latino origin students,

the majority of whom are of Mexican origin, at Macario García High School located in an urban area of the Southwestern United States.

The researcher incorporated extensive review of the literature based on sociohistorical events and influences. The dynamics and themes studied included curriculum standards, literary selection, multiculturalism, and the canon with movements that influenced Language Arts/English pedagogy. The research of the literature also points out that the secondary American literature canon has a long tradition rooted in beliefs of diversity and sociopolitical pluralism. The researcher presents some of his findings and discusses their significance.

Profile #4: Ms. Cindy Cárdenas, *“My philosophy of teaching is to teach [students] how to learn and think independently. . . . I want to hit all the bases of literature, depending on where [the students] go and where they study.”*

Ms. Cárdenas taught regular eleventh grade students at MGHS. She had studied at a community college. Then, she spent some time traveling. Next, she attended New York University. Right after college, during the 1996-1997 academic year, she began teaching at MGHS through the alternative certification program. She explained that some teachers in the department viewed her as the “Rebel Kid” or the “Golden Girl” because of her views. Moreover, she explained that the department staff members have been supportive. Her friends also encourage her as a teacher at MGHS. She mentioned that she rarely attends the weekly morning meeting of the department, since it’s mostly an informational session.

Ms. Cárdenas was in her early thirties and about five feet, two inches tall. She had shoulder-length black hair. She had light brown skin. Ms. Cárdenas dressed like

some teachers at MGHS. She wore a solid-colored blouse with slacks. Her commitment to her students was evident. During class breaks, some of her students entered her classroom to greet her. She expressed her enthusiasm by walking toward the door to greet more students.

When I met her during her conference period for the interview session, incense was burning. The scent was pleasant and added to the balance of the classroom setting. Upon entering the room, I noticed a cactus plant on her desk. There was a Compaq computer in the front area of the classroom. There was also a podium, overhead projector, and file cabinet. Bookcases and file cabinets were in the room. Ms. Cárdenas' desk was at the head of the classroom, facing the students.

At the entrance area near the bulletin board, students' acceptance letters to local and out-of-state universities were posted. The wooden cabinet was adorned with European art.

The classroom entrance was adorned with messages:

Welcome to my reality.

Garfield asks, "Can I get Caller I.D. for the voices in my head?"

Volunteers brighten lives.

Feel free to treat me like royalty.

There were two Latino students in the classroom. Both the male and female students decided to excuse themselves when I turned on the tape recorder.

Ethno: How would you describe your philosophy of teaching? What do you believe "works?"

Ms. Cárdenas: My philosophy of teaching is to teach [students] how to learn and think independently. This has worked for me thus far.

Ethno: Can you think of any characteristics that eleventh grade U.S.-Mexican students as a group bring to the classroom?

Ms. Cárdenas: This is the first year I am teaching an American literature course. I have taught British literature, and this year I was handed an American literature class. I was really unprepared as far as the textbook. I went back into my multicultural literature class from college and found some relevant material. One thing about these students is that they are inquisitive and are not afraid to share their opinions. The students are in tune with the world, and they are interesting because of this.

Ethno: What kind of work have you done in the classroom that facilitated the literary experience of U.S.-Mexican students?

Ms. Cárdenas: In the new textbook, the literature we have been reading has been varied. I brought—on my own—Mexican American literature to the classroom. I teach literary elements, and it seems that the students are more connected to the contemporary literature.

Ethno: Tell me something about your thoughts on teaching American literature in the eleventh grade classroom.

Ms. Cárdenas: I like teaching American literature because it means multicultural literature such as teaching Filipino literature and poetry, Latino and Latina literature. For me, it just isn't Nathaniel Hawthorne. Although we still read Southern writers, I know that "American" is broad, so I try to teach as [many] diverse works as possible.

Ethno: How much of what you know about teaching U.S.-Mexican students did you learn as a result of teacher training, either pre-service or in-service?

Ms. Cárdenas: I have always had the same percentage of Hispanic origin students—97 percent. I came here right after college [from New York University]. My degree is in humanities, which is mostly in philosophy and multicultural literature. I learned a lot from my professors; I learned how they engaged their students. At NYU, I studied as a playwright, too.

The literature in the textbook does not have a strong focus on Mexican-American literature, so I have to bring in [Gloria] Anzaldúa and [Richard] Rodriguez.

Ethno: What texts do you think belong in the eleventh grade American literature classroom?

Ms. Cárdenas: There are literary elements that we are supposed to teach, and I go by what I know the students will like. My needs and theirs are met through the literature selected.

Ethno: How do you handle the possible mismatch between what American literature you want to teach and what the administration (district superintendent or school principal) wants (for example, curricular mandates, philosophies) or what you have to teach with (for example, materials or supplies)?

Ms. Cárdenas: With all the heavy emphasis on [state tests], I treat my students as if they are going to college. It does not matter if you are going back to Mexico or [if you will] work here. Critical thinking and higher level learning are important. Higher thinking skills, critical thinking, analysis, logic, and thinking independently are the main things I hit on.

Ethno: How much access do you think your U.S.-Mexican students have to American literature?

Ms. Cárdenas: My students probably only have access to American literature in my classroom. The term is so broad. It can mean so many things. We study some of the canon and classics. I want to hit all the bases of literature, depending on where they go and where they study. I don't want them to feel alienated if they have to take a literature class in college.

Ethno: How do you think the schooling experience of the students you teach differs from that of Anglo American students in middle class, suburban communities?

Ms. Cárdenas: Schools that are Anglo have more advantages, but that does not account for students being smarter. We could all be reading [Ambrose Bierce's] "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," but the way a teacher looks at it from teaching a group of Hispanics is that going to differ from teaching a group of Anglos? I don't think that matters. (Interview, Spring, 2001)

The class session began promptly. She granted me permission to introduce myself to the students. I stated, "My name is Joseph Rodríguez, and I am a graduate of MGHS. I attended MGHS during the 1990s, and I have returned as a researcher and Ph.D. candidate in the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut.

The—"

“Yeah, go Huskies!” a male Hispanic student exclaimed. His peers directed their gaze toward him, and he smirked. He had an athletic build—broad shoulders and protruding forearms. He continued to grin through most of my presentation and observation. On occasion, he looked toward the back of the classroom where I later sat. A few times, he waved as I wrote my observations.

“The reason I am here today is to learn more about your class. I am interested in the teaching of American literature. I will visit your class a number of times this semester. So, in a way, I am student as well, and you are my teachers. Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns?”

One male Hispanic student raised his hand. He asked, “How long have you been going to school?”

“Since graduating from MGHS, I have been teaching and pursuing higher education. This is my eighth year of university study,” I responded.

Another male Hispanic student raised his hand. He asked, “How many schools have you observed already?” After the second male asked a question, I hoped to hear from the females in the classroom. I thought of a strategy to have them share their thoughts and interests on my research role.

“This is the only school I have been observing. I received permission from the school district administration and the MGHS principal. I have met with the four teachers of American literature. Later this month, there will also be a focus group of students.”

A female Hispanic student asked, “What have you found?”

“Right now, I am still organizing the data, so the results are not complete. I can tell you that I never thought I would return here other than as a teacher. Who would have thought that I would be a researcher and a doctoral candidate?”

The students’ questions confirmed many ideas that were shared during the interview I had had with Ms. Cárdenas. Their questions thwacked me a bit, especially the last one, but I managed to keep my composure. It was clear that the students wanted to be more engaged in my research journey, and they wanted to know more about the process and data collection. Ms. Cárdenas walked toward me, and I realized that it was time to begin the lesson. She thanked me for speaking.

She told me that I could sit toward the back of the classroom. There were 27 students present: 12 males and 15 females. 26 students were of Hispanic origin, while one female was of Asian heritage.

Ms. Cárdenas began her lesson on the Harlem Renaissance. She explained that their focus was on the decades from 1910 to 1940. She drew a map on the board of the New York City area.

I noticed the posters with messages on the walls.

Excellence knows no gender.

Life is what you make it.

Stand up for what is right, even if you’re standing alone.

Live. Love. Laugh.

Martha Stewart doesn’t live here.

If you thought being a teacher was hard . . .
try to be a teacher.

30 years from now,

it won't matter what shoes you wore,
how your hair looked,
or the jeans you bought.
What will matter is what you learned
and how you used it.

We can only see
 with open eyes.
We can only listen
 with open ears.
We can only think
 with open minds.

C/O 2001

An artwork poster of the Dahomey was nailed against the wall near the windows. A large map was titled "Literary-Pictorial British Isles" with an index of English literature. The map had been displayed for quite some time, and it was yellow with stains.

The lesson plan included a diverse discussion of the Harlem Renaissance period, including the sociopolitical climate that shaped it. The lesson was led by selected poems authored by "Harlem's Poet Laureate" or "Harlem's Shakespeare," Langston Hughes. The first poem discussed was "I, Too," followed by "Harlem" and "The Weary Blues." Ms. Cárdenas presented realities that informed the Harlem Renaissance, which included the Red Summer, Great Depression, jazz music, segregation, poverty, and "growing racial violence."

One male Hispanic student directed a question to Ms. Cárdenas. He asked, "Do you think there's still segregation?"

Ms. Cárdenas did not respond, since another student offered her response to the question. "There is," she said. "Read the paper." I noticed that throughout the class session students offered their exchange of informed opinions. No one was silenced by

Ms. Cárdenas. The students responded to questions and commentary with confidence and conviction. The works by many American authors were discussed, including Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Arna Bontemps, Jean Toomer, Gwendolyn Brooks, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker.

Ms. Cárdenas discussed the role of jazz music in American literature—in particular African American literature. The classroom became multimedia when she played a jazz tune from the 1920s. The students grinned and laughed as the compact disc roared with sounds from the computer on the front desk. “Feel free to get up and dance if you want,” Ms. Cárdenas said. A few females seated two rows over squirmed in their seats and turned red. Some students began to snap their fingers and move their bodies while seated at their desks. One male Hispanic student got up from his chair to throw a piece of paper away, and he walked with a stride full of gusto as the music of bebop jazz played.

Ms. Cárdenas read the poems aloud to the class. She explained, “Poetry is the only form of literature that was meant to be heard. It must be heard; it must be vocalized.” She introduced the poem “The Weary Blues” as a protest poem. The students discussed the speaker’s conflict. They voiced the speaker’s concern with rejection, unfairness, Jim Crow laws, and segregation. At the same time, they affirmed the speaker’s sense of pride, confidence, and personal strength.

Ms. Cárdenas connected the themes with a previous work the students read titled *Yo soy Joaquín: I Am Joaquín*, an epic poem from the 1960s Chicano and Chicana Civil Rights Movement. She explained, “Like Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzales, the author of *Yo soy Joaquín*, Hughes speaks of the entire ethnic group and race.”

The classroom assignment involved the discussion of mood. Students were asked to work on the following chart.

Poem	Mood of Poem	Elements That Contribute
“I, Too”		
“Harlem”		
“The Weary Blues”		

As the students worked on the assignment, Ms. Cárdenas walked throughout the classroom, encouraging students to read critically to identify the mood. Her presence encouraged the students to work independently. When they had questions, they asked her and some students also consulted their peers. With a large degree of freedom, they addressed their teacher, and she addressed them with equal care and concern.

Before the class was over, Ms. Cárdenas encouraged the students to register for the SAT. She was instilling the desire to attend college, and the necessary materials to make that happen were within the students’ reach within the classroom. The students did not have to visit the counselors’ office to take care of business. Ms. Cárdenas had brochures and SAT registration jackets from The College Board in her classroom, and five students walked to the boxes of brochures and registration forms and helped themselves. She also announced the April, 2001, testing date.

The students were informed about the dual credit courses that would be offered at MGHS in the 2001-2002 academic year.

Before leaving, some students approached me. “Good luck,” they said. “Come back and see us,” they said. I felt affirmed. I felt I belonged at MGHS after having left more than eight years ago.

Ms. Cárdenas thanked me and asked me to come back again.

Analysis

Ms. Cárdenas' style incorporated Freire's model of instruction. The teacher encouraged active engagement with the word and the world. The students were not being filled with the banking system of knowledge—regurgitating information as knowledge. In contrast, the students took center stage in the interpretation of conflictive sociopolitical and sociocultural ideologies. There was not a pre-packaged schooling and education process. The students had to think critically to form their own ideas regarding the literary selections. As early as the 1970s, Applebee attempted to negotiate the terrain of traditionalists and challengers. Applebee (1974) explains:

Any definition of literary heritage in terms of specific books or authors distorts the cultural significance of a literary tradition by failing to recognize that what the Great Books offer is a continuing dialogue on the moral and philosophical questions central to the culture itself. The usefulness of heritage lies in the confrontation with these issues which it provides; any acquaintanceship which avoids the confrontation is both trivial and irrelevant. (p. 248)

Ms. Cárdenas did not feel restrained by the mandated curriculum standards and the scope and sequence. She believed that she could meet many objectives through the teaching of diverse American authors and their works. She challenges the notion of "American," and explained, "The term is so broad."

The teacher was present in the challenges and turmoil of her students' everyday affairs, especially in reference to their schooling. Moreover, Ms. Cárdenas did not fear her feelings and emotions. She articulated similar respect, care, and consciousness from

her students. Rather than labeling her students or subjecting them to titles of indifference or detriment, she encouraged them to take action for their own self-actualization whether they were of U.S.-Mexican origin or not. Ms. Cárdenas integrated the holistic student and conveyed this as the interview progressed.

Like the role of the educator, the ethnographer must negotiate space as an observer and writer of multiple signs and symbols and ways of seeing. Both the critical educator and emerging ethnographer mediate a relationship in spaces of learning. Freire (1998) explains:

We should be cautioned about and open to the *relationships* between facts, data, and objects of a comprehension of reality. None of that is outside the educator's task in the context of his or her reading of the class, which serves as evidence that the educator's practice is not limited to mechanically teaching content. It also serves as evidence that the necessary teaching of content should not be devoid of critical knowledge about the social, cultural, and economic conditions within the learners' context. (p. 50)

The teacher must not become a machine that creates a factory of head-bopping students. Freire believes that fostering dialogue and a critical relationship with objects in the world greatly increases the possibility of critical consciousness in a world dominated by hierarchy and subjectivity. Students are empowered when they can name their reality and the mechanisms that shape and/or disrupt its course for critical consciousness. The dialogue fostered was one of conversation and interpersonal understanding. These dialogues for interaction involved inquiry, instruction, and the possibility of debate. The lifeless role of teacher as authoritarian and omniscient was absent. Ms. Cárdenas offered the necessary supplies for her students to read the world and decipher its conflictive symbols and meanings.

Profile #5: Mr. Miguel Tovar, “*My job, for example, is based strictly on numbers[.] It’s amazing. All data-driven. My whole job is.*”

Mr. Tovar was the school principal at MGHS. (He planned to retire sometime next year.) He was over six feet tall with a commanding presence. Mr. Tovar was in his late forties. He had a stocky, hulky build. He had fair skin and black and gray hair. He also had a neatly trimmed mustache. Mr. Tovar mentioned his upbringing in Laredo, Texas.

Mr. Tovar remembered his boyhood in South Texas and how a Mexican American teacher made a lasting impact on him. Unlike his father’s work attire, this teacher wore a suit everyday. “He even wore a silver watch, Joseph. *Todos los días venía así.* [Every day he arrived [dressed] this way,]” he explained. Mr. Tovar expressed how he became fond of his teacher’s everyday attire and neatness.

“He wasn’t all *choreado* [stained] with oil like my *Papi*,” he explained. Mr. Tovar watched him daily. From his meticulous description, it seemed as though he watched him intently with curiosity. As he shared these thoughts, I remembered an essay I had written regarding the meaning of work in my family home. Like Mr. Tovar explained, my family home fostered a strong work ethic, but we were also conscious of lasting impressions based on attire and cleanliness, even after having worked and earned the day’s salary.

Mr. Tovar was interviewed on a Friday, so he was dressed in casual attire. The look from his former teacher was not chosen today. Instead, Mr. Tovar wore a polo shirt that acknowledged the MGHS’s pride through the color and mascot. Mr. Tovar wore

pressed khaki slacks and a belt. He greeted me with enthusiasm. “Hey, Joseph, you’re ready for this?” he asked.

“Yes, sir. Shall we begin?” I responded.

“Follow me,” he commanded. He informed his administrative assistant that he would be having an interview session.

The office belonged to the instructional leader of the school. Three entrances were possible to his office. Upon entering the semi-dark paneled office, I recognized the 27-inch television monitor that displayed randomly selected areas of the school grounds every five seconds. As a researcher who had roamed the halls during 2000-2001 academic year, I did not even know that I was under any camera surveillance.

“Pretty neat, yeah?” Mr. Tovar asked. “You can’t even see the camera in the hallways,” he explained.

“Well, I had to find out toward the end of my research that I was being watched,” I explained with astonishment.

“You made it, then,” he affirmed. “Come in and have a seat.”

The office was adorned with student pictures and honorary plaques. One particular picture had Hispanic athletes peering into the camera lens for the critical snapshot. All of them were in athletic uniform. Some were crouched over, while others were standing proudly like young victors at attention.

“I still see one of those students every year. We go out for a drink,” he explained. “That other one, he died,” he explained. The students pictured in the frame were from his days as a middle school teacher in the local area.

A few posters were framed and featured corn—an indigenous staple in the continental Américas—and *chiles*, hot peppers. Mr. Tovar sat with confidence, but with a relaxed, upright posture. His desk was mahogany and orderly with a few documents. When I asked for the School Improvement Plan, Mr. Tovar offered his personal copy without hesitation. He looked through a bin on his desk. I noticed some envelopes ready for mailing on his desk.

The interview session began after the lunch hour on a Friday during the spring semester. Mr. Tovar did not mind which instrument I used to conduct the interview session. As a result, the session was tape recorded with field notes.

Mr. Tovar: You know what, you're probably the last one, Joseph, that we're going to be agreeing to [these] interviews.

Ethno: Great. No problem. I'm glad I got in.

Mr. Tovar: Oh, yeah, man, they just take up so much time. [Pause.] Okay, Joseph, let's start.

Ethno: Okay, great. It's great coming back. Thank you for giving me at least fifteen minutes of your time for an interview. These will be open-ended questions. I won't be prying for some information or pressuring you for some answers.

I did want to tell you, however, that meeting with the teachers in the English department was very positive. I feel that they're focused and caring toward the students. I was also looking at the selection of literature that they're teaching, and it was very diverse. I was looking in the American literature classroom, and how they (teachers) define American.

What I found is that the students are allowed to think independently. Teachers also take into consideration, when they choose the direction of their course, the terms set by the [standardized state examination] and curriculum standards. I wanted to ask you the vision that you find in curriculum. I know that there's a special committee that meets, since you had told me about it. What type of vision do you foresee on curriculum standards here at [Macario García High School]?

Mr. Tovar: Well, certainly, Joseph, the goal that we have here at [MGHS] is to try and help every graduate leaving [MGHS] to be successful at whatever he (sic) does. So, then, the teachers have to take the given curriculum, what we got, and of course you know that it's in layers. We have the AP [Advanced Placement], the regular classes, then we have the magnet classes that are geared for education, and special education classes.

But the idea is that when every kid (sic) leaves [MGHS]—whether they be [in] English or whatever [course]—you have to understand that they have taken 32 classes in the block schedule. It's a little different now. When they leave, they have a sufficient platform of knowledge to use at the next level that they are going to be able to go.

For example, I have 17 [senior students] that are going to go to UT (University of Texas at Austin) that have been accepted. They're going to be able to go and function at the college level. Now, this is my third try with the University of Texas, because it's a good school. I think it's a good test for us, because we[']ll send 16 or 17, although it's a small percentage of the kids we are sending, I want to know if we are able to reach that.

Did you meet Ms. Cárdenas?

Ethno: Yes, I did meet her.

Mr. Tovar: Ms. Cárdenas is bridging the curriculum between what we teach in senior English at [MGHS] and what they (the university) teaches in freshman English. That would be the goal for those kids to be successful there. Then, there's kids that are not going to go to UT. They're going to go to the [local] community college, so we have a similar project in what they are wanting to do, what their vision is. Then, we take our goals, and we kind of mix them. Then, we can pretty much bridge the gap between [those going to UT] and [those going to the local] community college.

For example, my valedictorian, or last year's valedictorian, is at University of Southern California, and she E-mailed me the other day and said, "Of all the things I did at [MGHS], probably my strongest suit at UCLA is my English classes because of my ability to write."

That is another thing that we strive is writing, writing, writing. As I talk to all of these college professors, I am told that a lot of people flunk out of college, because they cannot write. Algebra, chemistry, physics, all those things are basically the same, except the problems are a little harder. The concepts are the same. So, we work on that.

If you look at our [standardized state examination] scores, some of the strongest in the school district are coming from [MGHS]. That is considering the fact that there is a lot of luggage that our kids bring, if I may use the word “luggage” loosely. You know, they come from poor homes. Eighty percent of [MGHS] students live at or below the poverty level. A lot of them have that second language problem. You know, sometimes they’ll switch gears in their brains using the language problem.

Secondly, they don’t have the kind of reinforcement—the computers, the library, the time at home to get a lot of work done. In spite of all that, we have to compensate with what we do with them here. This is one of the reasons I decided to go to the block schedule, to this 90-minute period, because kids can’t stand an hour and a half in English every day. You see the same teacher every day. We have to train the teachers to teach to the block schedule.

In the beginning, a lot of people were teaching the 55-minute period in 90 minutes. Now, it’s like a two-day lesson what we’re doing.

This would be the vision to get these kids a platform of knowledge, so that when they go to the next level they’ll be able to be successful. Of course, once they get there, we have to help them with money and the whole thing that goes with it.

Ethno: Tell me about the input that you have from the parents toward the curriculum. Do they have any input or at any moment do they come into the picture? Is it only at moments of conflict that they come to the school?

Mr. Tovar: Well, no, to be honest, we don’t have that much input from parents, except when we send the newspaper that goes home [with the students]. Once every parent reads [the paper], we hope it strikes something up.

Now, we do have some input from parents, for example, that are professional. In our magnet [teacher] program of three hundred kids, half of the kids are the sons or daughters of people who teach in the school district. Many times when they take an assignment home, they will question, “Why are you doing this? Why are you reading that?” Then, we can invite them to come to one of our department meetings or our shared decision-making committee (SDMC).

However, remember that the curriculum is pretty much set by the [school] district. Okay, we add to it, that’s good, and I’m a big believer of Project CLEAR, which is a good curriculum that covers [standardized

state examination] and [college entrance examinations]. And the teachers just learn how to use that, and they will pretty much cover the entire thing.

But, good teaching goes a little above and beyond that. The caring part, the making sure that you are learning and are here, that you're well and that sort of thing. But as far as parent input in the curriculum, I would say it's very limited.

Ethno: Is there anything that you would like to ask me or share with me regarding my research plans or research goals?

Mr. Tovar: How do you plan to use all of this? How do you think that whenever you're finished with this project—suppose we get a hold of it—how is it gonna affect life around here? Well, maybe not here, but somewhere else.

Ethno: Well, the way I see it is that I am writing the English classroom. At least from my visits and interaction, it's an experience, and we hope that if someone else came they would find something similar. What I am doing is more of a modern ethnography: writing people, writing students, describing what I see. What is gained for Language Arts/English teachers is the sense of new curriculum, the new use of textbooks, more diverse textbooks.

How do teachers decide what will be taught? How will they teach tone, figurative language? Is it through a male Anglo American writer, or is it through a writer such as Maya Angelou or Toni Morrison who incorporate a lot of different styles and themes of writing.

Mr. Tovar: Okay.

Ethno: I am looking more at teacher selection, the use of curriculum, and I think it will affect teachers who do not have experience with a [Mexican or Latino-origin] population. I spoke to teachers of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and each one has a different philosophy but they're all going toward . . .

Mr. Tovar: The same goal.

Ethno: Yes. Well, as a professional, what I also found is that [. . .] they did not have any in-service or pre-service training in teaching this student population, including recent graduates.

Mr. Tovar: No, probably not. And [one of these] just graduated from college, right?

Ethno: Yes. And this teacher received no instruction in that area. So, all of these ideas are merging, and what I am finding is that teachers see themselves as relearning, rethinking, rewriting, and reteaching.

Mr. Tovar: Yes. And I see teachers more as facilitators. What we're doing is facilitating the objectives that the state has given the district, and then the district has taken those and maybe set their own two pennies worth of whatever we want to teach. Then, we give it to the teachers, and we train them to be facilitators. Those same things are what the universities want.

I don't want to go around and teach Chicano history, and all this other stuff and they (students) know everything about every learned Hispanic out there. Then, they walk into a classroom at the University of Whatever, and there's basic stuff they're supposed to learn and they don't know anything. [Phone rings repeatedly.]

A few years ago, we had an English school teacher here who never taught any English literature. She said that she was not going to do it. We had a big fallout. [Phone rings again. Receives call from the area superintendent.]

This is why we just can't dwell on just teaching Chicano history or Black history. We have to teach whatever is needed.

A new twist here. Next year, the Carnegie Foundation is releasing \$45 million to four school districts here. One of the things we're supposed to be doing with the money is redesign the high schools. The question is that we went to the universities and corporate America. We asked, "What does a graduate in the year 2006 need to look like?"

They come up with a number of things. As we move to that, we'll have to flip our curriculum all over again. I don't know where English literature is going to fall into all of this. When you work for IBM, do you need to be very fluent in the works of famous Mexican American authors? Do you think so? Or do you need to be very fluent with something like that? It just depends on what the child wants to do. Now, if the child is going to a liberal college and study literature, certainly that child will need to be knowledgeable in that area.

So, what's going to happen in the high schools is that we have to split the curriculum depending on what the children or what the students want to do. Nowadays, all that stuff is a manual. You have to be very

good with numbers, and you have to be a very technical reader, more than a writer.

So, this is where the direction that that grant is going to take us. It just depends on the needs of the kids. Hopefully, we can begin to identify kids for different areas. What happens when you do that, you begin to track kids. “Well, you’re very smart, you belong here. You’re going to be a construction worker, so you’re gonna be here. You don’t have to learn anything about that other stuff. You’re not going to need it in the future.”

We’re kind of between a rock and a hard place. So, what do we teach? In high school, you want to give them a mix of everything, expose them to it.

Ethno: You mentioned tracking.

Mr. Tovar: That’s what’s eventually gonna happen once we identify kids. It’s kind of like the AP versus the non-AP. You track smart kids versus the kids that can’t qualify for that. That’s just the way it is.

Ethno: I wanted to ask you, since we are looking at school districts. What about the role of the board members for this area? Do you find support from them?

Mr. Tovar: Oh, absolutely. The board members’ job is really to come up with policy. They get elected. They get trained. They lead. They see other things. They decide on goals, graduation requirements, spending money for facilities. Then, they turn it over to the administrators, and we’re the paid persons to do whatever they said.

A lot of it today, Joseph, is data-driven. My job, for example, is based strictly on numbers: how many kids passed the [standardized state examination], how many kids are present today, how many kids graduated, how many kids took the SAT, how many kids were over 1400. It’s all numbers. How much money did you spend? How much money do you have left over? It’s amazing. All data-driven. My whole job is.

And it’s just amazing how things have changed. It’s all part of the accountability system. If I don’t hit certain areas—my attendance is not there, my [standardized state examination] scores are not where they are supposed to be, my SAT scores are not where they’re supposed to be—then, guess what? I’ll probably get removed. It’s like teachers—how many kids were they failing, how many are they passing? And that’s part of their assessment. It’s changed altogether. Yet, there has to be a little bit of caring in there—the heart, from the heart, but the bottom line is data.

Ethno: Thank you so much for meeting with me.

Analysis

The interview with Mr. Tovar confirmed the challenges that public school leaders face: the corporate management style of accountability that is making a greater impact in public schooling across the country. The word alone conveys the sound and sense of authority and power. A person or a group of persons declare what shall be done, and others must delegate that authority onto others. The flow of power is established to ensure that the desired end is achieved. Beezer (1991) notes, “The teacher is legally an agent of the state and, therefore, the state has a legitimate interest in how the teacher exercises that authority” (p. 118). Teachers are accountable to the state their public school represents. State education agencies argue that standardized examinations and curriculum standards are mandated for the public interest.

Mr. Tovar shared goals of the school and the role of tracking throughout the interview session. On occasion, his thoughts were amplified by the role of accountability and its pressures on administrators and faculty members. Driven by data, Mr. Tovar indicated that this new movement across the country pressures individuals in leadership roles. The principal explained his desire to have more of his students attend state universities far beyond the local community college systems.

The assertion that the homes of U.S.-Mexican students lacks sociocultural capital continued to reinforce mixed messages. Mr. Tovar explained the second language acquisition process as “that second language problem”—“sometimes they’ll (students) switch gears in their brains using the second language problem.” From the initial

dialogue, Mr. Tovar utilized the linguistic innovation of code-switching with much ease and for cultural affirmation, since both us shared a cultural identifier as persons of U.S.-Mexican origin. However, in relation to his students at MGHS, he described their form of expression and coming into language as a “problem” repeatedly. To describe the challenges and circumstances of the students as “luggage” conveyed the sense that the students could perhaps easily lose their belongings and identification to become Other or mainstream tourists—unbound from sociocultural dynamics.

The thoughts shared by the principal further escalated into moments of intense cultural demystification to assert perplexing ethnocentric views. Mr. Tovar did not recognize the literary merit of multiculturalism, and he supported his position by offering an example of an IBM employee with hardly any need for Mexican American literature. Moreover, his assertion was driven by the institutionalization of tracking and its dynamics. Valenzuela (1999) recognizes that a “pro-school ethos among socially capitalized youth is not match against an invisible system of tracking that excludes its vast majority. Strategizing for the next assignment or exam does not guarantee that the exclusionary aspects of schooling will either cease or magically come to light” (p. 28-29). Because of schooling practices, students are not as autonomous as the system purports. Students must challenge and deconstruct meaning and messages embedded in the “subtractive schooling” strategies. The parents of the mainstream working-class students hardly had any input on the mandated curriculum and reform efforts, while the parents of the magnet specialty students voiced their concerns on curriculum standards and daily instructional demands on their children.

Accountability affected many areas of the schooling and administrative practices to the point of extremist pressure from outlying sources. Led by a data-driven culture, administrators and teachers rely on a reciprocal status that will allow them to produce numbers that are appealing to the system and fostering a learning and caring environment that will serve the needs and futures of their students.

Findings

Teacher Interview Questionnaire. The TIQ was comprised of items in the domain of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Teacher participants favored the questions and responded with interest. The participants were diverse in age, race, ethnic group, and education.

Culture relevance not only takes into account language, but it also considers student and school culture through pedagogical practices. This pedagogy “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 18).

Theoretical Explanations on American Literature Pedagogy

Although teacher participants demonstrated knowledge about the theories of culturally relevant teaching, there had received little formal training in this area. They challenged each other to engage in a pedagogy that is more holistic and inclusive of the students’ cultural experience to come into critical consciousness. With the exception of one teacher, the teacher participants questioned the definition of “American,” and they

found the word to encompass many realities in the selection of literary texts authored by writers from the United States. One teacher considered a more hemispheric understanding of literary selection.

At least three of the teachers had not had significant curriculum exposure to the recently adopted American literature textbook. Two teachers stated that they would spend more time with the textbook during the summer, since they were surprised to find an array of new material. The textbook featured senior consultants, contributing consultants, a multicultural advisory board, teacher review panels, manuscript reviewers, and a student board. The text opened with the following questions:

How can literature teach you about the traditions and issues of American culture?

How can a piece of literature from generations ago still capture our imaginations, our minds, and our emotions?

How can YOU find relevance in literature from earlier times?

The questions inform the student toward a critical reflection of literature and its place in U.S. society. Furthermore, a critical self-reflection incorporates the dynamics of national consciousness. The teachers favored a more critical curriculum that emphasized a worldview, but that also addressed each learner's progress and the relationship of learners to one another. The factory model of schooling was challenged, and a classroom culture of inclusion and diverse cultural encounters was fostered in the teaching of diverse U.S. literatures.

Perceptions and Beliefs

Teacher participants almost unanimously agree that lack of access in their students' homes is a major source of academic challenges for their students. (Earlier the researcher explained the problematic of making ethnic group-specific assertions that may be detrimental to students.) Unequal distribution of resources continued to be articulated by the teacher participants. The principal addressed issues of poverty, while at the same time he maintained that, overall, accountability standards set the school dynamics and progress from one academic year to the next.

One teacher believed that access to critical vocabulary skills would inform his students' future and presentation as speakers and thinkers. The teachers maintained that critical thinking strategies and assignments that actively engaged the students further enriched the learning process. The principal held a number of perceptions driven by accountability measures that only reinforced the feeling of alienation through cultural tracking. Overall, teacher participants identified their students' cultural knowledge as relevant in the classroom.

The Curriculum

The principal addressed the curriculum standards set the state and monitored by the school district. However, the teachers monitored their selection of American literature by the responses they received from their students. For example, one teacher redirected his instructional plans to incorporate more Mexican American literature, since students voiced their interest and concern. One teacher assigned reading selection that were not in the textbook, but available as classroom copies so her students could have

access to more diverse literary selections. Literary selections were taught along with canonical texts, but at the same time the teacher believed that the critical interpretation would be enriched by the dual reading and analysis of diverse texts. This same teacher emphasized the need for media literacy and for students to interact with literature through multimedia approaches.

According to the teachers, their students brought sociocultural capital into their classroom, and they believed that this was an asset for the instruction. Hence, they incorporated their students' culturally relevant literary production into their lesson planning and curriculum standards, especially in the teaching of critical thinking and literary elements. One teacher favored the chronological approach to the teaching of American literature and viewed his role as that of a historian. The approaches varied and included historical-biographical, genre, thematic, reader-response, and close-reading approaches.

What MGHS American Literature Students Say about the Curriculum and Instruction at MGHS

The focus group session was well attended by the eleventh grade English students. The student participants were from the four classes taught by the teachers interviewed by the researcher. Although the teachers had the opportunity to select students to participate, the researcher also made a classroom announcement to the students upon his observation visits. Hence, students, as a whole, had the opportunity to participate. The session took place one day after school during the Spring, 2001,

semester. The student group session began immediately after school from 3:25 P.M. to 4:30 P.M. Ms. Rojas, the language arts computer lab teacher's aide offered her assistance as the moderator for the student focus group assignment.

The student participants sat around round tables and were presented with pen and paper. The journal assignment (Appendix B) appears below. Following the assignments, samples of the student participants' journal assignment have been included.

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP: JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT

This semester you have read a number of selections from your reader, *The Language of Literature: American Literature* (Evanston, Illinois: McDougal Littell, A Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000). These selections included short stories, poems, plays, and personal essays.

On the two pages provided, tell me what you think about when you hear these two words: *American literature*. You can talk about the writers or stories you have read, and how you think each of these defines *American literature*.

You may use your literature textbook and/or English notebook. Also, you may double-space your written response on the two pages provided.

Sample 1: African American female

American literature conjur[e]s the idea of the American legacy. The legacy of America is composed of trends, themes, and issues that have impacted history. The Declaration of Independence and ["I Have a Dream["] express the theme of freedom and equality that should be available to all people. The Grapes of Wrath (sic) expressed the trend of people migrating to _____ and the difficulties they faced. ["America and I["] [selection by Anzia Yezierska] and ["Going Home Again: The New American Scholarship Boy["] [selection by Richard Rodriguez] acknowledged the issue of neglecting one's individualism in a foreign country or foreign culture in order to become mainstream.

Sample 2: Hispanic-origin female

When I hear the words American literature it makes me think about writings that have to do with America. I think about the stories that

have to do with America's history[,] about how authors have used the ways of society from certain time periods to describe how it was for people, in those days, to live a daily life in and how differently the many different matters were taken care of. Also, I think of about the people who have written about their own personal experiences in America, whether they are good or bad ones.

There was a novel that I read by Nathaniel Hawthorne called The Scarlet Letter. It was about the Puritan society and how he criticized their way of punishment towards a woman who had committed (sic) adultery. Her punishment being that she was to be publicly displayed by having to wear the letter A on her dress for everyone to see. This book is also about the hypocrisy of this society, how they punish this woman because she was caught. [T]here were also other people out there who were also doing wrong things and were not being caught, but they would come up to this woman and snub her and ridicule her because she was caught.

Also, American literature make me think of the many conflicts that people write about that go on in this country. I think of the many speeches that have been delivered in order to gain freedom, to give freedom, and also to fight for their rights. American literature has taught me the history, the life of the different time periods, and how many changes America has gone through.

Sample 3: Mexican-origin male

When I hear the two words American literature[,] I think of many things. For example, the diversity of style in American literature, the different influences of the literature, like the Indian people or other people. Also[,] when I think about American literature[,] I think of people like Ernest Hemingway and his style of cut and dry or Kate Chopin and her creativity. Both of these people have helped, along with others, to define American literature.

American literature is also very full of figurative language[,] which communicates ideas beyond the literal meaning of words, making the literature more fun and interesting for the audience. Finally[,] American literature is a great example of the minds that live in America and their ideas.

Sample 4: Hispanic-origin female

When the words, American literature, are mentioned, said, spoken about, or read about, to me it means stories that define the "meaning" of

life. Many poems and stories tell us things sometimes we don't even think about. For example, the poem, "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" by Emily Dickinson, describes how death can be. She shows that even if we tried to escape death, death will get to us. American literature shows and tells stories that leave you speechless. Sometimes you wonder why this story or poem was written like this. Was it that it happened to the person writing the story[,] or what is that the writer had a deep way of imagining things[?] American literature is full of misteries (sic) and a sense of making readers think about the story or poem. Every title in every writing makes you think what the story is about.

Sample 5: Hispanic-origin female

To me[,] American literature means a lot of things for example the way a story, poem, or short story is written. By the way [it] describes the setting or a character of this story. Also by writing what the story is about, if it[']s about love, family problems, a death situation. Many of this American literature is about a certain community or problem. It also talks about the history, the past, present[,] and future. It also helps you imagine places where you have never been to. It helps us to understand whether a character is good or bad, or by the way [they're] dressed. It helps you describe his (sic) humor, the way of thinking.

Also[,] it helps you understand a lot of things from our culture and about different kinds. By informing you how many traditions are in each culture, also by telling us readers how different can a culture be from another. It gives us a lot of details whether it is from our own culture or a different one.

Also[,] a lot of the poems I have read are really emotional[.] [S]ome of this (sic) authors really make us the readers feel the same way as the character. By giving a lot of details and telling or describing how the character feels in the poem.

It also helps us to know a lot of information about a certain story, whether (sic) it is a generation to generation story or if it[']s just a fiction one.

Sample 6: Mexican-origin female

In my opinion, what I believe American literature means to me is thinking about my culture, my family, especially where I am coming from. It helps me understand more about what, or how many cultures [there] are[,] what colors or traditions they have. Many of the stories I have read

until today [and] they have helped me see and understand the different heritages [that] are within African, Mexican, or American [W]hite people.

Also[,] the poems I have read in the American literature book explain many things. It helped me read bigger words [and] understand what each one meant. That is how I believe it help[s] me expand my language and see how [I can] improve it[,] by reading and knowing their meanings.

Whenever I hear those words “American literature” it seems like if it will be too hard to understand. But when I open the book and reach each story and poem, my heart gives it all to the story. But I have to pay close attention and let all my thoughts and opinions flow. So[,] I will ask myself questions about what each of the stories means[,] what is [the] point of view. Nowadays (sic) I have a better understanding about figurative language, similes, metaphors, and other literary elements that [have] help[ed] my skills go further when writing an essay or a brief explanation in a statement. Now I can point out what figurative language [the] characters of the story suggest.

American literature for me is like seeing daylight. It has the power to see inside of me things I never knew before[—][a]bout nature or within other characters in the short stories I have read. It also help[s] me recognize and see life and nature with [other] eyes. It also help[s] me recognize who I am, and where I am coming from. Also[,] all the things that surround me [and] what each mean. Like the different types [of] culture of Native Americans['] tales that keep the past alive. Drawing from the rich oral tradition, the [writers] capture the voices of storytellers from all tribal groups across the United States. These stories provide a glimpse into Native American’s diverse cultural heritage—their views of human behavior and relationships, the mysterious origins of life and natural environment.

Suggestions

The picture that emerges from the analyses strongly suggests that the staff members hold tenets from the multicultural reform efforts and the reformation of canonical standards. Based on the data from the Teacher Interview Questionnaire, observations, and interviews, the researcher questions the differing sociocultural

perspectives in the teaching of U.S.-Mexican students, the teaching practices of eleventh grade American literature teachers, and the effectiveness of the curriculum. He bases these concerns on the following findings:

1. That majority staff perceive and value the need for diverse U.S. literatures;
2. That majority staff emphasize critical interpretation of literary texts that represent a more holistic and culturally relevant view of “American literature”;
3. That the staff are cognizant of the role of tracking, which is a barrier that limits success and maintains a degree of segregationist practices, even though they may not use the word;
4. That the staff believes that they can follow mandated curriculum standards through the teaching of diverse American literary works.
5. That the majority staff believes that their U.S.-Mexican origin students have limited access in their home in comparison to suburban Anglo American students.
6. That the staff values multicultural texts and believes that these texts can enrich the study of classic and canonical texts in defining “American.”

Teachers believe they are autonomous in their selection of American literary texts as long as they follow the mandated curriculum standards set by the state and school district. Key members at Macario García High School understand that they are revising, rewriting, and rethinking curriculum standards as they examine effective ways of providing quality learning experiences for their U.S.-Mexican origin students.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Considering the recent headlines regarding the Department of Commerce's U.S. 2000 Census Bureau's analyses of data, the Hispanic American population increased dramatically in one decade. The researcher recommends a more comprehensive ethnographic study on the education of U.S.-Mexican and Latino students that would focus on teacher training in the Language Arts/English and the long-range achievement of both teachers and students in these programs. In addition, he recommends a broader study of textbook selection and implementation in the secondary literature program.

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APPENDICES

- A. Teacher Interview Questionnaire**
- B. Student Focus Group: Journal Assignment**
- C. Letter to Assistant Superintendent**
- D. Approval Letter from Assistant Superintendent**
- E. Letter to MGHS Principal**
- F. Letter of Announcement to MGHS Eleventh Grade English Faculty
Members**
- G. Parental Informed Consent Form (Spanish)**
- H. Parental Informed Consent Form (Spanish)**
- I. Staff Members' Informed Consent Form**
- J. Letter to MGHS Staff: Member Checking**

APPENDIX A
TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

(Adapted from Applebee, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1999; Rogers & McLean, 1994)

1. Tell me something about your background. When and where were you educated?
When and where did you begin teaching?
2. How would you describe your philosophy of teaching? What do you believe “works?”
3. Can you think of any characteristics that eleventh grade U.S.-Mexican students as a group bring to the classroom?
4. What kind of work have you done in the classroom that has facilitated the literary experience of U.S.-Mexican students?
5. Tell me something about your thoughts on teaching American literature in the eleventh grade classroom.
6. How much of what you know about teaching U.S.-Mexican students did you learn as a result of teacher training, either pre-service or in-service?
7. What texts do you think belong in the eleventh grade American literature classroom?
8. How do you handle the possible mismatch between what American literature you want to teach and what the administration (district superintendent or school principal) wants (for example, curricular mandates, philosophies) or what you have to teach with (for example, materials or supplies)?
9. How much access do you think your U.S.-Mexican students have to American literature?
10. How do you think the schooling experience of the students you teach differs from that of Anglo American students in middle-class, suburban communities?

APPENDIX B

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP: JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP: JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT

This semester you have read a number of selections from your reader, *The Language of Literature: American Literature* (Evanston, Illinois: McDougal Littell, A Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000). These selections included short stories, poems, plays, and personal essays.

On the two pages provided, tell me what you think about when you hear these two words: *American literature*. You can talk about the writers or stories you have read, and how you think each of these defines *American literature*.

You may use your literature textbook and/or English notebook. Also, you may double-space your written response on the two pages provided.

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

LETTER TO ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

7941 Katy Freeway, PMB 174
Houston, TX 77024-1924

2001

Assistant Superintendent
Department of Research and Accountability
Research Review Committee
School District
1234 Some Street
City, State 12345

Dear Assistant Superintendent:

I am enclosing a copy of my Dissertation Proposal recently approved by The Area Review Committee, Neag School of Education, University of Connecticut at Storrs. Also enclosed are the materials requested.

As stated in the Proposal, I would like to do an ethnographic study in the area of literature instruction at “Macario García High School” (pseudonym). Participants would include eleventh grade English students, eleventh grade English teachers, and Board of Education members. I intend to interview a sample of the eleventh grade English teachers as well as survey a sample of eleventh grade English students through a focus group. Rest assured that confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured for all participants.

The findings of my research will be made available to you upon completion of the project which I anticipate on or about September 30, 2001.

Please consider this letter as a formal request for permission to conduct doctoral research. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

R. Joseph Rodríguez

Enclosures: Research Outline (six copies)
 Dissertation Proposal with Consent Forms (one copy)
 Human Subjects Committee Form (one copy)
 Approval Letter from Dissertation Committee (one copy)

APPENDIX D

APPROVAL LETTER FROM ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

APPROVAL LETTER FROM ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

APPENDIX E
LETTER TO MGHS PRINCIPAL

LETTER TO MGHS PRINCIPAL

7941 Katy Freeway, PMB 174
Houston, TX 77024-1924

2001

Principal
Macario García High School
School District
1234 No Name Street
City, State 12345-6789

Dear Principal:

I want to thank you for your kindness in permitting me to do the research described in the Abstract and Dissertation Proposal—upon approval from the School District’s Assistant Superintendent. The goal of the investigation is to examine the sociocultural contexts surrounding the teaching of American literature in the eleventh grade classroom. I enjoyed your informal tone of our discussion in December, 2000, and I hope I explained my plans to your satisfaction.

About the interviews of eleventh grade English teachers, a sample will be involved. The number of teachers to interview will depend on how well the information they provide answer some of the research questions of the Proposal.

I also want to inform you of my interview procedures. Either before or during each interview, I will explain the purpose of the research. I will also tell them they can terminate at any time, refuse to answer any questions, assume them of anonymity, and ask them to sign and date an “Informed Consent Form.” In order to insure accuracy on my part, I will ask permission of interviewees to audiotape the session and take notes. I am enclosing a copy of the Informed Consent Form.

A most important procedure on my part is to ask different teachers to check preliminary drafts of my observations and summary of interviews. Their critical comments will help in insuring high levels of accuracy. I appreciate the spirit of cooperation, courtesy, openness, and candor you have shown me.

Sincerely,

R. Joseph Rodríguez

Enclosure: Abstract of Dissertation Proposal (one copy)
Informed Consent Form (one copy)

APPENDIX F
LETTER OF ANNOUNCEMENT TO MGHS ELEVENTH GRADE
ENGLISH FACULTY MEMBERS

LETTER OF ANNOUNCEMENT TO MGHS ELEVENTH GRADE
ENGLISH FACULTY MEMBERS

7941 Katy Freeway, PMB 174
Houston, TX 77024-1924

2001

Department of English
Macario García High School
School District
1234 No Name Street
City, State 12345-6789

Dear Language Arts/American Literature Teachers:

The Neag School of Education of the University of Connecticut has approved my Dissertation Proposal. Moreover, the School District's Department of Research and Accountability approved my work as well. This means I can proceed to do the research project. My plans are to examine the sociocultural contexts that give meaning and life to the high school's teaching of American literature. This is a large undertaking that will encompass interviewing teachers and a focus group of students in the eleventh grade.

At the high school, I would appreciate your participation in a brief semi-structured interview (30 – 60 minutes). During this time, I will ask your impressions, viewpoints, feelings, and ideas about the American literature program.

For relatively new staff, I attended Macario García High School during the 1992-1993 academic year. I earned my diploma in May, 1993. Conducting this research will be a kind of homecoming for me. I look forward to meeting you, and I would appreciate your support. In the past, the school staff members have expressed their enthusiasm for my academic interests. Should you have any questions, please contact me at your earliest convenience. During business hours, you may reach me at 123/123-4567. I thank you in advance for your time and patience.

Sincerely,

R. Joseph Rodríguez

cc: Principal

Enclosure: Staff Members' Informed Consent Form

APPENDIX G

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM (SPANISH)

Carta a los Padres de los Participantes

2001

Estimados Padres o Protectores de _____:

Mi nombre es R. Joseph Rodríguez. Soy un estudiante del programa doctorado en educación de la Universidad de Connecticut. Recientemente también trabajé como maestro de literatura. Estoy interesado en saber cómo algunos estudiantes perciben sus experiencias académicas en el programa de literatura estadounidense en la escuela.

Este estudio es un requisito para completar mi programa doctoral. Entrevistaré a los estudiantes varias veces durante el año escolar y también les pediré que participen en una plática. Los resultados me ayudarán a entender mejor los contextos socioculturales que influyen el programa de literatura estadounidense. La participación de estudiantes es crucial para poder completar el estudio.

Su hijo/a tiene permiso de traer su libro y cuaderno de literatura para nuestra reunión después de la escuela. La reunión se llevara a cabo en un salón de clase.

Gracias por su atención y apoyo.

Sinceramente,

R. Joseph Rodríguez

Yo, _____, autorizo a mi hija/o,
_____, que participe en el estudio.

APPENDIX H
PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM (ENGLISH)

Letter to Participants' Parents and Guardians

2001

Dear Parents or Guardians of _____:

My name is R. Joseph Rodríguez. I am a curriculum and instruction doctoral student at the University of Connecticut and a former instructor of literature. I am interested in learning the perspectives of eleventh grade English teachers regarding the instruction of American literature at _____ High School.

This study is a requirement to complete my doctoral studies. Participating students will be interviewed and be asked to participate in a focus group session. Your participation in this study is important.

Your son/daughter may bring his/her literature textbook and notebook to our meeting that is to be held immediately after school hours.

Thank you for your attention to my request. I appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

R. Joseph Rodríguez

I, _____, authorize my child,
_____, to participate in this study.

APPENDIX I

STAFF MEMBERS' INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Staff Members' Informed Consent Form

I, _____, hereby consent to participate in the following research project.

The Canon Revisited: An Ethnographic Study on the Teaching of American Literature to U.S.-Mexican Students at Macario García High School

(Title of Project)

R. Joseph Rodríguez

(Researcher)

The University of Connecticut, Storrs

(University)

The purpose of this study is to gain some understanding of how teachers form their instruction of American literature to U.S.-Mexican youth. You will be asked to participate through a series of interviews about your thoughts on American literature and its teaching to students. All of your responses will be kept confidential.

Please note that you are free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time without any repercussion.

(Signature of Participant)

APPENDIX J

LETTER TO MGHS STAFF: MEMBER CHECKING

LETTER TO MGHS STAFF: MEMBER CHECKING

7941 Katy Freeway, PMB 174
Houston, TX 77024-1924

2001

Dear Teachers,

I am working on Chapter IV, which is a presentation of the results of my research on the teaching of American literature at the high school. You may recall that I conducted a number of interviews.

In this kind of ethnographic investigation, it is highly recommended that the researcher give members of the high school a chance to read what he has found. The purpose is to eliminate as much researcher bias as possible, so that the picture the researcher paints (Chapter IV) substantially represents the focus of the study: the sociocultural contexts that embed the American literature program at Macario García High School (pseudonym).

May I please ask you to take a look at what I present as findings? Written comments would be most helpful to me. I may also mail your comments to the address listed above, or you may reach me through electronic mail at rjr99001@uconnvm.uconn.edu. My oral defense will be coming up soon. Thank you for your steady support.

Sincerely,

R. Joseph Rodríguez