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**Authoring multiple *formas de ser*: How bilingual Latina/o fifth grade students  
navigate their many worlds**

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**Authoring multiple *formas de ser*: How bilingual Latina/o fifth grade students  
navigate their many worlds**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

A los gemelos, Bencho y Clarena

Por motivarme de su manera.

Y a mis queridas hijas, Neenah Alexis y Leelah Sofía.

You two are the most breathtaking daughters a mother could wish for,

the most anticipated study breaks a student could look forward to,

and the most awe-inspiring teachers I have ever had.

The passage of time has been marked by your strength, love, and beauty.

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**Authoring multiple *formas de ser*: How bilingual Latina/o fifth grade  
students navigate their many worlds**

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Kimberley Kennedy Cuero, Ph.D.  
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My dissertation study not only links pedagogical theory, research, and practice, but also includes a personal element. I returned—as a researcher—to the elementary school where I previously taught bilingual Pre-K students. The following two research questions guided my exploration regarding the identity formations of my former Pre-K students who were in 5<sup>th</sup> grade at the time of the study:

1. How are Latino/a bilingual students' *formas de ser* [ways of being] revealed in different social spaces?
2. In what ways do these *formas de ser* (dis)accord with traditional notions of school achievement?

I carried out a qualitative study drawing from socio-cultural perspectives. I implemented purposeful sampling to work with a group of eight of my former Pre-K students. My data sources include daily participant observations (mostly during lunch, recess, and transitions), dialogue journaling, after-school focus groups, home visits, and interviews with teachers, students, and their families. My study presents a picture of how three Latino/a bilingual students were authored by themselves and others, particularly relating to their participation within their figured worlds of schooling.

In the first chapter, I discuss how U.S. dominant ideologies affect the schooling for bilingual students and give an overview of the study. In the second chapter, I review relevant literature that has informed my work, as well as my theoretical perspectives. The third chapter includes issues related to methodology and my positionality as a researcher. In Chapters four, five, and six, I present three in-depth, qualitative case studies on three of the focal students: Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José (pseudonyms). In the final chapter, I problematize (1) how the social construction of “good student” tended to be equated with whether a student was performing according to behavioral norms and expectations within the school rather than his or her connection with academic content and (2) how school success and achievement were narrowly conceived, exacerbated by the high-stakes testing climate. Conclusions and implications point to the importance of seeking out more equitable and additive education that attends to the multi-facets and dimensions of students.

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## **CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION**

I begin this dissertation by briefly describing my study: background, research questions, theoretical framework, and methodology. Second, I reflect on some of my own experiences that have indirectly guided me to this point in my professional life as an educator and as an advocate for Latinos/as in the U.S. public schooling system. Third, I discuss the current socio-political climate in the U.S., specifically regarding how dominant ideologies tend to support and perpetuate the status quo. Lastly, I present a brief overview of the upcoming chapters.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

#### **Background**

Starting in Fall 1996, I taught at Parks Elementary School (pseudonym) in a bilingual (Spanish/English) pre-kindergarten classroom for three years and a special education resource classroom for one year. Since that time, I have often found myself wondering how my former students were doing and asking myself questions like the following: Are they achieving academically as they move up through the grades and out of bilingual education? How do they feel about their home culture and language? To what degrees have they developed their bilingualism and biliteracy? Do they perceive school as a supportive and nurturing environment?

While I recognized that these questions were quite broad for the scope of my study and must be honed in order to suffice as adequate research questions, they represent

my starting point in the conceptualization of this study. The more I contemplated my proposed research, I realized I could not explore the circumstances of my former Pre-K students without considering the interconnectedness of academic achievement, literacy, language, culture, and identity. The boundaries between the aforementioned constructs are blurry and dynamically interwoven. In an effort to examine how some of my former students (in 5<sup>th</sup> grade at the time of the study) author themselves and their daily complexities, I returned, as a researcher, to Parks Elementary. On a broader scale, this study provides a window into the state of U.S. public schooling for particular bilingual Latino/a students from working-class backgrounds.

### **Research Questions**

In order to see how students act within their everyday contexts, the following research questions were addressed:

1. How are Latino/a bilingual students' *formas de ser* [ways of being] revealed in different social spaces?
2. In what ways do these *formas de ser* (dis)accord with traditional notions of school achievement?

With the first question, I intend to make a contribution to the research literature that explores how “[t]he terms *multiple identities* and *multiple affiliations* allude to a unique characteristic of Latinos. ...Their accommodation goes beyond their skills in using their phenotypic characteristics and is more about developing flexible, adaptive strategies and

the ability to handle stress” (Trueba, 1999: xxxix-xl, emphasis in original). I explain the concept of multiple identities and *formas de ser* in Chapter II.

The second question is meant to address the most asked question posed to educational researchers in reference to the broader implications for educational policy and practice: “So what?” If Latino/a bilingual students do in fact reveal multiple identities in different social spaces, why is that important for us to know as educators and educational researchers? Why do some Latino/a children do well in school while many others do not? Latino/a students’ “*persistently, pervasively, and disproportionately, low academic achievement*” (Valencia, 1991: 3-4, emphasis in original) must be explored qualitatively by looking at the reciprocal relationship of student identity and schooling—how individual students (dis)engage in schools and how the schools (un)welcome them.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In my study, I explore the complex and dialogic spaces where students demonstrate agency and actively author themselves (Bakhtin, 1981; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Voloshinov, 1973), which, as for Vygotsky (1988), derive from social processes. My attention has been directed toward the dynamic and often contradictory roles that students play. Giroux (1992) states that there are many “omissions and tensions that exist between the master narratives<sup>1</sup> and hegemonic

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<sup>1</sup> Master narratives refer to universalizing categories that stem from "the Enlightenment and Western philosophical tradition" (Giroux, 1993, p. 463).

discourses that make up the official curriculum and the self-representations of subordinated groups as they might appear in ‘forgotten’ or erased histories, texts, memories, experiences, and community narratives” (p.33). Attending to these omissions and tensions in the hegemonic discourses allows us to take this discussion to a more complicated place—a place where students’ agency and multi-dimensionality are considered.

### **Methodology**

I carried out a qualitative study (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Wolcott, 1995) drawing from sociocultural perspectives (L. Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1991). I implemented purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to work with a group of eight of my former students. In addition to student, parent, and teacher interviews, daily school observations from December through May (mainly during lunch, recess, and transitions), and dialogue journals, I directed a ten-week after-school focus group using daily events and digital pictures they took as springboards to discussion.

One reason that I felt so strongly about working with them for this research study was because they had experienced or were on the verge of experiencing many transformations given that they were in fifth grade. Like the majority of fifth grade elementary students, they had recently become the “big fish” on the elementary school campus. And the following school year, they would enter the mysterious and tumultuous world of middle school and be the smallest fish in yet a bigger pond. Once in middle

school, their experiences would include more class and schedule changes, more peer pressure, and more physical and hormonal changes.

Unlike their English monolingual counterparts, my former students had even more transitions thrust upon them. Most have been “transitioned” out of the bilingual program at Parks Elementary. With “a higher status majority language ever present on the screen, in the street, at school and in shops, children quickly learn which language has prestige, power and preference” (Baker, 2001: 92). Bilingual students often experience some degrees of subtractive bilingualism (Lambert, 1975; Wong Fillmore, 2000) since they receive minimal native language support in their academic content areas and more societal pressure “to switch to English and lose L1 as quickly as possible” (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003: 136). At this interesting juncture in the students’ academic careers, I captured glimpses of their lives and to contribute to our theoretical understandings of how bilingual Latinas/os view themselves in the schooling process.

### **DOMINANT IDEOLOGIES**

Darder (1991) states that dominant ideologies serve a two-fold function: (1) to legitimate the values, beliefs, and practices of the dominant cultures and (2) to marginalize and invalidate the ways of subordinate cultures. There are many ways that these functions are carried out. In the first section, I reflect on how my own experiences as a White, middle-class female have been, for the most part, legitimated in the schooling system. Next, I explore how the doctrines of individualism and meritocracy work to

uphold U.S. dominant ideologies. Lastly, I discuss how the U.S. public schooling system adheres to the achievement ideology.

### **I am the Automatic Default**

*My high school, Arlington Heights, had two parking lots. The big one was where all the White, popular kids and the ‘wanna-be’ popular kids parked. The back parking lot, where I usually parked was called the "Freak" parking lot. Although I had classes with the popular kids and we generally exchanged niceties and tolerated one another, I made a conscious choice not to be a wanna-be always trying to fit in with the "in" crowd. I chose to hang out with the kids who were, on the high-school hierarchy, "below" the popular White kids. I was aware of the social division of power among the middle-class White kids in my high school, but the division I didn't really recognize in my school was how kids from the culture of power were in the higher, AP tracks. I don't know what percentage of our high school was minority, but I knew that many kids from Como (a low-SES neighborhood in Southwest Fort Worth made up of mostly African-American and Latino residents) attended Arlington Heights. For the most part, my 4-story high school was severely segregated. Most of the ‘lower’ track classes (non Advanced-Placement classes) were held on the first floor or in the basement. I get mad at myself now because I never really thought about the ‘absence of presence’ of minority students in my classes.*

*Upon further reflection, I realize that I have been socialized not to recognize how power, SES, and race get played out and stratified in our society. All my glimpses of these power structures are hazy and muddled. If I weren't consciously thinking about how they get played out and digging in my memory with a pick ax, my experiences wouldn't even give me pause. I would most likely not have ever analyzed why my classes were and always have been made up of primarily White students from middle-class backgrounds. It's always been a given—the default situation. The only time in my life when I was not part of the “default” group was when I first started school in Spain at age four. I was the oddball in that situation, not speaking any Spanish, not knowing the*

*culture, being excluded because of my differences. But that was only nine to ten short months of my entire school career. My parents knew the placement was temporary and had the choice to take me out of the school if the situation became detrimental to my emotional or academic well-being.*

*For the most part, I've been in classes where higher education is expected, where the school culture doesn't drastically differ from my home culture, where I didn't have to learn new codes to be successful, and where I never questioned the curriculum—main characters looked like me, history was told from the WASP perspective, and so on. Even though I moved around a lot, academically I experienced a pretty seamless transition from one school to the next. My parents knew the drill. They had the cultural capital to maneuver the system. For example, my mom knew to keep pivotal samples of my class work, file away standardized test data, and request letters of recommendation from my middle-school AP teachers from Georgia before we moved to Texas so that I would be placed in AP classes in high school. I never thought of it as a system set up for those in power, those "in the know" of the system. I am one of those White kids who viewed the system as neutral and bland territory. I was one of those White kids that thought that "White" people do not have a culture, but was certain that Latinos as a group, Asians as a group, and African-Americans did. Only recently am I able to identify some typical WASP practices, such as asking known questions. And surprise! They correlate to many of the educational system's ideals and values.*

The above, introductory reflection captures a glimpse of my attempts to re-discover the hidden magnitude of my privileges in our society as a White, middle-class daughter of a military officer and a school teacher turned real estate investor/manager. Even though exposing myself and my shadows is cathartically painful, I use this reflection for several reasons. First, given that analyzing students' experiences within public schooling was the key focus of this study, I felt that I needed to start exploring and analyzing my own experiences. Second, it helped to personalize and contextualize

the abstractness of discussing dominant ideologies and identity formations (e.g., deficit-thinking, White privilege, and official knowledge). Third, it illustrates how those from the dominant culture are often unaware of the power they hold and the differentials it creates (Delpit, 1995).

A couple of years ago, I thought that I was beyond critiquing myself. After all, I had traveled and lived all over the world; studied bilingual and multicultural special education; learned another language; worked in a 'high-needs' school with 'at-risk' students; married an Afro-Latino; and mothered two daughters 'of color.' Hadn't I arrived? Couldn't I just critique others in the dominant culture who hadn't yet arrived? No matter how unprejudiced and open-minded I think I am, critical, liberatory education involves a never-ending process of being reflexive and struggling to deconstruct my ingrained social constructions and hierarchies and to peel off my ethnocentric/egocentric blinders.

### **Individualism and Meritocracy**

Much of the asymmetrical distribution of power and resources is hidden under the guise of individualism (Darder, 1991; Scheurich, 1997). Since Whites generally do not see themselves as part of a racialized group, Scheurich (1997) explains that "the idea that each person is largely the source or origin of her/himself, that is individualism, is considered a natural facet of life" (p.122). Valenzuela (1999) finds instances of how individualism explains away much of the hegemonic sorting that occurred at Seguin High School (located in the Houston area) commenting: "Collective problems are regularly

cast in individual terms, as if asymmetrical relations of power were irrelevant” (p.74).

Political and historical contexts and realities of subordinate groups are often ignored.

Similarly, Olsen (1997) finds that many of the teachers in her study of a diverse

California high school,

believe in integration, fairness, and equal opportunity. ... But the way they perceive the world is that students are all equally positioned and free to participate in school and that matters of achievement are the result of the individual choices students make. What they collude in not seeing is the active process of exclusion and sorting that goes on in the school’s program and practice, a sorting that consigns students by skin color, class, and English fluency into positions of very unequal access to resources, opportunities, and education. (p.10-11)

Those who are in positions of power and privilege often cling to individualistic sentiments in order to justify their own social positioning.

The strength and embeddedness of individualism helps to feed the dangerous meritocratic myth that “all Americans ‘started at the bottom’ and most have been able to ‘work themselves up through their own efforts.’ But ... ‘the bottom’ has by no means been the same for all groups” (Blauner, 1987: 155). This ‘pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps’ ideal not only ignores “the group-related, inequitable distribution of resources and power” (Scheurich, 1997: 124) but also rationalizes it, as discrepancies doled out according to individual efforts, abilities, and talents (Darder, 1991). As a result, the ways of the dominant group—founded primarily on middle-class Western European and male ideologies—“become universalized as measures of merit, hiring criteria, grading standards, predictors of success, correct grammar, appropriate behavior, and so forth” (Scheurich, 1997: 123). Since the dominant culture’s beliefs and practices are set up as the keys to ‘success’ in our stratified society, an individual (or group) who does not

master or adopt the idealized view of how an ‘American’ should look, act, talk, think, and be is considered deficient, according to the dominant individualistic and meritocratic mindset.

Since the skewed distribution of power and rewards is guised under the doctrines of individualism and meritocracy, inequities are easily explained away as the others’ fault. For instance, laundry lists of what students lack (e.g., cognitive stimulation, experience, language proficiency, home support, values, literacy exposure, etc.) appear in dominant discourses and excuse the schooling and socialization processes from any blame for “subordinate” students’ low academic attainment. By and large, the burden of academic underachievement is placed on the students themselves (Darder, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). This unwarranted burden placed on students—founded on dominant ideals—pathologizes their very existence and justifies viewing “the differences in culture and language between [educators] and their students from a culturally chauvinistic perspective that permits them to dismiss the possibility of a more culturally relevant approach in dealing with this population” (Valenzuela, 1999: 66; See also Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995).

Deficit thinking (Foley, 1997; Valencia, 1997; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997) justifies the subtracting of linguistic and cultural resources from minority youth, like those in Valenzuela’s study (1999), because their *resources* are typically viewed as *barriers* in the first place. As a result of Seguin high school’s failure to build on students’ skills, knowledge, and cultural backgrounds (Valenzuela, 1999), the amount subtracted from students is immeasurable: their funds of knowledge (González et al., 1997; Moll,

Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992), “their shared cultural identifications as Mexicans” (Valenzuela, 1999: 258), their concept of *educación* (Valdés, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999), and their potential for additive bilingualism, biculturalism (Darder, 1991; Lambert, 1975), and biliteracy (Edelsky, 1986; Moll & Dworin, 1996; Moll, Sáez, & Dworin, 2001).

### **The Achievement Ideology**

So how do these dominant ideological messages play themselves out in the daily lives of Latino/a youth regarding their schooling? Cummins argues:

that in most North American contexts, the education of ESL students (whether mainstream or withdrawal classes) takes place within structures that limit the possibilities for student’s personal, intellectual and social development. Despite the fact that most educators and policy-makers are undoubtedly well intentioned and committed to helping students succeed academically, they have generally failed to challenge and transform structures that systematically discriminate against students. (1994: 33-34)

One reason for this failure to challenge and transform discriminatory structures can be traced back to how school ‘success’ is rooted in the achievement ideology (Darder, 1991; MacLeod, 1987; Valenzuela, 1999; Weinberg, 1977).

MacLeod (1987) describes the achievement ideology by saying that most Americans:

view this society as an open one. Crucial to this widely held notion is a belief in the efficacy of schooling. As the achievement ideology propagated in school implies, education is viewed as the remedy for the problem of social inequality; schooling makes the race for prestigious jobs and wealth an even one. (p.97)

Blindly believing in the efficacy of schooling negates the fact that the dominant cultures' ways of being, knowing, behaving, and perceiving are valued and acknowledged over others in our U.S. public schooling system. Consequently, these ways establish how we define achievement and success. Valenzuela points out that "if a culturally biased premise is built into the school's definition of success, then the well-being of his community will remain in constant jeopardy" (1999: 265).

In his ethnographic study, MacLeod (1987) researched how two different peer groups, the Hallway Hangers and the Brothers—attending the same high school and living in the same low-income housing development—perceived the achievement ideology and their position within it. The Hallway Hangers were mostly White adolescents who tended to reject and disconnect from schooling:

Beneath their uncooperative conduct and resistance, however, lies a logic that makes sense to these boys and informs their attitudes toward school. The Hallway Hangers do not 'buy' the achievement ideology because they foresee substantial barriers to their economic success, barriers this ideology fails to mention. (MacLeod, 1987: 101)

The Brothers, on the other hand, were a group of mostly African-American adolescents who did "buy" the achievement ideology. Although most of the Brothers were not making particularly good grades and were placed in remedial and vocational tracks, they "attribute their mediocre academic performance to personal inadequacy—laziness, stupidity, or lack of self-discipline ... [instead of]... the processes that work to hinder their performance" (ibid: 100).

Stanton-Salazar (2001) writes a cutting description of how the low academic achievement of Latino/a youth is hardly ever addressed by looking at the deep-seated ideological structures that maintain the status quo:

Seldom addressed ... is the possibility that the school system's transmission process is not at all about instilling universal and rational values and traits, but rather about inculcating a psychological orientation that supports the culture and political interests of particular groups in society—groups that, in fact, effectively organize themselves into institutional networks on the basis of commonly shared class, racial, and gender attributes. Never addressed are the hidden ideological messages and the racist, classist, and sexist myths that might underlie the socialization forces mentioned above. Never addressed are the various adverse effects these ideological messages might have on the consciousness and coping patterns of different segments of the working-class minority youth population. (p.15)

Stanton-Salazar points out that the schooling process is not neutral and equitable for all groups. It is important to continue and extend on the work of scholars who examine how Latino/a students' participation in schools is affected by these ideological messages (Bartolomé & Balderama, 2001; Darder, 1991; Foley, 1990; Grinberg & Saavedra, 2000; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Moll & Dworin, 1996; Shannon, 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Trueba, 1999; Valdés, 1996; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999; Walsh, 1991; Worthy, Rodríguez-Galindo, Assaf, Martínez, & Cuero, 2003).

### **The English-Only Movement**

In order to ground the abstractness of this discussion regarding dominant ideologies and deficit thinking, I will highlight some of the happenings within the English-only movement. Ruiz (1984) maintains that there are three orientations to

language and its role in society: language-as-problem, language-as-right, and language-as-resource. By adhering to the first orientation which views languages other than English in the U.S. as a problem, the current English-only movement rationalizes the exclusionary treatment of non-English speakers in this country. At both the national and state levels, the English-only movement has had far-reaching effects regarding policy, practices, and perceptions of education for ELLs. On the national level, there are a number of reforms that seek to limit native language instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs). Disguised within the rhetoric of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, English-only efforts to expunge the word “*bilingual*” from educational policies and institutions (and replace it with “*English language acquisition*”) have also proven victorious (Crawford, 2002). The principal fatalities left in the wake of No Child Left Behind Act include the federal Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA), the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE), and, arguably the most lamentable of all, the Bilingual Education Act (BEA). The passing of the No Child Left Behind Act on January 8, 2002 not only marks official name changes to the aforementioned establishments, but also philosophical and pedagogical shifts vis-à-vis the education of ELLs while:

- Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA) became the Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited-English-Proficient Students (OELA) which purports to provide “national leadership in promoting high quality education for the nation's population of English language learners (ELLs) ... [and] to include various elements of school reform in programs designed to assist the language minority agenda” (<http://ed.gov/offices/OELA/index.html>),
- the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE) became the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction

- Educational Programs (NCELA) which is funded by OELA and “compiles information on materials, programs, research, and other resources that can help educators meet the challenge posed by the complex and changing educational needs of language minority students in U.S. schools” ([www.ed.gov/EdRes/EdFed/OtherED.html](http://www.ed.gov/EdRes/EdFed/OtherED.html)), and
- the Bilingual Education Act (BEA), established in 1968, “was eliminated as part of a larger ‘school reform’ measure known as No Child Left Behind, proposed by the Bush administration and passed with broad bipartisan support” (Crawford, 2002) and the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act emerges in its place.

As the name changes and overhauls suggest, the overriding focus is on English acquisition. (There is something offbeat with these changes. Do these name changes mean to suggest that English language acquisition was not an inherent part of the “*bilingual*” equation—as practiced in the U.S. context—in the first place?) These changes mark an about-face in language policy and planning. Crawford (2002) states, “Whereas the 1994 version of the Bilingual Education Act included among its goals ‘developing the English skills ... and to the extent possible, the native-language skills’ of LEP students, the English Language Acquisition Act stresses skills in English only.”

At the state level, English-only initiatives—spearheaded by the software mogul tycoon Ron Unz—have sprouted up in various states and undergone state-wide elections. California, Arizona, and Massachusetts have passed similar initiatives that call for the dismantling of bilingual education programs and implementation of one-year Structured-English Immersion (SEI) programs. One-year SEI programs place an unrealistic time limit on ELLs (a) to receive ESL support and (b) to acquire academic English (Guerrero, 2004; Ovando et al., 2003). This unrealistic time limit is justified by a dangerous pedagogical misconception found throughout the rhetoric of the English-only movement

and reflected in its policies: ELLs normally need only one year to acquire enough academic English to compete on equal footing with native English-speaking children (Guerrero, in press). This out-and-out negation of native language instruction and one-year time limit placed on ELLs are of great concern. Second language acquisition (SLA) theories and research are being ignored (e.g., the complexities of language and the importance of building on prior knowledge and experience) to the detriment of the students supposedly being served by one-year SEI programs.

### **Racism at the Level of Language**

Why have bilingual education programs generally been treated as an after-thought with funding and support? Why is the English-only movement so strong and growing stronger in this country? Christine Sleeter (in foreword of Valenzuela, 1999) identifies four (mis)assumptions that undergird the English-only movement as demonstrated in the 1998 California campaign to pass Proposition 227 which proposed to dismantle bilingual programs and opt for *one-year* English-immersion programs:

1. “there is no value in bilingualism, biculturalism, or fluency in a language or culture other than English,”
2. “fluency in any language except English interferes with education, or at least does not contribute to education in any meaningful way,”
3. “research on these issues is irrelevant,” and
4. “monolingual Anglo members of the general public are perfectly capable of deciding what kind of educational programming is best for non-Anglo language minority children ... and are better able to make decisions than are bilingual education teachers or the communities the children come from.” (pp. xv-xvi)

Because these (mis)assumptions are certainly not based on research about second language acquisition (Guerrero, 2004; Ovando et al., 2003), they can only grow out of deep-seated attitudes toward groups historically situated in subordinate positions. In the case of one-year structured English immersion programs, for example, the politicians and voters who endorse these unrealistic expectations and time limits will not be held accountable for students' lack of success. The burden to learn enough academic English in one year in order to compete on 'equal footing' with their English-monolingual counterparts is placed on the ELL students themselves. On the surface, the English-only movement appears to address issues solely related to language. However since languages are inherently inseparable from their discourse communities (Gee, 1996; González, 2001), this movement not only disparages language systems other than "standard" English but also the underlying resources and ideologies represented within "non-mainstream" discourse communities. Language is not merely a vehicle that we use to communicate information but a way of understanding and making sense of the world. The consequences of practices and policies that exclude individuals or groups based on language, race, culture, and the like do not stay at the institutional/policy level; on the contrary, they play themselves out/on the local, school, and individual levels.

For example, Olsen (1997) described how many linguistic and cultural minorities are often compelled to subtract their resources as they become:

racialized into our highly structured social order, where one's position is determined by skin color. ... In making the transition to life here, newcomers face tremendous pressures to adopt racial identities that limit them. For most

immigrants, Americanization means leaving behind their fuller national, cultural, and language identities, and abandoning hope that others will see and accept them in their full humanness. (Olsen, 1997, p.11)

What Olsen describes is a complicated process while students' multiple identities are being simultaneously fragmented and acquired (Yon, 2000). Their home identities are being called into question while racialized identities emerge.

One of the resources subtracted from students in these processes of racialization and *normalization* (Foucault, 1979; Ryan, 1991) is language. Even within transitional bilingual education programs, subtractive bilingualism occurs, because bilingualism and biliteracy are not primary goals of those programs. Much of the literature (Baker, 2001; Kjolseth, 1973; Ovando et al., 2003) discusses the subtractive nature of transitional bilingual programs, where neither language is developed to its full potential. Many factors contribute to subtractive bilingualism, including (a) the unrealistic push for children to forsake their native language in order to transition as quickly as possible to English (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan 2000; Guerrero, 2004), (b) the remedial, or compensatory, nature of the majority of bilingual education programs in the U.S. (Grinberg & Saavedra, 2000; Trujillo, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999), and (c) the hegemony of English which is responsible for relegating minority languages (Meyer, 2000; Olsen, 1997; Shannon, 1995).

## CONCLUSION

Given the many educational inequities that exist today (Cummins, 1996; Darder, 1991; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Kozol, 1991; Ortiz & Kushner, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Trueba, 1999) for many bilingual Latino/a youth, my study addresses how these and other issues shape the experiences of three students in particular. Superficially, a social reproductive model seems to be at work regarding the schooling for Latino/a bilingual students in the U.S. where they are helplessly caught up in a hegemonic whirlwind of alarmingly high drop out rates, low test scores, disproportionate referrals to special education, frequent incidences of disciplinary action, and minimal university enrollment (August & Hakuta, 1997).

Unfortunately, those facts do not capture the dialogic interplay between students and their many worlds, where they continually attempt to position/author themselves in relation to their worlds and, conversely, how they are perceived and get positioned/authored in our society. Students engage in this dialogic interplay in complex spaces where they demonstrate agency and author themselves. Acknowledging this dialogism challenges deterministic social reproductive models and forces us to address the subtle and ambiguous nature of student identity and agency demonstrated in their everyday actions, such as the ways in which students may resist, interrupt, and contradict the status quo (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Several qualitative researchers (Foley, 1990; Olsen, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Yon, 2000) have examined the complex forces (e.g., linguistic, social, and academic) at work within the academic pipeline for bilingual students at the

secondary level, while other studies (Andrade, 1998; Goodman & Wilde, 1992; Jiménez, 2000; Moll & Dworin, 1996; Shannon, 1995; Walsh, 1991) have focused on bilingual students at the primary level.

With my dissertation research, I make a contribution to our understandings of how many forces (e.g., institutional, group, individual) come together in bilingual students' social spaces and prompt them to invest in particular identities. My study adds to the body of research that examines the flexible nature of identity construction (Dyson, 1993; González, 2001; Holland et al., 1998; Jiménez, 2000; McCarthy, 2001; Trueba, 2002). Specifically for Latinos, Stanton-Salazar (2001) states that Latino/a students in the U.S. live in many different worlds “often requiring the commanding, negotiating, and managing of many diverse (and sometimes conflictive) social relationships and personalities” (p.18).

## **PREVIEW**

In the next chapter, I will discuss review literature that has informed my work, as well as my theoretical perspectives. The third chapter includes issues related to methodology and my positionality as a researcher. In Chapters four, five, and six, I present three in-depth, qualitative case studies on three of the focal students: Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José. I explore some of the ways that Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José authored themselves. Conversely, I will also focus on some of the forces within their figured worlds that served to author them, specifically in relation to school. In the final chapter, conclusions and implications point to the importance of seeking out more equitable and

additive education that attends to the academic, linguistic, and social needs of individual students.

## CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature that informs my study draws from sociocultural perspectives (L. Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1991), which have

...profound implications for teaching, schooling, and education. A key feature of this emergent [sociocultural] view of human development is that higher order functions develop out of social interaction. Vygotsky argues that a child's development cannot be understood by a study of the individual. We must also examine the external social world in which that individual life has developed. (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988: 6-7)

In this chapter, I present the three tenets that make up my theoretical framework. Second, I touch on how bilingual students are traditionally discussed in the literature regarding their academic and linguistic well-being. Lastly, I examine conceptualizations of identity (1) as a category and (2) as a process.

### THEORETICAL TENETS

In order to address my research questions (See Chapter I), I draw on a particular theoretical framework made up of the following three tenets:

1. All of us engage and interact within multiple **figured worlds**.
2. Many forces (e.g., systemic, group, individual) work to **author** us in our figured worlds.
3. As a result of the authoring process, we assume and invest in particular ***formas de ser*** [ways of being] depending on the figured worlds in which we engage.

In order to briefly introduce these tenets, I use the following excerpt from an interview conducted with Angela, one of the non-focal participants. Even though Angela is not a focal student, this excerpt provides a concise, valuable illustration of the theoretical constructs of figured worlds, authoring, and *formas de ser*.

KC: ¿Qué dirían tus maestros de ti?  
 Como Ms. Kendall—¿qué diría de ti?  
 Angela: *Quiet and seria.*  
 KC: ¿Y Ms. Walther?  
 Angela: *Loud [laughs] and helpful.*  
 KC: ¿Y por qué dirían cosas opuestas de ti?  
 Angela: Porque la clase de Ms. Kendall está más *strict*. Entonces estoy más callada. Pero en la clase de Ms. Walther, puedes pickear más *friends* y hacer lo que quieras. Y en la clase de Ms. Walther, *I always help her—me and Jeniffer are her helpers....*  
 KC: ¿Y qué dirías tú de ti?  
 Angela: Que soy una brat [laughs] en mi house because I get my sister in trouble all the time. But at school, I'm quiet. And with my friends, I'm a little loud.  
 (Interview, 5/11/04)

KC: What would your teachers say about you? Like Ms. Kendall—what would she say about you?  
 Angela: Quiet and serious.  
 KC: And Ms. Walther?  
 Angela: Loud [laughs] and helpful.  
 KC: And why would they say opposite things about you?  
 Angela: Because Ms. Kendall's class is more strict. So I am more quiet. But in Ms. Walther's class, you can choose to work with friends and do what you want. And Ms. Walther's class, I always help her—me and Jeniffer are her helpers....  
 KC: And what would you say about yourself?  
 Angela: That I am a brat [laughs] at home because I get my sister in trouble all the time. But at school, I'm quiet. And with my friends, I'm a little loud.  
 (Interview, 5/11/04)

In our interview, Angela could not describe herself in a singular fashion while considering her three major social spheres of home, peers, and school (Dyson, 1993). My interpretation of Angela's comments connects to the first tenet regarding the notion of figured worlds. On a daily basis, Angela navigated multiple worlds where the rules of engagement, the players, and the expectations continually changed and shifted. Her

broader figured world of schooling, for example, unfolded to reveal multiple worlds. In Angela's case, there were many figured worlds inside her public elementary school building. Among many others, there was one primarily associated with Ms. Walther, another with Ms. Kendall, and another with her friends.

The second tenet leads us to ask why Angela would have behaved differently vis-à-vis her various figured worlds. According to her own account, Angela was quiet and serious with Ms. Kendall but loud and helpful with Ms. Walther. Even though Ms. Kendall and Ms. Walther were both Angela's fifth grade teachers, they had different classrooms, taught different content areas, had different sets of expectations for and interactions with students, and exhibited different teaching styles. These marked differences between the two teachers and their interactions with Angela could have sent Angela a message that she was or should have been perceived differently. Maybe Angela was authored by herself and others as less confident in Math (which Ms. Kendall taught) than in Language Arts (which Ms. Walther taught). Maybe Angela authored herself as helpful because of the way that Ms. Walther fashioned her classroom and class procedures. For example, Angela was given the daily task of vacuuming the area rug toward the front of the classroom. Regardless of the specific reasons, the point is that Angela was continually authored by herself and others relative to her figured worlds.

Illustrative of the third tenet, Angela hinted that she behaved differently depending on the figured world. At school with Ms. Kendall, Angela described her *forma de ser* (way of being) as quiet and serious. At home with her sister, Angela described her *forma de ser* as that of a "brat." Angela seemed to modify her *forma de ser* depending on

the figured world in which she engaged. I argue that Angela did not intentionally nor randomly take on different *formas de ser*. On the contrary, many influences could have contributed to Angela's wide range of *formas de ser*, such as others' expectations of her, her desire to be perceived in a certain way, her bilingual proficiency, and her gender. Following is an expanded discussion of each of the three theoretical tenets using selected theories and research.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Tenet: Figured Worlds**

All of us engage and interact within multiple figured worlds. In order to explain this tenet, first, I give a theoretical description of figured worlds. Second, I provide a concrete example of a figured world—using Alcoholics Anonymous. Third, I explore how and why public schooling is made up of multiple figured worlds with particular rules of engagement and expectations for all the protagonists within.

*Theoretical description of figured worlds.* Bakhtin (1986) challenges scholars' ideas regarding "closed and finalized cultural worlds" (p.6) and proposes that culture should be viewed as an "open unity" within a particular culture. Figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) is one construct that attempts to consider the "open unity" of our complex day-to-day experiences. Holland et al. (1998) define figured worlds as

a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others ... These collective 'as-if' worlds are sociohistoric, contrived interpretations of imaginations that mediate behavior and

so, from the perspective of heuristic development, inform participants outlooks.  
(p. 52)

Because language has the power to limit and/or to enhance our imaginative possibilities, I prefer the term *figured worlds* over other terms such as *contexts*, *sites*, and *settings*. Adhering to a context-by-context analysis restricts our ability to examine the complexities of students' lives, because the boundaries that separate one realm of our lives from another are more fluid and permeable.

In our enthusiasm for specification we have ignored questions of interconnection and interdependence of various areas of culture; we have frequently forgotten that the boundaries of these areas are not absolute, that in various epochs they have been drawn in various ways; and we have not taken into account that the most intense and productive life of cultures takes place on the boundaries of its individual areas and not in places where these areas have become enclosed in their own specificity. (Bakhtin, 1986: 2)

We do not have the ability to pick up and leave one context, or setting, to enter another one as if we were free agents who can enter and disengage at will (Holland et al., 1998). Therefore, we must resist the temptation to sever, enclose, and specify the plethora of “areas of culture” that students navigate day in and day out. On the contrary, we must recognize and examine how the

word, directed at its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in an out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group. (Bakhtin, 1981: 276)

An individual's figured worlds overlap where there are “[c]ountless ideological threads running through all areas of social intercourse” (Voloshinov, 1973: 21).

*Alcoholic Anonymous as figured world.* I found Holland et al.'s discussion of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) helpful in my own understanding of the construct of figured world. The social construction of AA as a figured world is brought to light by Holland et al.'s descriptions of the history of AA, its members, and practices (e.g., meetings, literature, artifacts). Artifacts like sobriety chips—a token given to an AA member for staying sober for a determined length of time—are assigned meaning within the figured world of AA. Outside of that figured world, however, the same sobriety chip may not carry any significance. The sobriety chip, along with other AA practices, represents a social construction that carries specific meaning, because the actors (i.e., the AA members) have mutually agreed upon its interpretation.

*The figured worlds of public schooling.* Not unlike the figured world of AA, U.S. public schooling constitutes a figured world with specific actors, acts, and outcomes. You just have to sit in one faculty meeting to substantiate that public schooling constitutes a figured world. Teachers do not bat an eye while jargon flies around the room. The acronyms alone are enough to send someone from outside that figured world into a tail spin, such as TAKS, TEKS, LEP, ARD, ELL, ADHD, ED, LD, and IEP.

Walking through the halls of most U.S. public schools, the actors are apparent for the most part: students, parents, faculty, staff, and administrators. Other actors may not be so obvious, including local business owners that 'adopt' the school through donations and support; local, state, and federal educational organizations and offices; and politicians

and their constituents who decide which educational programs to support and to allocate funding.

There are many figured worlds even within the broader figured world of public schooling. Within the school building, for example, the figured world of music class is quite different from the figured world of recess. The figured worlds of instruction vary depending on any number of factors, such as grade level, content area, classmates, and teachers. We could span out from the school building to explore other figured worlds related to schooling: the community, the school district, the state education agency, and the federal education agencies.

More often than not, these figured worlds shift into and engulf one another, forming even more intricate figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998). In one parent-teacher conference for example, a classroom teacher and parent(s) may talk about a student's: (a) family history, (b) academic achievement using federal and state curricular standards, (c) peer relations citing observations made during recess and lunchtime, (d) extra-curricular interests outside of school like sports and religious activities, and (e) medical history. In this one interaction between teacher and parent, any number of figured worlds are pulled into the foreground where the only common denominator of the dissimilar worlds is the child.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Tenet: Authoring**

Many forces (e.g., systemic, group, individual) work to **author** us in our figured worlds. González (2000)—who studied Mexican-origin women and their children in the

physical and figurative Borderlands in and around Tucson, Arizona—found that the women in her study:

author and arrange their social fields through the mediation of structure and agency. Although they may author figured worlds, however, they do so within a prism of a social memory, a Discourse that has been constructed around particular fields. These social memories are part of the fabric that has been woven across generations, the shreds and patches of which these women take up and knit together. (González, 2001: 77)

This “mediation of structure and agency” is important to examine further. Therefore, in this section dedicated to the second tenet (authoring), I delve into some of the structures that author students in their figured worlds of public schooling. Later in my discussion of the third tenet (*formas de ser*), I address the mediation of “agency” within the figured worlds of school. I separate the constructs of structure and agency for organizational purposes, not to suggest a structure/agency dichotomy. Baez (2000) warns that many social theorists looking at schooling for students of color seem to have a dichotomous mindset leaning toward the side of agency (i.e., ‘free will’) or the side of structure (i.e., ‘constraints’):

...the most significant problem with the agency/structure dichotomy is that it obscures the nature of the power as it is exercised and resisted at the actual sites of oppression. The agency and structure debate in a very real sense is about power; either individuals have power (or can have it) *or* power is exercised by institutional arrangements (i.e., a collection of individuals acting in accordance with certain institutional roles). The debate, however, characterizes power as either *agentic* or *structural*. I will argue that power is, following Foucault, ‘disciplinary;’ that is, power exists throughout social relations, institutions, and processes, and it functions through surveillance, normalization, and control. (ibid: 338, emphasis in original)

I believe that the first tenet of *figured worlds* helps to understand that agency and structure exist dialogically together within social spaces.

*Dialogic authoring.* We cannot separate ourselves from our figured worlds nor from the dynamic and continual forces that operate within those worlds (Bakhtin, 1986; Holland et al., 1998). At the site of the individual, forces play themselves out through language, both spoken and unspoken, written and unwritten (Bakhtin, 1981; González, 2001; Voloshinov, 1973). Bakhtin explains that:

As a result of the work done by all these stratifying forces in language, there are no “neutral” words and forms... The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own. (Bakhtin, 1981: 293-4)

In order to ground this abstract process of self-authoring by way of words previously articulated by others, we will revisit the figured world of Alcoholics Anonymous and look at one small-scale example of self-authoring as a social practice. Changing one’s identity from “drinker” to “alcoholic” in the figured world of Alcoholics Anonymous is facilitated, in large part, by the practice where “members must agree to become tellers, as well as listeners, of AA stories” (ibid: 72). Telling of personal stories is an active process of construction and scaffolding (L. S. Vygotsky, 1988) where new members start to emulate the personal stories of seasoned AA members.

He learns to put his own events and experiences in to an AA story, and thus learns to tell, and to understand, his own life as an AA story. He reinterprets his own past, from the understanding he once had of himself as a normal drinker to the understanding he now has of himself as an alcoholic. (Holland et al, 1998: 87)

New members acquire the expected model, or “script” (Cameron, 1997) through participation in the figured world of AA, as opposed to explicit teaching (Holland et al, 1998). Other scholars (Delpit, 1995; Gee, 1996; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) discuss how we acquire a sense for how to author ourselves based on our participation within and exposure to a particular figured world, or Discourse community.

*Authoring within figured worlds of public schooling.* In Ryan’s article (1991), applying Foucault’s conceptualization of disciplinary technology (1979) in order to analyze the inequities in schools, he states:

In addition to the practice of perpetual observation, disciplinary technology relies on the creation, supervision, and maintenance of norms (and abnormalities). ... the accumulation of knowledge through constant observation, examination, and documentation produces norms to which individual subjects are compared and encouraged to perform. Such procedures create abnormalities and deviants, which they in turn attempt to treat, a phenomenon Foucault refers to as *normalization*. (p.105).

The ways that the official figured worlds of school have defined and controlled for ‘achievement’ fall under this process of *normalization*. Much like the story models found in Alcoholics Anonymous, public schooling relies on many *normalizing* performative acts that students are expected to follow—like raising your hand before going to the bathroom and walking in straight, quiet lines down the hallways. This process of *normalization* is often based on dominant U.S. ideologies, like the achievement ideology (See Chapter I).

*Normalization* originates from many sources and typically serve as a means to author, and ultimately control, students socially, behaviorally, linguistically, and

academically (Apple, 2001). Following is a description of a few tangible, daily structures in place at Parks Elementary, where I taught for four years and where my research study took place. At Parks, a form of social and behavioral control required students to sit at assigned tables in boy-girl order in the cafeteria. Depending on the noise level and class behavior determined by an adult lunchroom monitor, each class was assigned a score ranging from zero to four—four being the best. This score was recorded on a laminated monthly chart posted on the cafeteria wall. Upon picking up our students, we teachers would often glance at this chart for our class’s score and praise or scold the class accordingly.

Sometimes teachers and lunchroom monitors would single out a particular obedient child by giving him or her a “Parks buck” (a school-made, red piece of paper made to look like a dollar bill with a picture of Rosa Parks in the center). Every nine-week grading period or so, students could use the “Parks bucks” that they had earned and buy something at the “Parks store.” The “Parks store” consisted of a couple of long, rectangular tables temporarily set up in the main hallway with pencils, stickers, plastic necklaces, key chains, and other gumball-type trinkets. Sitting in boy-girl order, attaching importance to a laminated behavior chart, distributing “Parks bucks,” and visiting the “Parks store” are all examples of procedural acts that go along with artifacts specific to the figured world of schooling at Parks Elementary.

Outside of the figured world of Parks Elementary, those artifacts (e.g., the lunchroom score, the “Parks bucks”) lose their significance, because they become “divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse (seeing that sign is part of

organized social intercourse and cannot exist, as such, outside it, reverting to a mere physical artifact)” (Voloshinov, 1973: 164). There are many “signs” in the figured world of public schooling ranging from reciting the pledge of alliance in the mornings to student rosters and seating charts, from grade-level newsletters to PTA fundraisers.

In addition to behavioral and social control, there are many linguistic and academic expectations placed on students, without much input from the students themselves regarding their own schooling. Adults typically map out the students’ eight-hour day by selecting features as trivial as how to take attendance (Wong & Wong, 1991) and as substantial as the structures at the level of policy and instruction.

***Hegemonic structures.*** At the structural level, bilingual students tend to be authored as invisible (Trueba, 1999), as nuisances (Trujillo, 1998), or as ‘buying into’ the assimilationist achievement ideology and all its promises (Stanton-Salazar, 2001) .

Cummins listed some of the hegemonic structures that set out to limit bilingual students’ ability to author themselves out of the status quo:

- Policies at federal, state/provincial or local levels that fail to take account of the knowledge base that exists regarding students ...
- Teacher education institutions that continue to treat issues related to ESL students as marginal and that send new teachers into the classroom with minimal information regarding patterns of language and emotional development among students and few pedagogical strategies for helping students learn...
- Curriculum that reflects only the experiences and values of the middle-class White native-English-speaking population and effectively suppresses the experiences and values of ESL students.
- The absence from most schools of professionals capable of communicating in the languages of students and their parents ...

- Criteria for promotion to positions of responsibility (e.g., principals) that take no account of the individual's experience with or potential for leadership in the education of ESL students. (1994: 34)

Since Cummins' 1994 publication, an obvious structure that could be added to his above list would be how the discourse of Accountability and high-stakes testing authors Latino/a bilingual children in narrow and subtractive ways (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Valenzuela, 2001-2002).

The consequences of practices and policies that exclude individuals or groups based on language, race, culture, and other identity markers do not stay at the institutional/policy level; on the contrary, they play themselves out/on the local, school, and individual levels. For example, in her study at an ethnically diverse high school in California, Olsen (1997) described how many linguistic and cultural minorities were often compelled to subtract their resources as they became:

racialized into our highly structured social order, where one's position is determined by skin color. ... In making the transition to life here, newcomers face tremendous pressures to adopt racial identities that limit them. For most immigrants, Americanization means leaving behind their fuller national, cultural, and language identities, and abandoning hope that others will see and accept them in their full humanness. (Olsen, 1997: 11)

What Olsen describes is a complicated process while students' multiple identities were being simultaneously fragmented and acquired (Yon, 2000). Their home identities were being called into question while racialized identities emerge. The assimilationist messages of such policies and practices do not stay at the systemic level, but rather filter down and have a direct impact on the opportunities and identities of our bilingual students. As substantiated in the findings of Olsen's and many other research studies

(Foley, 1990; Gitlin, Buendía, Crosland, & Doumbia, 2003; Olsen, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999), numerous protagonists within the schools—the teachers, administrators, both dominant and “subordinate” community members, parents, and students themselves—have a hand in the marginalization of bilingual students.

*Counter-hegemonic structures.* At the structural level, there are also forces that strive to be noteworthy exceptions to the hegemonic structures. Educational researchers, for example, can be a force that challenge us to author bilingual students from a resource-oriented paradigm, as opposed to a deficit-oriented one (Fránquiz & Reyes, 1998; Ruiz, 1984). In a series of studies of Mexican-American households in Tucson, Arizona (González et al., 1997; Moll et al., 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992), researchers found that students’ funds of knowledge are often not on schools’ radar screens. Funds of knowledge, a term coined by Vélez-Ibáñez and popularized by Moll, refer to students’ knowledge and experiences that traditionally have fallen outside of what is valued and considered legitimate in school. Some examples of funds of knowledge from the studies by Moll and his colleagues in Tucson include agriculture and mining (e.g., crop planting, animal management, minerals), economics (e.g., renting, selling, building codes), household management (e.g., childcare, budgets, cooking), material and science knowledge (e.g., construction, painting), and religion (e.g., baptisms, bible studies). Moll et al. (1992) use “the term ‘funds of knowledge’ to refer to these historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p.133).

Teacher educators/educational researchers such as Ladson-Billings, have worked at the structural level to author present and future public school teachers to adhere to a culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). To varying degrees, they try to capitalize on their students' "funds of knowledge" (González et al., 1997; Moll et al., 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) and to move them forward academically while adding on to—not subtracting from—their linguistic and cultural resources (Lambert, 1975; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999).

Teachers prove to be valuable forces that author students. Shannon (1995), in her study of a fourth grade classroom of Latino bilingual students, discusses how the bilingual teacher incorporates approaches that aim to raise the status of the Spanish language and to challenge the hegemony of English. The teacher helps to create “a linguistic environment in which neither English nor Spanish is dominant, and minority-language children are enriched and empowered” (p.177) although the overall philosophy of the school and bilingual program is transitional and subtractive in nature. The Sunshine room (Whitmore & Crowell, 1994) is another example of a bilingual classroom where most of the students, at least in the year of the study, experienced an additive linguistic, academic, and cultural atmosphere. In Igoa's (1995) elementary ESL classroom that served students with various native languages, she incorporated activities (e.g., write and animate story strips based on their own lives) that draw from their own experiences and background in order to further their academic and English language development.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Tenet: *Formas de Ser***

As a result of the authoring process, we assume and invest in particular *formas de ser* [ways of being] depending on the figured worlds in which we engage. What I mean by *formas de ser* can be best explained using Gee's (1996) definition of Discourses as "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or types of people) by specific groups of people ..." (p. viii). As touched on in the previous section, the hegemonic structures (which are based primarily on the achievement ideology) tend to benefit the advancement of an idealized 'mainstream' that was born into and, thus, identify with the White, middle-class discourses in this country. I contend that we must recognize that the U.S. is a stratified society—classist, racist, and sexist in nature. Yet, we must resist the temptation of conceptualizing marginalization as a unidirectional, top-down process (MacLeod, 1987). Even though dominant ideologies are often internalized by Latina/o students, we cannot assume that all Latinas/os will interact and react in the same manner (González, 2001). So, how do students author different *formas de ser* taking into consideration all these structural forces found in schooling?

Although there are many hegemonic structures acting out on Latino/a bilingual students, they not pre-destined for social reproduction (Darder, 1991; Foley, 1990; MacLeod, 1987; McCarthy, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999). Studies, like the one conducted by Stanton-Salazar (2001) regarding the social support networks and help-seeking experiences of working-class Mexican-origin youth, highlight the agency of students in

response to structural constraints and social forces that challenge social stratification patterns where:

individuals and groups *wrestle* with social structure, and in doing so, continually recreate it—although not always in the same form. Sometimes we see this wrestling or constitutive activity working in the interests of reproduction; at other times, it provides the conditions for individual exceptions to reproduction; still at other times, it sets the stage for authentic change. ... social reproduction is actually a quite ‘jagged’ process, with multiple and multilayered forces at play. (: 23)

Although the construct of *agency* was not applied in the analysis of Stanton-Salazar’s study, his description of students who were able to “weave social webs” in order to promote academic achievement in schools exemplify a type of collective agency through resistance and social capital. Other studies discuss the “improvisational interactions” (Holland et al., 1998) of students and their individual and collective ability to assume *formas de ser* within the figured worlds of public schooling that been documented in the literature as resistance (Baez, 2000), empowerment (Cummins, 1994, 1996; Trueba, 1998), silencing (Quiroz, 2001), resiliency (Trueba, 1998), assimilating (Gordon, 1964), and acculturating (Igoa, 1995).

In her study of the social worlds of children at elementary school, Dyson (1993) uses a Bakhtinian framework to explain that “although individuals may share particular ways of using language, rooted in common social experiences and values, no two individuals share exactly the same set of experiences or belong to exactly the same set of social worlds” (p.54). In other words, similar histories and experiences are often present in the figured worlds of individuals with shared identity markers. However, individuals’ reactions and engagements within their figured worlds manifest themselves relative to

many other factors and forces, from the seemingly mundane (e.g., walking in straight, quiet lines) to the seemingly grandiose (e.g., English-only initiatives).

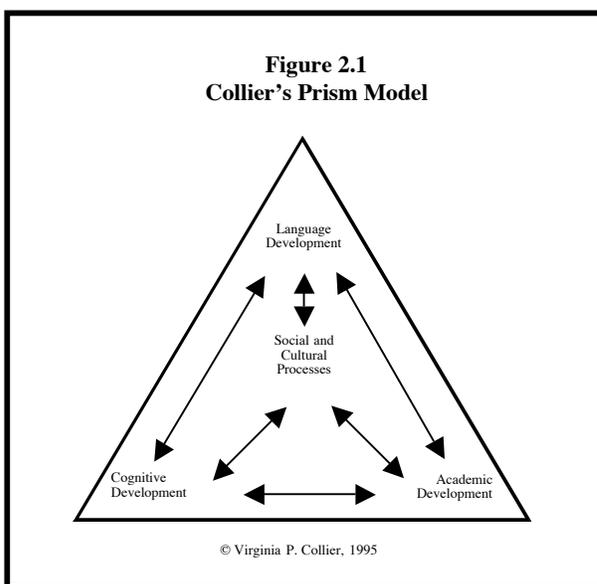
### **TRADITIONAL WAYS OF LOOKING AT BILINGUAL STUDENTS**

In much of the literature regarding bilingual students, the linguistic needs are often the main component addressed (Anstrom, 1996; Bachman, 1990b; Baker, 1996; Guerrero, 2004; Roberts, 1995; Ruiz, 1984). We cannot attend to the linguistic needs of bilingual students by treating language as a discrete phenomenon and removing it from its pragmatic and socio-cultural context (Bachman, 1990a; Oller & Damico, 1991).

Genesee warns that:

All too often, educational programs for [bilingual] children focus on teaching language to the exclusion of other aspects of their development. And yet research on child language acquisition during the last four decades indicates decisively that authentic language learning does not take place in isolation from other aspects of children's development. Rather, it is intimately linked with, constrained by and contributor to cognitive and social development. (1994: 3)

Furthermore, Collier's prism (1995) reminds us with that there are other components that must be tended to if bilingual students are to acquire necessary academic content and language to succeed in school (See Figure 2.1).



Collier, V. P. (1995, Fall). *Acquiring a second language for school*. Directions in Language and Education Series (Vol. 1, No. 4). Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

As indicated by the prism, language development (both native and second languages) is significant, but just a fraction of the whole. In addition to native and second language development, we must also take into account the academic development, cognitive development, and socio-cultural processes (Baker, 2001; Collier, 1995). Found at the perimeter of the prism, language development encompasses native and second language learning and acquisition. Academic development applies to the ability to comprehend and evaluate academic content in order to progress through the grade levels (Baker, 2001; Collier, 1995). Cognitive development refers to a natural, subconscious capacity to take in conceptual knowledge that occurs developmentally from birth to the end of schooling and beyond (Collier, 1995; Ovando et al., 2003). Students possess conceptual knowledge in their native language which “constitutes a major component of the ‘cognitive power’ that they bring to the language learning system. It thus makes sense

to value, and where possible, continue to cultivate these abilities both for their own sake and to facilitate transfer to English” (Cummins, 1994: 40). Social and cultural processes regard how the family, peers, community, and broader society influence the student’s overall development (Baker, 1996; Collier, 1995). All four components are interdependent. If one component is focused on to the neglect of another, an individual’s overall growth and future academic success may be affected negatively (Collier, 1995).

We mustn’t forget that the individual student is found at the center of this interconnected flurry of components. Therefore, I am interested in exploring the ways that individuals and these components (or forces) dialogically act upon each other at the site of the individual. In order to do this, we must turn our attention to how identity formation has been conceptualized and researched.

### **CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF IDENTITY FORMATION**

Peirce (1995) calls for a reconceptualization of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory, saying that it “needs to develop a conception of the language learner as having a complex social identity that must be understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction” (p.13). Only focusing on bilingual students’ surface-level linguistic needs, while important, blinds us from examining the socio-historical and socio-political contexts that have resulted in an overwhelming number of Latino/a bilingual youth experiencing low academic achievement. For example, what is the effect of having the primary language systems of bilingual students disparaged because the underlying

resources and ideologies represented within those discourse communities have fallen outside of the “mainstream”? Languages are inherently inseparable from their Discourse communities (Gee, 1996; González, 2001). Language is not merely a vehicle that we use to communicate information but a way of understanding and making sense of the world. Because bilingual Latino/a students inhabit identity markers that have been socially constructed to be perceived as inferior to the idealized ‘mainstream,’ an examination of how individuals’ identities have been conceptualized is necessary in order to explore how they will engage and respond within their many social spaces.

There have been many ways that identity has been conceptualized. Theories regarding identity formation have begun to shift “away from the concept of self as a set of genetically determined traits residing in a stable individual to a more dynamic, culturally based process of construction” (McCarthy, 2001: 122-125). In her study of an urban writing club of eighth-grade female adolescents, Egan-Robertson (1998) distinguishes between identity and personhood. She prefers the term personhood/ peoplehood “because of its critical historical roots in the ongoing national conversational about citizenship” and its

attention on the attitudes and assumptions about people embedded within the way a culture organizes itself through its discourse practices in institutions such as schools. Thus, the construct of personhood foregrounds concern with the range of possible identities available for an individual to take up. I argue that to take up a nondominant identity involves a struggle of personhood. (p. 451)

Egan-Robertson’s explicit inclusion of complex socio-cultural dynamics on the site of the person is helpful, because identity is often (mis)taken as a uniquely individual

development, often fixed and categorical in nature. Yon differentiates between understanding identity as a category and as a process:

As a category, identity announces who we are and calls upon notions of nation, class, gender, and ethnicity for definition. But a second way of talking about identities recognizes that identity is a process of making identifications, a process that is continuous and incomplete. (2000: 13)

In this section, I first review literature that discusses the shortcomings of thinking of identity as a category. Next, I discuss literature that asks us to move beyond singular notions of identity and challenges us to think of identity formation as a process.

### **Identity as Category**

Identity is often discussed in relation to an affiliation with an identifiable and categorical group of people. For example, bodies of literature exist that talk about identities specific to race (Omi & Winant, 1986), gender (Eder, Evans, & Parker, 1995; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Thorne, 1993), class (Hicks, 2002), culture/ethnicity (Trueba, 2002; Valencia, 1991), language (Lambert, 1975; Wong Fillmore, 2000), and sexuality (Cameron, 1997; Silin, 1995). As with most identity markers, we have been conditioned to see them as singular categories, or attributes. Race as an identity marker, for instance, is often viewed:

as something fixed and immutable—something rooted in ‘nature.’ Thus we mask the historical construction of racial categories, the shifting meaning of race, and the crucial role of politics and ideology in shaping race relations. Races do not emerge full-blown. They are the results of diverse historical practices and are continually subject to challenge over their definition and meaning. (Omi & Winant, 1986: 63-64)

This masking of the historical-political constructions and shifting meanings of identity hinders our ability to see the multidimensionality inherent in every individual.

McCarthy (1998) asserts that there are two conceptualizations—essentialism and reductionism—that eliminate the “noise” of multidimensionality, historical variation, and subjectivity of educational difference. The first conceptualization that eliminates the “noise” of multidimensionality is essentialism. Essentialist orientations tend to view identity markers as stable, homogenous entities with inherent traits/attributes, rather than fluid, dynamic ones (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; McCarthy, 1998; Yon, 2000). The consequence is that groups that share similar identity markers get blanketed together. Hispanics are this way; Asians are that way; and African Americans are the other way.

The second conceptualization that eliminates the “noise” of multidimensionality is reductionism (McCarthy, 1998). McCarthy states that reductionist orientations tend to look for decontextualized, mono-causal sources for educational difference. So one identity marker is teased out and separated from others, then reduced to just that one variable for examination. When we fall into the trap of treating race, culture, and other identity markers as fixed categories, there is a tendency to essentialize and/or reduce individuals according to their socially constructed ‘marks.’

Culture is just one of many identity markers viewed as singular. This singular notion of culture is particularly disconcerting when we are tending to the education for ‘bicultural’ students. The term *bi-cultural* suggests a dichotomy between two distinct, static cultures as if bicultural individuals were *Learning in two worlds* (Perez & Torres-Guzman, 1996), *Between worlds* (Freeman & Freeman, 1994), *Border Crossers* (Giroux,

1992), and having a foot in each world (Behar, 1993). This dichotomy ignores the overlap, contradiction, and conflict when Discourse communities (Delpit, 1995; Gee, 1996) come in contact with others (e.g., generational, regional, social)—forming multiple subcultures. A clear line does not exist that separates Discourse communities (Gee, 1996). This dichotomous mindset ignores the hybrid identities that individuals assume that run counter to blanket prototypes and stereotypes (González, 2001; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Alvarez, 2001).

The ethnicity categories of “Hispanic” and “Latino” are themselves problematic because they lump all Latinos together “as one seamless whole” (Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2002: 3). Many researchers (Farmer, 2002; González, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2002) caution against essentialist and reductionist notions where “the tired and facile ‘Latinos-are-a-big-family’ glosses over the contradictions, tensions, and fissures—around class, race, and color—that often separate them” (Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2002: 3). For example, there are significant differences between the lived experiences of a third generation English-speaking Cuban-American elite and a Maya-speaking recent immigrant from rural Guatemala. Yet on a demographic survey, these two individuals would check the same boxes regarding ethnicity/culture and possibly race.

Moya (2000) reminds us that essentialist approaches to identity “have been unable to explain the internal heterogeneity of groups, the multiple and sometimes contradictory constitution of individuals and the possibility of change—both cultural and at the level of individual personal identity” (p.10). What happens when our society’s nice-and-neat

categories, and the assumptions that go along with those categories, cannot contain the individual variations within them?

### **Extending Beyond the Singular: Identity as Process**

Identity is often reduced to a single category or characteristic as demonstrated by sayings like “being stripped of her identity” or “losing his identity.” There is literature on identity that seeks to challenge and to move away from these singular and absolute notions of identity. With his theory on additive biculturalism, Lambert (1975) challenged the notions of identity as singular and biculturalism as a dichotomy. Lambert, however, talked about identity as something to be resolved instead of something to be continually negotiated.

A student’s quest for survival and success relates to their “ability to define their identity in different ways in order to function effectively in different settings and cultural contexts” (Trueba, 2002: 8). Trueba’s conceptualization that immigrant and bilingual students demonstrate a “new cultural capital” as they flexibly acquire and manage multiple identities is an important one, because it (a) runs counter to how the biculturalism of many immigrants becomes pathologized by the dominant culture; (b) challenges the dichotomy of bicultural individuals being split between two, polar-opposite worlds; and (c) considers the multitude of intricate alignments that students make in order to navigate their many worlds (Gee, 1996).

Reading Trueba’s (2000) article about “new cultural capital” sent me on a quest for more literature regarding bilingual students’ ability to assume and acquire multiple

*formas de ser* (ways of being) depending on which of their social spaces they happen to be traversing. Therefore, the literature that most interests me not only takes into account the categorical markers of identity (e.g., race, language, class), but also re-conceptualizes those markers as part of a process for continual and dynamic identity negotiations.

Furthermore, with my research, I set out to expand on the literature that views identity as social practice. Yon is one researcher who asks:

what would actually be at stake for education to think about these various identity markers as social relations and not just attributes. Expressed another way, why study these experiences as experiences, as opposed to stable markers of identity? What does it mean to consider race as an experience, as opposed to a phenotype? Or what does it mean to think about gender as an experience of belonging and longing? The students ... live their identities through social relations. ... All of this suggests that students are making themselves in relation to others, and identity in this sense is always relational. (Yon, 2000: 131)

González explores identity as a social practice through the construct of *language ideologies*, which she defines as “a connection of language with social process, with special attention to the power dimensions that inhere in both” (2001: 175). She found that “for the women of Mexican origin, the hybridity of drawing from multiple semiotic systems and negotiating multiple identities is embedded in the continuum of daily life” (ibid: 76). In the following quote from González’s study, she acknowledges the power of the women in her study to demonstrate agency within their figured worlds although they were:

caught between discontinuities of language, nation, and ideology....However, these women are not trapped by the liminality of their status, passively bemoaning their marginality. They are active agents in drawing from multiple resource bases and multiple ideologies in order to ensure their children’s success. Like Gloria Anzaldúa’s ‘new mestiza,’ they operate in plural mode, casting out what is not

useful to them, appending new strategies, and merging received structures with the exigencies of their current lives. (González, 2001: 76-77)

The capacity to “operate in plural mode” is underscored in the following literature. Gee (1996) mentions that individuals make a series of intricate alignments (of whos and whats) as they unconsciously and consciously gauge their status and solidarity in any given context. Holland et al. (1998) discuss individuals’ identities as if they were performances/improvisations in their many figured worlds. The concepts of hybridity (Gutiérrez et al., 2001; McCarthy, 1998) and borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1999; Giroux, 1992; González, 2001) have attempted to explain how individuals navigate through various worlds in contact.

## **DISCUSSION**

We must acknowledge the collective “social memory” where “Each household has its own particular history of dealing with the intangibles of race, class, and minority status, which have very tangible lived experiences behind them” (González, 2001: 55). Even though identity markers are intangible social constructs, they have been assigned certain meanings within our society which result in very real consequences for the marginalized “Other” who occupy those markers. Identity politics matter because unearned privileges tend to be doled out to those who do not carry marginalized identity markers, such as being of color or a non-native English speaker (McIntosh, 1988; Moya, 2000). Identity markers and their categorical functions act as brute forces that actively attempt to author individuals and groups to the margins (Moya, 2000). I am concerned

with how the intangibles and the external structures and forces come to bear at the level of the individual student and, by the same token, how students demonstrate agency both individually and collectively within the figured worlds of public schooling.

Giroux (1992) states that:

...understanding how fragile identity is as it moves into borderlands crisscrossed within a variety of languages, experiences, and voices. There are no unified subjects here, only students whose multilayered and often contradictory voices and experiences intermingle with the weight of particular histories that will not fit easily into the master narratives of a monolithic culture. (p.34)

Giroux's words challenge me to aspire to join the ranks of researchers who attempt to consider the multilayered and contradictory voices of students and their particular histories (Dyson, 1993; Foley, 1990; González, 2001; Jiménez, 2000; Olsen, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Walsh, 1991; Yon, 2000). Studies that focus on students' voices have the capacity to reveal students' multidimensionality and how they use their agency to position themselves within figured worlds, where structures invariably work hard to orchestrate and constrain that agency. Therefore, in my study, I set out to (1) explode notions of achievement and academic success, (2) explore the "improvisational interactions" (Holland et al., 1998) of bilingual Latino/a students, and (3) examine assumptions regarding taken-for-granted structures within the figured worlds of public schooling.

## **CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY**

I have struggled with the question of balance in the presentation of the data. I recognize that I need to examine my own positionality and how I authored the participants in the study based on my presumptions and experiences. However, above everything else, I want the work that I did with the students to be the main focus, highlighting their daily improvisations within their figured worlds of schooling. Willis (2004) reminds me:

In one way I am a simple empiricist: Write down what happens, take notes about what people do and say, how they use objects, artifacts, and symbolic forms in situ. Do not worry too much about the endless debates concerning ethnographic authority and the slippages of discursive meaning understood from an abstract post structuralism. Tell me something about the world.... [addressing] an old-fashioned notion of ethnography and ethnographic articles having some empirical data in them, rather than endless methodological discussions where we learn everything about the sacred bourgeois subject. I seem to hear subjects screaming silently from the margins of the page, "but what the hell about us?" (P. Willis, 2004: 169)

Willis brings up a valid point that some research concentrates so much on the positionality of the researcher and the methodological pitfalls that the reader begins to wonder what the focus of the work really is. However, since I am the one making sense of and interpreting those screams and silences from the margins, I must reflect on and disclose who I am as former teacher, as filterer of the data, and as the go-between the participants and the reader. Obvious power differentials of race, class, age, and ethnicity exist between the participants and myself. Therefore, part of my charge as researcher

involves a painfully, cathartically, and (yes) egotistically motivated process of flashing what is under the proverbial researcher's overcoat.

**PART OF THE STORY**  
(Written Fall 2003)

*In May 2003, my very first class of Pre-Kindergarten students graduated from the fifth grade. My three-year old daughter and I attended their graduation ceremony. As I snapped photos and applauded along with their families and teachers, I had mixed feelings of pride, jubilation, and concern. As any teacher, I often find myself wondering if we prepared them for what awaits. Not wanting my former students to become part of the bleak statistics regarding native language loss, retention, drop-out, and low university enrollment that many working-class Latinas/os experience, I urge my former students—both in my mind and during my occasional visits to Parks Elementary—to move forward in their academic careers without sacrificing their cultural and linguistic resources. Getting lost in the statistics that we frequently spew off in my graduate classes is easy to do, but then I remind myself of my former students' names, faces, aspirations, and potential. I visualize the moments when they first entered my bilingual Pre-kindergarten classroom at the age of four—some wide-eyed and unsure, some teary-eyed and scared, and others excited and raring to go. These visualizations of my former students help to keep me grounded, and inadvertently they are the ones urging me to move forward in my academic career.*

*When my teacher colleagues and I used to get together in one another's classrooms or the teachers' lounge at the end of the school day, many of the English-monolingual teachers cited being called "teacher" by their students as one of their major pet peeves. I nodded silently agreeing that if students were to call me "teacher" I would be annoyed as well. Michelle, one of my good friends and fellow Pre-kindergarten teachers, asked me if I was bothered when my students called me "teacher." I replied, "My students don't ever do that." "Yes they do," Michelle countered, "I hear them call you maestra all the time—on the playground, in the cafeteria, in the hall..."*

*Michelle's observation caught me off guard. In my mind, the two words—teacher and maestra—did not appear interchangeable. Even though the words are translatable equivalents, their cultural connotations and significance are not the same. When students continually punctuate their sentences and questions with "teacher," the word (in my opinion) has a whiny, unpleasant ring to it like dragging your teeth on a dinner fork. Sentences punctuated with "maestra," on the other hand, are a sign of respect and honor. Once I was a child's maestra, I became maestra for the entire family. Maestra denotes continual emotional investment in my students' well-being; it is a title of distinction that is not shed even when students "graduate" from your classroom. As my former students move up through the grades, I may no longer be their teacher, yet I continue to be their maestra.*

*When I go to visit my former students at Parks Elementary or when I happen to run into them around town (e.g., at grocery stores, public swimming pools, or community festivals), they—along with their mothers, fathers, and siblings—still address me as*

maestra. *Maybe this is one of the reasons that the first descriptor that comes to mind when someone asks me what I do is “bilingual teacher” even though I left the classroom over three years ago in order to pursue a doctoral degree.*

### **PITFALLS OF REPRESENTATION**

“People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are.” (Holland et al., 1998: 1)

When I was working on the proposal for this study, I thought the above story was a ‘nice’ way to show my vested interest in and introduce it: to see how individuals represent and position themselves in their complex and contradictory worlds. The irony is that when I wrote it (and the hundred times I had read it since) I did not consciously and critically think about how I was representing, or authoring, myself. Someone reading my story may notice that I had subconsciously endeavored to author myself in a tidy manner.

With the above words, I authored myself as a caring and loving teacher because my good intentions and dedication to my former students were meant to shine through. With the above words, I authored myself as a down-to-earth academic because I kept my former students in mind as a way to keep me grounded and ‘real’ in the midst of my academic, highfalutin world. With the above words, I authored myself as a heroic figure because I did not choose just any students for my research with Latina/o students. I proposed to valiantly go back to the school where I used to teach in order to explore the circumstances of my former students. With the above words, I authored myself as a

linguistic insider with the students I proposed to work with by using Spanish terminology. With the above words, I authored myself as a *maestra*. Even though I am honored to be spoken to and thought of as my former students' *maestra*, I understand that I did not earn this regard because of something that I did personally or professionally as their teacher, but because of the families' respect for education.

My attempts to stay in a safe place and not complicate myself too much are slowly becoming apparent. Ironically, however, I sought to critically analyze how *others* represented themselves (whether they feel 'comfortable' or not). Since blindspots in my thinking, analyses, and interpretations are an inherent aspect of research, I had to put myself in it and to recognize how I colored it. One person who read the initial italicized story in this chapter saw a "loving teacher that values emotional bonds with students" while another saw a "racist, stereotypical White-girl victory narrative." I do not necessarily disagree with either interpretation. I am a loving racist. I am a White-girl teacher. I have emotional bonds with students who I view stereotypically. Deep down, I am a researcher who is drawn to victory narrative research. I embodied and continue to embody all of the aforementioned contradictions and tensions. I am also a daughter, a mother, a wife, a student, a triathlete, a friend and a member of Generation X.

If I am to appreciate my participants as complex, multi-layered individuals, I must avoid painting myself so simplistically and delve into my many layers and shadows. Examining myself as the researcher in this study will not only broaden the interpretation but also help me to become a stronger advocate for equitable education. Although I have had a long-time interest in the educational inequities that exist for working-class students

and students of color, I began my advocacy from a neo-liberal (Apple, 2001; Darder, 1991) missionary-type stance. As a university student and novice teacher in bilingual education, I approached my 'calling' as an imposing Mighty Mouse singing, "Here I come to save the day!" I chose to work with working-class children of color long before I read Paulo Freire, Henry Trueba, or Peggy McIntosh, but my reasons were quite uni-dimensional and ethnocentric. I thought I could elevate the poor and downtrodden to my level. I slowly am realizing (some of) the consequences of my deficit thinking. I consider myself a 'recovering deficit thinker,' because I do not believe that I can ever completely uncondition myself from my deficit orientation. I think of the infinite number of deficit tapes looping and echoing in my brain. I cannot erase all those tapes, but I can be more aware of the messages they carry and start to make counter-deficit ones. Before my 'heightened' awareness, I could get away with being a bleeding-heart liberal out to do missionary teaching, trying to make the lives better for the poor and downtrodden inner-city kids. Although I still want to play a part in making the lives better for working-class children and children of color, my rationale is much more formed and textured than it was before.

My commitment is real. I have been a teacher at the elementary and university levels for more than ten years. My teaching and research interests are interdisciplinary including bilingual education, early childhood (EC-4), language and literacy development, multicultural education, special education, and teacher preparation. Although I have many interests, issues of social justice and educational equity are common threads that run throughout my agenda as an educator and researcher.

Before I wondered how to get marginalized kids included. Now I am seeing how the system has been set up in an exclusive manner. Before I thought solutions were simple—a matter of good holistic instruction and challenging kids to succeed in authentic ways. Now I am starting to recognize how intricate and complex the perpetuation of the status quo is and how it spills over into everything that we do, say, and think. Before I sermonized to lay aside deficit-model thinking and to step into the light of new paradigm. Now I recognize that I have to consciously seek out my shadow beliefs, pinpoint when I view things through deficit lenses, and continually challenge my prejudices and conditioning. Before I thought I was one of the good guys through my advocacy for bilingual education and the like. Now I recognize that I am an integral part of the system perpetuating hegemony. I have known for a while that the educational system has not been set up for students in the margins to succeed; but now I question if the system has been set up to fail them. One layer at a time, I am starting to remove my multi-layered blinders to the hegemony in our society and am both motivated and alarmed about what I might see.

This study was challenging for me, especially considering that I had to reflect on how my authorings of these former students had not really been amended or challenged since they were in my classroom at the ages of four and five years old. Being a mother of a four year old at the time of this study helped me to realize that I did not give my Pre-K students sufficient credit for their ability to grasp and process the figured worlds around them. When I would visit my former students at Parks Elementary after I stopped teaching there in 2000, I never held deep and meaningful discussions with them about

much of anything. I, for the most part, would flutter among the lunchroom tables giving hugs and saying, “*¡No puedo creer cómo has crecido! ¿Cómo van los estudios? Y tu familia, ¿cómo está?* [I can’t believe how you’ve grown! How’s school going? And how’s your family?]” I admit that I have struggled not to view the students as uni-dimensional objects. In hooks’ (1989) description of “coming to voice,” she states that “[o]nly as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless—our beings defined and interpreted by others” (p.12).

While I continue to struggle to see the students as multi-dimensional *subjects*, I must also struggle with my interpretation of their ‘voices’ since I served as the filter of data. Even though I sprinkled the students’ stories and interview excerpts verbatim throughout this dissertation, I was the one who chose those excerpts, identified my theoretical framework, made sense of the data, and drew conclusions. This study has forced me to reflect on how I ignored students’ complexities with the best of intentions.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the previous chapter, I touched on how other scholars attempt to describe the dynamic identity negotiations of students on the margins. Through this research study, I add to the body of knowledge and research base regarding these issues. In this chapter, I discuss my methodology in relation to the following research questions:

1. How are Latino/a bilingual students’ *formas de ser* [ways of being] revealed in different social spaces?

2. In what ways do these *formas de ser* (dis)accord with traditional notions of school achievement?

I used the following ethnographic research methods: participant observation, handwritten field notes, audiotaped records, interviews, and relevant written artifacts, such as student writing samples and student records.

In this chapter, I first describe the setting for the study: Parks Elementary School (where I taught for four years and conducted my study) and the surrounding community. Second, I discuss the process of participant selection. Then, I explain the data sources and collection, detailing in particular the after-school focus group. Fourth, I explain my procedures for data analysis. Lastly, I touch on issues related to validity and the limitations of the study.

## **THE SETTING**

### **The Community**

Parks Elementary School lies on the outer edge of the school district and, consequently, the city. The school faces west. There are vacant lots/fields on the south and west sides of the school. The neighborhoods adjacent to the school (to the north and the east) are composed of single-family homes built in the eighties and the nineties. In the neighborhood farther east, there are a combination of single-family homes, multi-family homes, apartment complexes, and a fire station. There are not many businesses or community services in the near vicinity. For example, the closest major grocery store, gas

station, and public library are located across a major highway and a distance of at least a mile and a half. A set of railroad tracks separates the school and a local convenience store. At one point, we (some teachers, administrators, and parents) spent the better part of a school year trying to get the owner of the convenience store, who lived in Dallas, to be more vigilant and responsible regarding drug dealing around his store, by maintaining the premises, installing better nighttime lighting, and encouraging the store clerks to be more vigilant and solicit police participation if necessary.

### **The School**

Parks Elementary was built in 1992 and serves Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade students. It has been beyond maximum student capacity for the last several years and is still growing. In the year of the study, the school had approximately 700 students enrolled. Like many schools that serve children from working-class families, Parks struggled to recruit and maintain qualified, experienced teachers. Table 3.1 compares the teacher experience at Parks with the Texas state average. In 2002-03, over half of the teaching faculty at Parks Elementary had taught less than five years, compared to the state average of thirty-six percent (GreatSchools.net, 2005).

Teacher Experience	Parks Elementary	State Average
Beginning	4%	8%
1-5 Years	54%	28%
6-10 Years	13%	18%
11-20 Years	21%	24%
> 20 Years	8%	21%

Table 3.1: Teacher Experience at Parks (2002-03) (GreatSchools.net, 2005)

In addition to high teacher turnover, the administration had experienced a number of changes when the principal of six years, Dr. Jones (a passionate African-American educator from Chicago), left in 2002. In 2002-03, an interim principal was assigned. Although the interim principal solicited the permanent assignment at Parks, another principal, Ms. Padilla, was appointed to the school for 2003-04, which was the year of this study. Ms. Padilla was a former bilingual teacher herself and had worked in the office of bilingual education at the district level.

### **Demographics**

Parks Elementary primarily serves students of color from working-class families. According to the school district's records, the school reported having about 46% of its student population as "at-risk" and 92% as "economically disadvantaged" (a label partly determined by how many students qualify for the federal free and reduced meal plans). When I began teaching in 1996, the Spanish-speaking ELL (English-language learner) population was approximately 25%. The ELL population from the year of the study

(2003-04) was estimated at nearly 40%, while the state average was 15% (GreatSchools.net, 2005). The Latina/o student population has more than doubled since the school first opened. The 2002-03 student population of Parks was approximately 60% Latinas/Latinos and 40% African-American (GreatSchools.net, 2005). Due to mass development of low to moderately priced single- and multi- family homes, trailer subdivisions, and apartments, the current student population has increased to over 780 students (over a 40% increase over the last several years). During her six year tenure, Dr. Jones had actively recruited and hired qualified minority teachers and male teachers in order to provide ethnically-diverse role models for students. As a result, the school had a more diverse teaching faculty than most public schools in the state (See Table 3.2).

Race/Ethnicity of Teachers (2002-03)	Parks	State
African American	50%	9%
American Indian	0%	<1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2%	1%
Hispanic	25%	18%
White	22%	72%

Table 3.2: Ethnicity of Teachers (2002-03) (GreatSchools.net, 2005)

### **Bilingual Education Program**

The school currently offers a transitional bilingual education program to native Spanish-speakers from Pre-K to fifth grade. Before this school year, Parks only offered

bilingual education placements through the fourth grade. Even though we (several of the bilingual teachers from the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee) repeatedly asked Dr. Jones to hire a fifth grade bilingual teacher, our pleas were never heeded. Dr. Jones often told us that she preferred to place the few qualified bilingual teachers that she found at the earlier grade levels. Once Ms. Padilla had become principal, two bilingual fifth grade teachers have been hired at Parks. A focal issue for the administrators and many of the teachers had always been when to transition bilingual students from Spanish to English language instruction, especially considering the restrictions placed on whether students are permitted to take the Spanish-language TAKS and the quality of the translated test itself.

## **Ratings**

The school had received the state rating of “acceptable” for the last six years which indicates that between 50% and 80% of the student population passed the state-mandated skills tests in reading (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grades), mathematics (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grades), and writing (4<sup>th</sup> grade). In 2003, Texas replaced the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) with the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Therefore, the focal students in my study and their classmates took the TAAS in third grade and the TAKS in fourth and fifth grades. I had access to the focal students’ third grade TAAS and fourth grade TAKS scores. Unfortunately, the individual student scores for their fifth grade TAKS were not available in their cumulative files until after the study at Parks had concluded. However, the general scores for the fifth graders as a class at Parks are

compared to state averages (See Figure A.1 in Appendix A). Figure A.2 is the ethnic break down of how fifth graders scored on TAKS the year of the study.

**Fifth Grade (2003-04)**

The year of the study was one of many changes at the fifth-grade level. The fifth grade-class at Parks was departmentalized, which required students to alternate between three classrooms for content area instruction (See Table 3.3).

Time	Schedule
7:30-8:00	Homeroom/S.S.
8-9:45	1 <sup>st</sup> Rotation
9:45-11:30	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rotation
11:30-12:00	3 <sup>rd</sup> Rotation
12:00-12:30	Lunch
12:30-1:05	3 <sup>rd</sup> Rotation
1:05-1:50	Special Areas (Music, Art, & P.E.)
1:50-2:40	3 <sup>rd</sup> Rotation
2:40-2:45	Homeroom

Table 3.3: Rotation Schedule from 8/19/03 through 2/9/04

With departmentalization, each teacher could concentrate on planning and teaching one content area (i.e., Math, Language Arts, and Science) along with Social Studies. As the schedule indicates, Social Studies was pretty much an abandoned content area, purportedly taught during homeroom. It should be noted that school did not officially begin until 7:45. One reason that the three other content areas received a significant portion of the instructional day was because the fifth-grade TAKS covered Math, Science, and Language Arts. Social Studies was not an area tested.

One of the Bilingual Coordinators from the district met with the fifth grade team to urge Parks to assign all current and exited LEP/ELL bilingual students in the classrooms that had bilingual teachers. That way students could receive instructional supports in their native language (Fieldnotes, 12/03). Despite the school district's bilingual education department's recommendation to not departmentalize fifth grade, Parks continued to departmentalize.

Table 3.4 depicts the names of the fifth grade teachers, along with the content areas they had the charge of teaching. From August 2003 through February 2004, Ms. Schaffer was the only teacher who taught three subjects. The other three classrooms taught Social Studies to their homeroom class and three rotations of the same content area. In this table, I also make mention of the fact that Ms. Walther replaced Ms. Dawson in August 2003, because Ms. Dawson was reassigned as a Reading Specialist at Parks. Mr. Ortiz replaced Ms. Vinueza after the Winter Break. As some teachers informed me, Ms. Vinueza found teaching at Parks too stressful for her first teaching assignment. She moved to another city to be closer to her family.

TEACHER	Duties 8/19/03-2/9/04	Duties 2/9/04-5/26/04
Kendall	3 Rotations: Math & S.S.	2 Rotations: Math & Science
Ms. Walther replaced Ms. Dawson 8/03	3 Rotations: L.A. & S.S.	2 Rotations: L.A. & S.S.
Ms. Schaffer	2 Rotations: Bilingual L.A., Bilingual Math, & S.S.	2 Rotations: Bilingual L.A. & Bilingual Math
Mr. Ortiz replaced Ms. Vinueza on 1/6/04	3 Rotations: Science & S.S.	2 Rotations: Science & S.S.

Table 3.4: fifth-grade teachers and duties

In addition to switching between the departmentalized classes, the fifth-grade students at Parks were occasionally reassigned to different rotation groups in order to maintain heterogeneous ability groups, as indicated in Tables 3.5 and 3.6.

	Group A	Group B	Group C
8/19/03-2/9/04	<u>ELIZABETH</u>	Angela (moved to Group C 1/12/04) Alma Iván <u>Lizzie</u> (L.A. w/ Ms. Schaffer)	<u>Belinda</u> <u>Charlie</u> <u>JENIFFER</u> (moved to Group B 1/12/04) <u>JOSÉ</u> <u>Jorge</u> <u>Manuel</u> Octavio Roberto

Table 3.5: Rotation Groups and Reassignments (focal students are underlined and case study students are capitalized)

2/9/04 - 5/26/04	Scaffer/Ortiz team-teaching	Kendall/Walther team-teaching
Group A	Abel <u>ELIZABETH</u> <u>JOSÉ</u> Octavio Iván	<u>Belinda</u> Angela
Group B	<u>Lizzie</u>	Alma <u>Charlie</u> <u>JENIFFER</u> <u>Jorge</u> <u>Manuel</u> Roberto

Table 3.6: Team-Teaching Groups (focal students are underlined and case study students are capitalized)

## **PARTICIPANT SELECTION**

I used purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998) to work with a group of eight of my former students. In purposeful sampling, a researcher must “determine what selection criteria are essential in choosing the people or sites to be studied” (Merriam, 1998). As mentioned previously, my purposeful sampling pool consisted of the students who were in my Pre-K classroom in 1997-98. All students:

- were classified as “Hispanic” by the school,
- attended an all-day bilingual Pre-K program and continued on with transitional bilingual program through at least third grade,
- were promoted to the subsequent grade level without being retained since Pre-K,
- had been enrolled in the same elementary school for the majority of their elementary career, and
- were native Spanish-speakers.

After the study was approved by IRB and Austin ISD, my first step in the student selection process was to identify how many of my former Pre-K students from 1997-98 were still attending Parks Elementary. Based on attendance records in the office, I determined that sixteen of my former Pre-K students from the 1997-98 school year were attending Parks Elementary: fourteen were enrolled in fifth grade and two were enrolled in fourth grade due to being retained. Then in January, one of my former Pre-K students from the 1996-97 school year, Abel, returned to Parks Elementary from another elementary school. He had been retained so he was enrolled in fifth grade. Fourteen of the sixteen students from 1997-98 had been with me the entire school year. Two students,

Lizzie and Roberto, had left for Mexico mid-way through the school year due to U.S. residency issues. Lizzie and Roberto returned to Parks in first grade.

Once I identified the fifth-grade students eligible according to my purposeful sampling pool, I sought written consent from their parents.

I think that it will be best if I accompany students after school to where they are picked up by their parents. If I choose a couple of students a day to escort to their cars, I can greet the parents and explain the reasons that I'm back at Parks. I will briefly explain the consent forms and tell them that if they are interested in having their child participate in the study that they can return the consent form signed.

(Researcher's Log, 12/03)

I obtained written parental consent to collect data on thirteen of students from my 1997-98 Pre-K class and Abel, the student who had been retained from my 1996-97 Pre-K class. Consent forms were provided in English and Spanish depending on the participants' language preference. All the parents preferred the consent forms in Spanish, except for José's mother who had requested the English version.

Then, I traced the students' personal and educational histories (e.g., previous and present teachers, special programs, LEP status, etc.) and made every attempt to form a heterogeneous focus group with a balance of girls and boys and students currently receiving bilingual education and those exited from bilingual education. Since I was looking at issues related to identity, having a broader range of experiences and knowledge bases enhanced my study. Furthermore, heterogeneous grouping allowed for rich group interactions during the after-school focus group where students with varying experiences, levels of proficiencies, and strengths seemed to assist one another in dynamic ways (Pérez & Torres-Guzmán, 1996; L. S. Vygotsky, 1988; Whitmore &

Crowell, 1994). With the help of my dissertation chair, I made the difficult decision of choosing eight focal students out of the fourteen students who had turned in their parental consent forms. Table 3.7 provides the names (pseudonyms) of the focal and non-focal students.

Sex	Focal	Non-focal	Total
Female	4 Students: Belinda López ELIZABETH SÁNCHEZ JENIFFER RIVERA Lizzie Sears	2 Students: Alma Angela	6
Male	4 Students: Charlie Wayne Jorge Suarez JOSÉ RODRÍGUEZ Manuel Gutierrez	4 Students: Abel Iván Roberto Octavio	8

Table 3.7: Focal & Non-focal students (2003-2004)

I found it interesting that Lizzie and Charlie chose Anglo-sounding names. Lizzie chose her first name as a result of the TV program Lizzie McGuire. Charlie chose his last name because he liked John Wayne.

### DATA SOURCES AND COLLECTION

Since I planned to study social issues, relationships, and other phenomena in detail, I used multiple forms of data collection drawing from qualitative research methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). Observations during the regular school day and the after-school focus group provided pertinent information in relation to students' social interactions and academic wellbeing. The students and I corresponded through dialogue journal entries. I also conducted interviews with the students, parents, and teachers. In

addition to the data collected via the after-school focus group, interviews, and observations, I kept a reflection log throughout the study to record personal thoughts, questions, and reactions. Below I will discuss the data sources—specifying the rationale behind them and what they entailed.

### **The After-School Focus Group**

I invited the eight focal students to partake in an after-school focus group. Much of the data came from the after-school focus group. The ten-week after-school focus group yielded data in the forms of: (1) slideshows using students' digital pictures; (2) PowerPoint presentations; (3) audio- records; and (4) fieldnotes of participant observations.

Students at Parks Elementary were dismissed from school at 2:45 in the afternoon. In order to minimize the time students spent away from their classrooms and after-school responsibilities, the eight focal students met with me from 2:45 until 3:45 two days per week for ten weeks, for a total of about 20 hours. The project took place in both the elementary school library and in the bilingual reading specialist's small classroom.

*Digital pictures/slideshows.* Eisner (1997a) describes *aesthetic forms of representation* as “the forms we use to represent what we think—literal language, visual images, number, poetry—[that] have an impact on how we think and what we can think about” (p.349). I originally planned to conduct the after-school focus group and focus

solely on the students' 'literal language' (i.e., written and oral language). However, focusing solely on oral and written language would limit the students' facility to draw upon, tap into, and express how they make sense of and interpret their lives—their general semiotic capacity (Oller & Damico, 1991). Therefore, I expanded the after-school focus group to include alternative, or aesthetic, forms of representation in addition to the 'literal' ones that are typically the most valued in schools (Eisner, 1997a, 1997b).

McCarthy (2001) names one limitation of her study of elementary students' identities as not going beyond literal language and suggests "[a]lternative techniques to encourage students to talk about identity are needed. Activities such as asking students to draw pictures of themselves" (p.146) would be beneficial. By incorporating students' digital pictures into the after-school focus group, students were able to explore their identities in an alternative way.

One-by-one the students had a digital camera that I provided for at least a twenty-four hour period on a rotating basis. Each student had the camera at least two times during the course of the study. I instructed them to take pictures of images that somehow represented their lives. The pictures, along with other topics, acted as springboards to discussion of school- and non-school-related topics. For the first seven weeks of the after-school focus group, we viewed the students' digital pictures recorded on a floppy using a laptop and an LCD projector. Each time we met, we were able to view one or two students' pictures. As the images were projected on the wall in the small classroom where we met, the student photographer would provide commentary for the pictures. Sometimes the commentary would be a brief, "Esa es mi tía. [That's my aunt.] Next picture." Other

times, the pictures seemed to inspire a lengthier story or anecdote. The other seven students and I would periodically chime in with our observations or our own stories. For example, a picture of José's dog with her eleven puppies spurred a connection for everyone. Some students started talking about how they were going to ask their parents if they could have one of José's new baby pups. Other students, like Charlie and Manuel, started to reminisce about the last time José's dog had pups in first grade. One of Charlie's dog's was from that previous litter and Manuel had taken one home in first grade, only to have to return it when his parents nixed that idea.

For the last three weeks of the after-school focus group, I showed the students how to use PowerPoint presentations. The students inserted their own digital pictures into the PowerPoint slides. I told them to write stories about them. Jeniffer and Belinda were the only students who chose to work together on their PowerPoint presentations. The other six students chose to work on their own. They discovered all types of tricks in Powerpoint like changing backgrounds and playing with different fonts. We viewed the students' PowerPoint presentations on the last day of the after-school focus group during our pizza party. The pizza party was intended to give closure to the after-school focus group sessions.

*Language use.* Most of the conversations regarding the pictures were a beautiful mix of Spanish, English, and code-switching between the both. Interestingly, the students switched to mostly English for the last four weeks of the after-school meetings because I

had given the students the charge of making PowerPoint presentations to show on the last day of the focus-group meetings.

Most kids are writing their PowerPoint's in English! Manuel didn't know what else to write on the slide with his brother's door mat with "Not Welcome" on it. I told him, "*Me gustó lo que dijiste de que lo compró en la pulga donde un señor lo pinta así.* [I like how you told [the group] that your brother bought the mat at the flea market where the man paints messages like that.]" So he wrote "my brother bought it at the Flea Market." In English. Evidence that he may feel like it's a contrived school assignment.

(Researcher's Log, 3/7/04)

I wanted to encourage students to use Spanish throughout the focus group meetings and the project. I felt that accepting all modes of expression would not only send them a message that I valued their languages, but also as a more holistic window into their *formas de ser*. I expected that the issue of code-switching would surface during the students' interactions. Code-switching has been defined as the alteration between two languages such as Spanish and English in a rule-governed grammatical way within a single sentence or discourse (Franquiz & Reyes, 1998). Given that my perspective on this matter influenced the data analysis, I will explain my point of view. Stemming from a deficit paradigm, code-switching has been historically viewed as "interference" with language learning and communication (Franquiz & Reyes, 1998). I, like others, view it from a resource angle. Code-switching has definite conventional rules (Reyes, 1991) and is common within most bilingual communities (Perez, 1998a; Franquiz & Reyes, 1998). For example, if a child composes a text in English and substitutes words from her native language, she is demonstrating bilingual competence and conveying her thoughts. Franquiz and Reyes (1998) encourage educators to perceive code-switching in a more

positive light, as a “fund of knowledge” and value code-switching as yet another component of our multivoiced society.

## **Observations**

In addition to the data collected during the after-school focus group, I collected background and experiential information by observing students during the school day. Participant observations were made in several contexts. A participant observer “sees things firsthand and uses his or her own knowledge and expertise in interpreting what is observed rather than relying upon once-removed accounts from interviews” (Merriam, 1998: 96). First, as mentioned previously, I made observations as facilitator-researcher during the after-school focus group where I paid close attention to student interactions. Second, school observations were made. Typically from December 2003 through May 2004, I observed on and off during the three-hour period between 11:45 (just before lunch) and 2:45 (dismissal).

I usually arrived at Parks just before the fifth graders lined up for lunch at approximately 11:45am. Most teachers and other adults went to the front of the line to purchase their food. I, however, would observe and interact with students in the hallway and lunch line. I enjoyed the excited chatter of the students discussing what happened in class that morning, the previous night’s television shows, or family happenings. After eating lunch with some of the students, I would accompany the four fifth grade classes as they lined up to go to their classrooms. I usually went with one of the four classes to their classroom for the twenty minutes of instructional time before they had to line up again

for Special Areas (i.e., Art, Music, or P.E.). During the forty-five minutes of Special Areas time, I would do a variety of things including: (a) tagging along with the fifth grade teachers during their 45-minute planning period—attending grade-level meetings, one-on-one informal talks, helping them with paperwork, and/or prepare for a class party. I found that I could strike up informal conversations regarding the students, instructional content, or teaching and disciplinary demands of the district/school; (b) going to the school library to respond in students’ dialogue journals (explained in later section), to burn copies of their digital pictures to a CD, or to write in my researcher’s reflection log or fieldnotes journal; (c) discussing issues with school personnel such as the bilingual education specialist; or (d) observing during the students’ P.E. class a total of four times and during their Art class a total of five times. I never observed during Music because I was never invited by the teacher.

After Special Areas, I would once again line up with the classes as they returned to their classrooms for the last forty-five minutes of the day. School observations primarily focused on students’ daily interactions with peers and teachers. Fieldnotes and reflection journals were kept pertaining to observations made during the regular school day and during the after-school focus group.

### **Interviews and *Pláticas***

An interview is often touted as a conversation with a purpose. For their research on funds of knowledge, González et al. (1997) stated that they tried to avoid formal interviews “conducted as a unilateral extraction of information” and to create an

atmosphere that promoted dialogue and elicited narratives. I would like to believe that my knack for interviewing merely seemed like an informal conversation, but I would be ignoring a couple of important factors. First, I had never done this before. So it was going to take some practice. Second, I would be ignoring significant issues of power and motive underlying this methodology (Scheurich, 1997). After all is said and done, interviewing is a research method. As with any methodology, I had to contend with its downsides and be reflective about its consequences. Scheurich (1997) cautions not to fall in the teleological trap of equating interviews with an ideal of joint construction of meaning; rather “interactions and meaning are a shifting carnival of ambiguous complexity, a moving feast of differences interrupting differences” (p.66).

Since I was the students’ first formal teacher and was the facilitator of the after-school focus group, I strived to build on my previously established relationships with the students and their families during the open-ended interviews and *pláticas* [chats]. During interviews with the teachers, I asked to hear stories about the students that characterized their identity negotiations in school regarding their peer and adult interactions.

I interviewed each of the focal students a minimum of two times and a maximum of four times. Each interview lasted between twenty minutes and an hour. I conducted the first interviews one-on-one during the students’ lunchtime. I received the teachers’ permission to keep the student being interviewed ten minutes past their official lunchtime. I interviewed the students either in the bilingual reading specialist’s room (the same room where we met for the after-school focus group) or the conference room. I conducted the next set of interviews off campus at the local public library. I generally

took two students to the public library after school. While one student played/worked on the computers set up for children and adolescents for half an hour, I interviewed the other student. Once the student's thirty minute computer time limit had expired, the students would switch. On occasion, the student would opt to work less time on the computer and join the student being interviewed. Therefore, some of the interviews include two students as opposed to one. I found that the two-on-one interviews changed the tone of the conversations. The students were more apt to start making fun of other students or complain about teachers and doing school. In the one-on-one interviews, we touched on more intimate and family-related topics, in addition to school-related ones. The non-focal students were also interviewed at least once either one-on-one or two-on-one in the local public library.

Although I had initially planned to conduct interviews with all the focal students' parents, coordinating the parents' schedules with my own proved to more difficult than first anticipated. I conducted only one formal interview with Elizabeth's mother, Mrs. Sánchez. Mrs. Sánchez worked at Parks as a lunchroom monitor so it was easier to coordinate our schedules for the interview. I found that informal *pláticas* and visits to the home were more welcomed by and less obtrusive for the families. I did not have as much contact with Lizzie, Jorge, Charlie, and Manuel's parents because they picked their children up from Parks after the focus group meetings. However, I often took Elizabeth, Jeniffer, Belinda, and José home at the conclusion of our after-school focus group sessions. I would drop them off in a different order after each session. As a result, the parents and/or students would often invite me in their home for a visit. Therefore, the

*pláticas* allowed me to observe and partake in family discussions. After the visits, I would drive to another street, pull over, and either dictate audio-fieldnotes or write in my researcher's reflection log.

In order to gain insights into the teachers' perceptions of student participation in school settings, I chatted with students' current and former teachers. I conducted an informal interview with each of the fifth grade teachers at least once. However, the interviews were not as fruitful as I had hoped because I tried to cover too many topics at once (e.g., high-stakes testing, departmentalization, the focal and non-focal students). Given that the interviews were conducted before I had chosen the three case studies, there was very little depth on any specific student.

Interviews were audio taped (with consent) and later transcribed for analysis. If a participant appeared to be uncomfortable or reluctant at any point during the interviews, his or her choice not to respond was respected and validated. Follow-up interviews with the students were scheduled in order to clarify, explicate, or expand on details provided during the initial interviews.

### ***Paseos***

I took the focal and non-focal students on two *paseos* [mini-fieldtrips]: (1) a walking tour of the UT campus and (2) canoeing down Town Lake at Zilker Park. I thought of this for a couple of reasons. First, I thought that it would be a good way to show my gratitude to all of the students who participated in my study while allowing me to interview them and take notes on their behaviors as if I were some positristic

researcher ticking away on my note pad from the back of the classroom. Second, I wanted to see how forming these mini-figured worlds during the *paseos* would give me additional insights into the students' improvisational reactions. I formed groups of three and four students because a maximum of four students could fit in my car at one time.

UT Campus	Zilker Park
<u>March 8, 2004:</u> Belinda Charlie JOSÉ Lizzie	<u>March 15, 2004:</u> Charlie JOSÉ Jorge Manuel
<u>March 8, 2004:</u> ELIZABETH Jorge Manuel	<u>April 1, 2004:</u> Belinda Elizabeth Lizzie JENIFFER

Table 3.8: Groupings for *Paseos* with focal students

<u>May 27, 2004:</u> Alma Angela JENIFFER Abel	<u>May 27, 2004:</u> Alma Angela JENIFFER Abel
<u>May 28, 2004:</u> Iván Octavio Roberto	<u>May 28, 2004:</u> Iván Octavio Roberto

Table 3.9: Groupings for *Paseos* with non-focal students

Tables 3.8 and 3.9 indicate the groupings and which *paseos* we went on. On March 8th, I took all the focal students except for Jeniffer to the UT campus. Jeniffer could not go because her parents were taking her for an eye examination. I took the group of four in the morning and the group of three in the afternoon. I basically decided on the

groupings for that *paseo*. For the second *paseo*, the students in the after-school focus group wondered if they could split up into boys and girls. They also wanted to be able to choose where they could go. I told them that as long as their parents agreed that I could take them anywhere within the city limits for a four-hour *paseo*. I threw out some ideas that would not cost a lot of money and that would be fun, such as hiking on the greenbelt, sightseeing on Mount Bonnell, and canoeing on Town Lake. The boys liked the idea of going to Zilker Park. The girls, however, had more difficulty making up their minds. Elizabeth and Belinda wanted to go to GattiTown (A pizza place with games) or the shopping mall. Jeniffer started to cry, saying that her father would not allow her to go to either of those places. In the end, the girls decided to be “copycats” and to go canoeing as well.

After the school year ended, I took the first group on non-focal students and Jeniffer (because she missed the UT trip in March) on the walking tour of UT and canoeing in the same day. The following day, I took the remaining students. The canoeing trip cost each student \$2.50. Each student brought a picnic food item to share with the group.

### **Dialogue Journals**

For the purposes of this study, I define dialogue journals as a written conversation between the students and me (Peyton & Reed, 1990; Popkin, 1985; Reyes, 1991). Both focal and non-focal students were given dialogue journals and encouraged to correspond

with me. My introductory letter to all the focal students was written in Spanish on a computer, printed out, and taped to the first page of their journals.

26 de enero 2004

Hola J

¿Cómo estás? Estoy muy contenta de empezar este proyecto. Esta es nuestra primera carta J

Sabes que tengo una hija, ¿verdad? Su nombre es Neenah Alexis Cuero. Va a cumplir 4 añitos el miércoles. Todavía no lo puedo creer. Es muy linda. Le gusta bailar, hablar con todo el mundo, y jugar con nuestro gato (que se llama Cali). Neenah habla dos idiomas—español e inglés.

Cuéntame de tu familia. ¿Cómo es tu familia? ¿Tienes mascotas? Cuéntame lo que quieras.

De mí te cuento que he estado estudiando desde que dejé de enseñar en Parks. Estoy terminando mi doctorado en educación bilingüe. Voy a ser doctora como la Dra. Jones. Me gusta viajar y bailar. Tengo un esposo que baila muy bien. Así nos conocimos—bailando.

Bueno me despido. Pregúntame lo que quieras en tu carta J

Hasta muy pronto,  
Kimberley

January 26, 2004

Hello J

How are you? I am very excited to start this project. This is our first letter J

You know that I have a daughter, right? Her name is Neenah Alexis Cuero. She will be four years old on Wednesday. I still can't believe it. She's very pretty. She likes to dance, talk to everybody, and play with our cat (named Cali). Neenah speaks two languages—Spanish and English.

Tell me about your family. What's your family like? Do you have any pets? Tell me what you wish.

About me, I'll tell you that I have been studying since I stopped teaching at Parks. I am finishing up my doctorate in bilingual education. I am going to be a doctor like Dr. Jones [the former principal]. I like to travel and dance. I have a husband who is a very good dancer. That's how we met—dancing.

I'll say goodbye for now. Ask me what you wish in your letter.

See you soon,  
Kimberley

I told the students orally during the after-school focus group sessions on several occasions that they could choose to write in either Spanish or English. Some students, like José and Charlie, never wrote more than a short paragraph. Other students, like Jeniffer and Elizabeth, wrote to me consistently in Spanish through the end of the school year. Since Jeniffer wrote to me in our dialogue journal more frequently and with longer

passages than any other student in the study, many of her passages are included in Jeniffer’s case study chapter (Chapter V) in order to illustrate her complex layers as a bilingual Latina pre-adolescent. To give an idea of what a prolific writer Jeniffer was over the three months that we exchanged our dialogue journal, I was able to choose passages from over forty hand-written pages. As the following table demonstrates, the other focal students wrote less frequently and fewer pages overall than Jeniffer.

Focal Student	# of pages by student	# of pages by me	frequency & duration of correspondence
Belinda	23	22	sporadic through May
Charlie	8	12	sporadic through May
ELIZABETH	15	25	regular through May
JENIFFER	41	23	regular through May
Jorge	10	18	regular through March
JOSÉ	8	16	sporadic through April
Lizzie	11	11	sporadic through May
Manuel	9	17	regular through March

Table 3.10: Dialogue Journal Entries

### DATA ANALYSIS

Although I do not believe that I, as a researcher, have the power to “give voice” to another (Sparkes, 1998), the after-school focus group served as a forum that invited students to share (i.e., voice) their own experiences through photography and discussion. In order to organize the data and my interpretations of the identities, my role as a researcher were to draw on this multi-representational forum, along with the home visits, interviews, and observations, in the most reflexive manner possible. Some misuses of student voices in research may lead to students being portrayed in ways that their complexity is drowned out—generally resulting in victory narratives (Cary, 1999),

uncomplicated accounts of assimilation (Andrade, 1998), or tragic tales of social reproduction (McCollum, 1999).

Even though I was somewhat tempted to comb through the data with “predetermined categories of analysis” (Patton, 1990), I strived to remain open and attentive throughout the simultaneous processes of inquiry, analysis, and interpretation. The students’ representations of themselves and my interactions with and observations of them served as the primary guides in the research themes and findings. Data gathered was analyzed by coding emerging themes (Merriam, 1998). The major themes focused on students’ perceptions of their multiple, complex worlds (e.g., home, academic, peer-related) and the dialogic interplay that took place within these worlds affecting everyday relationships and performance.

As with any study, I had to “attend to whatever balance between analysis and interpretation best achieves the purposes of the research” (Wolcott, 1995). Of course, this balance is not an exact science. As Wolcott suggests, I tried to become my own Devil’s Advocate so I was always questioning my results and interpretations. I analyzed data—transcriptions of interviews and project sessions, samples of representational forms, and written fieldnotes—and searched for themes regarding students’ daily complexities. Employing numerous methodological techniques to study students’ figured worlds afforded me a more textured view of their complex and dynamic lives.

Reflecting upon how I went about analyzing, interpreting, and writing the three case studies that are presented in this dissertation, there was no exact science how I went about it. The most important aspect of what I am about to describe below is that I

constantly discussed the process with my dissertation chair and two of my writing groups with fellow doctoral students. Without, their guidance and feedback, I would not have made as much sense of the data as I did.

Following is a technical description of how I coded and analyzed the data using hard copies and electronic copies of my data. I first printed out all my fieldnotes, reflection journals, and interview transcripts. After reading through the data a few times, I flagged relevant data sets regarding broader topics that I knew I would be covering in my data chapters (i.e., case studies on Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José). After flagging the paper document with common themes, I searched for the electronic version and copied and pasted all the data sets relating to one broad topic in one Microsoft Word document. Then I read through the data sets while referring to my research questions. Next, I would make preliminary outlines of themes that tied my argument together based on data sets. I copied and pasted the most relevant data sets within the preliminary outlines. Then, I reviewed the data again to see if I left anything out that could enhance the chapter's argument. I would work on the preliminary outline to make it more workable which sometimes entailed condensing several themes and placing them under broader umbrellas and other times entailed separating out themes that I had originally placed under the same, larger umbrella. As the working outline with corresponding data sets became tighter, I would take out less important data sets and place them in an overflow/miscellaneous category at the end of the document for possible later use. I would continue to re-configure the working outline until the argument flowed more smoothly and in an order that allowed me to make reasonably logical transitions between

themes. Then I expanded and clarified the arguments within the outline. Finally I worked on the text of the chapter by copying a chunk of the outline into a new document and work solely on that chunk. As I wrote, many times I would think of something to expand upon that was in another section of the outline so I would go back to the outline and add to the appropriate place.

### ISSUES OF VALIDITY

#### ***Para una Gringa* [For a Gringa]**

*Several years ago, my husband and I were dancing salsa in local club and he told me to keep my back straighter. I immediately got defensive and said, “Everyone tells me I dance really well. Don’t you think I dance well?” He responded, “Pues, bailas bien para una gringa. ¿Pero quieres bailar bien para una gringa o quieres bailar bien? [Well, you dance well for a gringa. But do you want to dance well for a gringa or do want to dance well?]*”

The above anecdote parallels my experience as a researcher. I do not want to research well for a *gringa*; I want to research well. But to research well, I have to look at myself as a *gringa* and the baggage I bring along with me—the good, the bad, and the contradictory. In this analysis of my whiteness and its bearing on my research, I would like to point out a paradox. Race cannot be examined out of context ignoring other aspects of myself such as age, gender, native language, SES, nationality, etc (McCarthy, 1998). For the purposes of this section however, I focus primarily on my whiteness

(adhering to a dreaded reductionist orientation if you will). I briefly examine my collective identity regarding White privilege as someone who was reared in and reflects the dominant, White culture. Then, I enumerate ways that I endeavored to keep myself in check with my research of students who differ from me racially, economically, and linguistically.

Even though my mom and dad were raised on modest farms in Texas and Michigan, respectively, I was raised in a White, middle-class military family adhering to and conditioned with the doctrines of individualism and meritocracy (see Chapter 1). White privilege was not acknowledged. We were fish unaware of the water (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We did not recognize power differentials between us and the “others” (Delpit, 1995; McIntosh, 1988). Even if we—on occasion—admitted that there was a disadvantage for the “others” due to their darker skin color, we would not see the flip side of the coin: that we benefited from our whiteness.

Peggy McIntosh (1988) likens White privilege to many males’ thoughts on sexism and male privilege. Many males might admit that women don’t get the fair end of many deals because of their sex; yet many males don’t see how they benefit because of their sex. Their privilege is viewed as normal—the way things should be in a fair and just society. In summary, I saw how racism and White privilege hurt the “other” but did not see how those same social constructs privileged me. Like many White people from the dominant culture, I viewed “others” from a deficit-orientation (Delpit, 1995; Foley, 1997; Valencia, 1997). My commitment to educational equity has become much more personal as a wife and mother of persons “of color.” Being in a multi-colored, multi-national

family heightens my sensitivity to racism and discrimination. However unlike my husband and my daughters, I carry my unearned White privilege with me (McIntosh, 1988; Scheurich, 1997).

I must be aware of the bearing of my whiteness on my research. I can claim that I did my best to not demean, water down, or sensationalize my participants or their lives (Behar, 1993), but I have to be aware that the research process itself is based on the dominant ideology (Scheurich & Young, 1997). The problems/inequities that I perceive, my research questions, the methodology I use, and the analysis have racist epistemological roots (Scheurich & Young, 1997). Therefore, I must consciously work to identify my own biases and racist ways of thinking. I have to contend with the fact that the meanings of, behind, and surrounding the analyzed texts were filtered through my own biased lenses (Merriam, 1998). There is no easy way to deal with analysis. Like Bruner (1986), I agree that depth is better achieved by considering multiple points simultaneously.

Given my research design, my roles as participant-observer ranged “across a continuum from mostly observation to mostly participation . . . at different points at different times in the data collection process” (Glesne, 1999: 60). For example my role as the facilitator of the after-school focus group was much more participatory than my role as an interviewer. My role as an interviewer was more participatory than my role as an observer in the students’ classrooms. I recognize that no matter what role I played throughout the research process, I not only affected the happenings I set out to study but I also perceived and interpreted the data through my own lenses (Merriam, 1998).

In order to increase the study's trustworthiness, I incorporated some of the verification procedures outlined in educational research literature (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Walker, 1985). First, I carried out *persistent observation* in order to "develop trust, learn the culture, and check out [my] hunches" (Glesne, 1999: 32). Second, the multiple data sources not only provided valuable information in their own right, but also helped in the *triangulation* of the data and analysis, thereby strengthening "reliability as well as internal validity" (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative research, observing and examining a phenomenon from various points of view are important (Walker, 1985). Erlandson et al. (1993) state, "Perhaps the best way to elicit the various and divergent constructions of reality that exist within the context of a study is to collect information about different events and relationships from different points of view" (p. 31).

The third procedure was *peer debriefing* (Glesne, 1999). In addition to meeting with my dissertation chair incalculable hours, I had two official writing/peer-debriefing groups with fellow doctoral students. On average, I met with each debriefing group once a month where we shared our research and asked for clarification from one another. By asking me pertinent questions about my study, steering me toward appropriate literature, drawing parallels between my specific field and the broader issues of schooling and socialization, and giving me insights into Discourses that are not my own, this type of peer-debriefing allowed for deeper analysis of the data. The fourth procedure entailed *prolonged engagement* at Parks and with the students. Prolonged engagement contributes to establish credibility according to some researchers (Merriam, 1998; Ritchie & Lewis,

2003). I employed these final two procedures in my actual write-up of the study: *clarification of research biases* and *use of rich, thick description*. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) remind us that "...the role of the researcher is to provide the 'thick description' of the researched context and the phenomena found (views, processes, experiences, etc.) which will allow others to assess their transferability to another setting" (p. 268).

### **Tensions and Challenges**

Prior to the onset of the study, the last time I had consistent contact with the focal students in the study had been over five years before when they were in my Pre-K class. I kept in touch with my former students who continued at Parks as they moved up through the grades, but rather inconsistently. I continued to teach at Parks for two more years after they left my Pre-K classroom so I saw the students and their families around the school and at school functions. After I stopped teaching at Parks in 2000, I went back to the school two to four times a year to visit former students and colleagues. By choosing the school where I used to teach as the site for my research, I began the study with several (assumed) advantages and disadvantages. First, I had knowledge of the students when they began the formal schooling process at the ages of four and five. Second, I knew the students and their families and attempted to build on those relationships in order to increase their level of trust throughout the research process. While I recognize that my students and their families would not blindly trust my intentions and motives as a researcher, some apprehension concerning the research process (e.g., human subject permission forms, tape recording interviews, etc.) might have been lessened as a result of

our previous relationships. Third, I was able to capitalize on the relationships that I have established with many of the school's faculty and staff over the previous seven years in order to lessen being seen as a complete outsider within the school boundaries.

Thus far, the methodological aspects of the study seem to have been described in relatively smooth terms. However, there were definitely tensions and challenges that I had not foreseen, especially as a novice researcher. In this section, I briefly describe some of those tensions.

***Figuring out my place.*** I found myself reluctant to ask the teachers with whom I used to work critical probing questions regarding their perceptions of the students and their pedagogical practices within the larger system that dictated narrow ways of looking at academic achievement. I struggled to author myself in this figured world of Parks. For four years, I existed as a teacher in that physical space. Upon my return, however, I sensed that teachers were more cautious and suspicious as to my motives as researcher. Students also struggled to make sense of my interest in their lives. One day when we were walking to the conference room for our first interview, José asked, “You my mentor, Ms. Kimberley?” He tried to liken my being at the school to the other “labeled” adults who hang out with kids in their figured worlds—a mentor.

***Choosing students.*** I was lucky in the fact that I had fifteen students in my possible purposeful sampling pool. I was even luckier that all the students (except one) turned in parental consent forms to participate. So then, came the dilemma. Who to

choose? The only student who I was sure about not choosing was Alma. Although she would have provided great insights into the study, I felt that I would have been biased against her because I had made a personal loan to her adult sister-in-law for a significant amount of money that never was repaid. Other than Alma, there were no students that I felt like I had to or should exclude. After meeting with my dissertation chair a few times, we narrowed down the list to which students I would invite to partake as focal students, based on varying behaviors and outlooks on school.

I can't help but to feel guilty when I see the kids who I didn't choose. I feel like a heel—like the kid who didn't pick the others for my kickball team. Especially the girls, Alma and Angela. Roberto and Octavio also seem bummed out that they weren't the chosen ones. I've got to keep looking forward and stay focused. (Researcher's Log, 2/5/04)

I had a hard time excluding the others from the focal meetings, but I ate lunch with, interviewed, and gave dialogue journals to all students. I also took all students on the *paseos*.

***Questioning my motives.*** The following excerpt from my researcher's reflection log combines many of my confusions and frustrations with the study, particularly with the after-school focus group.

I hadn't responded to the kids in their dialogue journals this past week because I was feeling guilty about the distance I was placing between me and the kids that wasn't there before. Did I feel that I had to place distance between me and the kids in order to carry out "effective and legitimate" work in the after-school context? How much did playing into perceived institutional perspectives of "legitimate" learning play into my decision to have "products" in the first place? And I can't kid myself either. I also chose Powerpoints because it was safe and something I know about. Behavior was another aspect of me thinking about how the kids are being perceived under my authority. In other words, how I'm being

perceived by other adults in the school building. In the beginning, I didn't worry so much about how the kids were behaving or if they said a cuss word. But I quickly became self-conscious about how they looked in the hallway. If they laughed or talked too loud, if they came out into the hallway a little too fast or rambunctiously, if they were overheard saying a cuss word or telling an "inappropriate story," if...

Who the hell am I in this figured world of this elementary school? It makes me think about Schaffer's comment about which teacher attitudes seem to be valued in the school. She basically said that the teachers who operate in a negative state of urgency are the most valued at the school. Is that how I'm seeking my validation through my perception of how the school perceives success?

Damn! Am I on to something? I have to be able to express how I'm feeling in order for me to understand the context of the study and my positionality. I'm wanting the position of teacher and rejecting it at the same time. I'm conflicted. I'm ambiguous. What is my role? How are my actions affecting the kids?

Powerpoints: I also thought the kids would like manipulating their pictures on the slides, choose backgrounds and templates. Of course, I was trying to finagle some writing out of them. (Researcher's Log, 3/4/04)

The above reflection represents the end of the honeymoon period so to speak. I was beginning to question my role as researcher, what type of data I was really seeking, and how I was affecting the students in the study.

***Student expectations.*** The students had a certain expectation of fun for the after-school focus group. They were chosen for it—a special class with Ms. Kimberley. I was often authored as fun and laid-back. When some of the students, especially Jorge and Manuel, saw this insecure, teachery researcher; they seemed to buck against me. They actually stopped talking to me for a while once the after-school sessions ended. Manuel stated, "I didn't have fun anyway! I only came [to the after-school sessions] because I

liked taking pictures and for the snacks.” I had a hard time with the “rejection”, as evidenced below:

This doesn't feel good. Wimpy White teacher! Why don't I get mad at [Jorge and Manuel]? They're totally exerting power over me. Will there be attrition in my 8 focal students. Is it bullshit when we say that participants can withdraw from the study at any time, no questions asked?

I wanted to look at issues of identity and agency. Well, here it is! I guess I don't want it in my face though. How do I feel being on the receiving end of this agency of resistance. When we talk in theory about this stuff, feeling it from all sides is usually absent. It's agency when you're on their side. Resistance when we're on the receiving end. Feelings are in there. We look for silences. We look for tensions. When do we confront? When do we let it go? We've said along that we want kids to have a voice, teachers to have a voice. But if the kids don't want to talk about it, then we're stuck in the margins not knowing where anybody stands. These silences/tensions...

I fell from their pedestal of fun, not-like-the-other-teachers Ms. Kimberley. Fell from their graces. Yes, no cumplo con todo lo que digo/prometo. I make mistakes. I can be whiney.

Was this behavior predictable? Could I have foreseen this coming?  
(Researcher's Log, 3/30/04)

*Catching up to Myself.* I feel that I am constantly playing catch-up to where I would like to stake my claim. I say that I want to explore students' multidimensionality. Yet, I constantly have to keep my uni-dimensional authorings of myself and others in check. I speak of the dangers of essentialism and reductionism. Yet, I fall into those socialized traps all the time. I would like to claim a critical paradigm for myself. Yet, I find myself analyzing and writing more like a straight interpretivist. I caution against seeing agency and structures as a dichotomous arrangement. Yet, I hear myself speaking in “either/or” language. In sum, I see where I am trying to go; I am just not there yet.

## **Limitations**

There were several limitations to the study. Similar to Valenzuela (1999), I had requested that a staff mailbox be assigned to me in order to collect faculty/staff memos and other archival data. Unfortunately, the principal denied my request so my access to much of the daily memos and happenings was limited. Another limitation was that I did not include the two students from my 1997-98 class who were retained and in fourth grade at the time of the study. Including one or both of them would have proven valuable in answering my research questions regarding their *formas de ser* and academic achievement.

## **UPCOMING CASE STUDIES**

The next three chapters present case studies on Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José. A case study design is used “to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (Merriam, 1998: 19).

The primary data sources that I will draw upon for the three case studies in this dissertation are participant observations, dialogue journal entries, and interviews. I was present at the school nearly every day from December through May, averaging five days a week for two-three hours per day. The observations took place during school primarily during lunch, transition times in the hall, special areas like P.E., and afternoon content area instruction. The after-school focus group meetings and *paseos* also provided me with ample opportunities for participant observations and informal conversations. Data

also includes entries in my researcher's reflection log and informal conversations with peers and school personnel.

Much like Dyson (1993), I strived "to allow insight into the unofficial social dynamics that undergird the official world and, more specifically to this project, to the dynamics that undergirded the school experiences" (p.53) of the focal students.

Therefore, I primarily examined the interactions of Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José and their classmates in their "unofficial" figured worlds of school (e.g., lunch, recess, transitions between classes, after school).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ELIZABETH: DANCING ON THE “BUBBLE”**

I chose Elizabeth as one of my case studies because of her fluid ability to modify her *formas de ser* depending on the figured world in which she engaged. In this chapter, I delve into the complexities of Elizabeth’s daily life negotiations, particularly related to her figured worlds of school. First, I give pertinent background information relating to Elizabeth’s family life and interests. Next, I explore two ways Elizabeth tended to be authored by herself and others: (1) as a popular girl and (2) as a ‘good’ student. In addition to providing evidence of these two authoring constructions, I will problematize how these constructions seemed to yield limited opportunities for Elizabeth to flourish academically.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Before and after school, Elizabeth could often be seen with a bright, orange safety-patrol sash on the far side of the south parking lot, talking with two other fifth graders in the safety patrol and reminding students to walk and to use the sidewalk. She had medium length hair with long wispy bangs that she either pulled back or curled like little corkscrews framing her face. She often had a fashionable purse of some kind to match her day’s outfit—that ranged from a light, pink jogging suit with tennis shoes to a dress with high heels.

In response to my first letter in the dialogue journal (See Methodology Chapter), Elizabeth described a little bit about herself and her family:

...tengo dos hermanos. ... uno esta en el 9 grade..., el otro esta en el 7 grade... Yo tengo 11 años a mi me gusta bailar, cantar, y dibujar. ... A mi papá le gusta bailar como yo y trabajar. A mi mama le gusta *nature like plants and flowers*.

(Journal #1, 2/04)

...I have two brothers. ... one is in ninth grade..., the other one is in seventh grade. ... I am eleven years old. I like to dance, sing, and draw. ... My father likes to dance like me and to work. My mom likes nature like plants and flowers.

(Journal #1, 2/04)

As she indicated in her journal entry, she enjoyed dancing, singing, and drawing.

According to other dialogue journal entries and interviews with Elizabeth and her mother, she also enjoyed going shopping and playing soccer with the boys in her neighborhood.

### **My Recollections**

From my recollections as her Pre-K teacher, I remember Elizabeth as a sociable little girl who had many friends. When she and her classmates played, she often liked to be the director and tell everyone what the premise of their dramatizations would be. She enjoyed circle time, especially when we were singing a song or doing a choral reading of an entertaining poem or a repetitive big book. I used to love looking at her when she would sing or recite something with the group because she would hold her mouth as if she were smiling. When she spoke or sang, her tongue would often be toward the front of her mouth and her mouth would be slightly open. As a result, she had a slight lisp that made her somewhat difficult to understand (especially to a non-native Spanish-speaker like myself).

On the days that Elizabeth would arrive late to school with tousled hair, her mother, Mrs. Sánchez, would accompany Elizabeth into the classroom and say, “Disculpe

el atraso, maestra. Es que andamos bien atrasados esta mañana [Please forgive our tardiness, *maestra*. We were running late this morning.]” Mrs. Sánchez was ever present at the school, offering to help me and her sons’ teachers. I enjoyed having her in the classroom and on fieldtrips. She knew all my students’ names and skillfully redirected students if she thought they were acting disrespectful to classmates and the like. Mrs. Sánchez or one of Elizabeth’s two older brothers would pick her up everyday after school.

### **Elizabeth’s Family**

Mr. Sánchez grew up on his grandparents’ *rancho* in Guanajuato, Mexico. He came to the U.S. in 1982 and started working with a construction company in east Texas. Although Mr. Sánchez’s work was unpredictable at times and seasonal in nature, he had worked for the same construction company for over twenty years. When the company transferred him to Austin in 1986, he met Elizabeth’s mother through a mutual friend. After dating for a year, they moved in together and started a family. They had been in a common-law marriage ever since. Mrs. Sánchez described their relationship below:

Sra. Sánchez: [Mi esposo] estaba viviendo en College Station. Pero se vino para acá porque la compañía lo cambió pa’ acá. ... Y [nosotros estuvimos] saliendo un tiempo—un año. Y después de un año, decidimos vivir juntos. Al año, nació mi hijo más grande. Al siguiente año, nació mi segundo niño. Casi a los dos años—Elizabeth. Y así fue pasando el tiempo. Hasta ahorita que estamos

Mrs. Sánchez: [My husband] was living in College Station. But he moved over here because the company [he worked for] transferred him. ... And [we were] dating for a while—a year. And after a year, we decided to live together. A year later, my eldest son was born. The next year, my second son was born. Almost two years after that—Elizabeth [was born]. And time just kept passing us by. And we have been living

viviendo juntos desde que me junté con él.

KC: ¿Y se casaron?

Sra. Sánchez: Estamos viviendo en unión libre. No estamos casados. Pensamos hacerlo en cualquier rato, porque los niños nos lo piden.

KC: Ah, ¿sí?

Sra. Sánchez: Aunque aquí, usted sabe que se acostumbra a vivir en unión libre, pero pensamos hacerlo en un momento al otro. Casarnos cuando sea posible. Porque los niños—el más grande es el que dice que mejor nos casemos bien porque uno nunca sabe, que el día de mañana puede pasar algo. Y dice que la cuestión de papeles legales [de matrimonio] es mejor. Sí. Y le digo que todo este tiempo yo no necesito esos papeles legales. Pero, sí, lo vamos a hacer. Yo digo en cualquier rato.

KC: algún día.

Sra. Sánchez: Sí. Pues, ya digo “en cualquier rato.” Porque si le digo “algún día” lo miro muy lejano (laughs). Muy lejano. Ya digo “en cualquier rato.” (both laugh). Antes decía, “Mmm, ya en cualquier día. El día que sea. No importa.”

Ya—ahora—ya no. (Laugh). Pues, sí. Así ha sido nuestra vida desde 16 años que hemos estado juntos hasta ahorita. Las cosas siguen. Y allí seguimos nosotros. Y los niños son los que más nos importan, ¿verdad? Tratar de sacarlos adelante.

(Interview, 1/21/04)

together ever since we got together.

KC: Did you get married?

Mrs. Sánchez: We have been together under common law. We are not married. We think we’ll marry at anytime, because the children have been asking us to.

KC: Oh, yeah?

Mrs. Sánchez: And, you know, here, it’s common to live together, but we are thinking about getting married at any moment. We’ll marry as soon as we can get to it. Because the children—the oldest [Gabriel] keeps telling us to do it right because you never know what tomorrow will bring. And he also says that it’s best if we get our legal [marriage] papers in order. Yes. And I tell him that, in all this time, I’ve never needed any kind of legal papers. But yes, we’ll do it. I think we will at any time.

KC: some day.

Mrs. Sánchez: Yes, well, I say “at any time.” Because if I say “some day,” it sounds really far away. (laughs). Very far. I say “at any time.” (both laugh) I used to say, “Hmm. At any time now. Any day. It doesn’t matter.” Not any more. (Laugh). That’s been our life in the sixteen years we have been together. Things haven’t changed. And neither have we. What really matters to us the most are the kids, right? Doing all we can so they can get ahead.

(Interview, 1/21/04)

Mrs. Sánchez was originally from San Luis Potosí, Mexico. In 1982, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, she came to the U.S., immigrating to Brownsville, Texas. Since starting her family, Mrs. Sánchez prided herself on the fact that, for the most part, she had been able to be home with her children when they were not in school:

KC: ¿Y cómo le fue a usted en la escuela en México? ¿Había una escuela donde crecía?

Sra. Sánchez: No más estudié hasta el número 6. La vida es muy diferente—la forma de aprender muy diferente a la de aquí. Y yo no más tuve la oportunidad de estudiar hasta el número 6. Terminé la primaria. Y me vine para acá para los Estados Unidos a trabajar.... Si, desde los 14 años trabajando—limpiando casas. Trabajando en diferentes lugares. De primero para ayudarle a mi familia—mi mamá, mi papá. Ya cuando ya me junté con mi esposo, los primeros 5 años, no trabajé. Después de los 5 años, comencé a trabajar. Que ya no eran tan *babies*. Así empecé a trabajar pero siempre cuando no trabajar tiempo completo para dedicarles tiempo. ... Y ya estoy en la escuela. Y sé cuando van a llegar y allí voy a estar para lo que necesitan, ¿verdad? Comida o lo que sea; empucharles que hagan la tarea. Que no estén solos en la casa. Y a ver siempre y cuando por mi esposo porque ... nunca tiene un horario fijo para salir. ... Trato de, cuando me busco un trabajo, trabajar un horario de que cuando llegan de la escuela. Y también es lo que me ayuda. Y mi esposo no me exige que “tienes que trabajar para ayudar con los gastos de la casa.”

(Interview, 1/21/04)

KC: and how did you do in school in Mexico? Was there a school where you grew up?

Mrs. Sánchez: I only made it to the sixth grade. Life is very different there – the ways of learning is very different from the ones here. And I only had the opportunity to make it to grade six. I finished elementary school. And I came to the States to work.... Yeah, I’ve been working since I was 14 – cleaning houses. Working in different places. At first to help my family – my mom, my dad. After I got together with my husband, I didn’t work for the first 5 years. I started working after the fifth year. When my children were not babies anymore. That’s how I started to work, but not full time so I could spend time with them. ...And I’m in their school. I know that when they go back home, I’ll be there for whatever they need, right? Food, whatever; encourage them to do their homework. That they’re not home alone. And always being on the watch because my husband can’t do that because ...he never has a set schedule. ...When I look for a job, I try to work a schedule that will allow me to be home when the kids get there. And that’s what helps me. And my husband doesn’t demand that I work to help with things at home.

(Interview, 1/21/04)

When Mrs. Sánchez had jobs, she generally worked part-time during school hours. She enjoyed the proximity and flexibility of her last few jobs at Parks Elementary because she could see Elizabeth during the school day, volunteer at the school on her off hours, and be home with her children when they were not in school. She had worked part-time for Parks Elementary for about four years. She started out teaching embroidery after-school to second and third grade girls. Then she helped out in the library part-time until a position for lunchroom monitor opened up. She credited the former principal, Dr. Jones, for actively recruiting her to work and finding jobs for her:

Sra. Sánchez: Sí, por mucho tiempo, la Dra. Jones me había dicho si quería trabajar [en Parks Elementary]. Y nada más me detenía porque todavía estaba muy chiquita Elizabeth. Y pero ya cuando empecé a trabajar, ya empecé a agarrar la onda, ¿verdad? Y, pues, además como estaba en la misma escuela, eso me ha ayudado bastante.

(Interview, 1/21/04)

Mrs. Sánchez: Yeah, for a long time, Dr. Jones had asked me if I wanted to work here [at Parks Elementary]. The only reason I was hesitant was because Elizabeth was still very little. But once I started to work, I got used to the routines, right? And, well, being at the same school as my kids helped me out a lot.

(Interview, 1/21/04)

Unfortunately, in February 2004, Mrs. Sánchez had to leave her job as lunchroom monitor at Parks Elementary. As a result of a high-risk pregnancy in the first trimester, Mrs. Sánchez had to take off an unspecified amount of time from work because her doctor assigned her to bed-rest. She approached me in the library when I was working on one of the computers and requested that I help her write a letter to Ms. Padilla, the principal, and Ms. Johnson, the vice-principal. As she dictated the letter in Spanish, I typed the translation on the computer:

3 February 2004

Dear Ms. Padilla and Ms. Johnson,

I am writing to inform you that I am pregnant. Unfortunately, I have experienced some discomfort and bleeding as I enter my second trimester. Therefore, I will not be able to continue to work for the meantime as I have been assigned to absolute bedrest. I will keep you apprised of my circumstances, especially if I am able to work in the near future. I would appreciate if in the future you could keep me in mind for further employment.

Thank you for your understanding.

Sincerely,  
Teresa Sánchez

At approximately twelve weeks of pregnancy, Ms. Sánchez's doctor informed her that there was no indication of the baby's heartbeat and that it appeared to have stopped growing. The miscarriage (that had to be induced by DNC) was painful for her both physically and emotionally. Not having her job to return to after the miscarriage added to her emotional stress and caused additional financial strain on the family. By April, Elizabeth's mom had started taking care of a neighbor's little boy during the day, but she was still trying to get a job with the school district.

I share these happenings to contextualize what was happening in Elizabeth's and her family's lives throughout my time at the school. In a short period of time, Mrs. Sánchez found out that she was pregnant, lost her job, and had a miscarriage. These unfortunate happenings also signified that Mrs. Sánchez would not be physically present at the school for the first time in Elizabeth's entire elementary school career. It was also

significant because the order in the lunchroom was not maintained as well by the non-Spanish-speaking monitor who replaced Mrs. Sánchez.

### WHO WAS ELIZABETH AT SCHOOL?

This is, of course, a complex question, especially since I have been examining how there are multiple *formas de ser*, or interpretations of self, as a result of the elusive authoring process carried out in manifold figured worlds. Therefore, this question of who Elizabeth is—or was—may be answered in many ways. I could, for example, touch on ways that Elizabeth’s engagement was dialogically authored in regards to gender, language, race, and so on within her family and other figured worlds. For the purposes of addressing my research questions regarding *formas de ser* and school achievement, I have chosen two ways that Elizabeth was being authored by herself and others that directly affected her participation in her figured worlds of schooling. The first way entails how she was authored by herself and others as a popular girl. The second way involves how she was authored by herself and many teachers as a ‘good’ student.

#### Authored as Popular Girl

Yo me siento bien en la escuela porque tengo muchos amigos y amigas y tambien maestros y maestras buenos, igual que usted. Tambien me gusta la escuela porque estoy aprendiendo mucho. Por eso me gusta la escuela.

(Journal #6, no date)

I feel good in school because I have a lot of [male] friends and [female] friends. And also good [male] teachers and [female] teachers, like you. I also like school because I’m learning a lot. That’s why I like school.

(Journal #6, no date)

As Elizabeth’s dialogue journal indicates, Elizabeth seemed to enjoy school. She had many friends and often talked about how good her teachers were. This section includes how Elizabeth was authored as a popular girl by school faculty, peers, as well as herself. First, I examine her popularity by dividing it into the following sub-sections: (1) authored as well-liked, (2) authored as sought-after, and (3) authored as daring. Lastly, I will look at the social construction of being popular as it pertained to Elizabeth.

*Authored as well-liked.* Elizabeth was well liked by many individuals within the school. She was perceived to be helpful, *bien-educada*, and, in some instances, reserved. Because of her good comportment—or *buena educación* (Valdés, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999), many of Elizabeth’s teachers afforded her special privileges and duties (e.g., safety patrol, teacher helper, free reign of the CD player in gym, etc.). In an interview with her mother, she described Elizabeth as *servicial* (liking to help people), giving examples of taking care of her younger cousins and helping to interpret Spanish to English and vice versa for strangers in the grocery store. In one of Elizabeth’s dialogue journal entries, she mentioned what career she would like for the future:

Yo quisiera tener un trabajo de maestra me gustaria ser una maestra cuando se mayor.  (Journal #2, 2/04)	I hope to work as a teacher. I would like to be a teacher when I am older.  (Journal #2, 2/04)
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In subsequent interviews, she also mentioned that another consideration for her future career choice would be a doctor because she liked Science and helping people.

While many of her teachers would have described her as popular, at least one teacher did not view her as actively seeking her popularity status. Ms. Kendall, Elizabeth's Math teacher, explained this sentiment below:

KC: I've heard some of the boys have crushes on Elizabeth.

Ms. Kendall: I don't know. But maybe of all, she might be more—. Maybe she's looking into boys more. She'll be a little confrontational with them—I believe. But then still I don't see it a lot, because I'm not noticing it that much. But I do recall that she might be one that will chase one of them if they bother her versus someone else. ... But then again, Elizabeth does seem reserved. ...

(Interview, 1/16/04)

Ms. Kendall described Elizabeth as somewhat reserved. After observing her during content area instruction throughout the day, I could understand why Ms. Kendall made this observation. Generally speaking, Elizabeth did not volunteer information to the teachers or talk much to her classmates. She tended to appear “on-task” looking at the teacher when she or he was talking and following behavioral prompts specified by the teacher. One afternoon, for example, I observed her during a science lesson in Mr. Ortiz's class. The students were on the floor working in groups of three and four and measuring the distance that a toy car would travel depending on how far a rubber band was pulled back to propel the car. While other students engaged in excited chatter, Elizabeth silently measured the car's distances and recorded the measurements on a piece of paper.

*Authored as sought-after.* Many of my observations outside of Elizabeth's figured worlds of academic instruction (e.g., at lunch with peers, during P.E. class, at recess, during the after-school focus groups, etc.) revealed different facets of Elizabeth's

identity. Unlike her typical demeanor during academic instruction, I saw many instances where Elizabeth sought to be and/or was placed at the center of attention among her peers and certain adults, like myself. This section is intended to demonstrate how there was more to Elizabeth than just the quiet girl sitting on the floor doing group work in science class or the helpful girl sent to the library on an errand. She was often authored and authored herself as sought-after. In other words, many students wanted to be associated with Elizabeth or emulated her in certain ways, as illustrated by: (a) being aware of and setting fashion trends, (b) dancing, and (c) having boyfriends.

An excerpt from my fieldnotes demonstrates an amusing epidemic of alleged wrist injuries among some of the fifth grade girls:

4/20/04: Two of the Latina girls had hurt their wrists this week and had them bandaged up with long, white gauze dressing. José started joking about how all the girls are faking their wrists being hurt for attention. Joked that they took a hammer to their own wrists in order to milk attention.

4/21/04: I noticed that Elizabeth had her wrist loosely bandaged during the sock hop. She said she hurt it playing *fútbol* (soccer).

4/22/04: Today Elizabeth has a navy blue bandana on her wrist, folded at perfect angles and tied with small, tight knots. *Even her wrist injury is fashionable and trendy.*

4/23/04: During today's TAKS pep rally, I noticed that one of the original girls with the hurt wrist came to school with a bandana around her injured wrists, like Elizabeth's.

(Fieldnotes, 4/20/04 - 4/23/04)

One way that Elizabeth gained her popular status was to stay up on and set **current fashion trends**. In conversations with her friends and in her dialogue journal entries, Elizabeth often mentioned going shopping in malls, flea markets, and down in Mexico. One anecdote recounted by her mother illustrates Elizabeth's charisma and sense of style.

Because Mrs. Sánchez was still recuperating from her miscarriage, she could not take Elizabeth shopping for a blouse. So before Mr. Sánchez took Elizabeth shopping, Mrs. Sánchez forewarned him:

Sra. Sánchez: Le dije a mi esposo,  
“Elizabeth nomás necesita una blusa.  
Cuando lleguen allí a la tienda, te va a  
mostrar dos o tres juegos como si no  
puede vivir sin ellos, pero nomás  
necesita una blusa.”

(Fieldnotes, 3/31/04)

Mrs. Sánchez: I told my husband,  
“Elizabeth only needs a blouse. Once  
you get to the store, Elizabeth will show  
you two or three outfits and act as if she  
can’t live without them, but she only  
needs a blouse.”

(Fieldnotes, 3/31/04)

Mrs. Sánchez mentioned other instances, in addition to the above comment, where Elizabeth not only knew how to make a strong argument for getting what she wanted, but also how to sweet talk her father. During one of our *pláticas* (chats), Mrs. Sánchez mentioned that Elizabeth would sometimes sit on her father’s lap and snuggle up to him. If Mrs. Sánchez was in the vicinity, she would ask her husband, “¿No ves que quiere algo Elizabeth? [Can’t you see that Elizabeth wants something?]” Mr. Sánchez would say, “Ah-ha. No hay amor sin interés. ¿verdad? ¿Qué es lo que quieres, mi’ja? [Ah-ha. There isn’t love without motive, right? What is it that you want, my love?]”

On several occasions, Mrs. Sánchez and Elizabeth mentioned that Elizabeth and her father had an affinity for the love of music and **dancing**. Elizabeth said that she learned to dance from her father and from friends at home and parties, like *quinceañeras* and weddings. Music seemed to be a big part of Elizabeth’s identity.

KC: ¿Y en la casa bailan mucho?  
Elizabeth: [nods]  
KC: ¿Tú? ¿O toda la familia?  
Elizabeth: Yo y mi papá.

KC: And do you dance a lot at home?  
Elizabeth: [nods]  
KC: You? Or the whole family?  
Elizabeth: Me and my dad.

KC: ¿Sí?

Elizabeth: Y mi hermano también quiere que le enseñe. Como ayer me dijo, “Cómo es eso otra vez, Elizabeth? El baile de la cumbia?” ... Quiere que le enseñe a bailar—

KC: ¿Julio?

Elizabeth: No, Gabriel. A Julio no más le gusta bailar huapango, porque nomás saber bailar huapango. Y el otro [hermano], no. Nomás sabe bailar cumbia.

KC: ¿Y tu mamá también baila?

Elizabeth: Uh-mm. Pero ya casi no. Cuando vamos a un *party*, le decimos, “Vamos a bailar?” Y luego dice, “No, yo no.” Y mi papá dice, “Vamos a bailar?” [Y le digo,] “Okay”

KC: ¿Y a dónde van a bailar?

Elizabeth: Como a [inaudible], quinceañera, boda. Sí.... Mi papá me enseñó el huapango. Y mi amiga la cumbia.

(Interview, 2/11/04)

KC: Yeah?

Elizabeth: And my brother wants me to teach him. Like yesterday, he said, “How was that again, Elizabeth? The *cumbia*?” ... He wants me to teach him—

KC: Julio?

Elizabeth: No, Gabriel. Julio only likes to dance *huapango*, because that’s all he knows how to dance. And the other [brother], no. He only knows how to dance *cumbia*.

KC: And does your mom dance, too?

Elizabeth: Uh-huh. But not as much as she used to. When we go to parties, we tell her, “You want to dance?” And then she’ll say, “No, not me.” And then my dad will tell me, “Let’s dance.” [And I say,] “Okay.”

KC: And where do you go dancing?

Elizabeth: Like a [inaudible], *quinceañera*, weddings. Yeah. ... My dad taught me the *huapango*. And my friend the *cumbia*.

(Interview, 2/11/04)

Elizabeth’s love of dancing carried over into the figured world of schooling. She even stored some of her music CDs by the stereo equipment in the gym. When there was some free time at the end of P.E. class, the coach would let Elizabeth have free reign of the CD player and demonstrate dance moves and routines with her best friend, Yesica. She was chosen to be part of a dancing group for the Cinco de Mayo program and also was asked to teach a Kindergarten class how to dance cumbia, merengue, and salsa. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes offers a glimpse into how Elizabeth used music to express herself and to receive attention for that expression:

I visited the 5<sup>th</sup> grade in Gym. ... Elizabeth came up to the coach and said, “This is Ms. Kimberley. She knows how to dance merengue. Can I put on the CD?” The coach said, “Sure, okay, we have a few minutes left.” Elizabeth got excited and ran over to the 5-disk CD player and popped in a home-made burned CD with Merengue written in black permanent marker.

I went over to her, not quite sure of what she had volunteered me for, and said, “Vamos todos a bailar? [Are we all going to dance?]” Sure enough, all the girls were huddled behind us waiting for the music to come on. Most of the boys were at the far side of the gym. ... Some kids were practicing what they had learned that day (forming pyramids) and others were just hanging around. A couple of boys, like Bobby, were in the mass of girls goofing around—waiting for the 3<sup>rd</sup> track to start. Then Elizabeth and Yesica started moving their bodies to the beat, shimmying her shoulders, throwing up her arms and rotating her hips around. They were really good. Elizabeth came face to face with me and we started partner dancing a little bit. I was leading her in some spins. Then I told everyone to form a big circle. Elizabeth ran over to my right side to make sure that she was holding my hand. Belinda and Lizzie were in the circle much like the other girls—having fun and looking to me to see how to move. ...

After dancing for a couple of minutes in the big circle, Elizabeth started to look around and started to let go of my hand and the hand of the girl next to her. Elizabeth asked as she shimmied her shoulders, “Puedes hacer eso? [Can you do this?]” I did it. Then she said, “Puedes hacer eso? [Can you do this?]” Then she rotated her hips around with her hands up in the air. I tried to do it as well as she did but I looked much more forced than she did. As I completed my rotation, Elizabeth grabbed my hands again to partner dance. When I turned around to look at everyone, the circle had broken up. Some left to go sit down, some danced alone, and others formed dancing partners. Yesica started dancing with Elizabeth and they went into a full-fledged routine—showing off their moves. Next many of the kids lined up while others straggled to the door. Elizabeth and Yesica continued to dance until the last moment. Most of the kids in line were watching them dance.

(Fieldnotes, 1/22/04)

Elizabeth seemed to grow tired of dancing in the big circle and doing the same moves as everyone else. As soon as she asked me to start doing moves that were not related to the big group, the dance circle broke apart even though I tried to do the moves Elizabeth proposed while remaining on the circle’s perimeter. Elizabeth’s peers seemed to be cognizant of what she was doing at given times. I remember being surprised when almost

all the girls had congregated behind us as Elizabeth was putting the CD in the player and how quickly the dance circle disbanded after she lost interest in dancing uniformly.

Another one of Elizabeth's dance routines caused quite a commotion. The hallway was always congested at the end of Special Areas (i.e., Art, Music, and P.E.), because the entire fifth grade class was dismissed at 1:55pm. One of the African-American girls was coming out of the gym into the hallway after being in the same P.E. class with Elizabeth and complaining to another African-American classmate, "Elizabeth always gets to put her music on! Coach Pelletier told me that I could put mine on this last time. He always be letting her do whatever." Boys leaving the Art room shouted down the hall to kids exiting the Music room, "Elizabeth's dancing! Elizabeth's dancing!" Many boys and some girls hurried over to the double doors that led to the gym. The boys who arrived first peered through the narrow rectangular windows in the doors. When those windows got too crowded from all the clamoring bodies, a student opened the gym doors and twelve to fifteen bodies tried to pour into the gym's entrance simultaneously. Other kids still in the hallway were on their tippie-toes trying to catch a glimpse of Elizabeth dancing with Yesica. Although Elizabeth usually danced with Yesica, Elizabeth was the declared attraction for most of the fifth graders, as evidenced by the frenzied screams of "Elizabeth's dancing!"

The boys' reactions to Elizabeth's dancing indicates that there might have been much heteronormative discourse in the students' figured worlds of peer group affiliations. In their study of gendered authoring at the high school level, Eder et al. (1995) found that

a focus on being attractive is currently promoted through school activities such as cheerleading and through girls' gossip and other daily speech routines. Do contemporary practices prepare adolescent girls to deal with the competitive, aggressive sexual style promoted in male culture? Or do they further undermine the possibility of equality in sexual relations by focusing on female appearance? (:6)

As evidenced by the reactions of many of the fifth-grade boys to Elizabeth's dancing during P.E., the focus on physical appearance that Eder et al. (1995) described was playing itself out in the figured worlds of Elizabeth. A common topic among the fifth graders covered who liked whom. When I asked about Elizabeth, Lizzie (one of my focal students) said, "es estudiosa, pero le interesan más los niños. [is studious, but she's more interested in boys.]" (Interview, 5/04). Many of the fifth graders seemed knowledgeable about Elizabeth's 'love' life (e.g., whom she was with, since when, etc.)—as evidenced in the following conversation that occurred in my car as I was dropping off José, Belinda, and Jorge after our after-school focus group:

José: Okay, I'm going to tell you who everyone likes. Manuel likes—I'm not going to tell on Manuel. Jeniffer likes Silvio. Belinda likes Manuel. But Manuel doesn't like her. And Jorge told me at his house that he likes Lizzie since 1<sup>st</sup> grade *pero no más la quiere poquito* [but he only likes her a little bit]. *Y Marco quiere a Elizabeth. Elizabeth quiere a Marco.* [And Marco likes Elizabeth. Elizabeth likes Marco.]

Belinda: *Ya no.* [Not anymore.] They break up.

José: Why did they break up?

Belinda: *Porque Elizabeth estaba jugando con él.* [Because Elizabeth was just playing with him.] Well, that's what I heard.

José: Oh, Elizabeth was playing with Marco!

Belinda: That's what I heard.

José: Yeah, that's right! That's what Shantra told me too. That Elizabeth doesn't really like Marco. That she likes Andrés. I'm not sure.

Jorge: I know who likes Elizabeth.

José: Andrés.

Jorge: *No, otra persona.* [No, another person.]

José: You like Elizabeth. You like Elizabeth. You told me at your house. *Me dijiste* [You told me] you like Elizabeth.

Jorge: No

José: Yeah, you like Belinda.

Jorge: Who?

José: You! You like Belinda and Lizzie.

Jorge: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I told you all of that. Yeah, yeah.

(Audio-Record from car ride, 2/11/04)

In the above conversation, the only mention of a mutual liking concerned Elizabeth and other boys. While the other kids' likings were mentioned with more of a teasing, light-hearted tone, the friendly banter turned more serious when referring to Elizabeth. When Elizabeth's alleged relationships surfaced in the conversation, everyone seemed to perk up and to have something to say about it. Throughout my five and a half months at Parks Elementary, I observed that Elizabeth's crushes and alleged courtships were a regular topic of conversation among her peers.

I asked Elizabeth what having a boyfriend meant in the fifth grade:

KC: Y cuando dicen que Yesica y Andrés son novios. ¿Qué significa eso?

Elizabeth: Que se quieren.

KC: ¿Pero salen?

Elizabeth: Si quieren.

KC: ¿Qué hacen juntos [los novios]?

Elizabeth: Platican, juegan. Como [inaudible] es mi *best friend*. Tengo como *three boys that are best friends*: Bobby, Marco, Edison.

(Interview, 5/3/04)

KC: And when they say that Yesica and Andrés are boyfriend and girlfriend. What does that mean exactly?

Elizabeth: That they like each other.

KC: But do they go out?

Elizabeth: If they want to.

KC: What do [boyfriends and girlfriends] do together?

Elizabeth: They talk, play. Like [inaudible] is my best friend. I have like three boys that are best friends: Bobby, Marco, Edison.

(Interview, 5/3/04)

There were conflicting reports about whether Elizabeth had a boyfriend or not. According to her peers, Elizabeth had one boyfriend or another throughout the entire length of the study: first Marco, then Andrés, then Edison. In my company, she had

always denied having a boyfriend. When I directly asked her whether she had a boyfriend during our last interview however, she did not deny it. She did, however, tell me what would happen if her parents found out if she did have a boyfriend:

KC: Algunos me decían que dejaste a Andrés y ahora estás con Edison. ¿Tú sabías que hablan así de ti?

Elizabeth: Hm. uh-uh. [pause] No.

KC: ¿Y tienes un novio?

Elizabeth: Me regañan.

KC: ¿Tu mamá? ¿Qué haría?

Elizabeth: Me cambiaría de la escuela.

KC: ¿Sí?

Elizabeth: Dice que, como estoy atrasada, mejor que no tengo novio ahorita. [inaudible] Y que eche ganas a la escuela.

KC: ¿Qué opinas de eso?

Elizabeth: Está bien.

(Interview, 5/3/04)

KC: Some people have told me that you are not with Andrés anymore and that you're with Edison now. Did you know that they talk about you like that?

Elizabeth: Hm. uh-uh. [pause] No.

KC: So do you have a boyfriend?

Elizabeth: They would scold me.

KC: Your mom? What would she do?

Elizabeth: She would put me in a different school.

KC: Really?

Elizabeth: She says that since I'm falling behind [in school], it's best if I don't have a boyfriend right now. [inaudible] And that I should give it my all in school.

KC: What do you think about that?

Elizabeth: It's fine.

(Interview, 5/3/04)

However, Elizabeth told me on several occasions that her rumored boyfriends were just friends. Over the course of the study, she was most frequently rumored to be with Andrés.

Andrés and his best friend, Patricio, started attending Parks Elementary in the fourth grade and, by fifth grade, had earned reputations for being 'bad boys.' The discourse surrounding the two boys, especially Andrés, was upsetting for me at times. When I sat next to them at lunch one day, a couple of the girls were telling me that

Andrés and Patricio were saying that they liked the new girl in school—a third grader.

Then Yesica told Andrés that he had to be careful with what he said.

KC: ¿Por qué [debe tener cuidado]?

Yesica: Porque al principio de este año se metió en problemas por decir [pause] eso a Erica.

[Andrés y Patricio re ríen.]

KC: ¿Qué? ¿Qué dijo [Andrés]?

Yesica: Es que Andrés le dijo [a Erica] al oído que la quería y que la iba a violar. Erica le dijo a la maestra y lo mandó a la oficina.

(Fieldnotes, 3/31/04)

KC: Why [should he be careful]?

Yesica: Because at the beginning of the year, he got in trouble for telling that [pause] to Erica.

[Andrés & Patricio laugh.]

KC: What? What did [Andrés] say?

Yesica: It's that Andrés whispered in [Erica's] ear that he wanted her and that he was going to rape her. Erica told the teacher and he was sent to the office.

(Fieldnotes, 3/31/04)

Patricio was laughing as he said, “*Ahora, [a Andrés] le gusta Elizabeth. Es la niña más bonita de la escuela.* [Now [Andrés] likes Elizabeth. She's the prettiest girl in the school.]” Andrés smiled, bumped Patricio's shoulder with his body, and said, “*Cállate ya.* [Shut up already.]” As Manuel (one of the focal students) and I were walking to the room where we held the after-school focus group sessions, Manuel offhandedly mentioned to me that Andrés “*la quiere chingar a Elizabeth* [wants to screw Elizabeth].”

During lunch one day, a fifth grade boy, named Bobby, had written E-L-I-Z-A-B-E-T-H in black ink across his knuckles and on his forearm. He told the group of Latino boys at the lunch table, “I like Elizabeth. And I don't care if Andrés and Patricio find out. They can threaten me all they want to. Shoot! I'll tell Andrés to come over to my house after school if he got a problem with it.” Not surprisingly, Andrés and Patricio were considered the “class bullies” by many students (as evidenced by Bobby's posturing regarding them). They often threatened to beat up kids for different reasons, such as liking Elizabeth.

Andrés and Patricio threatened Roberto, one of my non-focal students, because they all supposedly liked Elizabeth. Roberto told me that for the better part of a week Andrés and Patricio had been bumping up against him hard whenever they would pass each other in the hall and sending verbal threats through other fifth grade messengers. So serious were the threats that Roberto appealed to his mom to transfer him to another elementary school. Due to incidents with Roberto, Andrés and Patricio were called into the office and, according to Charlie, “cried a river” because their parents were called. Roberto’s mother went up to school to find out what was happening. Since the situation had been brought to the attention of the teachers and the administrators, Roberto’s mother decided to keep him at Parks along with his little sister in third grade (Fieldnotes, 3/24/04).

When I asked Elizabeth about these incidents in our dialogue journal, she responded in a manner that hints at her grasp of the situation:

Es verdad que Andrés y Patricio se querian peliar con Roberto porque Andrés y Patricio me quieren pero yo no y se celaron porque Roberto me queria pero ya no le quieren pegar lla se calmaron ya esta todo arreglado.

(Journal #9, no date)

It’s true that Andrés and Patricio wanted to fight with Roberto because Andres and Patricio like me. But I don’t like them. And they got jealous because Roberto liked me. But now they don’t want to beat him up. They’ve calmed down. Everything has been taken care of.

(Journal #9, no date)

Elizabeth’s tone in this journal seemed to come from a place of awareness of the goings-on around her. In other words, she seemed aware of the relationships playing out around her and of her perceived place within those relationships.

*Authored as daring.* Elizabeth authored herself and others authored her not only as a sought-after girl, but as a daring one as well. I could use the term ‘daring’ in the sense of her not being nervous to dance in front of many people. In this section, however, I use the term to describe her daring *forma de ser* going beyond the heteronormative, desirability factor. Beyond a ‘typical’ fifth-grade girl’s script for being popular (e.g., clothes, dancing, boys), there were many instances where Elizabeth engaged in behaviors that most girls at Parks Elementary—who were or wished to be popular—would not have attempted. I have grouped some of the behaviors that I observed into two categories: ‘horseplaying’ and using mature language.

Some of the ‘**horseplaying**’ behaviors may stem, in part, from the heteronormative script of getting boys’ attention. However, Elizabeth tended to be a bit more aggressive than most girls at Parks would have been. On many occasions, I observed Elizabeth instigating horseplay with other students, especially Latino boys. An illustration of this occurred while Elizabeth’s class was lined up in the hall waiting to go into the gym. Elizabeth was play fighting with a boy from her class. When she saw me, she said, “If a boy bops you in the face like this [hits boy on the side of his head with an open fist], is that hitting a girl?”

On the *paseo* to UT with Elizabeth, Jorge, and Manuel, she engaged in playful behaviors (e.g., walking on the heels of Manuel’s shoes as she walked behind him, throwing leaves on top of his head), but she also pushed the ‘gross’ factor, which seemed to impress the two boys. For example, she took a picture of a dead pigeon, partook in a spit contest off the top level of the parking garage, pelted pizza crust at pigeons along

with the boys, and had Manuel show her how to spit a stream of coke through her front teeth like he did.

After citing Elizabeth as being one of his best friends, Iván jokingly described her as “mean” during a joint interview with he and Octavio:

KC: Cuéntenme de Elizabeth.

Iván: Mean. She be hating.

KC: ¿Por qué?

Iván: A veces quita las cosas a otros.

Pero cuando le quitamos las cosas a ella, se enoja.

Octavio: mm-mm.

KC: ¿Y por qué les quita las cosas?

Iván: Se cree mucho.

(Interview, 5/19/04)

KC: Tell me about Elizabeth.

Iván: Mean. She be hating.

KC: Why?

Iván: Sometimes she takes other people’s things. But when we take her things away from her, she gets mad.

Octavio: mm-mm.

KC: And why does she take your things?

Iván: She thinks she’s all that.

(Interview, 5/19/04)

Iván and Octavio went on to talk about how Elizabeth would never get in trouble for taking their things. In contrast, they would get in trouble if they “messed” with her. They also mentioned that Elizabeth and Yesica would sometimes quarrel over boys.

As many friends do at this age, sometimes Elizabeth and Yesica would fall out with one another for a couple of days or so. To my knowledge, one incident went beyond the typical verbal argument or silent treatment. On February 25<sup>th</sup>, Elizabeth was late getting to the after-school focus group session.

When Elizabeth came to the after-school program, she masked being upset pretty well, because no one seemed to notice anything out of the ordinary. At least, I didn’t notice anything unusual. After a couple of minutes, two 5<sup>th</sup> grade girls came in the room. They told Elizabeth that her mom was looking for her, because her mom had found out about “the fight.” Elizabeth squeezed past the two girls and exited out into the hall where her mom was waiting for her. The two girls left the room behind Elizabeth.

As you can imagine, the other seven kids in the room stopped working on their PowerPoint presentations and started speculating about what must have happened. A

couple of the boys got up and tried to sneak peeks out the door's window as Elizabeth's mom spoke with her and Yesica in the hallway. When I glanced out, Mrs. Sánchez was speaking sternly with the two girls. Both Elizabeth and Yesica had their arms crossed and were hanging their heads.

After a few minutes, Elizabeth came back into the room crying. I told everyone to keep working in pairs on their PowerPoint presentations. Lizzie (Elizabeth's partner to work on the computer that day) and I sat with Elizabeth on the far side of the room to talk to her about what had happened. She told us that Yesica was saying things about her and they got in an argument after school while Elizabeth was doing her safety patrol duty. They screamed at each other and then Elizabeth threw her cupcake (from a class party) at Yesica.

When I asked her what Yesica had said about her, she said, "Estaba diciendo cosas malas de mí. Llamándome una 'puta' y cosas así. [She was saying bad things about me. Calling me a slut and stuff like that.]"

(Fieldnotes, 2/15/04)

In her study of eighth-grade girls regarding how they fall into traditional patterns of self-doubt and self-censorship, Orenstein (1994) found that:

There was only one label worse than "schoolgirl" at Weston [Middle School], and that's her inverse, the fallen girl, or in student parlance, the slut. A "slut" is not merely a girl who "does it," but any girl who—through her clothes, her makeup, her hairstyle, or her speech—seems as if she *might*. Girls may protest the prudish connotations of "schoolgirl," but they fear the prurience of "slut": in order to find the middle ground between the two, a place from which they can function safely and with approval, girls have to monitor both their expressions of intelligence and their budding sexual desire. (p.51)

The above quote from Orenstein (1994) was from her study of eighth-grade adolescent girls. Therefore, to me, some of the language of sexual desire and the like seems too mature for Elizabeth's fifth-grade life. However, Orenstein does capture the gendered dilemma in which many girls at Parks are beginning to find themselves: trying to author themselves somewhere in the middle of extremes.

On the ride home, José and Belinda talked a lot about Elizabeth's fight<sup>2</sup>. José said, "Aw, man! We missed it! But was it just an argument? Or was it a cat fight?" Belinda said, "I don't know, but I heard Elizabeth threw her cupcake at [Yesica]." José said, "Ew! We missed it! We missed it! I was right there where it happened, too. If I didn't come early to the after-school thing with Miss Kimberley, I would have seen the whole thing!"

I told the students in the after-school focus group that they did not have to filter their language around me as they would around other adults in the school (See Methodology chapter). After I 'gave permission' to use **mature language**, three of the four boys in the focus group cussed in front of me at one point or another. In contrast, Elizabeth was the only girl of the four who cussed in front of me.

She was absent the day I mentioned being able to cuss in front of me. By the next after-school focus group meeting, all the boys were animatedly saying to Elizabeth, "Yes, she did! Ms. Kimberley, didn't you say we could say *malas palabras* [bad words] with you?" I nodded. Elizabeth smiled and said, "You really did, Ms. Kimberley?" She paused, looked around to the other seven students in the room, and asked me if I knew what *pisar* [to step on] meant. I told her that I knew one meaning, but it sounded like she was going to tell us another meaning of *pisar*. She laughed. Then, her voice became a whisper, "*Pisar* means to fuck." All the students busted out with laughter and turned to me to see how I would react. I have to admit I was taken aback, but I remained silent thinking to myself, "What have I gotten myself into?" She proceeded with an

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<sup>2</sup> In hindsight, I believe that Elizabeth was planning some kind of confrontation with Yesica, because she never went to safety patrol duty on the days we met after school. Mr. Houston, the teacher in charge of the

explanation, “You know when a *gallo* [rooster] wants to you-know a *gallina* [hen], le pisa la espalda [he steps on her back].” Manuel got excited and said, “Sí, tienes razón! Mis gallos pisan a las gallinas cuando quieren montarlas. [Yeah, you’re right! My roosters step on the hens’ backs when they want to hump them.] ¡Pisar!” Then Jorge echoed, “¡Pisar!” All the students laughed.

On the UT *paseo*, Manuel, Jorge, Elizabeth, and I started talking about scary movies. She asked me, “Ms. Kimberley, have you seen Ho’s?” Thinking of the movie Holes, I said, “No, I haven’t seen that one yet?” Manuel could not contain his laughter. He shook his head, patted me on the shoulder, and said, “Aw, Ms. Kimberley! You didn’t hear what she said. She didn’t say Holes. She said *Ho’s*. You know? Ho’s.” The three kids could not stop laughing at the play on words: “Ho’s” as the colloquial pronunciation for “Whores.”

*Examining the social construction of popularity.* Elizabeth appeared to be well-liked by teachers for her *buena educación* and to be singled out by many of her peers as someone to emulate and/or revere. With her high social status among many teachers, they might have unknowingly disregarded some of Elizabeth’s behaviors that might have contested their authorings of her as reserved, respectful, and passive.

Eder, Evans, and Parker (1995) made an interesting distinction between popularity as being the best liked and as being the most visible:

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safety patrol, had given permission to Elizabeth and Charlie to miss safety patrol duty twice a week after school for the duration of the after-school focus group meetings.

Studies of elementary students imply that the popular students are the best-liked. This was definitely not the case in this school. Instead, we were told that popular people were the most *visible* in the school; they were the students most people knew by name. According to some girls who were not as visible, the nice part about being popular is that “everybody knows you.” (: 31-32)

Elizabeth understood this distinction and consciously, and possibly subconsciously, engaged in her figured worlds of schooling with high visibility. As a visible student, she was on the safety patrol, wore trendy clothes, gossiped with the girls, and played *fútbol* with the boys. She knew that when a teacher was looking for a “responsible” student to go on an errand to the school library, the most visible students—in the teacher’s eyes—are not the multitude of kids waving their hands wildly, getting half-way out of their seats, and saying “Ew! Ew! Pick me, Miss! I’ll go!” On the contrary, the most visible student to fulfill that specific task within that figured world was one who sat erect, raised her hand straight up and kept it still, and made eye contact with the teacher.

Visibility was key in her answer to my inquiries into her popularity:

KC: Eres bastante popular, ¿verdad?  
¿Cuáles son las características de una  
niña popular?

Elizabeth: Que todos te conozcan en la  
escuela, no sé.

(Interview, 4/2/04)

KC: You’re pretty popular, right? What  
are the characteristics of a popular  
girl?

Elizabeth: That everybody in the school  
knows you, I guess.

(Interview, 4/2/04)

With her high social status among so many of her peers, Elizabeth seemed willing to and capable of having multiple peer group affiliations. In order to be known by

everybody in the school, Elizabeth was adept at crossing over many pre-established gender, ethnic, and racial lines that many students at Parks were generally reluctant to do. Whereas Elizabeth seemed to gain even more social status by having multiple peer group affiliations, other students considered less popular might have been looked down upon if they happened to deviate from socially established norms and to cross over into less familiar territory. Gándara, O'Hara, and Gutiérrez (2004) found that: "Only very popular students—star athletes, for example—seem to be able to move seamlessly across high- and low-achieving peer groups without being stigmatized" (ibid: 43). In Foley's (1990) ethnographic study of a Texas high school, he noted this same phenomenon of popular students, much like Elizabeth, being able to associate with various peer groups.

Elizabeth crossed over gender boundaries with her daring behavior around boys. For example, if a girl less popular than Elizabeth were to spit off the roof of a parking garage, that action might have meant being authored as 'gross' or 'nasty.' During an after-school focus group meeting, Elizabeth crossed over racial lines when she proudly displayed a picture that she had taken of her "best friends" that included two Latinas and two African-American girls. When José said, "Shantra and Lantelle aren't your best friends." Elizabeth replied, "Yes, they are. What's wrong with that?" Her popularity status seemed to be bolstered when she challenged established scripts among the fifth graders at Parks Elementary.

## Authored as ‘Good’ Student

Besides being authored as popular within her figured worlds of school, the second and final way that I look at Elizabeth was how she was authored, for the most part, as a ‘good’ student. Most of Elizabeth’s teachers considered her a ‘good’ student. Yet after delving deeper, a distinct split becomes visible between the two sides of her report card. Her fifth-grade teachers tended to cite her as being a very respectful student and one who behaved well. This sentiment was reflected in the high marks she received for her conduct/comportment. However, the academic side of her report card was another story—with marginal to average grades (mostly C’s and B’s). In this section, I will analyze the conduct side and the academic side of her report card. Finally, I will examine the social construction of being a ‘good’ student.

*Conduct side of report card.* Since Elizabeth was described by herself and her teachers as a ‘good’ student, I expected to see better grades on her report card and to hear more mention of the connections she made to academic content. Not until I began to see how Elizabeth defined ‘good’ student did I realize that conduct seemed to be a bigger part of the equation than academic achievement:

KC: Y cuando ves este lado del reporte, ¿qué piensas? El lado de “desarrollo personal” [o conducta].	KC: and what do you think when you see this side of the report? The side on personal development or conduct?
Elizabeth: Está bien.	Elizabeth: It’s OK.
KC: Entonces, ¿qué crees que la escuela está diciendo de ti?	KC: so, what do you think the school’s saying about you?
Elizabeth: Que tengo que mejorar más.	Elizabeth: That I have to do better
KC: ¿Pero aquí que están diciendo? [signaling the conduct side of the	KC: But what are they saying here?
	Elizabeth: That I behave in those classes

report card.]  
 Elizabeth: Que me porto bien en esas clases.  
 KC: ¿Entonces dirían que eres buena alumna? ¿Sí?  
 Elizabeth: [nods, indicating yes]  
 KC: Pero que necesitas mejorar.  
 Elizabeth: Um-mm [indicating yes].  
 KC: Entonces “buena alumna” qué significa?  
 Elizabeth: Es cuando te portas bien y tratas de respetar a las personas, eres amable, y no sé qué más.  
 (Interview, 4/2/04)

KC: So would they say that you’re a good student?  
 Elizabeth: [nods, indicating yes]  
 KC: But you need to do better  
 Elizabeth: Um-mm [indicating yes].  
 KC: So what does “good student” mean?  
 Elizabeth: It’s when you behave and try to respect other people, you’re kind and I don’t know what else.  
 (Interview, 4/2/04)

As Elizabeth’s response indicates, being a ‘good’ student meant behaving well, respecting others, and being civil. She never mentioned the importance of comprehending or expanding upon academic concepts. First and foremost, Elizabeth authored her place in the official figured worlds of school as a place to demonstrate her *educación*—which is “a foundational cultural construct that provides instructions on how one should live in the world. With emphasis on respect, responsibility, and sociality, it provides a benchmark against which all humans are to be judged, formally educated or not” (Valenzuela, 1999: 21).

The adults in the school often allowed Elizabeth certain privileges and duties because of her *buena educación*. For example, she was a member of the safety patrol. When her content area teachers needed someone to go on an errand, Elizabeth was often chosen whether it was to pick up a book from the library or to drop something by the

office. As mentioned in the section addressing the authoring of Elizabeth’s popularity, the coach allowed Elizabeth to store and play her music Cds during the end of P.E. class.

Elizabeth behaved in a respectful and on-task manner during my observations of content area instruction. A small example of Elizabeth’s way of being polite and considerate was the letter she wrote to me after our *paseo* to UT:

Marzo 8, 2004		March 8, 2004
...Gracias por llevarme con usted hoy a UT me gusto donde fuimos y me diverti mucho. Me gusto mucho cuando los hivamos en los elevadores y brincabamos me diverti. Luego me diverti cuando fuimos a ver las tortugas y peces gracias por comprarme la coca y pizza.		...Thanks for taking me with you today to UT. I liked where we went and I had a lot of fun. I really liked it when we were in the elevators and we jumped. I had fun. I then had fun when we went to see the turtles and fish. Thank you for buying me the coke and pizza.
Xoxo Elizabeth Sánchez [drew pictures of ardilla, tortuga, peces, Ms. Kimberly, Elizabeth, Manuel, Jorge] (Journal #6, 3/8/04)		Xoxo Elizabeth Sánchez [drew pictures of ardilla, tortuga, peces, Ms. Kimberly, Elizabeth, Manuel, Jorge] (Journal #6, 3/8/04)

Elizabeth not only thanked me verbally, but also in writing with descriptions of what she liked most and why she was grateful to me. She wrapped up her thank-you with a neatly drawn and labeled picture of some of the animals we saw at UT and four of us who went on the *paseo*.

While Elizabeth’s authoring as *bien educada* did not surprise me, I remember being surprised by her reserved nature during content area instruction in fifth grade. Remembering her very sociable *forma de ser* from my Pre-K classroom and looking through her report cards from past academic years, she had not always been authored as a “reserved” girl:

Pre-K: “Elizabeth es una niña muy sociable y a veces eso impide que preste atención en la clase. Tiene muchos amigos y se llevan bien...”	Pre-K: Elizabeth is a very sociable girl and sometimes that impedes her paying attention in class. She has lots of friends and they get along...
Kinder: “Tiene una actitud positiva y es muy amable con los otros alumnos...”	Kinder: She has a positive attitude and is very kind with the other students...
2 <sup>nd</sup> : “Ayuda mucho en la clase; es amiga de todos.”	2 <sup>nd</sup> : She helps in class a lot; she’s everyone’s friend.
3 <sup>rd</sup> : “[Es] un poco egocentrica. No trabaja bien con personas en sus grupos. Animela para que sea mas compartida...”	3 <sup>rd</sup> : She is a bit egocentric. She doesn’t work well with other people in her groups. Encourage her to share more...
4 <sup>th</sup> : “Sigue con la plática y distracción en clase.”	4 <sup>th</sup> : She keeps talking and getting distracted in class.

Table 4.1: Elizabeth’s Report Card Comments

For the majority of her elementary career, Elizabeth was authored from Pre-K through fourth grade as an active and talkative girl (although some teachers authored these traits more positively than others). Conversely, when Elizabeth was in fifth grade, Elizabeth acknowledged that she did not “open her mouth” with three out of four of her fifth grade teachers:

KC: ¿Qué diría Ms. Kendall de tí?  
Elizabeth: Que—um. [inaudible]. Que debo de abrir mi bo—abrir mi boca más, porque a veces casi no hablo allí. Pero—um. Que estoy respetuosa con ella. Que no me porto mal. No sé que más.  
KC: ¿Y qué diría Ms. Schaffer de ti?  
Elizabeth: Que soy *nice*, amable, respetuosa. Um. Que soy una persona en quien se puede confiar. Como hoy me puso a mí y a Iván a las personas que pueden asistir al maestro [substituto]. El maestro—y todos se estaban portando mal con él ...

KC: What would Ms. Kendall say about you?  
Elizabeth: That...umm. That I should open my mouth more, because sometimes I don’t talk there. But – um. That I respect her. That I don’t misbehave. I don’t know what else.  
KC: And what Ms. Schaffer say about you?  
Elizabeth: That I’m nice, kind, that I show respect. Um. That I’m someone you can trust. Like today, she selected me and Iván as the ones to help the substitute teachers. The teacher – and everyone was misbehaving with him.

KC: ¿También diría [Ms. Schaffer] que necesitas abrir la boca más en clase?  
 Elizabeth: Allí, no. Allí sí hablo. Porque con Ms. Kendall— a veces pienso que me va a regañar— que no agarro bien.  
 KC: ¿Por qué, qué?  
 Elizabeth: Me va a regañar que si no hago la pregunta de ella.  
 KC: ¿Y es por el idioma o por la maestra?  
 Elizabeth: La maestra.  
 KC: ¿Y qué diría Mr. Ortiz de ti?  
 Elizabeth: También que abra la boca porque casi no hablo allí.  
 KC: ¿No? ¿Aunque te gusta lo que están estudiando?  
 Elizabeth: Um-mm.  
 KC: ¿Y Ms. Walther?  
 Elizabeth: También que abra la boca.  
 KC: ¿Pero que eres amable y respetuosa?  
 Elizabeth: Um-mm. [indicating yes]

(Interview, 2/11/04)

KC: Would Ms. Schaffer also say that you need to speak more in her class?  
 Elizabeth: Not there. I do talk there. Because with Ms. Kendall – sometimes I think she’s going to scold me – that I don’t get some things  
 KC: Why? What?  
 Elizabeth: That she’s going to scold me if I don’t answer her questions  
 KC: And is it because of the language or the teacher?  
 Elizabeth: The teacher.  
 KC: And what would Ms. Ortiz say about you?  
 Elizabeth: To open my mouth too, because I don’t speak as much there.  
 KC: No? even though you like what they’re studying?  
 Elizabeth: Um-mm.  
 KC: And Ms. Walther?  
 Elizabeth: To open my mouth too.  
 KC: But that you’re kind and show respect?  
 Elizabeth: Um-mm [indicating yes]

(Interview, 2/11/04)

This notion of Elizabeth’s staying quiet seemed at odds with the images that most of her teachers’ comments from previous grades painted (See the table above). Mrs. Sánchez also described a conversation she had with Elizabeth’s second grade teacher, Mr. Catalán, that demonstrated her loquacious *forma de ser*:

Sra. Sánchez: Un día me dijo Mr. Catalán, “Cuando yo tengo problemas con los niños, yo sé a quien preguntar, porque Elizabeth siempre me dice la verdad.” “¿Qué me está diciendo? ¿Qué Elizabeth es bien metiche?” [Mr. Catalán me dice] “No, no, no, no. Es que una cosa es ser metiche y la otra es

Mrs. Sánchez: One day, Mr. Catalan told me, “when I have problems with the children, I know who to ask because Elizabeth always tells me the truth.” “What is he telling me? That Elizabeth is nosy?” Mr. Catalan told me, “no, no, no, no. One thing is to be nosy and another one to be communicative.

ser comunicativa.” [we both laugh]  
 KC: ¿Es lo que dijo Mr. Catalán?  
 [laughing] Ella es comunicativa.  
 Sra. Sánchez: Sí, dice [Mr. Catalán], “es comunicativa.” “Es que pasa de comunicativa, maestro.” [Mr. Catalán responde,] “No,” dice, “pero ella dice toda la verdad.” “Pues, sí, maestro, pero a veces se debe de callar.” [Mr. Catalán dice,] “No, pues, yo sé, pero es mejor que lo diga a que se quede callada.”  
 KC: [laugh]  
 Sra. Sánchez: Le digo, “Okay, está bien.” [laughs] Es ella ya. Ya la conoce.  
 (Interview, 1/21/04)

KC: is that what Mr. Catalán said? She is communicative.  
 Mrs. Sánchez: Yes, he says, “she’s communicative.” “She’s too communicative, teacher.” “No,” he said, “but she always tells the truth.” “Well yes, but sometimes she needs to stay quiet.” Mr. Catalan said, “Yes, I know, but it’s better to say things than to remain silent.”  
 KC: laughs  
 Mrs. Sánchez: I told him, “OK, it’s OK. That’s her. He already knows her well.”  
 (Interview, 1/21/04)

The above anecdote indicates that Mr. Catalán authored Elizabeth as being communicative and forthcoming in the second grade. Similarly, Mrs. Sánchez described Elizabeth as inquisitive and sociable both at home and in public. At home, Elizabeth was forthcoming to the point of making known her mother’s little *secretos* (secrets):

KC: [Parece que Elizabeth] va a ser una investigadora.  
 Sra. Sánchez: Sí. Con esa niña, en todo quiere andar. Todo quiere saber. Y a veces no se queda callada. Ella misma lo dice. “Papi, dice mi mamá que equis.” “Ay, Elizabeth, no te puedes quedar callada. Si yo te digo una cosa en secreto” le digo, “¿no puedes guardar el secreto?” “Ay, mami, se me olvidó que era un secreto”  
 KC: (laugh)  
 Sra. Sánchez: Así es ella.  
 KC: Se mete en todo?  
 Sra. Sánchez: Sí. Gabriel es más— puede distinguir cuando debe o no debe de. Pero Elizabeth no. Con esa niña, hay que tener cuidado.

KC: It seems like Elizabeth will become a researcher.  
 Mrs. Sánchez: Yes. That girl, she wants to be part of everything. She wants to know it all. And sometimes, she won’t stay quiet. She’ll even say that. “Daddy, mom says that.....whatever it is I said.” “Oh Elizabeth, can you remain quiet? Can’t you keep a secret if I tell you one? “Oh mommy! I forgot it was a secret”  
 KC: (laughs)  
 Mrs. Sánchez: That’s her.  
 KC: Does she get into everything?  
 Mrs. Sánchez: Yes. Gabriel is more – he knows when he should or shouldn’t do something, but not Elizabeth. You have to be careful with that girl.

KC: Todo es información—  
Sra. Sánchez: Todo.  
KC: Todos necesitan saber.  
(Interview, 1/21/04)

KC: Everything is information.  
Mrs. Sánchez: Everything.  
KC: Everyone needs to know.  
(Interview, 1/21/04)

In public, Elizabeth did not have trouble “opening her mouth” either. For instance, Mrs. Sánchez said that on several occasions, Elizabeth would offer to interpret for perfect strangers in the grocery store so that they could be understood by the grocery store employees (Interview, 1/21/04). In the following excerpt, Mrs. Sánchez recounted what happened when she had to take Elizabeth with her to a doctor’s appointment:

Sra. Sánchez: Créame que a veces cuando tengo citas al doctor, a veces es mejor no llevarla [a Elizabeth], porque observa demasiado y pregunta mucho. Entonces (Laughs), tengo que decirle, “Elizabeth, cálmate.”  
KC: (Laugh) Quiere saber de todo.  
Sra. Sánchez: Todo. ... Una vez me la llevé donde el doctor porque tengo problemas de tiroides—aquí en las glándulas [points to neck]. Entonces me la llevé yo porque pues le dije, “Voy a llegar tarde. Y no voy a tener cómo recogerla. Me la voy a llevar.” Y me dice, “Amá”, delante del doctor, “Amá,” pues, ni siquiera estábamos hablando de *babies* ni nada de eso. Pero dice, “Amá, dígame al doctor si usted va a poder tener *baby* algún día.” Dice, “Porque yo quiero que hay otro baby en la casa.” “Elizabeth,” le digo, “No estamos hablando de eso.”  
KC: [laughs]  
Sra. Sánchez: “Estamos tratando de otro tema el doctor y yo. Por favor,” le digo. “Okay, amá, está bien.” Y ya le dijo el doctor, “O, tú quieres que tu mamá

Mrs. Sánchez: Believe me, sometimes, when I have doctors’ appointments, it’s better not to take her (Elizabeth), because she’s always looking and asks too much. So, I have to tell her, “Elizabeth, calm down.”  
KC: (laughs) she wants to know it all  
Mrs. Sánchez: everything...one time I took her with me to the doctor, because I have a thyroid problem – right here in the glands (points to neck). So I took her with me because I was going to be late and had no way of picking her up, so I took her with me, and she told me, “mom,” right in front of the doctor, “mom,” we weren’t even talking about babies or anything like that, but she said, “mom, ask the doctor if you’ll be having a baby some day.” She said, “because I want another baby at home.” I said, “Elizabeth, we’re not talking about that.”  
KC: laughs  
Mrs. Sánchez: “The doctor and I are talking about something else, please.” I said that to her and she said, “OK,

tenga otro *baby*.” Dice, “Sí, porque no tengo con quien jugar. Y yo quiero otra nena, porque mis hermanos ya no pueden jugar conmigo. Y son malos conmigo. No juegan como juegan las niñas.” Le digo, “Sí, un día voy a tener otro.” Me dice, “Pero, cuándo va a ser eso?” ... Y el doctor dice, “Esta niña pregunta muchas cosas.” Le digo, “Sí, doctor, es muy preguntona.”

(Interview, 1/21/04)

mom, it’s OK.” And the doctor asked her, “Do you want your mommy to have another baby.” She said “yes, because I have no one to play with. I’d like another baby girl, because my brothers can’t play with me anymore. They don’t play like girls do.” I told her, “yes, I’ll have another baby some day.” And she said, “but when is that going to be?” ...and the doctor said, “This girl asks too many things.” I said, “yes doctor, she asks a lot.”

(Interview, 1/21/04)

Based on my recollections as her former Pre-K teacher, comments from her Pre-K through fourth grade report cards, interviews with Elizabeth and others, and extensive observations in and outside of the classroom, Elizabeth did not always experience difficulties “opening her mouth” in other figured worlds—those outside of fifth grade academics. However, Elizabeth, by her own account, was quite silent with most of her fifth grade teachers.

I will enumerate a few of the possible factors (e.g., comfort level, language, content) that could have accounted for Elizabeth’s fifth grade teachers’ authoring of her as reserved and somewhat passive. First, Elizabeth might have been assimilating to the behavioral expectations for a ‘good’ student over time. Second, she was moved into solely English-instruction in fifth grade, which might have shut out some comfortable channels of communication for her. Third, as a result of all-English instruction and the continued cognitive demand of higher-grade level content, she might have experienced difficulty comprehending and/or expressing herself. Fourth, the fifth-grade content-area

classes had a mix of “bilingual” students and English-monolingual Latino and African-American students. Many members of the faculty cited the behavior of the “bilingual” students as less of a concern than that of the monolingual English speakers in the school, especially the African-American students. Regardless of the factor(s), there seemed to be a message that if a student appeared to be quiet and ‘on-task,’ he or she was left alone.

*Academic side of report card.* Despite Elizabeth being cited as a ‘good’ student, her academic performance—in the form of grades—was fair, consisting of mostly C’s and B’s. She had aspirations of becoming a teacher since she was in third grade. When I asked her if there was anything else she thought about doing, she responded, “*Doctor, también. Mi mamá me dice que cuando se pone mala, yo la puedo curar.* [A doctor, as well. My mom tells me that I can make her better when she doesn’t feel well.]”

(Interview, 4/2/04). Unfortunately, Elizabeth had been red-flagged academically in several instances. I was privy to and will briefly describe some of the instances: (1) receiving an “F” in Science, (2) being labeled a “bubble” kid, and (3) struggling with language of instruction. Finally, I will examine how Elizabeth considered herself a ‘good’ student even though she authored herself as someone who was not particularly intelligent.

Receiving an “F” in Science. Elizabeth had received an “F” from Mr. Ortiz in Science in the third quarter. Elizabeth seemed surprised by the failing grade, as evidenced in the following excerpt:

KC: Tengo los *report cards* de ustedes porque es parte de mi estudio. Pues, quiero saber qué opinas tú de ti pero

KC: I have your report cards because that’s part of my study. I want to know what you think of yourself, but also

también quiero saber lo que está diciendo la escuela de ti. Y si estás de acuerdo, o no, y por qué. Entonces—ya hablamos un poco de eso el otro día, ¿verdad? Que estabas sorprendida por una calificación, ¿verdad?

Elizabeth: [nods]

KC: ¿de ciencias?

Elizabeth: um-hm

KC: Uh, ¿y por qué estabas sorprendida?

Elizabeth: Pensé que iba a agarrar una B o una C.

KC: ¿Y qué noticias has tenido? ¿Te da notas el maestro?

Elizabeth: ¿notas? Ya casi no.

KC: Casi no. ¿Entonces tú no sabes exactamente de donde agarra esas notas?

Elizabeth: No.

KC: ¿Y tienen tarea?

Elizabeth: Sí.

KC: ¿Y haces la tarea?

Elizabeth: ¿de ciencias? No, no tenemos.

KC: ¿No tienen? ¿nunca?

Elizabeth: No, casi nunca.

KC: Y las veces que tenías tarea, ¿la has hecho?

Elizabeth: Um-hm.

KC: ¿Y no le preguntaste por qué sacaste esa nota?

Elizabeth: Nu-uh.

KC: ¿Y qué dijo tu mamá cuando vio el *report card*?

Elizabeth: Que estaba muy mal.

KC: ¿Y qué pensaba tu mamá de las otras notas?

Elizabeth: Que estaban bien.

KC: ¿Y qué piensas tú?

Elizabeth: [Bien] también, pero mal en este. [points to F in Science]

(Interview, 4/2/04)

what the school is saying about you and whether you agree or not and why. So, we've already talked about that the other day, right? That you were surprised for having gotten a grade, right?

Elizabeth: (nods)

KC: In science?

Elizabeth: um-hm

KC: Uh, and why were you surprised?

Elizabeth: I thought I'd get a B or a C.

KC: And what news have you had? Does the teacher give you grades?

Elizabeth: Grades? Not as much anymore.

KC: Not much. So, you don't exactly know where he gets those grades from?

Elizabeth: No.

KC: And do you have homework?

Elizabeth: Yes.

KC: And do you do the homework?

Elizabeth: Science? No, we don't have any.

KC: You don't have any? Not ever?

Elizabeth: No, almost never.

KC: And the times you have had homework, have you done it?

Elizabeth: Um-hm.

KC: And you didn't ask him (the teacher) why you got that grade?

Elizabeth: Nu-uh.

KC: And what did your mom say when she saw the report card?

Elizabeth: That it was very bad.

KC: And what did your mom think of the other grades?

Elizabeth: That they were good.

KC: And what do you think?

Elizabeth: Good too, but bad in this one (points to F in Science).

(Interview, 4/2/04)

Even though Elizabeth was unsure about the reason for her failing grade, she said that she needed to improve.

I questioned Mr. Ortiz about the failing grade. Mr. Ortiz stated that since he had replaced Ms. Vinueza after Winter Break, he was not as familiar with the students and their content knowledge as he would have liked to have been. According to his rationale, he assigned an “F” to Elizabeth in Science, because she had done poorly on the MOY (Middle of the year) Science practice test for TAKS. Her failing grade on the Science practice test (48%) indicated, to Mr. Ortiz, that Elizabeth was not comprehending the classroom content. He did not justify Elizabeth’s failing grade based on her in-class participation or performance. Nor did he seem to question the fact that the MOY practice test was based on end-of-the-year expectations for fifth grade. He simply assigned grades according to a practice test designed for a one-size-fits-all fifth grader in Texas. He went on to explain that Elizabeth was in jeopardy of failing the Science TAKS; so he wanted that reflected on her report card.

Despite her failing grade in the next-to-last reporting period, Elizabeth stated, time and again, that she thought Mr. Ortiz was a good teacher and that science was her favorite subject. In the following excerpt, Elizabeth told me about what they were learning in Science class. She, then, proceeded to describe how she had taught herself about outer space using one of her brother’s Science books:

KC: ¿Cuál es tu tema favorito en la escuela?  
Elizabeth: Um, ahorita ya science.

KC: What’s your favorite subject in school?  
Elizabeth: Um, it’s Science now.

KC: ¿Sí? ¿Por qué?  
Elizabeth: Porque me gusta lo que estamos aprendiendo ahorita.  
KC: ¿De qué?  
Elizabeth: De *matter*.  
KC: ¿De qué?  
Elizabeth: De *matter*—es que no sé la palabra [en español]. También estamos aprendiendo de los planetas y eso. Apenas estamos aprendiendo de eso.  
KC: Dijiste que te gustan las estrellas y las constelaciones. Cuéntame de eso.  
Elizabeth: Como explicó el maestro que como [inaudible]. Como se mueve el *Earth*, cuantas horas para moverse alrededor del Earth para que sea—um, cuantas horas se lleva, y que puede pasar si—No nos enseñó tanto eso.  
KC: Pero siempre te ha gustado eso, ¿no? Dijiste que en la casa—antes de hablar de eso en la escuela, te interesaba eso. Cuéntame de eso.  
Elizabeth: Tengo un libro que me dio mi hermano de *Science*. Y tiene como el *Sun* y todos los planetas. Y los ponía en orden así como los pone el maestro. Luego leía el libro de que se trataba y qué se movía alrededor del sol.

(Interview, 2/11/04)

KC: Oh yeah? Why?  
Elizabeth: Because I like what we're learning now.  
KC: About what?  
Elizabeth: About matter.  
KC: About what?  
Elizabeth: About matter – it's because I don't know the word (in Spanish). We're also learning about the planets and all that. We're barely starting to learn about that.  
KC: You said you like the stars and the constellations. Tell me about that.  
Elizabeth: Like the teacher explained to us how (inaudible). How the Earth moves, how long it takes for the Earth to move around the sun – um, how many hours it takes, and that that can happen – he taught us all that.  
KC: But you've always liked that, right? You said that at home – before you talked about that in school, you were interested in that. Tell me about it.  
Elizabeth: I have a Science book that my brother gave me. It has information about the sun and all the planets. It had them in order, just like the teacher presented them. I would read the book about how planets moved around the sun.

(Interview, 2/11/04)

Elizabeth demonstrated her love of science not just by claiming it her favorite subject, but also by investigating concepts on her own using one of her brother's books. Unfortunately, Elizabeth's desire to pursue scientific knowledge was not recognized by Mr. Ortiz nor reflected on her report card.

Being labeled a “bubble kid.” Elizabeth, along with many of the students at Parks Elementary, was considered a “bubble kid.” A “bubble kid” was a term used at Parks to refer to a student who was teetering on the borderline between passing and failing the high-stakes standardized tests of TAKS. Many of the pull-out and after-school tutorials were aimed at the “bubble kids,” because with extra supports, a “bubble kid” could slide into the passing zone. Since resources were limited at the school, some of the students who were predicted to fail the TAKS (i.e., on the failing side of the bubble) did not receive as much attention and hard-hitting academic drilling as the “bubble kids.”

Since Elizabeth was a “bubble kid,” she was recruited for after-school and Saturday Science tutorials that primarily focused on TAKS preparation. She was also pulled from her regular class to receive small-group reading instruction twice a week where one of the Reading Specialists went over test-taking strategies and practice reading passages. Mrs. Sánchez expressed concern for Elizabeth spending so much time at school for academics. She said that, above and beyond Elizabeth’s eight-hour school day, she spent approximately six hours after school each week plus four hours on Saturdays doing tutorials. Mrs. Sánchez said that she was concerned with how far behind Elizabeth seemed.

After the fifth grade TAKS tests, I asked Elizabeth about them:

KC: Después de hacer el TAKS, me dijiste que era difícil, ¿verdad?

Elizabeth: Poquito, pero no.

KC: ¿Qué era el más difícil?

Elizabeth: El de *Reading*. Debes leer todo eso, leer las preguntas, y luego buscar la respuesta. Luego tienes que explicar

KC: After you took the TAKS, you told me that it was hard, right?

Elizabeth: A little bit, but not really.

KC: What was the hardest part?

Elizabeth: The Reading section. You have to read everything, read the questions, and then look for the right

porque piqueaste esa respuesta. Y de *Science* también era *hard*.

KC: ¿Y tú crees que ir a la escuela los sábados [para las tutorías de ciencias] te ayudó?

Elizabeth: Sí, porque antes no sabía que era *erosion* y allí me habían enseñado.

KC: Y había una pregunta de erosión.

Elizabeth: Sí.

KC: Y qué pensaste del examen de matemáticas?

Elizabeth: Estaba *easy*.

KC: ¿Terminaste temprano o tomaste mucho tiempo?

Elizabeth: De matemáticas—[Terminé] rápido. De Reading terminé después de las 2 y de Science después de la una.

(Interview, 4/2/04)

answer. After that, you have to explain why you picked that answer. The Science section was hard, too.

KC: Do you think going to school on Saturdays [for Science tutorials] helped you?

Elizabeth: Yes, because before I didn't know what erosion was and they had taught me there.

KC: So there was a question about erosion.

Elizabeth: Yes.

KC: And what did you think about the Math section?

Elizabeth: It was easy.

KC: Did you finish up early or did you take a long time?

Elizabeth: The Math one—[I finished up] fast. I finished the Reading after 2 o'clock and the Science after 1 o'clock.

(Interview, 4/2/04)

Elizabeth recognized that the additional hours of TAKS tutorials did help her to answer at least one question on erosion. Officially in Texas, the TAKS test is scheduled over a three day period in the Spring semester. However, for students, like Elizabeth, who attended Parks, TAKS was a daily undertaking that consisted of one practice test after another. For “bubble kids” and their teachers, the pressure placed on them by the figured world of accountability was great. As a result, it was not uncommon to hear the principal tell the faculty to build up “student stamina for the test” and to create “test-like conditions” throughout the school year. After the winter break, the principal mandated even stricter use of instructional time, stating that teachers “create test-like conditions as much as possible” so that students could “build up stamina for the test” (Fieldnotes,

2/04). One example was that all fourth and fifth graders would no longer have recess or any other to use the words of the principal “wild time” until after the TAKS tests.

Another example required Friday assessments (practice TAKS questions) to increase from about twenty minutes per subject area (i.e., Reading, Math, and Science) to an all-day affair.

Elizabeth—like her mother—seemed concerned about her own academic standing. For example, Elizabeth expressed concern about the possibility of not passing the TAKS tests. She said, “Me pongo bien nerviosa. Pienso que no lo voy a pasar [I get really nervous. I start thinking that I’m not going to pass it.]” (Interview, 4/2/04). She said that she worked extremely slowly. She stated that she worked a little bit faster in fourth grade, but now (in fifth grade), she was one of the last kids working on the test. The reason she gave for taking her time and being one of the last students to finish was because “*quiero agarrar un* good grade [I want to get a good grade.]” (Interview, 4/2/04).

Struggling with language of instruction. At the beginning of fifth grade, Elizabeth was transitioned into all-English instruction due to the transitional nature of the bilingual program. Elizabeth, by her own account, was struggling with the change:

KC: ¿Y a ti te gusta leer más en inglés o en español?	KC: And do you like to read more in English or in Spanish?
Elizabeth: en español.	Elizabeth: In Spanish.
KC: ¿Por qué?	KC: Why?
Elizabeth: Porque es más fácil para mí. Pero ahorita estoy batallando mucho [con el inglés].	Elizabeth: Because it’s easier for me, but I’m really struggling with English now.
KC: Y solías estar con Ms. Schaffer [la maestra bilingüe de quinto grado] para	KC: And you used to be with Ms. Schaffer (the bilingual fifth grade

*Language Arts, ¿verdad?*  
 Elizabeth: um-mm.  
 KC: Y después te cambiaron. ¿Y por qué te cambiaron?  
 Elizabeth: Porque me dijeron que era más fácil para mí. Y yo les dije que no iba a ser más fácil. Pero [inaudible]. Por eso me cambiaron para *English*.  
 KC: ¿Y ahora te gustaría estar en instrucción en español o en inglés?  
 Elizabeth: Español.  
 KC: Leerlo, escribirlo? o todo?  
 Elizabeth: Todo.... [Ahora] no podemos escribir en español.

(Interview, 2/11/04)

teacher) for language arts, right?  
 Elizabeth: um-mm.  
 KC: And then they switched you. Why did they change you?  
 Elizabeth: Because they told me it was easier for me. And I told them that it wasn't going to be any easier, but (inaudible). That's why they switched me to English.  
 KC: And would you like to receive instruction in English or Spanish?  
 Elizabeth: Spanish.  
 KC: Read it, write it? Or everything?  
 Elizabeth: Everything...[Now] we can't write in Spanish.

(Interview, 2/11/04)

Elizabeth seemed to be able to identify what would be in her best academic interests—receiving more instruction in her primary language. However, possibly due to the subtractive nature of the district's bilingual programs and lack of resources, Elizabeth was forced into silent resignation of an all-English curriculum. Even though Elizabeth claimed to be more comfortable with Spanish instruction and seemed to be experiencing difficulty with all-English instruction, she never really attributed any of her academic struggles with language. She wrote in our dialogue journal and stated in interviews that any trouble she was experiencing academically needed to be remedied by “*echándole más ganas* [giving it her all].” After taking the TAKS, she wrote, “*Yo me siento bien [acerca de TAKS]. Y pienso que sí los voy a pasar porque yo le eché muchas ganas.* [I feel good [about the TAKS test]. And I think that I am going to pass them [all the sections of the test] because I gave it my all” (Journal #14, no date).

In a grade level meeting in December 2003, the fifth grade teachers mentioned that Elizabeth was more comfortable with Spanish. Yet the message she received echoed the grade-level expectations and transitional philosophy of bilingual education: to perform in English and leave Spanish behind. Beyond the political and xenophobic reasons for this burned-bridges approach to bilingualism (Kjolseth, 1973) was the logistical fact that two of Elizabeth's teachers, Ms. Walther and Ms. Kendall, were English-monolingual teachers and could not instruct in Spanish. Ms. Walther, Elizabeth's Language Arts teacher at that time, mentioned that she had paired Elizabeth up with another bilingual student. That way Elizabeth could write her work in Spanish and then translate it into English with the help of the other student. Ms. Kendall pointed out that she modified her Math instruction using the textbook's recommendations for LEP students. Therefore, she felt like the "LEP students" were getting adequate support in her class. While Ms. Kendall made attempts to modify her instruction based on her students' linguistic needs, I was troubled that there were not more supports in place to assist Ms. Kendall with modifications. Manufactured notes in the margins of a Teacher's Edition textbook should not be the sole guide for ESL modifications. What institutional supports were in place for Ms. Kendall and Ms. Walther to serve an ELL student population of over 30%?

Despite the fact that Ms. Walther and Ms. Kendall made efforts to modify their instruction for their bilingual students, Elizabeth preferred the fifth grade teachers who were bilingual, Ms. Schaffer and Mr. Ortiz:

KC: ¿Qué opinas de matemáticas?  
 Elizabeth: También está *fun*. Pero lo que no me gusta más es *writing* y *reading*.  
 KC: ¿en inglés? ¿Pero antes en español?  
 Elizabeth: Sí, me gustaba.  
 KC: ¿Quién es tu maestro favorito?  
 Elizabeth: Ms. Schaffer *and* Mr. Ortiz.  
 KC: ¿Por qué?  
 Elizabeth: Porque ellos no te regañan tanto como Ms. Kendall y Ms. Walther. Y no dan tanta tarea.  
 KC: ¿No dan tanta tarea? Y cuándo Ms. Kendall te regaña, ¿cómo es?  
 Elizabeth: A mí nunca me ha regañado. Nomás así a personas les regaña o les grita y todo.  
 KC: ¿Y Ms. Walther te ha regañado?  
 Elizabeth: Ms. Walther, no. A veces cuando le digo que no hice mi tarea. Pero nomás me dice que lo haga otra vez, pero no me grita como a los demás niños. ...  
 KC: ¿Y cómo son los demás niños?  
 Elizabeth: Ellos no lo hacen [la tarea] porque no quieren. Y a veces no lo hago cuando no puedo y no tengo tiempo. Y me voy a dormir. Y cuando me dejaba cuatro tareas y Ms. Kendall me dejaba otras dos, eran como 6 tareas y no terminaba a tiempo. Pero todavía no me han regañado.  
 KC: ¿Y por qué les regañaba a los otros?  
 Elizabeth: Porque ellos siempre se portaban mal en la clase de ella.

(Interview, 2/11/04)

KC: What do you think about Math?  
 Elizabeth: It's also fun. But what I don't like is writing and reading.  
 KC: In English? And before, in Spanish?  
 Elizabeth: Yes, I liked it.  
 KC: Who's your favorite teacher?  
 Elizabeth: Ms. Schaffer and Mr. Ortiz.  
 KC: Why?  
 Elizabeth: Because they wouldn't scold me as much as Ms. Kendall and Ms. Walther. And they don't give so much homework.  
 KC: They don't give as much homework? And when Ms. Kendall scolds you, how's it?  
 Elizabeth: She's never scolded me. She only scolds some people or she'll scream at them and everything.  
 KC: And Ms. Walther has scolded you?  
 Elizabeth: Not Ms. Walther. Sometimes when I tell her that I didn't do my homework. But she only tells me to do it again, but she doesn't scream at me like she does to other kids....  
 KC: And how are the other kids?  
 Elizabeth: They don't do the homework because they don't want to. And sometimes I don't do it because I can't and I don't have time. And i go to sleep. And when she gave me homework and Ms. Kendall gave me homework, there were 6 homeworks and I didn't finish on time. But they haven't scolded me yet  
 KC: And why did she scold the others?  
 Elizabeth: Because they would misbehave in her class.

(Interview, 2/11/04)

At first, Elizabeth stated that she preferred Ms. Schaffer and Mr. Ortiz because they did not scold her like Ms. Kendall and Ms. Walther did. When I inquired further, Elizabeth

admitted that she had never really been scolded by either one of them even when she did not turn in all of her homework. However, she went on to say that other students were often reprimanded by Ms. Kendall and Ms. Walther. So her preference for the bilingual teachers might have been due to her comfort level with the language—at least having the option to use and be understood in her native language.

*Examining the social construction of ‘good’ student.* Elizabeth considered herself a good student, because in the classroom, she exhibited the traits of an obedient and respectful girl. When I asked Ms. Kendall about my former Pre-K students, she mentioned that all the girls (i.e., Elizabeth, Jeniffer, Belinda, Lizzie, Alma, and Angela) exhibited those traits:

Ms. Kendall: The girls are all—all of these girls are quiet and sweet. ... most of all of these seem very responsible, caring, and giving and willing to try and work. Go that extra mile. Very wanting-to-please-you.

(Interview, 1/16/04)

This description provided by Ms. Kendall, along with the data sets on Elizabeth’s comportment in fifth grade, demonstrates how Elizabeth and some of the other bilingual Latina students had been dialogically authored by their families, their teachers, their peers, the larger school system, and themselves to be ‘good’ (i.e., obedient) students.

Elizabeth did not consider herself especially intelligent:

KC: ¿Y crees que eres inteligente?

Elizabeth: [with hand open she rotates wrist back and forth]

KC: ¿Qué quiere decir eso?

Elizabeth: Más o menos.

KC: ¿Y por qué dices eso?

KC: And do you think you’re intelligent?

Elizabeth: (with hand open she rotates wrist back and forth)

KC: And what does that mean?

Elizabeth: More or less.

Elizabeth: Porque casi no—a veces ni me sé cosas de las preguntas y eso.

KC: ¿Y por qué?

Elizabeth: Porque *I'm not paying attention*.

KC: ¿Y que opinas de los maestros que has tenido?

Elizabeth: Son bien buenos.

(Interview, 5/3/04)

KC: And why do you say that?

Elizabeth: Because I almost don't – sometimes I don't even know the answers to questions and things like that.

KC: And why?

Elizabeth: Because I'm not paying attention.

KC: And what do you think about the teachers you've had?

Elizabeth: They're very good.

(Interview, 5/3/04)

Elizabeth repeatedly told me that she had good teachers. Furthermore, she seemed to have begun to place the responsibility of not understanding academic concepts squarely on her own shoulders, citing “I'm not paying attention.”

Unknown to her, that “F” was based on a single practice test score that was not even designed by the teacher to assess student knowledge of classroom content. She accepted full responsibility and the brunt of her mother's disappointment— simply, but poignantly, stating, “Debo mejorar más [I must get better at it]” (Interview, 4/2/04). What about the system that pushed her in school eight hours a day plus after-school and Saturday tutorials?

In order to understand the significance of defining ‘good’ students according to their comportment, rather than their academic prowess, we must consider socio-cultural, political, historical, and individual factors. This dialogic authoring of Elizabeth's student status took place on many levels. We must consider the intersection of a multitude of identity markers—such as gender, language, and race—within this particular socio-historical time of education. Now more than ever, the high-stakes testing climate is

forcing educators to define ‘good’ students as those who will dutifully and complacently engage in regimented academic tasks.

## DISCUSSION

Elizabeth authored herself and was being authored as someone who was held in high regard socially. She seemed to understand and to perform well within her various socially figured worlds of school. To a certain extent, Elizabeth’s seeming ability to perform well in her social worlds tended to compensate for her linguistic and academic struggles. Even though she was a very visible and prominent figure in her school, Elizabeth’s figured worlds regarding academics seemed dangerously neglected.

If I had spent less time in Parks Elementary, I would probably have been compelled to write about Elizabeth as a victory narrative for Trueba’s new cultural capital (2002). Surface-level observations and conversations with Elizabeth and significant persons in her life could have easily led me to believe that, in many respects, Elizabeth appears to be an “unconflicted” bicultural individual—having strong ties to Mexico, being well-liked by teachers and peers, given special privileges in school, demonstrating up-to-date knowledge of pop culture (e.g., fashion, music, manner of speech), and loving to dance and listen to Latin music. However, observations, interviews, school records, and the like reveal much more complex nuances and disruptions in the midst of Elizabeth’s apparent social successes within her figured worlds. While Elizabeth is socially resourceful and well-liked, her socially figured worlds, to a certain extent, made up for academic and linguistic disregard.

Elizabeth was able to compensate for a lack of academic and social balance in elementary school. But what will happen down the line? As the academic load increases with more pressures and fewer supports, how long will she be able to sustain 'good' standing? Whereas Elizabeth was adept at using her social capital to superficially contend with any linguistic and academic shortcomings, she was already beginning to learn a script where she was to be blamed for them. If this pattern continues of authoring her as less capable, her dreams of becoming a teacher or a doctor might soon be out of reach. Like in one study that addressed the inequitable treatment for girls in education, researchers found that "[m]ost girls desperately wanted to be well liked and popular. For many, achievement in the social arena became far more important than academic attainment" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994: 94).

## CHAPTER V

### JENIFFER: WRITING HERSELF OFF IN *LENGUAJE*

Jeniffer could have been reduced down to the category of an introverted ‘schoolgirl.’ After all, she was authored by herself and others as someone who liked school and applied herself. However, through the details and descriptions of Jeniffer in this chapter, more facets of Jeniffer’s *formas de ser* become visible, such as her playful interactions with her family and friends and her reported insecurities regarding her abilities in Language Arts.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of some important aspects of Jeniffer’s family. I also recount how I had authored Jeniffer prior to getting re-acquainted with her during the study and how my authoring of her had evolved throughout the study. I include my authorings of Jeniffer because it is important to share my journey in this research process and through what lens I view the students. This chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first section, I provide in-depth information regarding some of Jeniffer’s major figured worlds: (1) Dialogic authoring within figured worlds of home/family, (2) figured world of peer groups, and (3) figured worlds of fifth grade academics. In the second section, I discuss Jeniffer’s performance in *lenguaje* (Language Arts), specifically regarding the following areas: (1) how Jeniffer authors herself in the area of *lenguaje*, (2) how Jeniffer was authored in *lenguaje* by those in the school system, and (3) how she expressed herself through our dialogue journals. I highlight the discrepancies that arose between Jeniffer’s identities (a) as a *student* in the content area of

Language Arts and (b) as an *authentic reader and writer* throughout the pages of our dialogue journal<sup>3</sup>.

## WHO WAS JENIFFER?

### Family Background

Jeniffer had straight, medium-brown hair falling midway down her back. Even at the age of eleven, she had an older-sounding voice which I often confused for her mother's when I called them on the telephone. At 5'4", she was tall for her age. Her friends sometimes teased her about her rather large, size 9.5 feet.

Jeniffer lived with her mother, father, older sister (Emilia, grade 6), two brothers (Gilberto, grade 7, and Oscar, grade 1). Her oldest brother, Francisco, lived in Mexico with extended family members. Her parents had been renting a three bedroom/two bathroom house for over seven years. Mr. Rivera was a skilled carpenter, but had not held a steady job for years because he was hurt on a construction job. He fell from a height of about two stories, fractured his back, and experienced chronic pain from his injuries. At the time of the study, Mrs. Rivera worked at an elementary school cafeteria during the week and occasionally cleaned houses on the weekends with her daughters:

Perdon que no te e escrivido es que no me acorde en el fin de semana. Bueno es que la verdad estaba muy ocupada. Eso es porque el savado tube que ir a limpiar

Sorry for not writing you. It's because I didn't remember over the weekend. Well, the truth is that I was very busy. That's because on Saturday I had to go and

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<sup>3</sup> I verbally told the students during the after-school focus group sessions on several occasions that they could choose to write in either Spanish or English. Jeniffer chose to write all of her entries exclusively in Spanish, even though she had not received native language instruction since third grade.

<p>unas casas ... con mi papá y mamá<sup>4</sup>. (Journal #4, 2/23/04)</p>		<p>clean houses ... with my dad and my mom.  (Journal #4, 2/23/04)</p>
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Mr. Rivera usually picked up the family in their white van in the afternoon. First, he picked up Jeniffer and Oscar at Parks Elementary, then his wife at another elementary school, and finally Gilberto and Emilia from middle school. Jeniffer had planned to attend the same middle school as her older siblings (instead of the assigned “feeder” middle school for their neighborhood), because her parents considered it a safer school than the “feeder” middle school and logistically easier if Jeniffer, Emilia, and Gilberto all went to the same school. When I was visiting one day, Mr. Rivera joked as he was preparing dinner that he was the “*amo* [homemaker]” of the house. The following description comes from my fieldnotes:

**Jeniffer’s house:** When I dropped Jeniffer off at her house after the after-school focus group, her whole family was just getting home (parents and 3 siblings). They waved and gestured for me to go inside. I parked the car and walked inside with Jeniffer. We stood in the living room for hugs and initial greetings. I hadn’t seen her older brother in a couple of years. Then, Jeniffer’s parents and the kids started giving me a tour of the kids’ rooms. In the three bedroom house, the girls share one room and the boys share another room. They started talking about Mr. Rivera’s carpentry work because he made much of the furniture. The girls share a double bed with large, rounded carved posts on the head and foot boards. They also have a matching armoire and desk. The bedroom set was sanded smooth and stained an earthy-rose color. The girls had a computer in their room with internet access.

The boys have twin beds on either side of the room. Oscar’s bed was smaller and more worn than the other one. Both were painted dark brown and were a type of day bed with framing on three sides. They made certain to point out that Mr. Rivera did not make Oscar’s bed. He did make Gilberto’s bed using Oscar’s as a prototype and improving upon it. The boys also had a computer in their room with internet

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<sup>4</sup> Note: All of Jeniffer’s journal entries have been copied exactly as they appeared in the original hand-written entries. I have not corrected for spelling or punctuation. In the English translation, however, I have chosen to use conventional spelling and punctuation rules in order to facilitate understanding.

access. ...

Mr. Rivera went back to the kitchen and started preparing dinner. He told me laughing, “Ahora soy el amo de la casa....Cocino, lavo los trastes...Prefiero trabajar fuera, pero— [Now I’m the homemaker. ...I cook, I wash the dishes ... I prefer to work outside the home, but—]” Mrs. Rivera finished his thought, “Está bastante mal. [It’s pretty bad out there.]” Then he added, “Sí, no hay trabajos. [Yeah, there are no jobs.]” ...They invited me for dinner. Thanking them, I told them that I would love to stay but couldn’t, because I had to pick up my daughter from school. So we all said good-bye and they thanked me for bringing Jeniffer home.

(Fieldnotes, 1/27/04)

From what I could observe, Mr. Rivera was indeed a gifted carpenter. I think they showed me the furniture for a couple of reasons: first, because the family was proud of Mr. Rivera’s workmanship, and, second, to see if I could recommend Mr. Rivera to anyone who might like to hire him for a project—big or small.

Mr. and Mrs. Rivera seemed to have high expectations for their children. They wanted their children to be respectful, do well in school, and make good choices. Jeniffer’s peers, like Belinda and Elizabeth, considered her parents to be relatively strict. In my car after an after-school focus group meeting, Jeniffer and Jorge (another focal student from the study) were talking about how Jeniffer’s dad would not buy Gilberto a car when he turned sixteen, because kids can be “*loquitos* [crazy].” She also mentioned that Gilberto sometimes wore his “*pantalones pa’ bajo* (baggy pants).” When Mrs. Rivera asked him, “¿*Por qué andas así?* [Why are you going around like that?],” the kids attempted to explain that baggy pants are “*la moda* [the fashion trend].” Mr. Rivera referred to baggy pants as “*pantalones cagados* [crapped-in jeans]” (Fieldnotes, 2/16/04).

For the after-school focus group, I told the kids that I would take them on a *paseo* (fieldtrip) of their choosing, if their parents gave permission for them to do so. José

asked, “Can we also choose who gets to go? Like all the boys together and the girls separate?” After all of the eight students burst into simultaneous cheers of agreement to separate the genders for the last *paseo*, I conceded to José’s request. Belinda, Lizzie, and Elizabeth started tossing around the idea of going to the mall or to GattiTown (a pizza place with game rooms). Jeniffer started to cry, saying that her parents would not let her do something like that. I asked her if she would be allowed to go canoeing on the river or on a hike like the boys had decided to do. She said that her parents would let her do that.

Jeniffer cited another example of her parents’ watchful care and interest in the children’s choices during an interview:

Jeniffer: Mi hermana lleva el teléfono en el baño para hablar con su amiga. Y mi papá— ¡uwij! Dice, “¡Qué tanto hablas con ella! ¿Es muy privado lo que estás hablando o qué? ¿Por qué no lo puedes decir acá?” Y mi hermana dice, “No, no es malo.” Y cuelga el teléfono.

(Interview, 5/6/04)

Jeniffer: My sister takes the phone into the bathroom to talk to her friend. And my dad—Ewwee! He says, “You talk way too much to her! Is it so secretive what you’re talking about or what? Why can’t you say what you have to say out here?” And my sister says, “No, it’s not anything bad.” And she hangs up the phone.

(Interview, 5/6/04)

Jeniffer’s family members seemed tightly knit and supportive of one another. As you will see throughout this chapter, many of Jeniffer’s stories from our dialogue journal revolved around experiences with her family in Texas and across the border in Mexico. She often mentioned being with immediate and extended family members on weekends—going to the movies, attending weddings and church, going shopping, and the like. For longer vacation breaks, Jeniffer generally travels to Mexico to visit her eldest brother and other family members.

### **How I Authored Jeniffer in the Past**

As I wrote in the Methodology chapter, the last time I had consistent contact with Jeniffer prior to the onset of the study was when she was a student in my Pre-K class five years prior to the study. I remember Jeniffer as an attentive, soft-spoken student who seemed calm and happy most of the time. I had always perceived her as a smart, understated, unassuming, 'make-no-waves' kind of girl. She enjoyed circle time and centers. She often came to school in pretty dresses with patent leather shoes. Unlike most of my Pre-K students, whose clothes went home paint-splattered from centers or dusty and sweaty from the playground, Jeniffer's clothes seemed to go home as clean as they had come to school that morning.

When in Pre-K, Jeniffer never rode the bus to and from school. Her parents (usually her father) picked her up, along with her older brother and sister from school everyday. Her father, Mr. Rivera, had injured his back doing construction work the year before, and he often came to the school with a neck and back brace that restricted his movement. I actively recruited parent volunteers to come to my classroom and spend time, whether it be helping during centers, reading a book, joining the students during lunch, or helping to pass out the afternoon snack after naptime. Usually the mothers helped out because I did not have as much contact with the fathers. I convinced Mr. Rivera to volunteer on a bi-monthly basis. He came to my classroom to help out a few times but seemed a bit uncomfortable and stopped volunteering after a few visits.

At the end of the Pre-K school year, the family had planned to leave for Mexico before the school year was officially out. Jeniffer's parents sought my advice about what they should do regarding school policies and regulations. They were concerned about how their decision to go to Mexico before the conclusion of the school year would affect their children's standing in the school, because, up until that point, all of the Rivera children were known for being responsible, compliant, and dedicated students. I checked with both the principal and the secretary in charge of the school records. They recommended that the family officially withdraw all three Rivera children so that the absences would not count against their school records. When I relayed the information to the Riveras, they heeded the advice from the office and withdrew the children from the school, making sure that they had the blessings of the school and their children's teachers.

### **My Authoring Amended**

When I returned to Parks Elementary for this study, I had to continually remind myself of all the changes the students had gone through since Pre-K. Given my uni-dimensional authorings of Jeniffer, I expected to find a lot of evidence that showed Jeniffer as a quiet, unassuming girl in most contexts, like the following excerpt from her dialogue journal illustrated:

... el domingo mi tia se caso no en una iglesia pero en como ofecina y luego nos fuimos a su casa a selebrar. Mi hermana y unas de mis primas bailaron una mucica para que no sea aburida la fiesta...  
(Journal #3, 2/23/04)

... on Sunday my aunt got married, not in a church but in like an office. And then, we went over to their house to celebrate. My sister and some of my cousins danced to some music so that the party wasn't boring...

(Journal #3, 2/23/04)

Jeniffer did not include herself in the description of her sister and cousins dancing at the party which suggested that she may not have joined in the dancing. This entry helped to confirm my simplistic authoring of her.

However, Jeniffer did not sit idly. On the contrary, she actively engaged as sister, daughter, contributing family member, etc. When I asked Jeniffer if she acted differently at home than at school, she told me that she was quiet at school but not at home (Interview, 5/6/04). The following two dialogue entries referring to snowball fights and riding go-carts on the beach provide examples of how Jeniffer authored herself as vibrant and fun-loving:

... jugamos [en la nieve], primero isimos unas torres de nieve y las tumbamos. Luego unos niños vinieron y nos tiraron unas pelotas de nieve y isimos una gerra de nieve. ... Cuando terminamos mi vesina salio y agaramos nieve de su carros y isimos gerra vesino contra vesino. Pero luego dijo mi hermano que isieramos niñas contra niños y nosotros dijimos que si...

(Journal #3, 2/14/04)

... we played [in the snow]. First we made snow towers and knocked them down. Then some kids came and we threw snowballs at each other and had a snow war. ... When we finished that, my neighbor came out and we gathered up the snow from the cars and had a neighbor-against-neighbor war. But then my brother said to do girls versus boys. And we said yes.

(Journal #3, 2/14/04)

...Cuando fuimos a Bronsvill mis primas estaban feliz porque casi nunca vamos a

... When we went to Brownsville, my cousins were happy because we almost

su casa. Me gustó ir porque fuimos a la plalla y llevamos el go-car. Yo lo maneje en la arena y estaba muy padre porque la arena princaba en mi cara. Tambien cuando llovio y avia charcos de agua fuimos afuera a jugar. Mis primas y yo y mis hermanos Emilia no quiso. Luego mi hermano Gilberto saco el go carr y lo amarro con un carro de mentiras. Despues jalamos mis primitas atras y yo, Gilberto y Oscar enfrente, pasamos por los charcos y resio. Yo nomas lo maneje una ves y nos mojamos mucho porque le di resio....

(Journal#6, 3/23/04)

never go to their house. I liked to go because we went to the beach and we took the go-cart. I drove it in the sand. It was really cool because the sand jumped in my face. And when it rained and there were puddles, we went outside to play. My cousins and I and my brothers—Emilia did not want to. Then my brother Gilberto got out the go-cart and tied it to a toy car. Then we pulled my cousins and me behind [the go-cart], Gilberto and Oscar were up front. We went through the puddles really fast. I just drove it one time and we got really wet because I punched it hard.

(Journal#6, 3/23/04)

Through observations, interviews, and interactions with Jeniffer, I now realize how simplistically I had authored her at the onset of the study—as merely a good, obedient ‘school girl.’ I now see Jeniffer as being a person with more depth and more texture. While I cannot deny that this ‘school girl’ image was confirmed in many instances throughout the study, there were many complex and nuanced dimensions that lay underneath that image. Beneath that simplistic image, I was able to capture glimpses when Jeniffer went outside of the parameters of what we might consider appropriate thoughts and actions of a stereotypical ‘schoolgirl.’ Although they were not specifically talking about Jeniffer, Charlie and José described the traits of a ‘schoolgirl/boy’ as someone who: liked school, got good grades, and pleased the teachers (Joint Interview, 5/04). While Charlie and José shed some light on the term for either sex, Orenstein (1994) includes some of the gendered nuances of the term ‘schoolgirl’ in the following description:

The lessons of the hidden curriculum teach girls to value silence and compliance, to view those qualities as a virtue. In fact, students tend to believe that, although they pay more attention to boys, teachers actually like girls better: as one Weston girl once told me, ticking the list off on her fingers, “teachers like us because we’re nicer, quieter, and better behaved. And the girls are right: teachers *are* more likely to describe girls as “ideal” pupils. Yet since, in practice, educators reward assertiveness and aggression over docility, the very behavior that is prized in girls becomes an obstacle to their success. (pp.35-36, emphasis in original)

### **SELECTED FIGURED WORLDS**

In this section, I will discuss her engagement within three of her figured worlds: home/family, peer groups, and fifth grade academics. Through our correspondence in dialogue journals and time spent together throughout the study, Jeniffer begins to open up to me, revealing profound thoughts and observations regarding her place within her many figured worlds—as daughter, sister, friend, student, and language broker. Within these figured worlds, we see how she carves out her identities in complex ways which had been overlooked if I had not taken a closer look at Jeniffer.

#### **Dialogic Authoring within Figured Worlds of Home/Family**

Jeniffer’s figured worlds of home and family cover a lot of territory—both figuratively and literally. Figuratively, she has many sub-worlds that include her roles as sister, as daughter, as contributing member, etc. Literally, her figured worlds span from Texas to Mexico. Before I delve into some of the aspects that I have found out about Jeniffer within her figured worlds of home/family, some family background information is detailed in order to provide contextual elements.

In Jeniffer's first letter to me in our dialogue journal, Jeniffer identified the members in her immediate family and mentioned her ties to Mexico because her oldest brother had been living there. One of the most interesting aspects of this letter was how she authored each one of her siblings and her parents based on whether she perceived them to be 'good' to her or not. She authored herself as a 'good' person overall even though she became angry sometimes.

Enero-26-2004

Hola J

Como estas? Yo estoy muy feliz porque lla estoy otraves estudiando con tigo. Savias que tengo 3 hermanos y una hermana. Mi hermana es muy mala porque no juega con migo hoy nos peliamos y no se porque es asi con migo abeses quisiera no tener hermana. Bueno mi hermano es muy bueno aunque es hombre se oye rediculo pero juega con migo, el se llama Gilberto es el segundo mallor. Francisco mi hermano mallor es muy bueno tambien el esta en Mexico pero bino unaves para aca y se porto muy bien con migo. Tu no te enojavas con tu hermana aveses? El otro es Oscar el es un poco bueno pero casi aveses es muy fastidioso. Mi mamá es muy Buena conmigo y mi papá tambien pero mas mi mamá. Aveses quisiera ser la mas Chiquita para que mi papá y mamá me consintieran como a mi hermanito Oscar. Mi mamá me quiere ami mucho porque soy la unica que me paresco a ella cuando estava Chiquita, tu a quen te pareses? Quien the queria mas? Yo pienso que yo soy Buena pero a veses me enojo.

January-26-2004

Hello J

How are you? I am very happy because I am studying with you again. Did you know that I have 3 brothers and a sister. My sister is very bad because she does not play with me. Today we got in a fight and I don't know what she is like that with me. Sometime I wish I did not have a sister. Well, my brother is very good. Even though he is a man, it sounds ridiculous—but he plays with me. His name is Gilberto and he's the second oldest. Francisco, my eldest brother, is very good as well. He is in Mexico but he came here one time and behave really well with me. Did you used to get mad at your sister sometimes? The other [brother] is Oscar. He is a little bit good but sometimes he is very bothersome. My mom is good to me and my father is too, but especially my mom. Sometimes I wish I was the youngest so that my father and mom would dote on me like they do with my little brother Oscar. My mom loves me a lot because I am the only one that looks like her when she was little. Who do you look like? Who loves you the most? I think I am good but sometimes I get angry.

Bueno lla me tengo que ir L

Adios, Jeniffer Rivera

Well, I have to go L

Good-bye, Jeniffer Rivera

This letter provided a good example of the dialogic authoring that took place within her family's dynamic, because she made value judgments of each family member's 'goodness' based on her experiences and interactions with them. As I delve more specifically into Jeniffer's individual relationships with her family members, more details will surface concerning the constant, reciprocal authoring that took place within Jeniffer's figured worlds in her home/family.

I was a bit surprised upon reading Jeniffer's first entry, because it challenged some of the basic ways that I had authored her since she was four years old in my Pre-K classroom. For example, I was alerted to my gravely simplistic authoring of Jeniffer when I found myself taken aback by her upfront admissions about sometimes wishing that she did not have a sister and that she were the youngest sibling so that her parents would dote on her like they doted on Oscar. I suppose I had expected a "perfect girl" (Orenstein, 1994) journal entry. Perfect girls would "silence themselves rather than speak their true feelings, which they come to consider 'stupid,' 'selfish,' 'rude,' or just plain irrelevant" (Orenstein, 1994: 37). Even though Jeniffer did not reveal anything earth-shatteringly appalling, she did break from my gendered and racialized expectations of the quiet Latina who could never think a blemished thought.

*Siblings.* As Jeniffer mentions in the letter, she has four siblings. At the time of the study, the eldest brother Francisco was living in Mexico with relatives. The second oldest brother Gilberto was in eighth grade, the older sister Emilia in sixth grade, Jeniffer in fifth, and Oscar in first. When I asked Jeniffer about her relationship with Emilia, she said that she had been trying to ignore Emilia more recently because she did not like how Emilia had been treating her. Jeniffer gave an example of a typical altercation in an interview:

Jeniffer: Como [Emilia] dice, “Sal de mi cuarto!” Y yo le digo, “Es mi cuarto también.” Y dice que va a quitar mis cosas. Y si no salgo [del cuarto], dice a mis papás. Y luego mi papá me regaña a mí porque ella dice, “Tengo que hacer mi tarea.” Y luego, habla por teléfono con mi prima o con su amiga.

(Interview, 5/6/04)

Jeniffer: Like [Emilia] will say, “Get out of my room!” And I tell her, “It’s my room, too.” And she says that she is going to throw my things out. And if I don’t get out [of the room], she tells my parents. And then my dad scolds me because she says, “I have to do my homework.” And then, she talks on the phone to my cousin or with her friend.

(Interview, 5/6/04)

Despite the fact that they fight over territorial issues and the like, the sisters did have moments when they got along. For example, Jeniffer would generally wear her hair pulled into a loose pony-tail. Whenever Jeniffer went to school with her hair fixed with elaborate twists and ornate butterfly-shaped clips, I would compliment her on how nice it looked. Jeniffer would smile and say, “Me lo arregló Emilia. [Emilia fixed it for me.]”

Jeniffer seemed extremely close with Gilberto, mentioning that he played with her and taught her about academic concepts and how to swim. In an interview with Belinda (Jeniffer’s best friend), she mentioned that Jeniffer was very intelligent and how her smarts could be attributed, in part, to the fact that “Su hermano le enseña. [Her brother

teaches her.]” (Interview, 5/11/04). Gilberto often kept Jeniffer motivated in school by helping her with her school work and sharing what he had been learning in school, as illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

Jeniffer: ...matemáticas siempre me han gustado desde chiquita porque mi hermano Gilberto me enseñaba. Él me enseñaba lo de sus clases. Y por eso me gusta matemáticas.

(Interview, 2/5/04)

Jeniffer: ... I have always liked Math ever since I was little, because my brother Gilberto would teach me. He used to teach me about what he was learning in class. And that’s why I like Math.

(Interview, 2/5/04)

Jeniffer: Mi hermano Gilberto a veces me ayuda y dice, “Eso está bien. También esto. Y tienes que cambiar eso.” ...Y estoy tratando de enseñar a mi hermano Oscar—que está chiquito—para que luego cuando sea grande, sepa como yo. Porque cuando yo era chiquita, mi hermano Gilberto me enseñaba como cosas más altas....

(Interview, 5/6/04)

Jeniffer: My brother Gilberto sometimes helps me and says, “This is right. That one is, too. And you have to fix that one.” ... And now I’m trying to teach my brother Oscar—who is younger—so that when he is older, he’ll know like I do. Because when I was little, my brother Gilberto would teach me more advanced things....

(Interview, 5/6/04)

In the interview, Jeniffer continued to describe how Gilberto taught her higher concepts even when she was in Kindergarten. Interestingly, she seemed to have stepped into a similar mentoring role with her younger brother Oscar. Stanton-Salazar (2001) mentions that much of the literature addresses the role of parents in children’s education, but the older siblings’ power to influence is often not discussed.

*Mi mamá dice...* In addition to Gilberto’s marked influence on Jeniffer, her mother authored her in specific ways which seemed to influence how Jeniffer authored herself. For instance, Jeniffer stated that she would like to be a teacher or nurse because

her mom said that she had a lot of patience. Jeniffer talked about both of these possible professions by prefacing that her mom had said that she would make a good teacher or nurse:

KC: ¿Y qué quieres ser tú cuando seas grande?

Jeniffer: Pues, mi mamá dice que maestra. A mí me gustaría eso—ser maestra. O, si no, una enfermera.

KC: ¿enfermera? ¿Por qué?

Jeniffer: Porque dice mi mamá que tengo mucha paciencia. Y sí, me gustaría estar con niños así—jugando con ellos y enseñarles cosas. O como cuando mi hermano se lastima, yo lo curo.

KC: No dijiste “doctora.” ¿Por qué?

Jeniffer: Sí, pero es que—es que casi no me gusta ver la sangre. Me asusta.

KC: ¿Tú crees que las enfermeras también ven sangre?

Jeniffer: Sí, pero no tanto. Como los doctores tienen que operar a las personas. Y eso me da como cosa.

(Interview, 5/6/04)

KC: What do you want to be when you grow up?

Jeniffer: Well, my mom says a teacher. I would like that—being a teacher. Or, if not that, a nurse.

KC: A nurse? Why?

Jeniffer: Because my mom says that I have a lot of patience. And yes, I would like to be with children like that—playing with them and teaching them things. Or like when my brother gets hurt, I make him better.

KC: You didn’t say “doctor.” Why?

Jeniffer: Yeah, but it’s that—it’s that I really don’t like the sight of blood. It scares me.

KC: Do you think that nurses have to see blood as well?

Jeniffer: Yes, but not as much. Like doctors have to operate on people. And that grosses me out.

(Interview, 5/6/04)

Another illustration of how her mother’s authoring resonated with Jeniffer occurred during an interview with Jeniffer and Angela. The three of us were discussing the issue of ethnic/cultural self-identification. Unlike in the previous interview excerpt (when Jeniffer seemed to agree with her mother regarding possible career choices), the following excerpt shows that Jeniffer had reservations regarding her mother’s authoring of her ethnic identification as a *Chicana*. Jeniffer began to answer the question of her

self-identification using her mother's words, but ultimately rejected the label of *Chicana* when referring to herself.

Jeniffer: Mi mamá me dice que soy chicana.

Angela: Chicana—Que eres americana pero mexicana también.

Jeniffer: Dicen que soy African-American. O Hispanic.

Angela: ¿African-American?

KC: ¿Quieres decir Mexican-American?

Jeniffer: Sí, eso. Mexican-American. Yo digo que soy Mexican-American porque chicano suena wákala.

Angela: Sí, como—

Jeniffer: *Strange*.

(Joint Interview, 5/6/04)

Jeniffer: My mom says that I am Chicana.

Angela: Chicana—that you're American but Mexican, too.

Jeniffer: They say that I am African-American or Hispanic.

Angela: African-American?

KC: Did you mean to say "Mexican-American"?

Jeniffer: Yes, that. Mexican-American. I say that I am Mexican-American because Chicano sounds yuck.

Angela: Yeah, like—

Jeniffer: *Strange*.

(Joint Interview, 5/6/04)

While Jeniffer states that she prefers Mexican-American during that particular interview, she chooses another way to self-identify in her second dialogue journal. Instead of referring to herself as Mexican-American, she refers to herself as *mexicana*. She then goes on to tell me how she and Alma like to speak Spanish with one another during class.

El 7 de febrero 2004

... Sabias que nomas yo y Alma somos las unicas mejicans<sup>5</sup> en nuestra clase.

(Journal #2, 2/7/04)

February 7, 2004

... Did you know that just me and Alma are the only (female) Mexicans in our class.

(Journal #2, 2/7/04)

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<sup>5</sup> I believe that Jeniffer left off the "a" in *mejicanas* because of the English influence.

## **Figured Worlds of Peer Groups**

This section will focus on Jeniffer's primary group of girlfriends from Parks Elementary, which was primarily composed of other bilingual Latina girls. Toward the end of the year, she started to become good friends with Ashley, the only White girl in the fifth grade. Her friendship with Ashley caused some tensions between Jeniffer and her other friends. Based on my observations of Jeniffer during the school day, after-school groups, and *paseos*, I will detail how Jeniffer tended to act around her friends and how she dealt with conflicts and tensions that arose within these friendships. Then I will share some surprising glimpses of Jeniffer's identities that deviate from how we might stereotypically author a 'school girl.'

My unsophisticated expectations were to find data to corroborate that Jeniffer was often the observer in a group of peers, and one who often felt more comfortable blending into the background. During our first after-school focus group, for example, her best friend Belinda exaggeratedly explained how Jeniffer and she "are best friends since Pre-K. Well, not in Kinder because we had different teachers, but really since Pre-K. Jeniffer is so smart and pretty. We talk on the phone all the time..." Jeniffer sat quietly, smiled, and then pat Belinda's arm saying, "Ya, Belinda. Ya. [Enough, Belinda. Enough.]" For the most part, Jeniffer did get along well with her peers. She often seemed quiet and passive, because I did not hear what she and her friends discussed. They often whispered or spoke in hushed tones. I did, however, see her laughing and talking with her friends on many occasions and in a variety of settings (e.g., in the hall, at lunch, in classrooms, *paseos*, etc.).

*When conflicts arose.* Some of the interactions that I was privy to related to how Jeniffer handled conflicts that arose within her primary peer group. Her first response tended to be trying to make peace through negotiation and compromise. For instance, Elizabeth, Lizzie, and I were visibly flustered when Belinda tried to convince me at the last minute to change the destination and date of the last *paseo*. I had already approved the plans with the four girls and their families and was not open to a change in plans. Jeniffer, on the other hand, calmly offered alternatives to Belinda so that Belinda would be able to stick to the original mutually-agreed-upon plans (Fieldnotes, 3/30/04).

Jeniffer did have a limit to her patience and favor. When we went to the park, I shared a canoe with Lizzie and Elizabeth. Jeniffer and Belinda shared the second canoe. Jeniffer seemed intent on listening to my directions on how to steer and navigate the canoe. Belinda, however, kept splashing Jeniffer, laughing, and rocking the canoe which resulted in them zig-zagging down the river, crashing into the river's north and south banks, and running into a lot of trees along the river's edge. To no avail, Jeniffer asked Belinda to stop her antics several times, her tone growing harsher with each request. On the return to and about a hundred yards from the canoe rental place, Jeniffer decided that she had had enough, put her paddle down, and crossed her arms. Belinda followed suit by putting her paddle down and crossing her arms. Unfortunately, the current just carried them farther away from where they had to go. Lizzie, Elizabeth, and I were amused by the sight of the two girls facing forward in the canoe with their arms sternly crossed, floating down the river in the same direction from which we had just come.

We yelled to them from the other canoe that they just had to put up with one another for a few more strokes and then they could get out of the canoe all together. But they had to go through their silent treatment first. It was a true battle of wills. I'm not sure who gave in first and started the trudge back, because the other girls and I were busy taking pictures, splashing each other, and getting out of the canoe. Belinda and Jeniffer enjoyed the rest of the *paseo* which consisted of wading in the water, a picnic, and people watching. They, and especially Jeniffer, seemed embarrassed when Elizabeth and I teasingly reminded them about the incident as we drove across the bridge that was over the river where we had canoed. Everyone laughed, except for Jeniffer, who fell silent and looked down at her lap.

Another conflict arose when Jeniffer started to spend more time with Ashley. Belinda and Angela (who are in different classes from Jeniffer, Ashley, and Alma) started to ignore Jeniffer or to greet her with a curt "hi" over their shoulder during lunch and in the hall. In an interview, Jeniffer described the goings-on:

Jeniffer: Y [Belinda] viene y me dice, "Es que Angela me dice que ya no soy tu *best friend* por una semana porque estaba celosa porque siempre andas con Ashley." Y dicen Angela y Belinda que van a ignorar a Ashley y a Jeniffer. Y por eso no me estaban hablando tanto. Y luego Belinda me dice, "*I'm sorry*. No es mi culpa. Es que Angela dijo eso, yo no." Y pienso, "*Yeah, right!*"

KC: ¿Belinda no puede tomar sus propias decisiones?

Jeniffer: No sé. Dijo que Angela es la que se pone celosa y por eso no me hablan.

KC: Como en el *sock hop*. ¿No crees que

Jeniffer: And [Belinda] comes to me and says, "It's that Angela told me that I have not been your best friend for a week because I was jealous since you always hang out with Ashley." So Angela and Belinda decided that they were going to ignore Ashley and me. And that's why they haven't been talking to me. So then Belinda tells me, "I'm sorry. It's not my fault. It was Angela's idea [to ignore you], not mine." And I thought to myself, "Yeah, right!"

KC: Belinda can't make her own decisions?

Belinda se puso celosa también cuando estabas bailando con Ashley?  
Jeniffer: Y Alma me dijo que Belinda dijo, “Jeniffer y Ashley son estupid.” Entonces yo creo que sí. También se puso celosa porque andaba jugando con Ashley y no con ella.  
KC: ¿Y qué dices de todo eso?  
Jeniffer: Digo que son buenas amigas porque no cualquier amiga es así— [mucha gente pansaría] como, “Déjala. Yo puedo encontrar otras amigas.” Y Belinda no es así. Yo escribí una carta de quienes son buenas amigas. Y puse que Belinda, Alma, y Ashley. A Ashley no conozco tanto pero me parece que es buena amiga porque siempre quiere ayudar y todo.  
(Interview, 5/6/04)

Jeniffer: I don’t know. Belinda said that Angela gets jealous and that’s why they stopped talking to me.  
KC: Like in the sock hop. Don’t you think that Belinda was jealous as well when you were dancing with Ashley?  
Jeniffer: And Alma told me that Belinda said, “Jeniffer and Ashley are stupid.” So I think she does [get jealous]. She also got jealous because I have been playing with Ashley and not her.  
KC: And what do think of all this?  
Jeniffer: I say that they are good friends, because not every friend is like that— [most people would be] like, “Forget her. I can find other friends.” And Belinda isn’t like that. I wrote a letter about who are my good friends. I wrote down Belinda, Alma, and Ashley. I don’t know Ashley very well, but she seems like a good friend. Because she always wants to help and everything.  
(Interview, 5/6/04)

In the end, Jeniffer can be reflectively forgiving of Belinda, even though she did not believe that Belinda is as innocent as she had claimed. One of their PowerPoint slides seemed to sum it up when they wrote, “...some times we get mad at each other. Our friendship is still here.” (Jeniffer is on the right side; See Appendix E.1).

*Desire to mentor/teach.* Jeniffer’s desire to mentor others was demonstrated not only with her little brother (See section entitled SIBLINGS) but also with her peers on several occasions that I observed. Following are two examples of her mentoring/teaching her peers. The first example occurred when I first brought the digital camera during

lunchtime for Belinda to use. Jeniffer smiled when she saw the camera and said, “Oh, I already know how to use that camera. We used one like that in Yearbook [an after-school enrichment class].” She took the camera from me in order to explain the features to Belinda, Charlie, Angela, and Alma.

The second example is when Jeniffer went on a *paseo* with some of the non-focal students. After I took the four girls from the focus group canoeing, Jeniffer told me that she did not like canoeing. After thinking about the situation more and reading Jeniffer’s dialogue journal entry below, I believe that her initial dislike of canoeing had to do with her unfamiliarity with canoeing and the friction between her and Belinda.

...A mi si me gusto el paseo que tuvimos no nomas al fin perotambien al prinsipio. Casi en el prinsipio porque me asustaba en la canoa y tambien porque no savia manejar bien. Pero si me gusto. Belinda nomas me queria mojar toda y poreso aveses chocavamos con los arboles. Al ultimo me gusto porque nos metimos al agua, lo bueno fue que no nos callimos al agua. Estab resbaloso poreso tenia miedo de callerme. Ami me acordo de cuando fui a Mexico al rio. Gracias por llevarnos a un paseo tan divertido y duro porque con las canoas me dolieron las manos...

(Journal #8, 4/2/04)

... I did like the *paseo* that we went on—especially the end but the beginning, too. Not so much in the beginning because getting in the canoe scared me and because I didn’t know how to navigate it well. But I did like it. It’s just that Belinda was trying to get me soaking wet and that’s why we kept running into the trees [hanging over the river bank]. At the end, I liked it because we got to go in the water. It a good thing we didn’t fall in the water. It was slippery. That’s why I was scared to fall in. It reminded me of when I went to Mexico to the river.

Thank you for taking us on such a fun and difficult *paseo* because my hands hurt after canoeing.

(Journal #8, 4/2/04)

I had promised to take the non-focal students who were my former Pre-K students on the *paseos* (to UT and the park) after school let out for the summer. Since Jeniffer had missed the initial *paseo* to UT, she joined me and three other students. I gave Jeniffer the

option to forego the canoeing segment of the *paseo* because I thought that she did not enjoy it the first time. To my surprise, she eagerly told me that she was excited about canoeing a second time. As she got in the canoe, she could not stop smiling. She helped the other students by giving them verbal instructions and physically demonstrating how to hold the paddle, steer, and brake. Because she was the only one who had been in a canoe before, she seemed to enjoy being the expert among her peers.

***Other formas de ser.*** On a few occasions, I captured glimpses of Jeniffer in ways that deviated from the typical pigeon hole she was placed in by her peers and teachers (including myself). Often she had been simplistically authored as merely a ‘good, quiet girl.’ Clearly, there was much data showing that Jeniffer fit the expectations for being a ‘good’ friend and a ‘good’ girl. However, there was also supporting evidence that revealed different facets of her identity, other *formas de ser*. Some of these *formas de ser* are not as fleshed out as other data sets and themes because my time in the field was limited and only allowed me to capture certain contexts. As we might expect from any person, Jeniffer could not be reduced to having one identity. Therefore, I will share a few of the anecdotes that challenge the notion of Jeniffer being forever cast in the light of just a good, obedient school girl.

Once in a while, her playful side would come out. In the last session of the after-school focus group, Jeniffer and Belinda presented their PowerPoint presentation that focused on their friendship and families. They were laughing and nudging each other while they explained the slides. During the car ride home, José said, “Man! Jeniffer and

Belinda were acting so dumb!” Jeniffer replied with a sarcastic, buoyant tone, “Yeah! Jeniffer’s so smart, she acts dumb” (Fieldnotes, 3/24/04).

Another time that Jeniffer exhibited other facets of her *forma de ser* was when she talked about Ashley (one of her best friends) in the dialogue journal saying that “a veces *nos pone de nervios*” [Ashley sometimes gets on Alma and my nerves] (Journal #11, 5/4/04). During an interview with Jeniffer and Angela, they started making fun of Belinda’s self-professed talents and activities (e.g., how smart Belinda is, how she can do Karate and play soccer, etc.).

This next example strays from Jeniffer’s *forma de ser* as mentor/teacher. During one interview, Jeniffer expressed regret in helping Belinda so much in fourth grade when they were both placed in all-English instruction with a monolingual English teacher. Jeniffer thought that Belinda was smarter than she was now. Jeniffer perceived that Belinda had surpassed her and ‘left her in the dust,’ especially in Language arts. In hindsight, Jeniffer’s competitive spirit flashed as she wondered if she would see herself as the ‘smarter’ one if she had never helped Belinda to the extent that she did.

During one of the fifth grade sock hops, I had returned Elizabeth and Jeniffer’s journals to them. Elizabeth was busy dancing and asked me to hold on to her journal. I had put it on the steps of the stage where Jeniffer was sitting and asked her if she could watch it for me. About ten minutes later, I walked out in the hall to get a drink from the water fountain. I saw Jeniffer sitting against the wall in an alcove next to the bathrooms in one of the side hallways. She was looking down intently at Elizabeth’s open journal in her lap. She looked up nervously, shut the journal, and stood up rather quickly. I said,

“¿Estabas leyendo el diario de Elizabeth? Sabes que eso es privado. No querrías que alguien leyera las cartas que escribimos tú y yo, ¿verdad? [Were you reading Elizabeth’s journal? You know that’s private. You wouldn’t want anyone to read our letters to each other, right?” She shook her head nervously and said, “No, no lo leí. [No, I didn’t read it.]” (Fieldnotes, 4/21/04). This anecdote shows that Jeniffer not only read private correspondence using clandestine tactics, but also denied it altogether when I took her by surprise.

### **Figured Worlds of Fifth-Grade Academics.**

#### *School history.*

Jeniffer: Muchos dicen que no les gusta la escuela porque está muy aburrido.  
KC: ¿Y qué opinas tú?  
Jeniffer: A mí me gusta la escuela mucho. En realidad me encanta.  
Quisiera vivir allí.

(Interview, 5/6/04)

Jeniffer: A lot of kids say that they don’t like school because it’s very boring.  
KC: And what do you think?  
Jeniffer: I like school a lot. Actually, I love it. I wish I could live there.

(Interview, 5/6/04)

As evidenced in the above excerpt, Jeniffer claimed to have always liked school. She was considered a hardworking and dedicated student by her teachers and parents. I have mentioned Jeniffer’s overriding identity image as ‘school girl’ quite a bit thus far. But I have yet to paint a picture of her figured worlds of fifth grade academics. Therefore, this section is dedicated to addressing Jeniffer’s identity as a student.

In third grade, Jeniffer was chosen to be one of the students who would take both the Reading and Math sections of the TAKS test in English at the end of the year. After

third grade, she received all-English instruction from primarily English-monolingual teachers. The school's practice of transitioning an ELL to all-English instruction, and earmarking her to take all standardized tests in English from third grade usually indicates that the child is viewed as being advanced in her academic abilities. In other words, when an ELL was transitioned and exited from bilingual education programs early, this was often taken as a sign of 'success,' according to a school with traditional notions that ascribe to the achievement ideology and hegemony of English (Shannon, 1995).

*Discourse surrounding Jeniffer's performance as a student.* Ms. Kendall, Jeniffer's fifth grade Math teacher, wrote on her report card: "Jeniffer is an exceptional student!" For the most part, Jeniffer seemed to fit in with the achievement ideology. She had developed effective study habits, took her schoolwork seriously, and engaged in extra-curricular activities, such as enrolling in an after-school class, where students learned how to put together a school yearbook.

Her second grade teacher, Mr. Catalán, authored Jeniffer as someone who was intelligent and wrapped up in her school work. However, he also mentioned that she was very strict with herself and her approachability was hard to gauge:

Mr. Catalán: Jeniffer. Wow! Es una niña que me costó mucho conectarme con ella. Me costó bastante. Con ella, nunca supe hasta cuando quería que le ayudara. ... Nunca supe dónde estaba. Nunca. No sabía si lo que le ofrecía, le ofendería. No sabía cómo ganarle. La energía me costó mucho. Muy tímida. No sé. Nunca supe—nunca me sentí

Mr. Catalán: Jeniffer. Wow! I had a really difficult time trying to bond with her. I really struggled. With her, I never knew to what extent she wanted me to help her. I never knew where she was. Never. I didn't know if I offered to help whether that would offend her or not. I didn't know how to win her over. It was tiring. She was very shy. I don't know.

bien con ella.... Porque Jeniffer estaba muy encerrada en su mundo. Siempre le he visto muy encerrada en su mundo. ... Era muy difícil conectar con otros. Tenía pocos amiguitos, poquitos. Estaba con sus tareas, en la casa. ...  
KC: Y cómo le iba en las tareas?  
Mr. Catalán: Bien. Pero me acuerdo que se frustraba bastante si algo en el trabajo no le salía como ella quería. Así le costaba mucho esfuerzo. Y luego si no sacaba el grado que ella quería o pensaba que sacaría, lloraba por frustración. ... Era muy inteligente. ... Quería todo perfecto. No la vi así muy creativa o la personalidad así divirtiéndose—en un año. ... Parece que ahora no anda tan estrictamente. Antes andaba muy estricta. Pero ahora, más desenvuelta, más libre.

(Interview, 5/04)

I never knew—I never felt good around her.... Because Jeniffer was enclosed in her own world. ... It was hard for her to bond with others. She had very few friends, very few. She was occupied with her school work, and at home. ...  
KC: And how was her school work?  
Mr. Catalán: Good. But I do remember that she would get really frustrated if something in her work didn't turn out the way she wanted. So she spent a lot of energy stressing over it. And if she didn't get the grade she wanted or expected, she would cry out of frustration. ... She was intelligent. ... She wanted everything perfect. I didn't see her as very creative or having a fun-loving personality—all year long. ... Now it appears that she has loosened up a bit. Before she was wound up really tight. But now, she's less on guard, freer.

(Interview, 5/04)

Mr. Catalán remarked that Jeniffer seemed less harsh on herself in fifth grade, but it was clear to me that that pattern continued of demanding high quality work from herself and expecting good grades as a result.

Jeniffer seemed to enjoy working on cognitively challenging tasks. The intensity with which she and Belinda worked on their joint PowerPoint presentation in the after-school focus group provides one example. She and Belinda actually asked for more time to work on their joint PowerPoint presentation than the time allotted. The other focal students, by comparison, did not particularly enjoy working on the PowerPoints after the first couple of sessions. On the last day, they had to work on their presentations before

presenting the slideshows to the after-school focus group, Belinda and Jeniffer worked really hard on the format and content of their slides. Unfortunately, they failed to save their work properly and I couldn't retrieve all the changes and revisions they had made during that after-school session. They were both greatly disappointed and Belinda nudged Jeniffer and said, "Just think, Jeniffer, all that work wasted! And we were using higher-order thinking, too. Just like Ms. Walther tells us to do." They both laughed and asked me if they could work on it some more during lunch the following day (Fieldnotes, 3/22/04). They worked on it, but they said that they didn't have enough time to make it as good as it was the previous day.

Given that Jeniffer had learned how to use PowerPoint with me, Ms. Walther put Jeniffer in charge of teaching Alma how use the program. Together Jeniffer and Alma put together an intricate slideshow with text and lots of pictures to show all the fifth grade class, family members, and faculty at the end of the year transition ceremony (a.k.a. fifth grade graduation).

Jeniffer admits that academic concepts do not automatically come easily for her and that she studies and works hard. In the following excerpt, she touches on many topics (e.g., study habits, intelligence, academic strengths and weaknesses) regarding how she views herself in the figured world of academics. I chose this excerpt for several reasons. The first reason is to illustrate how Jeniffer's figured worlds overlap and influence one another. We could not discuss her figured world of academics without mentioning the influence of her family and friends. The boundaries of figured worlds

should be understood as permeable and shifting entities that engulf other figured worlds at times and that are enveloped by others at different times.

Secondly, the way that Jeniffer discusses her intelligence illustrates how she often tried to fit the mold of an unassuming “school girl.” She answers my question about her intelligence by stating how she perceived others to have authored her intelligence (much like how she answered questions regarding her future career plans and her ethnicity using her mother’s perceived authoring of her). When I asked her again, she said that she thought many individuals were smart so she could assume that label as well. Lastly, this excerpt hints at Jeniffer’s insecurity in the area of Language Arts. Once I delved more deeply into how Jeniffer saw herself in the content area of *lenguaje*, I uncovered a wealth of ambiguity and contradiction. This discussion deserves more in-depth analysis which will be broached in the next section.

KC: ¿Por qué hay muchos niños que dicen que la escuela es aburrida?

Jeniffer: No sé tal vez porque les regañan los maestros. O no les gusta trabajar. O no saben tanto de ese sujeto y como dicen, “Ay. Yo no quiero ser—no quiero ir a la escuela porque no puedo hacer esto.” Antes decía eso pero ya no.

KC: ¿Antes decías eso?

Jeniffer: Que no me gustaba la escuela porque habían muchas cosas que eran difíciles para mí, pero ahora es bien fácil. Como ahora dice Alma, “No me gustan las matemáticas porque no entiendo nada. Es bien aburrido.” Y a mí no. A mí me gusta. Y tal vez por eso dicen eso de no gustar la escuela...Yo estudio como una hora, y

KC: Why are there so many kids that say school is boring?

Jeniffer: I don’t know, maybe because the teachers scold them. Or they [the students] don’t like to work hard. Or they don’t know much about the subject or, like, they say. “Ay. I don’t want to be—I don’t want to go to school because I can’t do this.” I used to say things like that, but not anymore.

KC: You used to say that?

Jeniffer: That I used to not like school because a lot of things were hard for me, but now it’s really easy. Like now Alma says, “I don’t like math because I don’t understand anything. It’s so boring.” And I’m not like that. I like it. And maybe that’s why they say

luego miro tele y luego voy a comer y estudio otro sujeto otra hora y luego otro [sujeto] y luego voy a dormir.

KC: ¿Entonces no haces todo a la vez?

Jeniffer: No, porque si no luego—como yo sé más matemáticas. ...Y luego cuando me tocaría la lectura, diría, “Ay, no. Es bien aburrida la tarea.” Y así [cambiando de actividades], no [es tan aburrido]: tantito de un sujeto y luego hago otra cosa y así.

KC: ¿Matemáticas es tu materia favorita?

Jeniffer: Mm-hm. [indicating yes]

KC: Sí, a mí también me gustan las matemáticas.

Jeniffer: A casi toda mi familia les gustan las matemáticas—menos a Emilia. A Emilia le gusta eso de ciencias.

KC: ¿Crees que tú eres inteligente?

Jeniffer: [pause, little shrug with slight smile] Muchos dicen que sí. Y mis papás dicen que soy bien inteligente. Digo que sí porque muchos me dicen que sí. Pero a veces [diría] no tanto tanto. Y me digo que tengo que ser mejor en eso y estudiar más. Muchos niños son inteligentes; entonces yo digo que sí soy inteligente [también].

KC: ¿Pero de todos modos tienes que estudiar?

Jeniffer: Porque si no—si yo digo que soy inteligente, me voy a quedar presumiendo. Los otros niños se van a sentir mal porque van a pensar que son burros.

KC: ¿Entonces por eso no quieres decir que eres inteligente?

Jeniffer: No. Yo les digo a mis amigos, “Ustedes también son inteligentes. Pero deben de estudiar más.” Y me dicen, “Quiero ser como tú.” Como they don’t like school.... I study for about an hour, and then I watch some TV and then I go eat and study another subject for another hour and then another subject and then I go to bed.

KC: So you don’t study everything at once?

Jeniffer: No, because then later—like I know more Math. So when it would be time for Reading, I would say, “Ay, no. This homework is so boring.” And like this [changing activities], it’s not [so boring]: a little bit of one subject and then I do something else and so on.

KC: So Math is your favorite subject?

Jeniffer: Mm-hm. [indicating yes]

KC: Yes, I also like Math.

Jeniffer: Almost everyone in my family likes Math—except for Emilia. Emilia likes that related to Science.

KC: Do you think that you are smart?

Jeniffer: [pause, little shrug with slight smile] Many say so. And my parents say that I’m really intelligent. I say that I am because many tell me so. But sometimes [I would say] not so much. And I tell myself that I have to be better in that and study harder. Many children are intelligent; so I say that I am [as well].

KC: But do you still have to study?

Jeniffer: [nods] Because if I don’t—if I just say that I am intelligent, then I will be bragging. The other children will feel bad, thinking that they are not as intelligent.

KC: So is that the reason that you don’t want to say you are intelligent?

Jeniffer: Not really. I tell my friends, “You are all smart, too. But you have to study more.” And they tell me, “I

Ashley y Alma dicen eso. Yo digo,  
“No, yo quiero ser como Belinda  
porque ella sabe de lectura.”  
(Interview, 5/6/04)

want to be like you.” Ashley and  
Alma say that. I say, “No, I want to be  
like Belinda because she is smart in  
Reading.”

(Interview, 5/6/04)

### ***LENGUAJE: A DEEPER LOOK***

Throughout the study, Jeniffer repeatedly describes her academic forte as Math. Not until I analyzed fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and dialogue journal entries did I notice how prevalent her lack of confidence appears in the content area of Language Arts. In this section, I will take a deeper look at her authoring in the area of *lenguaje* (Language Arts). Then, I will illustrate her proficiency as a bilingual reader and writer by surveying some of her extra-curricular writing samples throughout the study, particularly her dialogue journal entries.

#### **Authoring Herself in the Area of *Lenguaje***

By fifth grade, her doubts about her abilities as a student of *lenguaje* had become apparent to me. In addition to interviews where she discussed her difficulty with *lenguaje*, she mentions it in a couple of her dialogue journals:

A mi me gusta un poco lenguaje pero lo  
que mas me gusta hacer es matematicas  
y ciencias tambien me gusta el arte.  
(Journal # 2, 2/7/04)

I like Language Arts some, but what I  
like to do most is Math and Science. I  
like Art, too.

(Journal # 2, 2/7/04)

Estoy bien nerviosa por el examen [de TAKS] del miercoles el de lectura porque no sé tanto de lectura. No me preocupo por el de matematicas porque en el ultimo que hicimos nomas me sacé 4 males de to el examen...

(Journal #10, 4/23/04)

I'm really nervous about the [TAKS] test on Wednesday. The one on Reading because I don't know so much about Reading. I'm not worried about the Math test because on the last one we did I only missed four on the whole test.

(Journal #10, 4/23/04)

Interestingly, the day after she fretted over the reading portion of the TAAS, her next journal entry dedicated thirteen lines to describing a reading passage from the test regarding penguins. Jeniffer knew that penguins were my favorite animal, because I usually signed my letters with a penguin drawing next to my name. She described various details and facts that she remembered from the passage, like how penguins were not able to see very well on the ice and how they had many enemies in the water so they spent more time on land. Even though Jeniffer took the TAKS in English, she wrote a detailed summary in Spanish and then connected it to her own life and mine by writing:

...Uste a visto un pinguino de verda? Yo no pero quisiera. Tambien me gustan los delfines mucho porque estan bien bonitos, pero nunca los e visto de verdad.

(Journal #10, 4/23/04)

... Have you ever seen a penguin in real life? I haven't but I'd like to. I also like dolphins a lot because they are so pretty, but I have never seen them in real life.

(Journal #10, 4/23/04)

Jeniffer could have chosen to write to me about any topic the day after she took the Reading TAKS. She could have chosen not to write to me at all. Most of the students in my study had stopped writing to me by April or wrote to me very infrequently. Yet Jeniffer not only chose to write to me every chance she had, but also chose to write about a TAKS reading passage from the test she had taken the day before. There was a seeming

contradiction in the way that Jeniffer perceived, or authored, herself in the area of *lenguaje* and the way she sought out opportunities to use the written word with me via our dialogue journal.

### **Authored in *Lenguaje* by the School System**

What happened along her elementary career that has caused Jeniffer to doubt her abilities as a reader and writer? Using report cards (PK-5), benchmark tests and TAKS and TAAS ratings, I will construct a broad timeline that looks at how Jeniffer had been authored by the school system in relation to *lenguaje*. This is not intended to constitute an exhaustive investigation of Jeniffer's experiences in Language Arts. It should be taken as a broad, yet brief, survey of how Jeniffer was authored in her permanent school records regarding Language Arts.

***Pre-K through second grade.*** Overall, Jeniffer's report cards from Pre-Kindergarten through second grade indicated that Jeniffer's academic abilities and attitude as a learner were authored in a positive light. Following are specific comments related to *lenguaje*.

Pre-K	Me ayuda explicar los conceptos académicos a sus compañeros. Demuestra una actitud muy positiva hacia el aprendizaje de todas las materias.	She helps me explain academic concepts to her classmates. She demonstrates a very positive attitude toward learning in all subjects.
Kinder	Jeniffer es un buen ejemplo para los otros alumnos. Le gusta leer y escribir en frente de los demás. Bravo! ... Jeniffer es una buena lectora y le encanta leer a la clase. Deletrea palabras muy bien.	Jeniffer sets a good example for other students. She likes reading and writing in front of the class. Bravo! ... Jeniffer is a good reader and loves to read to the class. She spells words really well.
1st	Ha subido niveles en lectura y está leyendo al nivel de segundo grado.	She has moving up in her reading level and is reading on a second grade level.
2nd	Sus cuentos son muy originales y organizados. Sus producciones son de calidad.	Her stories are very original and well organized. Her work is of high quality.

Table 5.1: Jeniffer’s Report Card Comments

***Third and fourth grade.*** In 3rd grade, there were two items that stood out on Jeniffer’s report card that might have affected her outlook on *lenguaje*. First, she received an F in the third grading period in writing, because—according to the teacher’s handwritten report card comments—Jeniffer needed to improve “*su escritura de composición de su diario* [her composition writing from her journal].” She received consistent A’s and B’s in the other grading periods in “Lenguaje,” “Lectura,” and “Escritura.” Incidentally, she received straight A’s in Math. Secondly, Jeniffer took both the Reading and Math portions of TAAS in English even though she was officially in the bilingual program. She must have been selected by the teacher and LPAC committee as a student who could handle taking the tests in English that year. This practice of selecting certain students to test in English (usually the ones perceived to be the most advanced) was common at

Parks and other schools with transitional bilingual programs. She met minimum standards in TAAS Reading, but did not master all objectives. In Math, she mastered all objectives.

In 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Jeniffer was placed in an all-English instruction setting without any native language supports. Her report card showed that she had received all A's in Reading, Writing, Listening/ Speaking/Critical Viewing, and Math. The results from her fourth grade TAKS, however, painted a slightly different picture. While she passed and received commended scores on the Math portion of the TAKS, she barely passed the Reading TAKS standards. I cannot help but to wonder if Jeniffer would have a more confident outlook on her abilities in Language Arts if she had not been selected to take her first high-stakes standardized test (i.e., 3<sup>rd</sup> grade TAAS) in her non-native language. Ironically, the reason she was one of the few bilingual students slated to take the test in English that year because of her promising abilities in all content areas.

*Fifth grade Language Arts.* From what I observed in grade, *lenguaje* generally related to decontextualized drills and Friday TAAS assessments with sample reading passages. Ms. Walther, the Language Arts teacher, tried to fit in enrichment projects, such as having some students explore their family trees and collect stories, but she was constrained by the high-stakes push to get student scores up. Therefore, there was a lot of overhead and desk work with practice reading passages, where students were required to perform rudimentary tasks, such as underline key words and phrases, learn to jot down quick margin notes next to each paragraph, and answer multiple choice questions after the passage. My reflection log captured this lack of authentic language arts activities:

...As far as other writing samples go, I've observed quite a bit of TAKS passages. So what will that tell me? A lot about how narrow we're making L.A. for students. On Wednesday, I asked the kids how much they are writing in school. They all said they hardly do any writing at all. Dialogue journals will provide some writing samples, but not in the context of academic/content areas...

(Researcher's Log, 2/29/04)

Where Friday assessments used to take up approximately 45 minutes to one hour of the school day in Math, Reading, and Science, the principal instructed the teachers to make Friday assessments last all day long. The principal insisted that the teachers "build student stamina" for taking the TAKS test.

While Jeniffer's Math scores were straight A's, her grades in *lenguaje* consist of B's and C's. By 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Jeniffer was well aware of her standings when it comes to the periodic benchmark (practice) tests and the yearly TAAS exams. She could even cite how many she got wrong on the Math portion. Even though she passed her 3<sup>rd</sup> grade TAKS and 4<sup>th</sup> grade TAAS exams in reading, she did not receive commended scores. In other words, she met the minimum requirements set by the state but did not do exceptionally well. On the Math sections of these tests, however, she not only passed but received commended scores both of those years.

Following that same pattern, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Middle-of-the-Year assessments taken around December indicated that Jeniffer scored a 66% on Reading and an 84% on Math. Considering that the Middle-of-the-Year assessments rate what students should know by the end of the school year, Jeniffer seemed to be in relatively good shape to pass the Reading TAAS and in excellent shape to exceed expectations on the Math TAAS. Not surprisingly, Jeniffer's dialogue journal entry dated on April 23, 2004 indicated that she

felt confident about the Math portion of the TAAS but shaky regarding the Reading portion.

### **Through our Dialogue Journals**

Through our dialogue journals, however, I saw Jeniffer treating our written correspondence with fervor and commitment. An examination of our correspondence over approximately three and a half months reveals many insights into her thinking as a proficient and knowledgeable reader and writer and as an academically-minded scholar. Using examples from Jeniffer's writing, I will discuss five of the voices she assumed while writing: confidant, family historian, cultural teacher, scholar, and writer. Then I will explicate some of the effective strategies she uses in her writing, more specifically, visualizing, planning, checking facts, considering audience, proofing, editing, and painting vivid pictures.

*Voices.* In my read of Jeniffer, I have identified five voices that Jeniffer assumed throughout the course of our correspondence in the dialogue journal: confidant, family historian, cultural teacher, scholar, and writer. While there are many other voices that I could have chosen to highlight by examining Jeniffer's entries, I chose the following five because they emphasize Jeniffer's deep engagement with the text and the task. This deep engagement can be explained in part by the personal nature of the entries. Dialogue journaling incorporates students' "funds of knowledge" (González et al., 1997; Moll et al., 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). Funds of knowledge can act as a

springboard for writing. While students write about something familiar, momentum for their entries often builds. Jeniffer seemed to have a vested interest in dedicating herself to the quality of her writing (Edelsky, 1986). Students can be placed in a position of being the “expert” by teaching others about their experiences, knowledge base, and culture. The students also benefit affectively. Reyes (1991) found that Latino/Latina students had a more positive self-concept when the topics they wrote about dealt with more familiar, contextualized concepts.

Due to the personal nature of our dialogue journal, the first voice that she took on is that of **confidant**. She asked many personal questions and responded to many of mine. She asked me to keep a couple of secrets. For example, she asked me not to tell anyone about the house her parents were thinking about buying. She also scotch-taped a professional picture taken at the mall of her, her sister, and two girl cousins in our journal.

A second voice is that of **family historian**. Many of Jeniffer’s journals bring to light how Jeniffer is grounded in family stories and history. I have chosen two excerpts. The first describes a cave in a river in Mexico that her uncle and eldest brother have explored.

... Ahora casi se nadar en lo ondo porque mi hermano Gilberto me enseño. La Presa esta gigante tienen una cueva donde adentro tiene como botellas de vidrio rompidas pegadas en las orillas y en los lados. La verdad es yo nose como es porque no me e metido. Pero mi hermano Francisco que esta en Mexico y si tomo una foto. Una ves mi hermano se

Now I can almost swim in the deep because my brother Gilberto taught me. The dam is pretty big and has a cave with something like broken glass stuck to the edge on both sides. The truth is that I really don’t know how it is because I have not gone it all the way. But, my brother Francisco, who lives in Mexico, has, and he took a picture. Once my

metio pero como esta casi alta llamero se callia. Aiy como unas piedras para afuera donde esta la fuente y por ally se suven pero la corriente los empujan para avajo. Cuando yo este mas grande me quiero meter. A mi me daria miedo meterme ally en la noche. Pero mi tio Tito una ves se metio en la noche dise y tenia un foco de mano y lo prendio. El dise que se miravan como cristales o diamantes...

(Journal #8, 4/2/04)

brother got in [the deep] but he almost fell because to go there you have to climb up. There is something like rocks on the outside where the water comes out; that is where people climb up and the current pushes them down. I want to go there when I get bigger. I would be afraid to get there at night, but my uncle Tito went there once at night and he said that he had a flashlight on. He said that he could see some crystals glowing like diamonds...

(Journal #8, 4/2/04)

It is easy to understand why these images of underwater caves, swift currents, and stones that sparkle like diamonds live in Jeniffer's mind's eye. Whereas the above excerpt is quite fantastical in nature, the following excerpt shows how Jeniffer takes on the voice of family historian with a more serious tone.

... Mis papas se conosieron creo que en un restaurante. Mi mamá tenia como 20 años y mi papa como 31 bueno se llevan 11 años yo creo que es muchos años que se llevan. Si yo me caso yo quiero que me lleve uno o dos años. Bueno mi mamá trabajava en ese restaurante y mi papá siempre iba a comer ally despues de ir a pescar. A el le gustaba pescar porque cuando el era chiquito el y mi abuelito ivan a pescar. Pero luego se murio cuando mi papa tenia 15 años. Mi mamá no lo conosio ni nosotros. El se llamaba Erasmo como uno de los hermanos de mi papá que tambien se murio. Mi abuelito se murio cuando estaba dormido. Primero dise mi papá que estaba muy cansado porque acababa de ir a pescar. Entonses mi abuelita le iba a preparar una comida que le gustaba no me acuerdo cual ni mi

I believe my parents first met in a restaurant. My mother was about 20 years old and my father was about 31. Well, there is an eleven year age difference between the two. If I ever get married, I would want him to be only one or two years older. Well, my mother used to work in the restaurant and my father would always go there to eat after going fishing. He liked fishing because when he was a child, my grandfather would go fishing, but he died when my father was fifteen years old. My mother never met him nor did we. His name was Erasmo like one of my father's brothers who also did. My grandfather died in his sleep. My father says that he [my grandfather] was very tired because he had just gone fishing. Then, when my grandmother was preparing him a dish he liked, which

papá. Y mi abuelito se iba a acostar un ratito. Luego cuando lo iban a despertar ella estaba muerto. La verdad mi tía le dijo a mi papá cuando tenía 15 años después que se murió mi abuelito. Es que mi papá había llegado de la escuela y prendió el estero. Y mi tía dijo que lo apagara porque se había muerto mi abuelito. Bueno Ya termine esta carta y no le escribí más porque no sabía que escribir.

(Journal #7, 4/1/04)

neither I nor my father remember what it was, my grandfather went to lie down for a bit. When they went to wake him up, he had already died. The truth is that my aunt broke the news to my father when he was fifteen. My father has arrived from school and turned his stereo on, and my aunt told him to turn it off because my grandfather had just died. Well, I finished this letter and I do not write more because I do not know what else to write.

(Journal #7, 4/1/04)

She links the story of how her parents met with the story of when her paternal grandfather died. In the two excerpts of the river and the death of her grandfather, Jeniffer documents her family's stories in vivid detail. But she also connects the stories to her future life somehow, showing that she is vested in these stories. In the story of the river, she states that when she is older that she will be able to swim where the water is deeper and possibly venture into the magical cave. In the story of her parents meeting, she mentions that if she gets married that she doesn't want such a drastic age difference between her and her potential spouse—only wanting a one or two year age difference as opposed to an eleven year difference like her parents.

**Cultural teacher** is the third voice that Jeniffer assumed. In the following passage, Jeniffer talked about one of her favorite places in Mexico—a large church:

A mi me gusta ir a San Juan de los lagos porque en el centro del pueblo hay una iglesia gigante. Me gusta la iglesia de allá porque no es como cualquier iglesia. Esta iglesia es muy especial para muchos

I like to go to San Juan de los Lagos because in the center of town there is a huge church. I like the church there because it is not like the other churches. This church is very special for many

mexicanos porque adentro de esa iglesia ay una virgen. Esa virgen se llama La San Juanita y lo especial es que esta hecha de puro oro y casi todas las cosas de adentro tambien, Bueno no los asientos ni el piso pero las virgenes y los santos tambien. La virgen esta puesta enfrente de la iglesia pero adentro. Tiene un bido ensima de ella, cuando yo entro yo agarro agua bendita y me persino. Una vez cuando fuy caminamos de rodillas todas las escaleras y desde el hotel. Cuando llegamos al frente de la virgen ya nos levantamos y yo llora no aguataba mis rodillas y mis pies. Creo que por eso me gusta estar de rodillas en el piso yo creo. Tambien me gusta una cruz de Jesus que esta afuera pero esa es de oro. Lo que no puedo creer es algo que esta atras de la iglesia (adentro no afuera). Hay unas fotos de accidentes y personas casi llorando destrozadas que dicen que fue un milagro que vivieron esas personas. Lloro casi ni hay espacio para otros para poner otros accidentes que pasaron. Yo creo que las personas le piden a la virgen (La San Juanita) y como les ayuda luego le dan a agradecer. Nosotros le fuimos a agradecer que mi prima chiquita que acababa de nacer casi creo que era 3 meses se habia salvado. Es que se habia puesto bien grave y entonces la llevaron al hospital pero dijeron que se podia morir. Pero mi mamá y mis tías y tíos le pidieron a la virgen (La San Juanita) que la salvara...

(Journal #9, 4/7/04)

Mexicans because there is a Virgin inside. This Virgin is called La San Juanita, and it is special because it is made of pure gold, just as almost everything inside is. Well, not the church pews nor the floor, but the virgins and the saints are. The Virgin is placed at the front altar inside the church. She is encased behind glass. When I get in the church I take Holy Water and I make the sign of the cross. We walked to the main altar on our knees all the way from the hotel, going up the steps. When we arrived and we were in front of the Virgin, we stood up and I could not stand nor my knees nor my feet. I believe that is the reason why I like to kneel on the floor. I also like a cross of Jesus that is outside, but that one is not made of gold. Something that is surprising is something that is found behind the church (inside, not outside). There are pictures of accidents and mutilated people that claim they are alive because they experienced a miracle. There is hardly any room left [on the walls] for other pictures of miracles that have already happened. I believe that people ask the Virgin (La San Juanita) [for miracles] and since she helps them, they go to give thanks. We went to thank her because of my little cousin who had been saved three months prior. She was very ill and they took her to the hospital where they said she could die. But, my mother, and my aunts and uncles asked the Virgin (La San Juanita) for her to be saved...

(Journal #9, 4/7/04)

The details that Jennifer included in the above excerpt combined her personal fondness for the church, a detailed explanation of how the church looked, why it was important to

many Mexicans in general, and why it was important to her family in particular. The fact that Jeniffer knew that I am a White, non-Catholic researcher from the U.S. might have challenged her to include as many explicit features as she could.

The fourth voice that I identified was that of a **scholar**. She exhibited her knowledge of academic registers in several ways. Drawing and labeling her colorful pictures of the river rocks and the river is one example of how Jeniffer was familiar with and utilized the academic writing register. When she wrote over several days or time periods in the same letter, she dated all the separate entries or drew lines to separate the mini-entries. When moving on to new topic of conversation, she either skipped lines or drew a squiggly line. One time she even wrote “Nuevo tema” to signal the topic change so I did not get lost.

In the PowerPoint presentation that she arranged with Belinda for the after-school focus group, they included direct quotes from one another as reporters would do.

... A comment from Belinda “I will miss you when we go to middle school.” (Pp, 3/24/04, Slide #3)
... Jeniffer comment: “She got me by surprised in this picture”. (Pp, 3/24/04, Slide #4)

Another example from the PowerPoint presentation that Jeniffer did with Belinda shows how they composed a mini-story line that divided and described events during a day using a traditional Western style of writing related to one topic containing a clear beginning, middle, and end. Belinda and Jeniffer planned out this slide several weeks ahead of time deciding which pictures still needed to be taken to complete the story line (See Appendix E.2).

We have seen how Jeniffer wrote like a confidant, a family historian, a cultural teacher, and a scholar. Now I want to highlight the final voice that I identified: Jeniffer as **writer**. As some of the previous excerpts illustrate, Jeniffer was adept at documenting her travels, weekend escapades, her family stories, etc. After Jeniffer wrote about riding the go-carts on the beach as sand bounded up and hit her face and how they rode the go-carts through rain puddles and got everyone wet, I wrote how impressed I was with her descriptions and how I could almost picture her on the beach:

el 29 de marzo 2004	<p>Hola Jeniffer~</p> <p>¡Me encantó tu carta! ¡Qué chévere pasaste las vacaciones! Describiste el viaje muy detalladamente de la arena brincando en tu cara por ejemplo. Y como se empaparon en los charcos. Y como tu mamá no aguantaba mantener una cara seria— se tenía que reír.</p> <p>Ahora me diste ganas de salir en un go-cart a la playa cuando llueve. :) No más he ido un par de veces en esos carriles donde tienen llantas y pasto si te chocas. [I drew a picture of a go-cart track] ...</p>	March 29, 2004	<p>Hello Jeniffer~</p> <p>I loved your letter! You really had a cool Spring Break! You described your trip with so many details such as the sand jumping in your face for example. And how you got soaked in the puddles. And how your mom couldn't keep a straight face— she had to laugh.</p> <p>Now you made me want to take a go-cart on the beach while it rains. I have only gone a couple of times on one of those go-cart tracks where they stack tires and bails of hay in case you crash. [I drew a picture of a go-cart track]...</p>
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In Jeniffer's response to my letter, she reflected on the process she went through while writing the entry referencing go-carting on the beach:

<p>Que bueno que le gusto mi carta. Yo la escribi larga porque sabia lo que iba a escribir. Yo tambien sentia que estuvaly [en Brownsville manejando los go-carts por la playa y los charcos] otraves cuando lo escrivi. Bueno estaves no se lo que boy a escribir pero al ratito lo pienso mientras ago mi tarea.</p>	<p>I'm glad that you like my letter. I wrote a lot because I knew what I was going to write. I also felt like I was there [in Brownsville riding the go-carts on the beach through the puddles] again while I was writing it. Well, this time I don't know what I will be writing about, but I'll think about it while I do my</p>
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[skips 2 lines]  
Lla termine mi tarea y si lo pense bien.  
Mis papas se conosieron ...  
(Journal #7, 4/1/04)

homework.  
[skips 2 lines]  
I finished my homework and I really  
thought about it. My parents met...  
(Journal #7, 4/1/04)

Jeniffer was extremely in tune with and reflective about her writing. She talks like a writer and employs effective strategies to obtain her desired effect.

**Strategies.** Jeniffer is not only making deep connections and weaving together complex storylines (as we saw in the above section regarding her identities within her writing) but also employing effective strategies of a competent and confident writer. I will briefly discuss the following strategies below: (1) visualizing; (2) planning; (3) checking facts; (4) considering audience; (5) proofing and editing; and (6) painting vivid pictures.

In the last excerpt, we see the first effective strategy—how Jeniffer **uses visualization** to rekindle vivid memories of riding go-carts on the beach. She even stated that she felt as if she were there again as she wrote about it. The second strategy is the fact that Jeniffer **planned out** what she was going to write about. She mentioned that she wrote a long entry because she knew what she was going to write about it. Her planning was evident when she took pictures to school one day to show me. She showed me a picture of the river in Mexico where the sparkly rocks can be found and said, “Ms. Kimberley, this is what I wrote about in my last letter. Es el río. [It’s the river.]” Then she showed me a second picture of a building that looked like a Cathedral. She told me that it would be the topic of her next letter to me. And right as rain, she wrote that passage about

the church in the center of town with the gold-plated virgin (La San Juanita) behind glass and her significance. Her entry regarding the church and La San Juanita was planned for at least several days.

The third strategy that Jeniffer employs is **checking facts**. She is definitely a stickler for every last detail. For example, she wanted to find out what her grandmother was cooking for her grandfather the day he died. Unfortunately, she was forced to write “una comida que le gustaba no me acuerdo cual ni mi papá. [a meal that my grandfather liked, but I don’t remember what it was and neither does my dad.]” One time she wrote “La Presa” (the name of the river in Mexico) in the margin above the date of her entry. I believe that she had asked one of her family members about the river, because in the body of the journal entry, she wrote that the river “se llama La Presa no se porque pero asi se llama. [named La Presa. I don’t know why it’s called that, but that’s what it’s called.]” Her fact-checking assures that her writing is more complete and includes more details.

**Considering her audience** is another effective strategy that Jeniffer uses in her writing. As previously mentioned, the personal exchange of ideas and stories shows that Jeniffer is cognizant of her audience. She considers the audience by doing things such as referring to my interests (e.g., passage about penguins), teaching me about Mexican culture (e.g., iglesia), and asking me personal questions. Fifth, Jeniffer demonstrates **proofing and editing**. Given that dialogue journals entries usually take the form of informal letters and are not reworked, I did not expect to see any evidence of proofing or editing. For the most part Jeniffer wrote in pencil so I cannot tell if she had been revising

and editing throughout all the entries, but she did use correction liquid two times when she wrote to me in ink. She also underlined a word that she wasn't sure how to spell, namely "veterinario" (veterinarian).

Lastly, Jeniffer **paints vivid pictures** by using rich descriptions and details. At times, Jeniffer's passages pulled me right into the middle of what she was describing. When Jeniffer wrote about how she was scared that her three-month old puppy died when he fell out of the go-cart and almost got run over, I found myself holding my breath for a second or two. When she wrote about swimming in the river with the sparkly rocks, I was compelled to write to her immediately about how much I love to play in the water especially at Barton Springs and how I hope that someday my daughter has as much confidence in the water as I do. The following excerpt describing her mom not being able to contain her laughter after seeing her kids and the cousins soaking wet from playing in the puddles made me laugh out loud:

...Cuando nos metimos [a los charcos] estavamos empapados y mi mama dijo que mejor jugaramos asta que parara de llover. Luego llovio mas resio ... Estava bien divertida que esta la sirvienta de mi tia se fue a jugar con nosotros y se mojo mucho. ... Estava bien chistoso que mi mamá no se aguatava la risa ni yo. Despues...

(Journal #6, 3/23/04)

...When we went in [the puddles], we were soaked and my mom said that it would be better if we continued to play outside until it stopped raining. Later it rained even harder. We were having so much fun that even my aunt's maid came out to play with us and she got really wet.... It was so funny that my mom couldn't contain her laughter, neither could I. After that...

(Journal #6, 3/23/04)

Painting a vivid picture with words about an interesting happening at La Presa (the river), Jeniffer transported me to the river's edge:

... Una vez cuando fuimos [al río en México] vimos a un burro en la agua se miraba super chistoso. También luego una vez pensamos que una vaca se iba a aventar al agua porque estaba en la mera orilla del rillo y estaba mirando para abajo. Tenía unas manchas como café y era negra tenía una cara como chistosa. ...

(Journal #8, 4/2/04)

...One time when we went [to the river in Mexico], we saw a burro in the water. It looked super funny. Then another time, we thought that a cow was going to jump into the water, because it was right on the bank of the river looking down. [The cow] was black with brownish spots and a funny-looking face. ...

(Journal #8, 4/2/04)

## DISCUSSION

Jeniffer appeared to have always applied herself in school and complied with the rules and norms of the school. She liked school and was considered intelligent. In school, she generally had a soft-spoken nature and often chose to observe rather than to be in the spotlight. Her second grade teacher, Mr. Catalán, described her as being hard to read as if she had much apprehension to be authored outside of her strict world. She might have been less likely to disclose herself openly to others—maybe resisting having others author her in ways she was not comfortable with.

She was extremely vigilant about how others authored her and strived to match their expectations accordingly. Jeniffer had demonstrated this tendency on several occasions. In one interview, she described herself by what she perceived as others' perceptions of her. When I asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up, she said, “Mi mamá me dice una maestra...o una enfermera... [My mom says a teacher...or a nurse...].” When I asked her if she was intelligent, she said, “muchos dicen que sí... [Many people say that I am...].” When I asked her how she self identified her ethnicity, she said, “Mi mamá me dice que soy Chicana... [My mom says that I’m a Chicana...].”

Only in the last instance regarding her ethnicity did she express to me a dissenting opinion, claiming that *Chicana* sounded “weird” and that she preferred “Mexican-American.” In a figured world of lines separating success from failure, Jeniffer tended to show reluctance about having others see any contradictions or ambiguity.

Maybe because I didn’t expect to be surprised by Jeniffer was precisely the reason she *blew me away*. I expected to see a sweet, compliant, respectful, and intelligent girl. Of course, I did see all of those characteristics, but I also captured glimpses of so much more. I observed things that confirmed, yet provided more texture and depth to, my original authorings of Jeniffer like her observant and nurturing *forma de ser*. Other data shed light on Jeniffer’s multiple identities that challenged my uni-dimensional frame of her as merely a good schoolgirl.

Jeniffer was much like her father; they were both craftspeople. While her father worked wonders with wood, Jeniffer worked wonders with words. Unfortunately, neither Jeniffer’s confidence in *lenguaje* nor the standardized test scores reflected her abilities and potential in this area. Jeniffer expresses herself amazingly well when writing her dialogue journal entries in her native language. Although Jeniffer often left out appropriate punctuation marks and did not always use conventional spelling in Spanish, we must not forget that she had foregone literacy instruction (and any academic instruction—for that matter) in her native language for more than two school years. Yet she chose to write all of her journal entries in Spanish.

So how did this disconnect happen between *lenguaje* as a content area and *lenguaje* as a social practice like that used in Jeniffer’s dialogue journal entries and other

extra-curricular writing? Willis' (1995) study on her third-grade son who felt like he could not draw on his own experiences as an African-American child in a predominantly White school, because his peers and teachers would not understand. Like Willis' son, Jeniffer did not feel like a writer because she was not invited or encouraged to write or share her own stories. As a result of Jeniffer's experiences with the school system's authoring her *lenguaje* as mediocre at best and failing at worst, she only made room for herself within this prescribed, high-stakes, and decontextualized climate that narrowly defined standards for success. Created within this larger figured world of schooling, perceptions of herself as a reader and a writer fell short of meeting the "successful" norms set by the school system. This perceived failure furthered her self-doubt in *lenguaje* and played a role in her future academic decisions. Despite much "achiever" authoring, a self-described love of school, advanced study skills, and an established desire to learn, Jeniffer had chosen to opt out of enrolling in Honors classes in middle school.

I am sure that many factors influenced her decision to enroll in "regular track" classes, but her authored ability in *lenguaje* had definitely shaken her footing as a competent "school girl." If she felt shaky, she might tend to play it safe and to take what appeared to be the easier route. She, like most of us, was reluctant to expose herself to possible failure. She probably felt more comfortable fitting the mold of "school girl" when the perceived bar was set lower, especially in the area of *lenguaje*. She navigated a figured world of schooling where exact lines seemed to be drawn all around her, such as:

- a certain percentage point separates the A's from the B's, the B's from the C's, and so on;
- a certain raw score determines whether you pass or fail the TAKS;
- a certain number determines whether you are commended for your perceived abilities or not;
- a coach categorizing and separating out the "winners" from the "losers" to help out with Track-n-Field day.

Some kids, like Jeniffer, strived to author themselves so that they found themselves on the successful side of these high-stakes lines being drawn so they could meet the expectations of the achievement ideology. Although she managed to find herself on the desired side of the lines for the most part, she might not have felt comfortable taking risks because there was too much at stake.

## CHAPTER VI

### JOSÉ: ENGAGING IN *TRAVESURAS*

José seemed to understand that “Star students are not the only ones who capture the teacher’s attention. When schools are not able to meet their needs, some boys cross the line and go from calling out to acting out. On the classroom stage these males take the bad boy role, sometimes using it as a passport to popularity” (Sadker & Sadker, 1994: 201). José did not seem as concerned with a status of *popularity* as he did with a status of *notoriety*. While I would not consider José popular like some of the other boys at Parks Elementary, in the sense of exhibiting athleticism or being conscious of his physical appearance (e.g., clothes, hair), he sought visibility and notoriety through behaviors that included teasing, joke telling, calling out, and acting out.

In this chapter, I will examine some of the complex reasons behind José’s *travesuras*, or mischievousness. First, I will provide some background regarding his family and language use. Second, I will discuss his ‘intelligence within and outside of the classroom. Next, I will explore why José seemed to fight against being labeled a “schoolboy.” Fourth, I will delve into how teachers seemed to explain his *travesuras* and deal with them. Lastly, I will consider his older brother’s influence regarding some of his ‘non-scholarly’ values that were not given a place in José’s figured worlds of schooling and the social practice of ‘being bad’ among his friends and peers.

## **JOSÉ'S BACKGROUND**

José's hair had looked the same from Pre-K to fifth grade—thick, black, and cut in a three-quarter-inch buzz cut. When it was freshly cut, it was especially bristly and tickled the palm of my hand when I touched it. José had always been one of the shortest students in the class. In Pre-K, I remember that adult and older student passers-by would often stop dead in their tracks to watch José walk by, usually saying something along the lines of, “He’s so little!” or “He’s so cute!”

When I asked José to describe himself in fifth grade, he said:

José: I’m a boy. I’m a person. I’m a human being. That’s it.

KC: Tell me about your personality.

José: Like I like playing. Like Nintendo. And sometimes I like riding bikes. And my friend that I see mostly is Silvio. And I used to each day go to his house or he used to come to my house. But now I don’t, because I have more homework.

(Interview, 2/17/04)

Even though I asked him about his personality, he focused on the acts and things he liked to do. José also told me that he liked CiCi’s pizza with spinach, punch, soda especially Coca-Cola, and fresh tomato slices with salt.

In the after-school focus group, José seemed motivated to take pictures using the digital camera. When I first showed the students how to use PowerPoint with text and picture combinations, José hurriedly inserted about twenty of his pictures on to one slide—shrinking them down to one-and-a-half inch squares so they would all fit. Then he looked at me and said, “When we are done, can we play on the internet?” In my teachery tone of feigned patience, I said, “We have three more after-school sessions to work on our PowerPoint slideshows before we show it to the group on the last day. Why don’t you work on it some more.” Delpit (1995) could have definitely used my response to José as

an example of White, middle-class teachers way of giving veiled command which “are commands nonetheless, representing true power, and with true consequences for disobedience” (p. 34). In other words, I knew and José knew that I was really saying, “No, you can’t get on the internet. Now get to work on your PowerPoint slideshow.”

José ended up with a PowerPoint presentation with two slides. The first slide was titled “Me and me” and read: “I took a picture because they are all me.” There were three pictures on the slide: playing chess in Mr. Ortiz’s class; standing in a white t-shirt with a wide, smirky grin and his head tilted sideways; and standing with both hands in his jeans’ pockets next to his big screen TV with Japanese anime on the screen. The second slide titled “my family” read “I took thies [sic] picture because they are in my family.” This slide contained nine pictures, including a picture of his dog and her eleven pups and miscellaneous pictures of his family.

### **Family Background**

José’s mother, Ms. Rodríguez, was a third-generation Mexican American. When I asked him (during an interview in Park’s conference room) if his mom was born here in the U.S. he said: “Yeah, my mom was born here and my grandma. Well, my grandma’s grandma wasn’t. My grandma’s mom wasn’t. But we don’t go to Mexico” (Interview, 2/17/04). Ms. Rodríguez had been working at a local lunchtime diner for several years. Her job entailed many aspects of the restaurant business from food preparation to serving to cashiering.

José's father, Mr. Rodríguez, was originally from Guatemala. Considering that José had only been to Guatemala once when he was four-years old (with his father and older brother, Rigo), I was especially impressed with his ability to recall so many vivid memories. Among other details, he recalled the floor plan of his grandmother's house and how the mangos tasted fresh from the tree in comparison to the mangos found in the U.S. The following is what José answered when I asked him if he liked going to Guatemala:

Yeah! It was fun! Like we lived right here [using hands on table to draw pretend house plans] and there were some stairs to go under our house, but you could still see the sun. And there were big trees of uh—mangos. Green mangos. They were good; they weren't rotten. We used to go get the salt and we put salt on it. And it tastes good—even gooder than these mangos. It tastes good, good, good...

(Interview, 2/17/04)

Below, I include another one of José's recollections regarding his grandmother's chickens to give you a sense of the rich experiences he had there:

... And my brother said that we used to eat a lot. We used to eat like ten over-easys each day. ...there was a lot chickens, a lot, a lot, a lot, I mean—a lot. We had a dog and we used to tell him to go fetch a chicken. And he'd go fetch it. He wouldn't kill it; he just got it from here [signaled the back of the neck]. And he brought it and I saw my dad kill one *y cocinarlo* (and cook it). And it was UGLY. They first took off the feathers and they'd hang it from the *patas* (feet). They cut off the head I think and then they tie them and left them on the floor. And the chicken ran for all it wanted for just like a minute.

(Interview, 2/17/04)

With a transcribed interview, I know it is impossible to capture the rhythm and tone of José's typical manner of speaking in school, at home, and around peers. However, I believe the following section may help to give you an idea of José's exaggeratedly hurried, and sometimes jerky, way of talking:

And um—I'm not sure where was it, but uh—somewhere around the house, there was a little store. They used to sell like little ice creams. Well, they weren't ice creams, but they were like--. You know the little um—sticks that have the um—frozen--. What do you call it? ...It was like the little thing inside the snow cones inside the little plastic thing. But they were red and they were BIG. And they used to call it—it was called uh, uh, uh—*bomberitos*. And each day we would go buy some. And I remember uh—

(Interview, 2/17/04)

José had always been someone who seemed to talk a million miles a minute. When he did not have something to say, he often opted to fill a conversation with uh's, um's, and oh's rather than giving up charge of the conversation to others. However, whenever I broached the topic concerning José's father, his tone seemed to become sharper and his answers more curt. In this particular interview, José sidestepped my inquiries regarding his father two separate times. One time, instead of giving me any details about his father, José started to talk about how his little brother (Edward) thought that José was from Guatemala:

KC: What about your dad?

José: What about him?

KC: He's from Guatemala, right?

José: I don't know. Yeah! My little brother thinks I'm from Guatemala, because my dad took us to Guatemala. So my little brother thinks that I'm from Guatemala, too.

KC: I remember when you went. You went in Pre-K.

José: I stayed there for two months.

KC: Yeah, you were there a long time. You went with your little brother, right?

José: No, big brother.

KC: But Angel didn't go, right?

José: No, they were scared. They didn't want to get on the airplane. They were scared of [sound effects of plane crashing].

KC: Angel was scared?

José: And Camila.

KC: Your oldest sister?

José: She's already eighteen.

(Interview, 2/17/04)

The second time, José seemed to steer clear of other questions about his father:

KC: ... Do ever see your dad anymore?

José: Huh?

KC: Do you see your dad still?

José: Yeah. But in Guatemala, there was a skinny, skinny dog and when I was outside, it started chasing after me. And I ran inside the house, but there were no doors so I had to get on top of the bed. It was about to bite me. I think it did bite me.

(Interview, 2/17/04)

When I asked José if he still saw his father in fifth grade, he changed the topic of conversation to the skinny dog. José seemed to have a knack for quickly moving on to another topic when he appeared uncomfortable with the subject of conversation or when the topic was one that he did not want to pursue. José's parents had been separated since he was in second grade as Mr. Catalán, José's second grade teacher informed me in an interview on May 2004. According to Ms. Rodríguez, José's father had returned to Guatemala and was not allowed to have physical contact with the children. Mr. Rodríguez occasionally sent messages, gifts, and money via his brother and sister who lived in Texas. Given the sensitivities of the subject regarding José's father, I tried to obtain more information from Ms. Rodríguez. Unfortunately, the children were always present during our visits so I did not have an opportunity to inquire further. Ms. Rodríguez and I had set up a time for a one-on-one interview, but it was cancelled due to another commitment that Ms. Rodríguez had. Unfortunately, we did not find a time to reschedule the interview.

## Family Portrait

At the time of the study, José's four siblings Camila, Rigo, Angel, and Edward were 18, 15, 13, and 7 respectively. José lived with three of his siblings (Camila had moved out of the house to live with her boyfriend), his mother, and her boyfriend Julio. Julio was originally from Mexico and had been living with José's family for two years. Julio worked in construction—mainly with sheetrock and roofing. During one homevisit, Ms. Rodríguez mentioned that Julio had difficulty finding work because he was an undocumented worker. Ms. Rodríguez described how much Julio loved her kids, especially José and his little brother, Edward. She told me that they have problems like any other couple, but that Julio loved her kids too much to ever leave. José's little brother, Edward, called Julio “dad.” The other children called him “Julio.”

Rigo had a big influence on how José authored himself (which will be discussed later in this chapter). Angel, an eighth grader at the time of the study, had not spoken since the second grade to anyone outside of her family except for one particular friend<sup>6</sup>. Edward was often cited by teachers as being José's “mini-me,” because they looked and behaved so much alike. In the public library during one of my interviews with José, Edward joined the latter part of it. They described what nicknames they had for each of the kids in the family that got them mad:

KC: So tell me about Angel.

José: She doesn't talk. ... Well, she does, but she doesn't like talking around other people—not the family. ...

KC: Tell me why she doesn't like to talk to other people?

---

<sup>6</sup> Angel's selective mutism is another topic that I would have liked to inquire about during an interview with Ms. Rodríguez. Regrettably, a one-on-one interview never took place.

José: I don't know. She never talks.  
KC: Have you ever asked her?  
José: Yeah. [José looked over his shoulder and motioned for Edward to come over to the table where we were sitting]  
KC: Edward, why do you think that Angel doesn't talk to other people?  
Edward: Because she's embarrassed.  
KC: But she talks to you? Does she yell at you?  
Edward: When she's mad.  
José: We call her *muda* [mute].  
KC: You call her *muda* [mute]?  
José: When she gets me mad.  
KC: And what does she say?  
José: She calls me "Beaver."  
KC: Oh, she calls you beaver?  
Edward: And I call him "beaver" too.  
José: I don't like "*cagón*" [shithead]. I used to but not now.  
José: I call Rigo Negro. Because when he was born, he was dark.  
Edward: Yeah, sometimes, Rigo gets mad.  
José: I always used to call him *carbón* [charcoal]. And my other sister, we used to call her "pig." ... But I'm not serious. So I have every name for each one to make them mad.

(Interview, 4/22/04)

Despite sibling taunts, José's family seemed close-knit in many ways. During my five visits to their home, Ms. Rodríguez along with the four siblings living in the house would stay in the living room to converse and/or listen to the conversations. No one turned on the TV or went into another room for more than five minutes. When Ms. Rodríguez pulled the family photo albums out to show me, the children flocked over to the sofa—Rigo on the arm, Angel balanced on the back of the sofa, and José and Edward sitting next to Mrs. Rodríguez and me.

As Ms. Rodríguez summarized the events depicted in the pictures, she mentioned that Rigo was not in many of the pictures because he hated to have his picture taken. She also mentioned that they are all huggers and cuddlers except for Rigo. She said that he

never liked being touched or hugged on. When I mentioned the hugging incident in front of Rigo, he said, “That’s because José wouldn’t stop screaming unless I hugged him.”

Ms. Rodríguez voice raised in a motherese tone, “*¿Es cierto, mi’jo?* Taking care of your little brothers.” The remark seemed like a mix of praise and affectionate *burlas*.

### **“I don’t speak Spanish!”**

Although José was enrolled in the bilingual program through fourth grade, English had always seemed to be his language of preference. As with most of his daily interactions with family, peers, and teachers, José seemed more comfortable conducting our interviews in English. However, he had the tendency to slip in Spanish words and phrases (e.g., *cocinarlo, patas, sangre, un borracho, muda, carbón*) when speaking with someone who was bilingual. This pattern of language use—using mostly English with certain words and phrases in Spanish—was similar to how José’s mother spoke. As José’s former teachers, Mr. Catalán and I remembered that Ms. Rodríguez seemed more comfortable with English when receiving written correspondence or discussing José’s academic performance and behavior. Mr. Catalán stated that “con los hermanos [de José], siempre les hablaba más en inglés [always used more English when speaking with José and his siblings.]” (Interview, 5/04).

Despite the fact that José’s mother felt more comfortable and proficient in English, she chose to place him in the bilingual program at Parks in Pre-K. I remember speaking with her about that decision in 1997. She mentioned that she regretted her previous decisions to place Camila and Rigo in English-only instruction. She said that

Mr. Rodríguez had been the only consistent Spanish-language model for them. So for Angel, José, and Edward, she decided to place them in the bilingual education program. She also mentioned that the bilingual classes seemed more well-behaved and orderly.

Even in Pre-K, I remember José claiming that he did not understand everything that was said because, “I don’t speak Spanish.” Despite his claims, he remained in bilingual education until he was in third grade. He was even slated to take the third grade TAAS test in Spanish. He did not pass either the reading or math sections as shown in the table below.

3 <sup>rd</sup> grade Spanish TAAS	José’s scores items correct/items tested	Standard Expectation for passing score
Reading	19/36	26/36
Math	14/44	31/44

Table 6.1: José’s Third-Grade TAAS Test

In fourth grade, José was placed in all-English instruction. When José took fourth grade TAKS in English, he did considerably better. Not only did he receive a commended score in Reading, but he received the second highest TAKS reading score in the school. See table 6.2 below.

4 <sup>th</sup> grade TAKS	Did José meet standard?	Did José receive commended scores?
Reading	YES	YES
Math	YES	NO
Writing	YES	NO

Table 6.2: José’s Fourth-Grade TAKS Test

### **JOSÉ’S THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE**

On José’s Pre-K report card, one of my comments stated that José “*no tiene verg\_enza por hacer preguntas. Es muy curioso y observador* [he is not ashamed to ask

questions. He is very curious and observant.]” (Report Card, 1997-98). José continued to amaze me with his higher-order questions and observations both inside and outside the classroom.

### **Outside of the Classroom**

José would often ask for clarification if he did not know a word or concept. This often happened in the after-school focus groups when we were speaking in Spanish. José would often ask for clarification of Spanish words by punctuating his question with “I don’t know Spanish.” The following example from my field notes shows José simultaneously showing his bilingualism and denying (or not recognizing) it.

Lizzie mentions that lying “es un pecado.”

José says, “Qué es ‘pecado’? I don’t speak Spanish.”

Lizzie: “I really don’t know; I haven’t had my *primera comunión*.”

[Then the girls start side conversations about religion. José asks silly questions combined with authentic questions regarding religion.]

(Fieldnotes from After-school focus group, 2/4/04)

José’s advanced level of questioning also stood out to me and some of his teachers. At times during our interviews, I wondered who was interviewing whom. As we sat down for the first interview, he wanted to know who I had already interviewed, where the interviews took place, how long they lasted, and if I asked the same questions in each interview. He also wanted to know which of my former Pre-K students were not chosen for the after-school focus group and why. He wanted to know why I recorded the interviews and who would hear them. When I attempted to explain to him that I would

use some of what we talk about for a paper I was writing, he wanted to know how audio-text could be used for a written paper. Then I described how I would use a transcribing machine to type out our conversation. This opened up to more technical questions about how a transcriber works.

When José was interested and engaged in a topic, he investigated it unremittingly. On the day we took a *paseo* to the UT campus, José sat in the front seat. Lizzie had brought a music CD with a variety of Spanish- and English-language hip-hop and pop songs for us to listen to in the car. I told José how to eject the 6 CD cartridge in my car's glove compartment. Once he put the disk in the cartridge, he started to study the construction of it and asked how it played the CDs once it was in the machine. He pointed out the little numbers and arrows on the side of the cartridge that I had never noticed before. Lizzie, Jeniffer, and Charlie all started to yell, “*!Ya, José! Deja de hacer tantas preguntas. Pon el disco ya.* [Come on, José! Stop asking so many questions. Put the CD in already.]” He smiled and said, “Okay, okay. I'm putting it on.” Instead of putting the cartridge in, closing the glove compartment, and sitting back in the seat, he leaned forward as close to the glove compartment as he could, slid the cartridge in while keeping his hand on it as the machine pulled it inside, and continued to watch it as all six disks loaded into the machine. He said, “Oh, Ms. Kimberley! I see the CDs through the little crack. Oh cool! There are lights in there! I see lights! Ms. Kimberley, did you know there were lights in there? What are they for?”

José seemed to take great interest in electronic and mechanical gadgets. Whenever I had recording equipment (e.g., boundary microphone, cassette recorder, digital recorder,

camcorder) out during interviews and after-school focus groups, he would touch, investigate, and ask questions about them. During a visit to his house, Ms. Rodríguez commented on the fact that her brother had given the family a used computer. Before the family could fix up the computer to use, José and Edward had disassembled it. Upon hearing this, José said, “But, mom, it wasn’t working!”

### **Inside the Classroom**

José authored himself—along with many of his peers, family, and teachers—as someone who did not apply himself to academic pursuits. However, I observed José seeking to satisfy his fervent curiosity on several occasions during school or during academic-like topics. During one of my observations in Mr. Ortiz’s classroom while the class was preparing to do a science experiment, I noted José’s quick, analytical thought. He called out suggestions to the teacher showing his involvement in the science experiment that the class was carrying out (Fieldnotes, 4/6/04). Another example of José’s learning curiosity was cited by his Language Arts teacher, Ms. Schaffer. She told me that José had asked, “How does oil get in the ground?” José proceeded to ask advanced questions that went beyond the scope of Ms. Schaffer’s knowledge base and the information in the textbook. As a result, Ms. Schaffer called her husband, a geological engineer, to attain answers to José’s sophisticated questions.

Even though José almost never did assigned homework, the following anecdote illustrates José’s passion for learning and connection whether the quest for knowledge was officially labeled “homework” or not. When I took José home one day, he said, “Mr.

Ortiz gave the supercomputer to José's best friend Silvio. Silvio did not want it and was going to throw it away after school. So I asked him if I could have it. And he gave it to me! It's in my backpack!" The "supercomputer" was a project Mr. Ortiz's classes worked on that consisted of series of aluminum foil circuits threaded across twenty 9x12 pieces of construction paper. As soon as we walked in the house, José ripped open his backpack, took out the construction paper with labyrinths of aluminum foil, kneeled down in the middle of the living room, and quickly, but carefully, started laying the pieces on the floor in a five by four grid. Ms. Rodríguez, Rigo, and Angel walked in the house shortly after we had arrived. We all sat on the couches and talked while José busily connected the aluminum foil circuits. Then he announced, "Done! Now all I need is a battery and a light bulb!"

### **THE UNDESIRABILITY OF BEING AUTHORED AS A 'SCHOOL BOY'**

For José, being considered a 'schoolboy' was undesirable as evidenced in the following interview excerpt with him and Charlie. According to José, someone who makes good grades and/or likes school would be viewed as a "schoolboy/girl."

Charlie: ...I'm kind of getting good grades.

KC: Do you like getting good grades? [12:59]

José: No! [to Charlie] Get like me!

Charlie: Kind of.

KC: Why kind of?

José: [to Charlie] Why kind of? If you like it a lot, you're going to be like Marisa.

She's [inaudible]

Charlie: For real! [sucks teeth] My sister's a smart girl. She's a smart-pants.

(Joint Interview, 5/04)

José continued to talk to Charlie about the negative aspects of being “smart.” In other words, José argued why being authored as a “school girl/boy” was not desirable and should be avoided. So he mentioned that smart kids got beaten up. Then he returned to the topic of Marisa in order to strengthen his argument:

José: .. Everybody hates [Marisa], because she thinks she’s all that and kissing up to the teachers. And the teachers be treating her good, because she does a lot of good scores. She be messing with—

Charlie: She be messing with people and then the teachers won’t even say nothing.

KC: So what do you think about people who get really good grades?

José: I don’t know.

Charlie: I have to spell it out: N-E-R-D-S.

KC: They’re nerds?

Charlie: Yeah. [Laughs]

José: You’re smart and you’re a nerd.

Charlie: I’m not wearing glasses like Yesica.

José: What?

Charlie: I’m not a four-eyes.

José: She looks funny. [they laugh]

KC: Do you have to have glasses to be a nerd?

José: No! You got to be a “school girl.”

KC: So if you get really good grades, you’re a schoolboy?

Charlie: Yes!

José: Or if you like school.

Charlie: And if you want to marry school.

José: Yeah [laughs]

Charlie: Here’s the wedding ring, school.

KC: Did you used to like to get good grades?

José: I used to like it in Pre-K. When we did fun stuff and get to go to sleep. With Ms. Kimberley.

(Joint Interview, 5/04)

The dialogic authoring process was evident in José’s story, because the “schoolboy” label was always present as José defined it. A schoolboy can be someone who gets goods grades but it can also mean someone who likes school. The adults in his life, including myself, constantly reminded him of how capable he was of doing well in

school based on his intelligence and isolated instances of stellar performances. Yet he never seemed sure that doing well in school or liking school was how he wanted to author himself, especially if that would yield a “schoolboy” label. In this section, I will discuss three aspects including how José: (1) categorized ‘school-like’ work; (2) downplayed his intelligence, and (3) showed his intelligence in alternative ways.

### **Categorizing ‘School-Like’ Work**

In certain instances, I observed that José seemed to like school or school-related things when (a) his interest was peaked, (b) he felt a connection with or wanted to impress a teacher, or (c) the likelihood of being deemed a ‘schoolboy’ was minimal.

*High-interest topics.* José did not seem to mind showing his passion for high-interest topics such as robots, supercomputers, and the relationship between oil and dinosaurs. I will discuss three possible explanations for this. One possible explanation may be that these topics did not seem ‘school-like’ in José’s mind. In other words, he may have felt comfortable showing more enthusiasm than usual because high-interest topics varied greatly from the typical day-to-day banking-education activities and lessons at Parks driven, in part, by high-stakes test preparation. Banking education, a concept coined by Freire (1973), primarily relies on the practice of transmission teaching as if students were passive, empty vessels and teachers were all-knowing sources of knowledge.

A second explanation may be that he openly showed passion for learning when the topics related to him personally. For example, he was motivated to come to the after-school focus group sessions where the students took digital pictures and discussed them amongst themselves. After I told him that the after school focus group meetings lasted an hour and a quarter, José commented on how time seemed to pass by quickly because he was having fun. He said: “for me it’s like thirty minutes in there!” (Interview, 2/17/04). Another explanation may be that school-related topics that allowed José to investigate on a deeper level intrigued him. If Ms. Schaffer had not given José’s interest about the relationship between oil and dinosaurs an outlet via her husband, José’s probing questions possibly would have blended in with most other days when José’s *forma de ser* was (mis)understood as another attempt by José to disrupt the school day. While I heard many, many accounts (by José, teachers, other students, and his mother) of José intentionally disrupting the school day, I never really observed extreme types of behavior. On the contrary, I observed mostly trivial, yet incessant, behaviors that seemed to grate on teachers’ nerves, such as calling out answers, talking over people, and getting out of his chair for trifling reasons like sharpening his pencil when he was supposed to be reading a passage.

***Connection with teachers.*** Right before my initial interview with José, he had Ms. Kendall for Math and Ms. Walther for Reading. Mr. Ortiz had just taken over for Ms. Vinueza as the Science teacher (See Methodology Schedule for Changes). During the initial interview, José stated that Math was his favorite subject because it was fun with

Ms Kendall even though “Sometimes I do good in Math, but not all the time” (Interview, 2/17/04). In the following excerpt, he states that Ms. Kendall and Ms. Walther were his favorite teachers.

KC: Who’s your favorite teacher in fifth grade? And why?

José: [shrugs] ... Oh, I have two favorite teachers. Ms. Kendall and Ms. Walther, too. ... Well, like—she’s really mean, but when I get in trouble, she turns nice.

KC: She turns nice when you’re in trouble?

José: Like when I don’t do my homework and I call home. Then she treats me good. She just tells me to do my homework. And this time I passed my Friday Assessment and she said she very proud at me. ...

KC: Your mom said that you haven’t been doing your homework. That Ms. Walther called and said you weren’t doing your homework.

José: She gives a lot of homework.

KC: So you do part of it or none of it?

José: Like—if like I leave one homework, she doesn’t accept any of it. So she gives it back to us. And we have to throw it in the trash. And we have to start it all over.

(Interview, 2/17/04)

Despite the fact that Ms. Walther had made José call his mother when he did not bring his homework, he strived to pass his Friday assessment (A.K.A. practice tests for TAKS) and liked the fact that he had made Ms. Walther proud. José seemed to respond better with the teachers who set clearer boundaries with him.

Around the time of this initial interview, the class rotations had just changed. José no longer went to Ms. Walther and Ms. Kendall (his favorite teachers). José had Ms. Schaffer for Reading and Math and Mr. Ortiz for Science and Social Studies. In an interview, he stated that Math was not as fun with Ms. Schaffer (Interview, 2/17/04). This could explain why José cited science as his favorite subject in our April interview.

Regardless of Mr. Ortiz “slamming” José on several occasions, José seemed to enjoy his class over Ms. Schaffer’s. “Slamming”—as the kids called it—happened when Mr. Ortiz

wished to make an impression on or an example of a student viewed as misbehaving. According to his students, Mr. Ortiz would get a textbook, walk over to the student, and slam it as hard as he could on the student's desk. Sometimes he would send all the other students outside of the portable to wait while he gave the "slammed" student a verbal scolding. In the following excerpt, José described some of his experiences of being "slammed":

KC: Is Mr. Ortiz still slamming the book?

José: Yeah!

KC: How many times has he done that to you?

José: [counting on fingers] One, two, three, four.

KC: Four times? Does he send everyone out of the room to talk to you?

José: Only one time. He sent everyone out. He talked to me. And I was just like—*así*—ignoring him so I wouldn't get more in trouble. So he slammed the book. And I just looked at his face. And he was asking me a question and I didn't answer it. And so he slammed it again. And then I answered it before he slammed it again. And then he called the whole class in. And then I was just sitting down like that listening to him. And he came and slammed the book just for nothing.

KC: The same day?

José: A different day.

(Interview, 2/17/04)

Although Mr. Ortiz "slammed" José on several occasions, José seemed to like him and want to do well in Science class and on the Science benchmark tests.

KC: But you still like his class [even though he "slams" you]?

José: Yeah. Because he was teaching about Mars. And now he's teaching about what "matter" means and carbon dioxide, and carbon monoxide, and hydro—[pause]

KC: hydrogen?

José: Yeah. Hydrogen. When it's H<sub>2</sub>O and when it's H<sub>2</sub> and all that.

KC: Do you know what H<sub>2</sub>O is?

José: What?

KC: Water.

José: Yeah! The H stands for water.

KC: The H stands for Hydrogen. H<sub>2</sub>O stands for water because when 2 hydrogens are with an oxygen it makes water.

José: Water, water?

KC: Mm-mm.

José: He said that the carbon—that's bad. The oxygen—that—Because right now that there is a lot of carbon dioxide floating around. And that there is more oxygen than carbon and—if you heard the news sometime, it says that if you turn on the car, that the carbon comes out—the black smoke—and they die, because there is too much carbon. And it-it only has a little bit of oxygen so you don't get to breathe that much. It only has one oxygen in each one.

KC: Right! And that's bad news. ...

(Interview, 2/17/04)

José stated that science was his favorite subject “because we learn interesting stuff” like building ‘supercomputers’ and remote-control robots. I believe another reason that science was his favorite subject was due to his connection with Mr. Ortiz.

One reason that José seemed to connect with Mr. Ortiz and want to perform well in Science class was because Mr. Ortiz did not readily permit José to “fake” his indifference, to claim that he was “distracted,” or to downplay his intelligence. Elizabeth cited one such occasion when Mr. Ortiz called José's common bluff of downplaying his intelligence:

KC: ¿Y crees que [José] es inteligente?

Elizabeth: Sí lo es.

KC: ¿Qué indica que es inteligente?

Elizabeth: Porque como un día no era tan travieso y estaba contestando todas las preguntas solito. Y el maestro le dijo, “José, tú de verdad eres inteligente, pero no quieres que nadie sepa de eso.”

KC: ¿Quién dijo eso?

Elizabeth: [Nuestro] maestro, Mr. Ortiz.

KC: ¿Y qué hiciste tú cuando dijo eso?

Elizabeth: Dije que era cierto. El maestro quería que todos le pusieran atención a José.

(Interview, 5/2/04)

KC: And do you think [José] is intelligent?

Elizabeth: Yes, he is.

KC: What shows that he is?

Elizabeth: Because one day he was not mischievous and he was answering all the questions. The teacher said, “José, you are truly intelligent, but you don't want anyone to know that.”

KC: Who said that?

Elizabeth: [Our] teacher, Mr. Ortiz.

KC: What did you do when he said that?

Elizabeth: I said that that was true. The teacher wanted all of us to pay attention to José. (Interview, 5/2/04)

When I asked José about the incident cited above by Elizabeth, he smiled for a split second before consciously changing the topic of conversation.

To serve as another example of José being selective about his scholarly pursuits depending on his connection with teachers, I believe his connection to me as his former Pre-K teacher played a part in José choosing to participate as a focal student in the study. When I first went to Parks to begin the study and choose focal students for the after-school focus group, José came running up to me when all the fifth grade classes were outside. He asked practically out of breathe, “You doing a program?” I told him some precursory details like we would be meeting a couple of times a week after school to talk about their lives. He made a point to tell me that he does not participate in any after-school classes or tutorials, but that he would be interested in mine because I used to go to his house when he was in my Pre-K class (Fieldnotes, 12/17/03).

*Low risk of being labeled a ‘schoolboy.’* Before he categorically admitted to wanting to partake in the after-school focus group, José asked as if he had forgotten a very important detail, “Is Manuel doing it?” (Fieldnotes, 12/17/03). I believe that José wanted to clarify whether Manuel was going to participate because José considered Manuel one of the ‘coolest’ students out of my former Pre-K students (i.e., the participant pool for the study). Therefore, if Manuel were to participate in the study, José’s interest in participating would not likely be judged as though he were a ‘schoolboy.’

Another example of José feeling comfortable with school-related discourse happened on our *paseo* to the UT campus. I took José, Lizzie, Belinda, and Charlie in the same group. Lizzie, Belinda, and Charlie would have been considered by many of their peers to be ‘school kids.’ They were extremely excited about the *paseo*. For example, Lizzie talked a lot about her sister (a graduating senior in high school) applying to colleges. During the *paseo*, Lizzie picked up informational brochures and the campus newspapers to take home to her sister. In this fleeting figured world created on this particular *paseo*, José seemed comfortable expressing enthusiasm for school-related topics. I took the group to the Education building to see where I worked and studied. After meeting Dr. Blanco, José whispered, “Is he famous?” I said, “He is to bilingual teachers like me.” He responded softly, “Wow.”

Then I took them to the PCL which is one of the main libraries where my study room was. On our way to the study room, we passed through the stacks with books in foreign languages. There were old books with German, Russian, and other languages on the spines. The students were all excited and started browsing the stacks. They asked for the camera and asked me to take digital pictures of them in the stacks. When we arrived to the study room (an unattractive, windowless, florescent-lighted, beige room measuring approximately 9 x 7), they started rummaging through some of the academic books sprawled out on the desk. Then they spotted some children’s books of short, scary stories that I happened to have in the room. Spontaneously and frenzy-like, Lizzie and Belinda grabbed one, sat on the floor in the corner of the room, and excitedly flipped through the book talking about the pictures and the story titles. Charlie and José followed suit.

Grabbing their own books, Charlie sat on the floor in the middle of the room and José sat on one of the chairs. I stood by my desk wondering what had just happened.

On our way out of the library, José said, “Can we go to the other floors?” I got a curious look on my face and said, “Y’all don’t want to see the other floors. They all look the same. Lots of books.” He said, “I know! Can we see them?” I told them that we had a lot more to see and we needed to get going. Mindful of the time, I was trying to keep the *paseo* moving in order to finish on time. In hindsight, I would have taken time out to visit the other floors.

As José, Lizzie, Belinda, Charlie, and I were walking on South Mall, students were whizzing by and around us in every direction trying to make it to their next class. Charlie saw a short college student walking by and turned to José saying, “All we need is backpacks like that girl and they’ll think we’re in college.” José started walking by my side and said, “Ms. Kimberley, did you see that itty-bitty girl right there—with the backpack? They could think we’re in college, too.”

In this fleeting figured world created on the UT *paseo*, not only was José acting like a “schoolboy” but he was also envisioning himself as a ‘college boy.’ When I asked him about his interest in possibly attending college, other forces and structures begin to flood José with contradictory and ambiguous authorings regarding schooling and his place in it:

KC: What do you think you have to do to get into college?

José: Behave good. Do my work with a great smile [smiles big]. ...

KC: So, when you say you want to go to college—

José: Is this all going to be about school?

KC: Well, José, it’s interesting. Because you say you want to go to college, you know

you're smart, you know you can do good work, but then you also say, "I don't have to pass any test. And I really don't have to work hard to get to sixth grade." So where do you want to be? Where do you see yourself? [I was using my hands to show the two extremes.]

José: In this side. [points to the hand of going to college, etc.]

KC: On this side? Starting when?

José: I don't know. Starting tomorrow. [He smiles exaggeratedly big.] ... The day of the test. When we finish the test, that's when I start behaving good.

KC: The day you finish the TAKS? Because you want to go to Spaghetti Warehouse and the museum?

José: yeah.

(Interview, 4/22/04)

The distant figured world of college seemed to drift even farther away when I asked him what going to college would entail. To me, it seemed like he became apprehensive about continuing the conversation about his future school plans when he mockingly stated, "Behave good. Do my work with a great smile" and asked if the whole interview would be about school. José returned to the topic of the here-and-now figured world of fifth grade schooling where he seemed to do a type of a cost analysis on which behaviors would have the bigger pay-off. He implied that he would engage in *travesuras* pre-TAKS (maybe to keep the days of drill-n-kill activities more interesting). However, he implied that he would reign in the degree to which he engaged in *travesuras* post-TAKS because he wanted to be included in the end-of-the-year fieldtrip to the Spaghetti Warehouse and I-MAX movie at the Texas History Museum. As a side note, due to his "bad behavior" as cited by Ms. Schaffer, José was not allowed to go on the fieldtrip despite his plans.

José began to think in the short-term (e.g., behaving good after TAKS = going on fieldtrip), because he was well aware of the script that will play out for the remainder of the school year: drill-n-kill until the day of the high-stakes test, then teachers lighten up,

the kids do more fun things like going on field trips. Talk of college quickly was overshadowed by his immediate concern of keeping up with the day-to-day game of shaking up the monotonous school days and not appearing like a schoolboy in the process.

During this same interview, José wanted to verify what boundaries he would find in the figured world of UT if he were to go with his mother. He wanted to know if “they” would get mad if he were to show up to explore what the campus had to offer. Naively showing my privilege as a formally educated, White woman, I assured him that he could go into the buildings without a hitch (almost as if he would not even be noticed). Thinking back, I realize that a little, “brown” kid and his mother would be noticed if they were to explore this figured world of UT. Despite living in a state where Latinos/as are the new “demographic majority,” their “political minority” status (Bengio & Ben-Dor, 1999) continues to be confirmed by the fact that the UT student enrollment for Latinos/as is a very low seven percent ([www.utexas.edu](http://www.utexas.edu)). José initially seemed interested in the topic of going to college which was indicated by his interest in wanting to visit the campus with his mother and inquiring if he could have gone into classes. He was also responsible for putting the conversation back on track to discuss his future as a college student.

### **Downplaying Intelligence**

Wanting to participate in the after-school focus group and the UT *paseo* are just two examples of how José felt comfortable to partake in school-related endeavors when

the risk of being singled out as a ‘schoolboy’ was minimal. However, when the risk was high, José tended to downplay his intelligence. In a previous interview excerpt for example, José stated that school would be better if teachers only gave ‘easy’ problems.

José claimed that reading was his least favorite subject, “...because it’s boring.” During that same interview, José told me he was pretending to read practice passages in Ms. Schaffer’s class.

KC: What did you think about the passage you read today in Ms. Schaffer’s class?  
José: Oh, I didn’t ever read it. I was just faking...  
KC: You were just faking?  
José: No, I just read paragraph one and two on the elephant. Then I saw the questions and then—um—it said paragraph six. So I just went to paragraph six.  
KC: So you didn’t have to read the whole thing?  
José: No.  
KC: But you did answer the questions right.  
José: How do you know?  
KC: Because I looked at it.  
José: They were right? Oh.

(Interview, 2/17/04)

In José’s effort to rush through the reading passages and corresponding questions, he did not seem to appreciate the fact that he was actually demonstrating advanced reading strategies such as reading ahead and skimming for pertinent information. Ms. Kendall also mentioned that José rushed through his class work in order to visit with his classmates.

Besides “faking” or rushing through his class work, another way that José downplayed his intelligence was by using the discourse of the school to explain his lack of attention and poor performance in his classes. He would often claim, “I’m distracted. I can’t concentrate.” As we sat in his driveway one day, I asked him why he didn’t do

better in school when we both knew he was very capable. He smiled and said, “It’s because I get distracted.” As I continued talking, Angel, his sister, walked by the car to enter the house. José exaggeratedly turned his head away from me and followed her with his gaze. Then he looked back at me with a big smile and said, “What did you say? See! I got distracted!” We both laughed. He managed to poke fun at himself for using those catch phrases associated with ‘off-task’ behaviors exhibited by students labeled with ADD/ADHD.

### **Alternative Ways to Show Intelligence**

When I asked José how Mr. Ortiz would author him, he said that Mr. Ortiz would say he was smart:

KC: If I were to go to Mr. Ortiz and say, “Tell me about José,” what would he say?

José: I don’t know. That “he’s a smart kid.” Because each time—like when the principal came, she asked what we were doing and I was saying everything.

KC: You were saying everything?

José: I even screamed it out. And he said, “Okay. Let other people talk.” But I still said everything that I knew.

(Interview, 2/17/04)

To a certain extent, José seemed to enjoy the fact that Mr. Ortiz recognized his intelligence. However, one seemingly safe way to showcase his intelligence in front of his peers and adults was to do it in unacceptable ways such as screaming out answers in front of the principal.

As a result of downplaying intelligence and resisting that ‘schoolboy’ label, José often chose to show his intelligence in other ways, such as testing boundaries. José tested

boundaries by behaving in ways that disrupted the school day. Even when he participated in the academic lesson, he seemed to purposefully do it in unacceptable ways as illustrated in the following excerpt:

KC: Because even when it seems like you're not paying attention—

José: I'm really paying attention.

KC: You can say the answers.

José: Like today, I was being really bad, but I still tell them the answers.

(Interview, 4/22/04)

Pretending to be 'off task' and behave "bad" did not deter José from keeping up with most of the academic teaching. While he may have often not appeared to attend to the academic content of the day's lesson, José liked to know what was happening in the classroom both socially and academically.

He admitted that he liked to talk "all the times" which included talking over people, making fun of people, telling jokes, and calling out answers.

KC: Do you like to talk?

José: Yeah.

KC: Do you think you talk over people sometimes?

José: Not sometimes. All the times.

KC: [laugh] And why do you think that you do that?

José: Because I want to answer the questions. ...Because [Mr. Ortiz] was telling me to raise my hand, but they [the teachers] always pick other persons.

(Interview, 2/17/04)

In his mind, José was guaranteed to receive more attention from calling out answers than from raising his hand or waiting his turn. Calling out the answers in a loud and abrupt manner allowed José to not only seek out attention from his peers and teachers but also verify that he knew the content of the lesson.

However, José did run the risk of being blocked out as if he were background noise because of his incessantly talkative *forma de ser*. During a science experiment, José's constant questions and suggestions went unacknowledged by Mr. Ortiz. Even though José's interest piqued, Mr. Ortiz acted as if he were accustomed to blocking out José's 'noise.' When I asked José about it, he changed the subject to how many minutes we had been talking during the interview.

### **“THAT LITTLE STINKER!”**

In this section, I look at how teachers authored school and how that played out in José's authoring. Since most teachers viewed José as an academically capable student, his attention-seeking (mis)behaviors and (dis)engagement with 'school-related' tasks caused José to be authored as though he were a drain on the system. In other words, he was continually authored by his fifth-grade teachers and administrators as someone who was capable in theory, but in reality, sapped the school of valuable resources. For example, he was targeted to receive small-group, pull-out reading instruction based on the results from the Beginning-of-the-year (BOY) benchmark tests. Ms. Dawson, the reading specialist in charge of the special pull-out groups, mentioned that she did not believe José should be pulled out. This type of individualized attention would have been better directed toward students who needed it more than he, such as students who were in danger of failing the TAKS test. As a result, José was often reprimanded for not behaving better and not applying himself.

According to school report cards (PK-5<sup>th</sup>), interviews with teachers, and observations, adults seemed to be well aware of José's intelligence. After all, his performance on the 4<sup>th</sup> grade high-stakes tests showed that José was capable of doing better in school. Yet, he rarely seemed on task, behaved in acceptable ways, or turned in homework. Our inclination as teachers is and should be to seek out explanations for this mismatch of performance and potential. Besides home and peer influences, (which will be discussed in later sections of this chapter), another possible explanation that had been posed is characteristics of attention deficit disorder. Ms. Schaffer asked me on at least two occasions if José demonstrated behaviors consistent with the ADD/ADHD label when I had him in Pre-K. I said that I had never been comfortable using that label, especially for four and five year olds. I added that I remember José being able to demonstrate prolonged interest when he would become engrossed in something. I told her that José was extremely active in my classroom and that his curiosity and level of questioning always kept me on my toes. I also mentioned that he had always seemed to treat the world as his stage and would seek attention any way he could.

She commented, "I think it's more than seeking attention. I mean— As soon as I get him to stop tapping his pencil, his feet start stomping. As soon as I get his feet still, his mouth is going. As soon as I get him to stop talking, he's up walking around the room" (Fieldnotes, 2/04). Ms. Schaffer was trying to see if her observations of José's behavior were consistent over time. Looking through his report cards spanning across his six-year elementary career, teachers often commented on and deducted points from categories such as demonstrating self-discipline, following directions, and respecting

others' personal space and belongings. As far as I was aware, no action was ever taken to evaluate him for special education services due to his *forma de ser*.

After I observed José during Ms. Schaffer's class one day while they did practice reading passages, she approached me in the hall later that afternoon with a smile on her face and eyebrows raised. She said affectionately, "That little stinker! He can stay still. He can keep still and do his work. Usually he's up, down and up, down. He was really pulling it together for you." She said that she could not understand how he scored the second highest Reading score in the school on the fourth-grade TAKS, but was not passing any of his fifth-grade benchmark tests (Fieldnotes, 2/17/04). Ms. Schaffer wondered aloud if something was going on at home. Then she told me about a parent-teacher conference with José's mother. Ms. Rodríguez had told Ms. Schaffer that she was worried about José's older brother Rigo. She said that Rigo would go out with friends and sometimes not return for days. Ms. Rodríguez cut the parent-teacher conference short in order to go home and wait for Rigo, because he had not returned home since going out with friends the night before. When I asked José what Rigo did with his friends, he changed the subject and started talking about his puppies.

José seemed to be aware of the fact that consequences did not necessarily match up with the severity of the action. In other words, consequences—or punishments—were frequently doled out somewhat arbitrarily. Some days he could "salir con la suya [get away with things]" (report card comment, Pre-K) without much consequence. Other days one infraction could cost him a field trip. In the following excerpt, José pointed out that Mr. Ortiz seemed to favor the students from the bilingual class (Silvio's class) over his

own all-English instruction class. He stated that Mr. Ortiz was harder “on the person that talks English. Because with the other class [the bilingual class] *son bien nice*” (Interview, 4/22/04).

The teachers at Parks often talked about how the bilingual classes behaved better than the English-only classes (Fieldnotes, 2/04). Seemingly, José had tuned into the fact that the way students were authored based on ethnicity/race/language influenced teacher expectations and behavior. In other words, he felt that the bilingual classes received preferential treatment not necessarily because they were better behaved, but because they were perceived to be better than the other English-instruction classes.

José realized that he could sometimes bank on the fact that some consequences were either never followed through with or less severe than originally planned. For example, Ms. Schaffer took privileges away from José on several occasions, but Mr. Ortiz sometimes un-did the punishment or made it less severe, as José attested to this below:

KC: And what were you doing? How did you lose the sock hop?

José: I wasn't listening to [Ms. Schaffer]. And I always used to stand up and I went over and sat on the bean bag. Bean bag chair. Bean bag?

KC: Does Mr. Ortiz take anything away from you?

José: Nope. ...Mr. Ortiz is nice because the first sock hop I lost it. But Mr. Ortiz still gave me a chance.

(Interview, 4/22/04)

Even though José had the sock hop taken away, he was able to go anyway. Similarly, Ms. Schaffer had banned José and other students from the class Valentine's Day party. While Ms. Schaffer hosted the party for her and Mr. Ortiz's classes, Mr. Ortiz was in charge of

the punished students. According to José's account, Mr. Ortiz did not want to be a "mean teacher" and allowed the punished kids an intimate party of their own:

KC: I noticed that you didn't get to go to the Valentine party on Friday.

José: That's because of Ms. Schaffer. She got me in trouble.

KC: She got you in trouble?

José: No, I got in trouble. But all I was doing was whispering and she marked marks on me.

KC: I saw that you had a lot of check marks by your name.

José: Five.

KC: Nine.

José: Nine?! It was five. ...But, look, Mr. Ortiz is a nice teacher, too. Because he said that he didn't want to be a mean teacher. Since Paulino brought a bag of Hot Cheetoes and Eduardo brought 2 bags of Hot Cheetoes and a Coke. ...Mr. Ortiz said that we could have a party of four people...So we had a party with chips, cookies, and soda.

(Interview, 2/17/04)

On certain occasions, José sought out 'negative' consequences, because he seemed to like the alternative more than the privilege. Below, José discussed that he preferred to have the symphony field trip taken away, because he would have most likely been sent to help out the Pre-K classes with his fellow 'mischievous' fifth-grade counterparts:

KC: But what do you do if you don't go? like to the symphony?

José: You stay with a Pre-K class. Like if they're eating something—like chocolate chip cookies and punch, they give you some. Last time I lost a field trip and I—uh, we—went to the Pre-Kinders, they were eating cookies and um—punch. And *me dijo la* teacher, right?, about the cookies and to get three of each kind. And so that makes it nine cookies and I got 2 cups of punch. And I get to go to sleep sometimes. And I get to make the children go to sleep. And it's fun.

KC: You rub backs?

José: Huh?

KC: You help rub their backs and stuff?

José: Yeah, that's how they go to sleep faster. And I always tell them, "Hey, if you go

to sleep, when you wake up, your teacher's going to tell you that you're a good boy."

KC: [laugh]

José: And then they go to sleep.

(Interview, 4/22/04)

Interestingly, he motivated the Pre-K students to go to sleep with a promise that they would be authored by their teachers as 'good' children. He used the discourse of the achievement ideology to appeal to the Pre-Kinders sensibilities.

Despite his *travesuras*, teachers, like Mr. Catalán, generally authored José as "simpático y chistoso [nice and funny]" who did not have malicious intentions or motives (Interview, 5/04). After Ms. Kendall described José's *travesuras* in one interview, she emphasized that José was not an "angry" student and did try to please.

Ms. Kendall: I would [say José is charismatic]. He's not one to where he's—I guess—just angry. I've gotten onto him before, "José, go sign the book." "Okay." He'll go sign the book and try—I guess—to be back on task. But eventually he would fall into that same—. Or if I make eye contact, then he'll jump back to like "I'm paying attention." And, you know, I know he's about ready to get off target again. But, yeah, he bounces right back to being lectured to "Okay, I'm José again." So he does [try to please] ...After that point of that he sees you notice that he's about off task. He'll come back on task or try to act like he never did anything to begin with.

(Interview, 1/16/04)

Many of my observations were consistent with Ms. Kendall's commentary that José did not want his performances to be (mis)interpreted as having bad intentions.

## **RIGO: A DIFFERENT KIND OF MENTORING**

The word ‘mentor’ is used to refer to someone who apprentices or teaches another person subject matter or values that generally subscribe to the achievement ideology. In his book *Ain’t no making it*, MacLeod (1988) described another type of mentoring among the *Hangers* where “valuation of physical toughness, emotional resiliency, quick wittedness, masculinity, loyalty, and group solidarity point to a subculture with its own norms, which is passed on from the older to the younger boys” (p.117). Much like the *Hangers*, Rigo (José’s older brother) emphasized values that tend to lie outside of the realm of the achievement ideology which I classified into: (1) preservation within schooling and (2) preservation of physical self.

### **Preservation within Schooling**

Conscious of the stigma of being authored as schoolboys, Rigo and José seemed to analyze the protagonists and rules for engagement within the figured world of schooling. On several occasions, José mentioned that his brother had told him about the high-stakes, standardized tests that really would not affect his promotion to the next grade. The following excerpt brings to light how Rigo talked to José regarding the TAKS test:

José: Rigo says—he says that in the test, if you don’t pass the test, you could still pass to sixth grade. All you got to do is do good work and your work. And they’re just trying to get you to pass the test, but it’s like—if you don’t even pass it, you could still pass to sixth grade. It’s just like they’re just trying to press you to pass it.  
KC: But, do you think you’d have a problem passing the test?  
José: Math questions are easy, reading questions are easy.

(Interview, 4/22/04)

This excerpt demonstrates José's complex understanding of the figured world of the schooling system and those within it. Even though José did not seem to believe that he would have trouble passing the fifth grade TAKS tests, he iterated what he would have most likely passed to the next grade level even if he would not have passed the standardized tests. He was aware that passing to sixth grade did in fact "depend on your work" (Joint Interview with Charlie, 5/04). José authored teachers as if he were aware that the pressures of the standardized tests were passed down from the teachers to the children.

José's critical reflections regarding the figured worlds of schooling were revealed in other instances such as his belief that Mr. Ortiz was not as hard on the bilingual class as he was on the all-English instruction class. I witnessed a similar type of critical reflection from Rigo about two of his high school teachers during the following conversation that took place in José's home after one of our interviews in the public library. For the interview with José, Edward had gone with us to the library (because Mrs. Rodríguez did not want Edward to ride the bus and be at home without José) and did some drawings from a how-to-draw-animals book he had taken off the shelves:

KC: Edward, where are your animal drawings that you did in the library?

Rigo: He threw them away. Didn't you, buddy?

Edward: Yeah.

Rigo: That's alright. I throw my work away, too. I throw all my drawings away, too.

KC: You draw, Rigo?

Rigo: Nah. I can't even draw. I'm in art right now. We do a bunch of stuff, but I don't even like my teacher.

Ms. Rodríguez: You don't like any of your teachers, Rigo.

Rigo: No, but this teacher's racist. He's just racist. He's like one of those old hippie

dudes. He thinks he's cool, but he's racist.  
Ms. Rodríguez: [She quickly, but nervously, looked at me. Then she turned to Rigo, giggling] Mi'jo, what do you mean he's racist? How do you know?  
Rigo: Well, White kids can eat in the classroom, but as soon as we eat anything, he's like, "Y'all can't eat in here." Or we ask him if we can get on the computer and he says, "No." And then a White kid asks him and next thing you know he lets the White kid on the computer. He's just racist. It's alright though. I'm passing; I'm passing. At the beginning of the year, I was like making 97's. And now I'm doing the *same* work as I've always been doing and he's brought me down to the 70's. That's alright though. I'm passing. But he is just racist.  
Ms. Rodríguez: What about that teacher who called me and said—  
Rigo: Aw, man! Why you even bringing that up? She's not racist. She's just not a good teacher.

(Fieldnotes, 4/04)

I include the above excerpt for three reasons. First, it shows an example of how Rigo treated his younger brothers with affection when he confided that his own drawings, much like Edward's, ended up in the trash can. Second, one of the messages the Rigo seemed to be sending indirectly to his siblings was that "passing," or getting by, was key. Third, Rigo made a distinction in how he spoke of the two teachers. His art teacher was classified as racist, because he gave the White students preferential treatment and started to grade Rigo lower for the same effort. Even though I do not know the specific reasons that the second teacher was classified as a bad teacher, Rigo emphasized that she was not a racist.

### **Preservation of Physical Self**

José seemed to look up to Rigo. In the following joint interview with José that took place at the public library, I brought up the topic of siblings:

KC: Te dicen algo tus hermanos de middle school, Charlie?  
Charlie: My brother gets in trouble too much.  
KC: What for?  
Charlie: fighting.  
KC: in Deacon [middle school]?  
Charlie: Peabody [middle school].  
José: Have they ever whooped him? ...How old is your brother?  
Charlie: Twenty. No, I'm playing. 13.  
José: My brother would have whooped him.  
Charlie: My big brother is 26.  
José: My brother would still whoop him.

(Joint Interview, 5/04)

Despite the fact that José bragged that Rigo could have hypothetically beaten up both of Charlie's brothers, Rigo's mentoring seemed to stress that physical self-preservation would prove more successful if José avoided physical altercations altogether. Given the family members' small stature, Rigo underscored relying on other means to demonstrate masculinity and/or status.

When Ms. Rodríguez told me in front of the family that Rigo was trying to "scare" José by telling him that he would inevitably get beaten up once he entered middle school, Rigo said, "I wasn't trying to scare him! I got beaten up when I was at Deacon [Middle School]." Rigo's intentions did not appear to have been to intentionally scare José. After all, Rigo based what he told José on personal experience. To illustrate that Rigo did not seem to use this information of beatings as a scare tactic, I provide the following excerpt from an interview with José and Charlie:

KC: Your brother said that you're going to get beat up [when you go to Deacon Middle School]?  
José: He said that I better meet somebody black. Like talk to them to make friends with them.

KC: If they're black?

José: Yeah. Somebody black. Or a lot of them. So that way, if someone tries to beat me up, he will like stand up and be like, "Nah! He's my homeboy."

(Joint Interview, 5/04)

Ms. Rodríguez seemed to think that Rigo was intentionally trying to scare José. In contrast, the fact that Rigo gave José a specific strategy (i.e., to make black friends) in order to avoid possible physical altercations reveals another motive. I believe that Rigo considered this information as part of José's preparation for his future figured world of middle school. Rigo specifically mentors José by advising him to opt for making allies as opposed to trying to win fights.

### **BEING BAD: AS SOCIAL PRACTICE**

Besides acting as allies in case of physical altercations, I will look at other voices that peers in José's school served in this section. As for many children, one advantage to attending school is being able to see friends on a regular basis:

KC: Do you like coming to school everyday?

José: When it's boring at my house, I'll want to come to school and see my friends.

(Interview, 2/17/04)

José's friends and peers seemed to play important voices in José's engagement in *travesuras*—namely spectators and recruiters/recruits.

## Spectators

When the students received their report cards in the next-to-last grading period, José ripped open the envelope to see the behavior side of the report card. Ones represented the lowest mark and fours the highest. He went over to Iván laughing and pointing out his low marks. He said excitedly, “Look at all the ones I got!” Then he proceeds to call them out one by one. He looked around the room smiling. When he saw that I was watching him from across the classroom, he called out to me over Iván’s shoulder, “You want to see how bad I am, Miss?” He walked over to where I was sitting to show me his marks for behavior. I asked, “Do you like getting ones?” He said, “No, I’d like to get 3’s and 4’s. [pause] No! Really I don’t care. I don’t care what I get.” Then he smiled really big.

José seemed to be actively pulling Iván and me in as spectators to his ‘bad-ness.’ This pattern of having spectators had been going on throughout most of José’s elementary career, as evidenced by Angela and Jeniffer’s recollections from second and fourth grade:

KC: Y cuéntenme de José.

Jeniffer: Digo que José habla mucho.

Angela: Y habla bien *loud*, ¿verdad?

Jeniffer: Siempre me ponía de nervios [cuando estábamos en la misma clase].

Angela: Y te acuerdas en *fourth grade* with Ms. Willis. O con Mr. Catalán en second grade. Y le decimos, “Le voy a decir a Mr. Catalán que estabas haciendo eso y no-sé-qué.”

Jeniffer: Siempre lo mandaba a la clase de Ms. Kalaswad, porque estaba horrible. Siempre se portaba malo y

KC: Tell me about José.

Jeniffer: I’d say that José talks a lot.

Angela: And he’s really *loud*, right?

Jeniffer: He always got on my nerves [when we were in the same class].

Angela: And do you remember in fourth grade with Ms. Willis. Or with Mr. Catalán in second grade. And we World tell him, “I’m going to tell Mr. Catalán that you were doing this, that, and the other.

Jeniffer: He always sent him to Ms. Kalaswad’s class, because he was

andaba con Ms. Kalaswad.  
(Joint Interview, 5/6/04)

horrible. He always behaved bad and  
then was sent with Ms. Kalaswad.  
(Joint Interview, 5/6/04)

Although José “*se portaba malo* [behaved badly]” and spent much time outside of Mr. Catalán’s classroom according to Jeniffer and Angela’s recollections, Mr. Catalán was impressed with José’s intelligence and comprehension of instructional content (Interview, 5/04).

In contrast to Mr. Catalan’s image of José being intelligent, some of José’s peers seemed to define intelligence according to the achievement ideology:

KC: ¿Y se mete en problemas mucho?  
Lizzie: Pues, sí, porque dicen que anda diciendo maldiciones mucho.  
KC: ¿Crees que es inteligente?  
Lizzie: Sí, si lee y se pone la mente en el estudio.  
(Interview, 5/04)

KC: Does he often get into trouble?  
Lizzie: Well, yes, because they say he is cussing all the time.  
KC: Do you think he is intelligent?  
Lizzie: Yeah, if he reads and puts his mind into it.  
(Interview, 5/04)

KC: Cuéntame de José.  
Belinda: *Bad boy.*  
KC: Por qué?  
Belinda: Porque se porta mal.  
KC: Tú lo has visto portarse mal?  
Belinda: *Yeah. When I was in Group C.*  
KC: ¿Qué hacía? Dame un ejemplo.  
Belinda: Como: “*Ha, Ha! You got in Trouble! Ha, Ha!*”  
KC: ¿Crees que es inteligente?  
Belinda: *Not that much.* No pone atención.  
KC: ¿Y si pusiera atención?  
Belinda: Sí, podría.  
(Interview, 5/6/04)

KC: Tell me about José  
Belinda: *Bad boy.*  
KC: Why?  
Belinda: Because he misbehaves.  
KC: Have you seen him misbehaving?  
Belinda: *Yeah. When I was in Group C.*  
KC: What did he do? Give me an example.  
Belinda: Como: “*Ha, Ha! You got in Trouble! Ha, Ha!*”  
KC: Do you think he is intelligent?  
Belinda: *Not that much.* He does not pay attention.  
KC: What if he payed attention?  
Belinda: Yes, he could be.  
(Interview, 5/6/04)

According to Lizzie and Belinda’s descriptions, intelligence is something that you actively work on by doing things such as reading, putting “la mente en el estudio [your mind on your studies],” and paying attention. This mindset reflects the achievement ideology. Therefore, Lizzie and Belinda could not feasibly author José as intelligent since he did not strive to ‘achieve’ and do his ‘best.’

Just because José did not consistently make an effort to reproduce the achievement ideology (e.g., tasks such as turning in homework, taking time to check over his work, and minding the teacher), other peers considered him intelligent. For example, Elizabeth considered José intelligent citing evidence of how Mr. Ortiz had authored him one day during class. However, she seemed to think that José engaged in *travesuras*, because he did not know how to call attention to himself effectively:

Elizabeth: [Es] travieso. ... Le dicen que no agarre eso y todavía lo agarra, que no hablen y él sigue hablando, que se ponga en línea y no se pone en línea. Como lo hace a propósito.  
 KC: ¿A propósito?  
 Elizabeth: Sí....Digo que no sabe llamar la atención.  
 (Interview, 5/2/04)

Elizabeth: [He’s] mischievous. ...They tell him not to grab something and he grabs it anyway, not to talk and he keeps talking, to get in line and he doesn’t get in line. Almost like he does it on purpose.  
 KC: On purpose?  
 Elizabeth: Yes....I think because he doesn’t know how to get attention.  
 (Interview, 5/2/04)

Other students such as Iván and Octavio explained that José got into trouble because he wanted to test the boundaries:

KC: *Y cuéntenme de José.* [Tell me about José]  
 Iván: Trouble maker.  
 Octavio: Yeah [laughs].  
 Iván: He gets suspended.  
 KC: He got suspended?

Octavio: *Por cuatro o tres días.*[For four or three days.]  
 KC: *¿Por qué?*[Why?]  
 Iván: He try to be skipping classes.  
 Octavio: *Siempre se pone en problemas.*[He always gets in trouble.]  
 KC: *¿Y creen que es inteligente?* [Do y'all think he is intelligent?]  
 Iván: *En Math, sí.* [In Math, yes.]  
 Octavio: *Yo creo que es bueno en matemáticas y en* [I think that he's good in Math and in] *Science. También le gusta* [He also likes] *Social Studies.*  
 KC: *¿Y por qué se mete en tantos problemas?* [Why does he get in so much trouble?]  
 Octavio: *Siempre hace algo malo.* [He always does something bad.]  
 Iván: *Siempre le gusta tratar las cosas para ver cómo son.* [He always likes to test things to see how they'll turn out.]  
 KC: *¿Cómo así?* [What do you mean?] Like—test his limits?  
 Iván: Yeah, he tests how much trouble he can get in one day.  
(Joint Interview, 5/19/04)

While Iván and Octavio recognized his intelligence/strengths in several content areas, they kept returning to his *travesuras* as a primary way to author him.

### **Recruits and Recruiters**

The above excerpt touched on when José was suspended from school. When a substitute teacher was covering Ms. Schaffer's class, José and two other boys decided to leave their lunch period early and to go hang out in the Pre-K classrooms during the thirty minute time slot between lunch and Special Areas. Given that the boys' unannounced presence was suspicious to the Pre-K teachers and their unannounced absence was noticed by the substitute teacher, they were caught roaming the halls after about twenty minutes. All three boys were suspended.

This anecdote illustrates how *travesuras* often involved a stipulation of recruitment. Would any of those three boys have made that decision to “skip classes” if the group dynamic were taken away? The group dynamic among particular students

presented a dialogic process where they engaged in *travesuras* as a result of recruiting others or being recruited by others. The collective struggle legitimated the notion that they really did not feel in place with the scripts of the achievement ideology. However, it should be noted that the three boys went to the Pre-K classrooms instead of trying to disappear as most students “skipping classes” would typically do. According to José, they told the Pre-K teachers that they were sent down to help out. How many students “skipping classes” would choose to go help other teachers?

Sometimes the recruitment process involved being recruited into engaging in *travesuras*. Mr. Catalán mentioned that there was immediate attraction between José and Gerardo when Gerardo was a newcomer to Parks in the second grade. They dialogically propelled one another to engage in *travesuras* while alternating voices of follower and leader.

Catalán: ... [José] Era buen chico. Pero lo que pasó ese año con mi clase es que tenía a Gerardo. Y tenía muchos problemas. Entonces tenía a ése y también a [José] Rodríguez.

KC: Ellos dos se atraían de inmediato.

Catalán: Sí, porque se ve que [José] no tiene mucha auto-estima. Entonces siempre va a estar metido detrás de los que lo pueden organizar. A los que lo pueden dirigir. Busca los líderes.

(Interview, 5/04)

Catalán: ... José was a good kid. But what happened that year with my class was that I also had Gerardo. And he had a lot of problems. So not only did I have Gerardo but also [José] Rodríguez.

KC: There was an immediate attraction between the two.

Catalán: Yes, because it's obvious that José does not have much self-esteem. So he always gets involved with those who can organize him. Behind those who can lead him. He looks for the leaders.

(Interview, 5/04)

According to Mr. Catalán's account, José's low self-esteem and disorganized *forma de ser* contribute to his tendency and desire to be led into “problem” behaviors. Ms. Kendall

offered an additional explanation when I asked her to speculate about my former Pre-K students' transition to middle school, she said: "Wrong influences? As far as I think will quickly jump into that. ... I see [José] far easily jumping into this crowd because it's cool. And I think he kind of wants to be on that cool level" (Interview, 1/16/04).

Other times the recruitment process involved recruiting others into engaging in *travesuras* as José explained below:

KC: You didn't go [to the sock hop] yesterday, right?

José: Nope. Because of Ms. Schaffer. She wrote my name on the board so I couldn't go.

KC: Does she do that a lot? When does she write your name on the board?

José: When we behave bad, but she didn't write Silvio's name. Probably because—I don't know. Silvio always behave bad, too. He behaves as bad as he can. I told him to stand on the tables and everything. He did all that and they just called his mother and he had to go to another class. He didn't even listen.

(Interview, 4/22/04)

Elizabeth had noticed that José tried to recruit Silvio to behave "as bad as he can":

Elizabeth: José le dice [a Silvio que haga se porte mal] y le regañan a Silvio. Y luego dijo José, "Sí, lo hiciste, ¿verdad?" Y Silvio le dice, "Sí, por eso me puse *in trouble*."

KC: ¿Y por que José quiere que se meta en problemas?

Elizabeth: A lo mejor quiere que se pone *in trouble* como él.

(Interview, 5/2/04)

Elizabeth: José tells [Silvio to behave bad] and they end up scolding Silvio. And then José asks him, "You did what I said, right?" And Silvio tells him, "Yeah, that's why I got in trouble."

KC: Why does José want him to get in trouble?

Elizabeth: Pobably because José wants Silvio to get in trouble like him.

(Interview, 5/2/04)

Even though José and Silvio did not have class together, they were able to galvanize their bond by plotting *travesuras* and comparing notes later. Another reason to engage in *travesuras* as a group was to increase the likelihood of receiving the same set of

consequences and, hence, to serve out the punishment together. José offered one example of this collective plotting below:

José: Oh, yeah. I told Silvio that I had lost my symphony and pep rally. And that I told Silvio to behave bad, because he didn't want to go to the pep rally or the symphony. And me and my [other] friend lost the pep rally and the symphony. So [Silvio] tried to behave bad, but he was a little bit too bad. That's why they called his father and sent him to another class. ... He did not lose the symphony or the pep rally. So I told Silvio to tell Ms. Schaffer that Mr. Ortiz doesn't want him to go to the symphony or the pep rally.

(Interview, 4/22/04)

When Silvio was not assigned the same punishments as José, José went to the lengths of telling Silvio to lie to Ms. Schaffer about Mr. Ortiz taking away the symphony and the pep rally. If they ended up with the same set of punishments, they not only got to prove their solidarity but also they might have been able to see one another during the school day:

KC: Do you get to hang out with your friends at school?

José: No, since they changed the rotations.

KC: Who aren't you with that you want to be with?

José: Darío, Silvio, um—that's it. In the cafeteria, we used to be able to talk together and sit at the same table. But now that the new group has to stay together and the other one has to stay together.

(Interview, 2/17/04)

As José explained above, the figured world of school hardly afforded students time for high-quality, unstructured interactions with one another. For example, even their lunch time was highly regulated. Rather than being able to choose to sit with whom they wished, students typically had to sit at designated class tables in a boy-girl seating pattern.

## DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I have explored several reasons behind José's engagement in *travesuras* such as trying to downplay his intelligence, to receive attention from adults and peers, to test the teachers'/school's boundaries, and to make passive schooling more interesting. Regardless of the reason(s), José had been authored—for the most part—as a smart student who should have known better than to behave inappropriately.

Rarely do we take the time to turn the lens on ourselves within the schooling system to seek out more profound explanations of the academic, social, and emotional needs of students like José. We need to understand that the reasons are complex and intertwined. In an interview with Mr. Catalán, he pondered a multitude of factors that could explain the discrepancy between José's academic potential and performance, including the rigid figured worlds of school:

Es un niño muy, muy inteligente, pero no sabía—no tenía *social skills*. No sabía cómo comportarse; no sabía cuándo hablar. ... Su gran problema es más—de cómo integrarse en la sociedad tan rígida: de ir a la escuela, estudiar, toda la rutina. No, para él, todo era más libre. No le gustaban las reglas. Pienso que su nivel de inteligencia tiene que ser alto. Porque sin hacer nada, siempre ... podía comprender todo rápido, ¿no?

(Interview, 5/04)

[José] is a very, very intelligent boy, but he doesn't know—he doesn't have social skills. He didn't know how to behave himself; he didn't know when he should talk. ... His biggest problem has more to do with—how to integrate himself into the rigid society: going to school, studying, the whole routine. No, for him, everything was much freer. He didn't like the rules. I believe that his level of intelligence has to be high. Because without doing anything, he could always understand really quickly, you know?

(Interview, 5/04)

Mr. Catalán said that José always seemed distracted and disorganized, but he seemed to understand the content and passed the tests. José seemed to rage against the socializing agents that schooling embodies. His lack of “social skills” could have had more to do with resisting education as “as a principal site for colonization” (Walsh, 1991), where schools:

most often become the location for socializing individuals into compliance and for perpetuating class divisions and the status quo. Children are alienated from meaningful symbolic interaction within their culture in order to diffuse group solidarity and dissipate collective identity; they are acculturated into a mold that favors those in power. (ibid: 4)

Jose’s values were not given a place in his figured worlds of school. For example, the values of self- and family-preservation that Rigo emphasized through his informal mentoring were not acknowledged within José’s rigid figured worlds of school. His ability to analyze and to question did not often have a place either. School seemed to be a place that sought conformity to the achievement ideology. José, however, did not appear to want his intelligence and curiosity channeled into performative scripts that required passive, unreflective participation. He refused to engage in learning as a banking construct. Therefore, José found alternative ways to engage in learning and make schooling meaningful for him. His engagement in *travesuras* allowed him to actively construct a place where he could exhibit his values, intelligence, curiosity, and sense of humor.

José had a special knack for not only calling attention to himself, but also controlling the topic at hand. Even though, on the surface, he seemed distracted, his authoring was quite deliberate in order to stay in his comfort zone. When he did not want to engage in the day's lesson, he turned the attention away from the academic and toward the discipline. This behavior was observed in Hurd's research where he noted, "The classroom environment is fraught with constant disruptions by some male students, managed in turn by teacher threats, and results in a shift of attention from the class lesson to discipline" (2004: 66). Besides controlling the attention of the figured worlds of his classrooms, José tended to control the topic of conversation whether I was interviewing him or we were with a few of his peers in my car. As soon as we broached topics that made him feel vulnerable and/or uncomfortable, he would change the topic away from things, such as his father, his school performance, and his sister's selective mutism.

## CHAPTER VII CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

When I returned to Parks Elementary School to examine the circumstances of my former students, I found myself falling into the trap of branding them in essentialized and reduced ways. Even with my framework and intentions of exploring the multiple facets of their school and other identities, I struggled to see more—more of their figured worlds, more of the authoring processes, and more of their *formas de ser*. My struggles to see more stem from how I have been conditioned to (de)value children in simple, ‘empty vessel’-type ways. These struggles to see children’s multidimensionality were intensified considering my background and unearned privileges as a White, middle-class, native-English-speaking ‘American,’ because I have been conditioned to author Latinos (and others of color), working-class people, and non-native speakers of English in deficit ways. Therefore, my struggles were two-fold: uni-dimensional and deficit-oriented.

In the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters, I broadened my in(tro)spection of the three in-depth case studies regarding how Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José were authored by themselves and others. After reading the case studies, my hope is that the reader resists the temptation to brand these students with constricted, fixed notions of identity: Elizabeth as just a popular Latina; Jeniffer as simply a wallflower schoolgirl; and José as merely a misunderstood troublemaker. Although Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José appear to be similarly situated in terms of socially constructed identity markers of race, class, primary language, ethnicity/culture), their improvisational interactions vary according to all the forces in their figured worlds. Looking at the differences among these three

particular students reminds me of the inherently flawed tendencies of essentialism and reductionism. Addressing my research questions regarding *formas de ser* and academic achievement have forced me to take notice of the multi-facets of student identity formation and to examine the academic consequences for students' investment in their *formas de ser*.

In the chapters presenting case studies of Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José, I sought to explore (1) how their *formas de ser* were revealed in different social spaces and (2) how their *formas de ser* (dis)accorded with traditional notions of school achievement. In this final chapter, I first provide a brief overview of each of the case study students in order to highlight the most salient aspects regarding their *formas de ser* and school 'achievement.' Next, I discuss the major themes that I identified from the three case studies, consisting of (1) Institutional Authoring of Achievement, (2) Collective Barriers, Individual Blame, and (3) Building on Strengths, Minimizing Vulnerability. Then, I provide a general orientation for tying my study to the broader socio-political context of education and outline suggestions for pedagogical practice and for educational research and theory. Lastly, I conclude with some final reflections.

### **REVISITING ELIZABETH, JENIFFER, AND JOSÉ**

Elizabeth was highly regarded among teachers and peers, although their images of her varied greatly. Her social authoring was quite flexible and malleable, depending on which figured world she occupied. Therefore, the reasons for her popularity were modified depending on the expectations of a given figured world. Elizabeth's teachers

held her in high regard because she seemed to assume a *forma de ser* that was respectful, trustworthy, and obedient. Her popularity among many of her peers had a very different set of performance criteria, such as setting fashion trends and telling jokes and stories with mature content or undertones. Despite her high social regard, Elizabeth stated that she was not comfortable in all-English instruction. She was also red-flagged as a “bubble” kid, which is a term used at the school for students in danger of failing the high-stakes TAKS test. Why was a student with such sophisticated social awareness, like Elizabeth, seemingly authored by herself and others into circumstances of underachievement and low expectations?

Jeniffer, by her own account, enjoyed school, especially Math. Her academic prowess did not come without effort, however. She had developed rigorous study habits and capitalized on the way her older brother scaffolded academic concepts for her. Despite her reputation as being one of the brightest students, she demonstrated much self-doubt in the area of *lenguaje* (Language Arts), due in part to how Reading performance was primarily gauged based on the English-language version of the TAKS test and its accompanying drill-and-practice activities and benchmark tests. Despite Jeniffer’s self-proclaimed struggles in *lenguaje* and her barely-passing Reading TAKS scores since third grade, Jeniffer showed amazing insight and talent as a writer throughout the handwritten pages of our dialogue journal. She chose to write in her native language of Spanish even though she had not received Spanish-language instruction since third grade. Why was there such a disconnect for Jeniffer between *lenguaje* as a school subject and *lenguaje* as an authentic interaction on the pages of our written correspondence?

José was cited by many of his teachers as an academically capable student who had made the second highest score at Parks on his fourth-grade TAKS Reading test. However, José viewed being authored as a schoolboy as undesirable; he did not seem to buy into the achievement ideology. As a result, he seemed to prefer to seek attention through behaviors that were deemed inappropriate according to the performative expectations within official figured worlds of school. Despite José's (mis)behavior, he demonstrated an intense curiosity for learning, as evidenced by his incessant, yet higher-order, questions and his ability to call out correct answers during content area instruction even when he appeared to be "off-task." His older brother, Rigo, and José himself seemed to prioritize 'getting by' in school with their solidarity to peers in tact. Why couldn't José's zest for learning have been channeled in authentically positive and contextualized ways?

### **CROSSCUTTING THEMES**

Focusing on *formas de ser* and school achievement, I have identified the following three themes that crosscut the case studies presented in this dissertation. The first theme focuses on the institutional authoring of achievement in the areas of behavior, academics, and language. In the second theme, I look at how collective barriers and constraints within our figured worlds of public schooling are often passed off in the form of individual blame. The last theme centers on the student response of self-protection within the figured worlds of public schooling.

## **Institutional Authoring of Achievement**

Many teachers tend to think of ‘school’ as a place where students should try their best and apply themselves in order to reach their full potential. This belief is heavily based upon the achievement ideology (Macleod, 1987). Unfortunately, the ways that we institutionally regulate “school achievement” tend to limit students’ ability to author themselves in ways that allow them to be academically successful *and* to show solidarity to their own ethnic/racial groups (Gee, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). Institutions seek to control almost every aspect of students’ days, ranging from setting specific curricular ‘essentials’ (Hirsch, 1987) to policies that dictate the language of instruction (Baker, 2001; Guerrero, 2004; Ovando et al., 2003).

This institutional control echoes Foucault’s (1979) descriptions of the process of *normalization*. Normalized authoring of achievement was particularly evident in the current high-stakes climate in Texas schools, like Parks. Therefore, I dedicate much of the discussion in this section to how high-stakes testing and the practices that go along with it seek to normalize students in three ways: (1) behaviorally, (2) academically, and (3) linguistically. In this section, behavioral, academic, and linguistic authoring refers to how those in the schooling system have dialogically set norms for students to partake ‘appropriately’ in the figured worlds of school.

***Behavioral authoring.*** From my time at Parks Elementary, I gathered that teachers, students, and administrators tended to gauge whether students were “good,” or not, primarily based on how they performed according to the behavioral norms and

expectations within the figured worlds of public schooling. As indicated in the case studies, Elizabeth and Jeniffer were authored by themselves and others as “good” students because they assumed respectful and obedient *formas de ser* while participating in official figured worlds of school (i.e., instructional and other adult-directed times). José, on the other hand, was not perceived as a “good” student because he behaved in ways that seemed unwieldy as compared to the school’s behavioral norms. While Elizabeth was authored by the teachers as a good student, Jose performed better on the TAKS tests than Elizabeth and received grades similar to those of Elizabeth. Hence, content area grades and test scores are obviously not the sole criteria for determining what makes a “good” student.

There was a message that seemed to be getting through to students regarding whether a student received an evaluation of being “good,” or not. The evaluation was heavily based upon student attitude (as determined by institutionally-sanctioned expectations for comportment), as opposed to student comprehension of and connection with academic content. One reason that behavior, or attitude, is such an important aspect of the institutional authoring of students links to a primary function of schooling: to indoctrinate students with the beliefs and values of Western dominant ideologies. For children whose ideologies differ from those of the dominant cultures, this indoctrination understandably threatens many of them, because a subtractive process often results (Valenzuela, 1999; P. Willis, 1981). Therefore, students, like Elizabeth and Jeniffer, tend to be most valued because they appear to be submissively receptive to the indoctrination of dominant ideologies.

Another reason that behavior tended to be such an important factor in determining the caliber of the students relates to the types of learning and teaching that takes place in Parks and other Texas public schools, especially those that serve poor and working-class students. At Parks, the high-stakes testing climate required a great deal of passivity from students. For example, students in the fifth grade were not allowed to experience recess—or, to use the words of the principal, “wild time”—after the Winter Break in order to have more time to prepare students for “the test.” In order “to build student stamina” for the TAKS, weekly assessments went from taking an hour and a half of the day on Fridays to the entire school day. During my classroom observations, students were often working on practice TAKS reading passages and math problems.

Several students, like José, seemed to challenge the validity of passive, transmission-style learning. As a result, José tended to resist the ideological notion that striving to do his ‘best’ was a desirable way in which to author himself. For the most part, José’s *forma de ser* of behaving and questioning countered the behavioral and academic expectations of students in transmission-teaching school settings like those found at Parks Elementary. In other words, José seemed to oppose banking education (Freire, 1973) environments which assume “learning [is] premised on the voyeuristic consumption of texts” (Giroux, 1993: 31). Whereas banking education relies on the notion that students should engage as voyeurs in their learning, José resisted the expectation of participating in passive, unreflective, and obedient manners. For this reason, José thought school was “boring” for the most part.

*Academic authoring.* Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and Jose’s *educación* [character education]<sup>7</sup>, emphasizing respect and compliance, seemed to align with the school’s expectations for passive and obedient *formas de ser* while learning scripted types of curriculum, especially in the high-stakes testing climate. Scripted types of curriculum, primarily revolving around by the TAKS test, seemed to be a by-product of academic control and surveillance techniques used in the figured worlds of schooling. Although the TAKS test officially took place during one week in April of 2004, its eminence was felt throughout the year in the forms of drill-and-practice activities, Friday assessments, practice benchmark tests, and after-school and Saturday tutorials. Our dependence on banking education (Freire, 1973) has made way for the “No Child Left Behind” legislation and its rhetoric of standards and accountability. While legislators purportedly had good intentions of addressing inequitable schooling, the calamitous consequences are especially felt in the schools with working-class students and students of color.

In the form of a highly scripted curriculum aimed at covering what *might* appear on the high-stakes TAKS tests (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001), the faculty and staff at Parks Elementary worked overtime in a constant state of *testing triage*. This state of testing triage labeled students, like Elizabeth, as “bubble kids;” overlooked both Jeniffer’s talent and insecurity in the area of *lenguaje*; and placed José in special pull-out classes for reading because he received a 32% on the Reading benchmark tests taken at the beginning of the fifth-grade year. Testing triage resulted in other unfortunate

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<sup>7</sup> The fact that José did not always choose to implement his *educación* in ways similar to Elizabeth and Jeniffer does not mean that messages of valuing school and being respectful were not an important aspect

occurrences. In fifth grade at Parks, for example, Social Studies hardly received attention because Social Studies was not an area tested on the fifth-grade TAKS. The abandon of Social Studies as content area is just one example of how the test becomes the curriculum (Valenzuela, 2001-2002). Another example of testing triage was how the teacher-certified curriculum specialists at Parks were used primarily for crunching TAKS numbers (e.g., graphing the results of the beginning- and middle-of-the-year benchmark tests by grade, teacher, and subject area) and performing remedial catch-up with “bubble” kids. When I was a teacher at Parks, the curriculum specialists were dedicated and talented classroom teachers who inspired me in my own teaching. I regrettably construed that the curriculum specialists’ experience, dedication, and know-how could have been put to better use in order to holistically serve children at Parks.

*Linguistic authoring.* The high-stakes tests are a symptom of how the achievement ideology has taken hold in our schooling institutions and reduced learning to one standardized measure. Although we have bilingual programs for many native Spanish-speakers in Texas, the push for students to transition into all English-instruction and to take the standardized tests in English as quickly as possible is a symptom of a much more deep-seated issue:

This innovation [bilingual education] must be understood within its broader social context. The U. S. version of these programs serves almost exclusively working-class and poor children, precisely the children most neglected and stigmatized by the educational system. The primary goal of most bilingual programs has been to

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of José’s authoring from his figured worlds of home, family, and community. On the contrary, his strategies to employ his *educación* in other ways and at different times demonstrate his agency.

teach the children English in order to accommodate them as soon as possible within the broader monolingual system, the very system whose faults motivate the development of bilingual alternatives in the first place. (Moll, 2001, p.14)

In the chapters on Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José, their bilingualism and biliteracy was not valued or fostered to any considerable degree. The consequences of the subtractive nature of transitional bilingual programs could be seen in each of the student's case studies.

Jeniffer was authored as an advanced student from early in her elementary school career. As a result, she was slated to be transitioned earlier than many of her bilingual classmates. Even though she was officially enrolled in the bilingual program from Pre-K through third grade, her teachers and the LPAC committee decided to have her take the high-stakes test (called TAAS at that time) in English. Then in fourth and fifth grade, Jeniffer received English-only instruction. As evidenced in her dialogue journals, her ability to express herself in Spanish was impressive, especially considering that she had not received native language instruction for two years. However, her biliteracy was not fostered in the official figured worlds of school. This, I believe, was a contributing factor to her insecurity in *lenguaje* in general. In her mind, she seemed to equate literacy solely with the 'target' language—English. Based on her experiences in the figured worlds of school and the priorities within, her association that literacy and the English language should not come as a great shock. Unfortunately, the English-monolingual approach toward literacy has been deeply entrenched in the U.S. school systems, making little space for biliteracy and multiliteracy development (Moll & Dworin, 1996; Moll et al., 2001; Pérez, 1998; Reyes, 2001; Schwarzer, 2001).

Unlike Jeniffer, Elizabeth remained in the bilingual education setting through the beginning of her fifth-grade year. Although she was transitioned and placed with mostly monolingual-English teachers, neither Elizabeth nor her teachers felt that she was prepared to handle all-English instruction. Elizabeth's reservations about having to perform in English were palpable, stating that she felt more comfortable reading and receiving instruction in Spanish. Elizabeth's experiences at Parks prompt me to ask two key questions about her bilingual education. First, why wasn't she better prepared to be able to receive instruction in English by the fifth grade? Second, why were native language supports essentially cut off from Elizabeth as soon as she transitioned, especially considering that two of the four fifth-grade teachers were bilingual? She was basically placed in figured worlds that could not effectively capitalize on her strengths nor knowledge base in her native language.

Quite the opposite of Elizabeth, José always seemed more comfortable with the English language and English-language instruction. Even in Pre-K when we used a Spanish word that José was unfamiliar with, I remember that he sometimes would proclaim, "What? I don't speak Spanish?" Unlike Jeniffer however, it was determined (assumingly by his teachers and the LPAC committee) that José would take his third-grade TAAS test in Spanish. He did not pass the TAAS in third grade, but received commended scores the following year when he took the fourth-grade TAKS in English. Why weren't his confidence and proficiency in Spanish more developed after receiving bilingual instruction from Pre-K through third grade? Had he begun to internalize the hegemony of English (Shannon, 1995) at an early age? Or was he not as exposed to or as

confident in Spanish due to the fact that he had different Spanish-language models than his peers (e.g., Guatemalan father, Chicana mother, and English-speaking siblings)? The reasons for these three students' insecurities with English and/or Spanish are complex, calling for quite a bit of conjecture. Unfortunately, none of these three students felt 'accomplished' in their bilingualism and biliteracy to an extent that they were able to manage the academic demands. To varying degrees, all three students had experienced subtractive bilingualism in their experience at Parks. Subtractive bilingualism has been widely documented as a common occurrence among students in transitional bilingual education programs, like that of Parks (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003; Roberts, 1995; Worthy et al., 2003).

### **Collective Barriers, Individual Blame**

My intent with this section is to briefly discuss and explicate some primary collective barriers that Latino/a, working-class, and bilingual students may experience in the figured worlds of U.S. public schooling. While I did not directly and explicitly address collective barriers in the case studies, I would like to acknowledge, however inadequately, the ways that collective forces play themselves out in schools. While not a major focus of my study, the power of forces, such as racism, classism, ethnocentrism, and sexism, in the authoring process is significant. Therefore, educators and others need to recognize that these major authoring forces need to be seen as part of the broader contexts under which schools, teachers, administrators, parents, and students are functioning.

In the academic portrayals of the three case study students, there were several examples of how the students cited some sort of personal inadequacy with their behavioral, linguistic and/or academic abilities. One example of academic and, most probably, linguistic inadequacy was authored via Elizabeth's failing grade in Science. Despite the fact that Science was Elizabeth's favorite content area and that she had expected a "B" or a "C" at worst in the third grading period in fifth grade, Mr. Ortiz told me during recess that he had assigned her a failing grade based on how she had performed on the middle-of-the-year TAKS practice test. Not understanding how she had received the failing grade, Elizabeth shrugged her shoulders and decidedly told me that she just had to "*echar más ganas* [give it her all]" and work on getting better at Science. She went on to say that Mr. Ortiz was a good teacher. Another example of academic and linguistic inadequacy was evidenced in Jeniffer's mediocre performances in English literacy—as narrowly measured by discrete, English-monolingual skills. Jeniffer felt inadequate in the area of *lenguaje* [Language Arts] because she was not performing as well as she would have liked to on the high-stakes tests. José's behavioral inadequacy was passed off as an individual flaw or weakness. José—who was arguably the most critically aware of institutional practices of *normalization* (as compared to all of the students in my study)—claimed to get "distracted" and that to make school better, he would want easy questions. His resistance within the figured worlds that overlooked his thirst for knowledge was authored by himself and others as a lack of ambition and direction.

The above instances are just a small sampling of how Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José were authored as inadequate in multiple ways. I could share other examples that are not included in the pages of the case studies. I could share various examples from the other students who participated in this study. Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José are not isolated cases of what happens to students who do not conform to these behavioral, academic, and linguistic processes for *normalization*. *Normalization* allows institutions and those within them to author non-conformists as “abnormalities and deviants” (Ryan, 1991). In other words, conformist expectations yield individualistic repercussions. Teachers, parents, and administrators are authored to conform to strict, conformist standards as well as children. My discussion, however, focuses on how students are (ab)normalized through institutional forms doled out in individualistic ways (e.g., individual report cards, individual scores on a standardized test, and individual rewards and punishments). While students are expected to conform to collective standards set forth by the cultures of power (Delpit, 1995), they are also conditioned to attribute their achievement, or lack thereof, as an individual pursuit. Furthermore, if students do not ‘achieve’ according to institutional authoring, the brunt of the blame tends to be placed solely on the student and their so-called ‘deficits.’

One institutionally-sanctioned way that we author children in deficit-oriented (Foley, 1997; Valencia, 1997; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997) ways is through the official and unofficial labels that we assign to them. Apple (1990) states that “much of the literature on the labeling of children in schools tends to rest upon a peculiar brand of ‘idealism.’ That is, it assumes that pupil identities are created almost wholly by teachers’

perceptions of students in classrooms” (p.140). Elizabeth was labeled as a “bubble kid,” which carries connotations of lacking intelligence, ambition, or talent. Jeniffer was labeled as an “exited” bilingual student midway through her elementary school career, which signified that she would no longer need or benefit from bilingual services. Labeled as a “troublemaker,” “a bad boy,” and “a little stinker,” José was authored by himself and others as someone who did not care for school and did not apply himself. All of these labels are narrowly individualistic and do not allow an exploration of the reasons behind such connotation and the subsequent consequences.

Consistent with the individualistic and meritocratic nature of the achievement ideology, “barriers to success are seen as personal rather than social” (MacLeod, 1987, p. 79). This “tendency to place the onus of students’ underachievement on the students themselves” (Valenzuela, 1999, p.74) could be observed in how Elizabeth reacted to her failing grade in Science, or how Jeniffer demonstrated insecurities in *lenguaje*, or how José repeatedly admitted to being “bad.” Collective identity markers (like gender, race/ethnicity, and class) and the social inequities that escort them in our society are not given the attention necessary to address individual student ‘underachievement.’ Much of student ‘underachievement’ cannot solely be attributed to the individual students themselves. On the contrary, we must look at how we, in the institutions of school, have unjustly and collectively contributed to authoring children on the “bubble,” out of Honors classes, and into the principal’s office. We have constructed collective barriers in the

paths of children based on their socially-constructed identity markers in the forms of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia<sup>8</sup>.

Gender, for example, was a complex issue that connected to other identity issues like race, class, and culture. Although José's *forma de ser* often seemed to run counter to the achievement ideology, he was often rewarded with attention for his unruly behaviors. This attention, especially toward boys, is consistent with much of the literature that shows how boys are often rewarded for calling out answers and other behaviors that are supposedly inappropriate (Cameron, 1997; Eder et al., 1995; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Ironically, "good" students, like Jeniffer and Elizabeth, often do not receive much teacher attention due in part to how we tend to favor females (particularly females of color) in our schooling system (González, 2001; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Elizabeth and Jeniffer were "good" students and did not typify a dissenting presence, their academic and linguistic needs did not appear to be addressed any better than José's. On the contrary, José could at least improvise a forum for his *quejas* [complaints] whether they went acknowledged or not. Elizabeth and Jeniffer, on the other hand, were not given nor did they create a forum to voice injustices or question discrepancies (e.g., Elizabeth failing science grade; Jeniffer's patchy experiences in *lenguaje*).

Then, is it safe to assume that gender is the primary identity marker that contributes to José's 'unruly' *forma de ser*? Arnot (2004) states that some of the boys in her research resisted the normalization of schooling, because "What is at stake in

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<sup>8</sup> I could have easily dedicated an entire dissertation to examining just one marginalized identity marker (e.g., skin color, native languages and discourses, socio-economic status, sexuality, and gender).

acquiring dominant linguistic and cultural forms is not just the accusation of class disloyalty, but also the negation or repudiation of masculine sexuality defined in terms of virility, pugnacity, and self-assertion” (p.27). As Arnot’s explication, as well as the three case studies presented in this dissertation, shows, forces combine and act (dis)jointly in the figured worlds of schooling. As forces, race, class, sexuality, and dominant ideologies—just to name a few—function simultaneously and dialogically with gender. For instance, Elizabeth’s case study focused a great deal on her gendered and heteronormative authoring. Yet, I should emphasize that other forces were dynamically authoring her *formas de ser*, like race and class.

### **Building on Strengths, Minimizing Vulnerability**

Within their figured worlds, Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and Jose were all successful strategists in different aspects. Elizabeth’s ability to modify her *formas de ser*, Jeniffer’s rigorous study habits, and José’s artful way of controlling the topic of conversation serve as a small sampling of the many strategies on which they had come to rely in order to navigate their many worlds. One interpretation of the development of these and other strategies and *formas de ser* relates to how agency is enacted. A dual relationship exists in the types of student agency I observed at Parks: to build on strengths and to minimize vulnerability. Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José essentially capitalized on their particular strengths and resources in order to protect themselves from feeling vulnerable.

While Elizabeth doubted her academic and linguistic abilities, she protected herself by building on her social resources in order to be authored as a respectful,

dedicated student and a girl that many peers wanted to be associated with. Being held in high social-regard seemed to minimize her vulnerability in the academic and linguistic realms. Although Jeniffer liked school and performed assigned academic tasks to the best of her ability, she felt vulnerable in the area of *lenguaje* and cited that as being one of the main reasons that she did not want to consider enrolling in Honors classes in middle school. Therefore, Jeniffer minimized her vulnerability by devoting herself to the content areas that seemed to come more naturally to her (i.e., Science and Math), calling on her older brother for academic (and, perhaps, linguistic) support, and developing good study habits. José demonstrated agency by deflecting questions or attention that made him uneasy, calling attention to himself, and laughing off accusations of not caring about his education. José seemed to constantly calculate, according to Gee (1996), his solidarity and status in any given figured world. If he felt that he had to choose between solidarity to his “homeboys” and status as someone who cared about school, he chose solidarity. In the figured world we had created on the *paseo* to UT, he did not feel like he had to choose solidarity over status, partly because Charlie, Jeniffer, and Lizzie were Latinos/as who openly discussed liking school.

In *Dreamkeepers*, Ladson-Billings (1994) highlights the importance of African-American students being able to claim a positive ethnic/racial collective identity that does not exclude the desire to excel academically. Considering these possibilities, I believe in the importance of fostering the development of a positive Latino collective identity that includes academic pursuits as desirable. The conditions necessary for these positive

identities to occur are certainly complex and require a reevaluation for practice, research, and theory.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

Even though this study was carried out with a small group of bilingual Latino/a fifth-grade students, the findings go beyond this setting and take relevance for classroom practice, policy decisions, and educational research. This study considers the process of schooling for three students who have been historically and politically marginalized—“other people’s children” (Delpit, 1995). Based upon the case studies of Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José and how they have been authored by themselves, others, and, ultimately, the schooling system, I have seen how narrowly and flatly students, especially those from the margins, can be authored. As a broader critique of the systems, I see important indications of crucial ways that we can serve children better. As a result of achievement ideology’s deficit-orientation, students are not given serious consideration. Along with many scholars (Cummins, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Foley, 1990, 1997; Fránquiz & Reyes, 1998; Grinberg & Saavedra, 2000; Moll et al., 1992; Valencia, 1997; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999), I caution that viewing students of color and from working-class backgrounds through deficit lenses and failing to tap into their linguistic and cultural resources ultimately subtract from their schooling experiences.

## General Orientation

With my critiques of how systems flatten students' *formas de ser* through practices such as high-stakes testing and subtractive bilingualism programs, I offer some suggestions for pedagogical practice and research so that we may seek directions that allow us to broaden notions of what is acceptably valid in schools. The suggestions are not meant to function as a 'how-to' manual. On the contrary, my intent is to share some practical suggestions based on how my study was carried out methodologically and logistically. My wish is that the reader considers her or his own positionality and orientation regarding the schooling for students who have been historically and politically marginalized in the figured worlds of schooling.

Instead of unrealistically requiring students to *normalize* and conform to out-of-date institutions, we must recreate ourselves within the institutions in order to tap into and build upon the wealth of knowledge and resources that students have coming into schools. By proactively authoring ourselves in a resource-minded orientation, we can co-construct knowledge along with the children we purportedly serve, as opposed to approaching education as a uni-directional, top-down transmission of knowledge. Why should educators strive to author themselves in a different orientation? All children, like those in my study, would benefit from moving toward resource-oriented approaches, Building on students' strengths and validating their multiple facets would take precedence over trying to remediate their 'deficits' as compared to biased norms.

## **For Practice**

As a qualitative researcher, I had the luxury of dedicating my time, energy, and focus to just a handful of students for approximately six months. As a former classroom teacher who had to contend with many pressures and constraints, I realize that classroom teachers do not have that luxury. Especially with departmentalization, the fifth-grade teachers at Parks had to get to know and carry out instruction for their homeroom students as well as the students in their rotation schedules. Therefore, I do not mean to propose the unrealistic goal that teachers get to know their students as I came to know Elizabeth, Jeniffer, and José. After reading the three case studies, however, my hope is that teachers see the benefit of paying closer attention to their students and their *formas de ser* both within and outside of the official figured worlds of school.

Report cards and TAKS scores do not have the power to reveal students holistically and uniquely. Engaging in holistic relationships with students will allow teachers to catch glimpses of how and why students are dialogically authored to (dis)engage in academic pursuits. Even the smallest details of students' lives have the potential to inspire modifications of instruction and curricular content that include students in their own learning. In the official (i.e., academic/instructional) figured worlds of school, teachers could incorporate authentic and valuable opportunities into the curriculum. For example, students could engage in writing through dialogue journals with the teacher. Dialogue journals would provide a forum for many students to express themselves and feel part of an relevant correspondence with the teacher. Students could be invited to bring in artifacts from home with special significance or express themselves

through alternative forms of representation, like the focal students did with their digital pictures. Storytelling, such as oral and/or written autobiographies, could be a valuable endeavor in the classroom setting.

Some ways to get to know details of students' lives outside of the official figured worlds of school include having lunch with students periodically, visiting with the students and their families in their homes, or participating in daily life of the community (e.g., grocery shopping, festivals, carnivals, religious functions). I learned a great deal about students' *formas de ser* on our mini-*paseos*. With the permission of the families and the school administration, a teacher could take a group of three to five students on an adventure to the local library, park, or college campus.

Teachers who are aware of and tuned into aspects of how students are authored by themselves and others have a distinct advantage in order to get to know students more holistically; to inform instruction and assessment; motivate students with what they are already interested in and know about; and advocate for better ways of including students in their own education. Other ways to encourage achievement of many levels is to: (1) foster native and heritage language development, (2) advocate for multiple forms of assessment, and (3) tap into and integrate funds of knowledge into the curriculum. These implications are not meant to fall solely on the shoulders of the teachers. Administrators must value teachers' precious time and dedication by offering more supports. For example, at Parks, the curriculum specialists (who were effective classroom teachers at Parks) were appointed to helping classroom teachers and students 'achieve' on a broader scale. However, much of their time was used for clerical tasks on compiling data on the

TAKS tests and small-group remedial instruction. They did not have time to work with teachers on integrating instruction across content areas and enriching the curriculum. Teachers need more time and freedom to think outside of the rigid teaching guidelines and learning objectives in order to approach teaching and learning from a more relevant and critical stance.

### **For Research and Theory**

Researchers need to join in the all-important dialogue regarding high-stakes testing (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Scheurich & Skrla, 2001; Scheurich, Skrla, & Johnson, 2000; Valenzuela, 2001-2002). Therefore, we not only need to investigate its effects on Latino/a participation in schools, but also explore the benefits of alternative and multiple forms of assessment. Besides evaluating students' ability to think and express themselves critically, analytically, and creatively, multiple forms of assessment need to address the issue of how we continue to evaluate bilingual and biliterate children, like Jeniffer, Elizabeth, and Jose, according to a monolingual-English standard.

On the subject of bilingualism and biliteracy, researchers must challenge the compensatory and remedial nature of most bilingual and ESL programs. Furthermore, more research needs to document the advantages of programs that have an additive and enrichment orientation toward bilingualism and biliteracy, like dual-language and late-exit bilingual programs. Of course, research should focus on the linguistic and academic advantages in enrichment-oriented programs. Another focus, maybe not as apparent, should be how school and ethnic identities are authored within enrichment programs.

Like Trueba, researchers need to dedicate more of their efforts into documenting Latino/a students who are ‘successful’ without leaving their collective identities behind. Out of this proposed research, we can build on the landmark theories of bilingualism and biculturalism (Darder, 1991; Lambert, 1975; Moll et al., 1992; Trueba, 2002) and work toward developing theories that fathom ways that children can find a place of equity and excellence. For example continuing to examine the importance of phenomena that influence students having both a positive school and ethnic identity, such as social networks (Guerra, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 2001), generational and immigrant status (Olsen, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999), and language supports (Collier, 1995; Roberts, 1995; Shannon, 1995).

### **FINAL REFLECTIONS**

Understanding more about how Latina/o bilingual students make sense of and react to the multitude of expectations placed on them by school, their families, and their peers will aid us in our effort to create more supportive and culturally relevant educational opportunities. The three case studies in this study are meant to complement the growing scholarship regarding bilingual Latino/a students, their identity formations, and their complex schooling experiences. I make a contribution to the literature by providing more evidence for the need to (1) interrupt notions of academic achievement and success, (2) explore “improvisational interactions” of bilingual Latino/a students, and (3) examine our own assumptions regarding taken-for-granted structures within the figured worlds of public schooling.

Endeavoring to hear the students' voices (for possibly the first time) has served me in ways that I am just beginning to fathom. Hopefully, my endeavor as a former teacher turned researcher will serve other educators who, like me, had the sanctimonious privilege of overlooking our students' depth with the best of intentions. Silin (1995) states that part of our job as educators is "clearly culture-bound and value-saturated because it prepares children to live within specific communities and traditions" (p. 88). If we are to examine education and its effects on children holistically and integrally, we must continually ask ourselves for which "specific communities and traditions" are children being prepared?

In many ways, the figured worlds of school are set up to overlook students' multi-faceted *formas de ser* and the dialogic authoring processes influencing the whole child. As a result, *formas de ser* are often flattened and made uni-dimensional. Their strengths and multi-dimensional richness tend to be overlooked and not capitalized on because of the ways that the figured worlds of school have been structured. If there is hope for educational systems to be responsive to students' social and academic well-being, we must move toward a different orientation that acknowledges student resources and explores students' multidimensional perceptions of their daily complexities. Striving to understand their perspectives will help us seek out and create more classrooms that promote active participation within our multivoiced society, where multiple discourses are accepted and fostered within classrooms. In order to achieve 'success' on many levels, we must promote discourses and practices that consider the whole child and her many *formas de ser*.

Appendix A  
2003-04 TAKS Results

**5th Grade TAKS (2003-2004)**

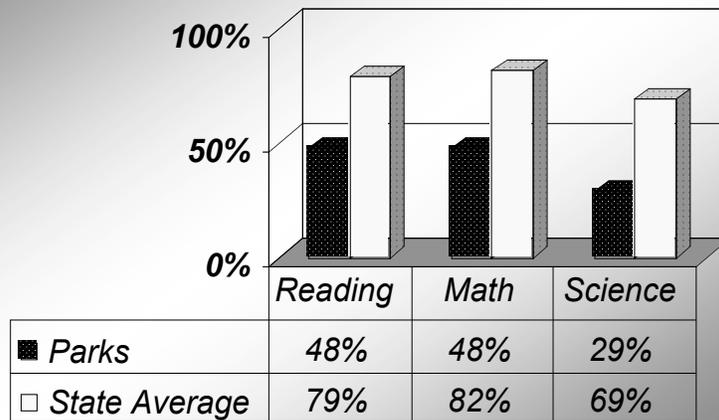


Figure A.1: Fifth Grade TAKS (2003-2004)

**Parks 5th Grade TAKS (2003-04)**

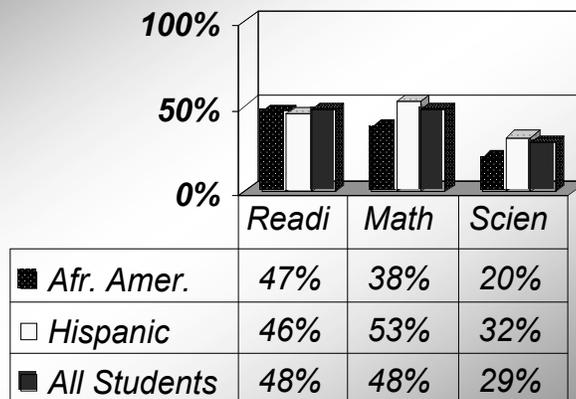
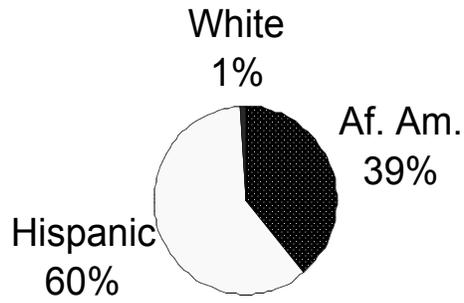
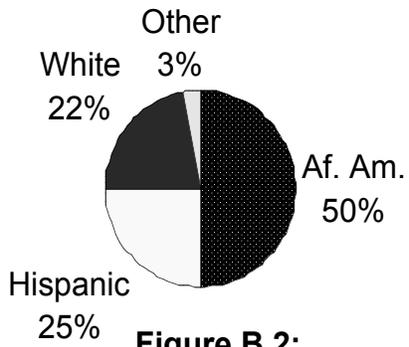


Figure A.2: Parks Fifth Grade TAKS (2003-2004)

Appendix B  
Ethnicity at Parks



**Figure B.1:**  
**Student Ethnicity at Parks (2002-2003)**



**Figure B.2:**  
**Teacher Ethnicity at Parks (2002-03)**

Appendix C  
Nine-Weeks Grading Periods (2003-04)

1st nine weeks	8/19/03 – 10/17/03
2nd nine weeks	10/20/03 – 12/18/03
3rd nine weeks	1/6/04 – 3/12/04
4th nine weeks	3/22/04 – 5/26/04

## Appendix D Data Collection Procedures

Month	Major Procedures
Aug. 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IRB paperwork submitted</li> <li>• visited students during the first week of school</li> </ul>
Sept. 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School district paperwork submitted</li> </ul>
Nov. 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IRB and School district approvals received for study</li> <li>• Dissertation Proposal Meeting with committee</li> </ul>
Dec. 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Met with principal and fifth grade teachers</li> <li>• Familiarizing myself with 5th grade classroom members and routines</li> <li>• Begin to eat lunch with students daily</li> <li>• Seek written consent from parents</li> </ul>
Jan. 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select focal students for after-school focus group</li> <li>• Begin after-school focus group meetings twice a week</li> <li>• Begin dialogue journal entries with students</li> <li>• Eat lunch with students daily</li> <li>• Observe during transition times and in classrooms</li> <li>• Interviews with students and teachers</li> <li>• Visit homes of selected students</li> </ul>
Feb. 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After-school focus group meetings twice a week</li> <li>• Eat lunch with students daily</li> <li>• Observe during transition times and in classrooms</li> <li>• Dialogue journals</li> <li>• Interviews with students and teachers</li> <li>• Visit homes of selected students</li> </ul>
March 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After-school focus group meetings twice a week</li> <li>• Eat lunch with students daily</li> <li>• Observe during transition times and in classrooms</li> <li>• Dialogue journals</li> <li>• Interviews with students and teachers</li> <li>• Visit homes of selected students</li> <li>• <i>Paseos</i> with focal students</li> </ul>
April 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat lunch with students daily</li> <li>• Observe during transition times and in classrooms</li> <li>• Dialogue journals</li> <li>• Interviews with students and teachers</li> <li>• Visit homes of selected students</li> <li>• <i>Paseos</i> with focal students</li> </ul>
May 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat lunch with students daily</li> <li>• Observe during transition times and in classrooms</li> <li>• Dialogue journals</li> <li>• Interviews with students and teachers</li> <li>• Visit homes of selected students</li> <li>• <i>Paseos</i> with non-focal students</li> </ul>

Appendix E  
 Jeniffer's Selected PowerPoint Slides



This is me and my best friend Belinda. Mr. Ortiz class, Alma Saenz took this picture. We were best friends PK but some times we get mad at each other. Our friendship is still here. A comment from Belinda miss you when we go to middle school. This picture Mr. Ortiz was mad with a student. We were mixed 5 grade classes



E.1: Jeniffer's Friendship Slide



## Events During the Day

	<p>PICTURE OF JENNIFER'S YOUNGER BROTHER, JOEL</p>	<p>? The first two pictures are in the morning when we go to school in the morning sun.</p>
<p>PICTURE OF JENNIFER'S SISTER AND OLDER BROTHER ON GO-CARTS WITH PUPPY</p>		<p>? The second two pictures are in the evening when Emilia and Gilberto are playing the go-carts.</p>
		<p>? The last two pictures are in the night when the moon is full and Belinda is asleep.</p>

E.2: Jeniffer's Story Slide [Note: Permission for siblings not obtained]

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## VITA

Kimberley Kennedy Cuero was born in Lubbock, Texas on October 6, 1971, to her loving parents, James and Ginger Kennedy. Being the daughter of an U.S. Air Force officer, she and her older sister, Kelli, lived in and attended school in many places including Spain, Germany, Michigan, Florida, Georgia, and Texas. Kimberley married Rubén Dario Cuero in 1997. Together they are raising their two beautiful daughters, Neenah Alexis (born January 28, 2000) and Leelah Sofia (born February 21, 2005), bilingually.

Upon her graduation from the University of Texas at Austin with a B.S. in Bilingual Special Education in 1995, she was awarded a fellowship through the Federal Academy for Educational Development in order to live in Quito, Ecuador, study at *La Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador*, and to intern with *El Consejo Nacional de Discapacidades* (the National Council for Disabilities). She returned to Austin, Texas to work at the elementary level as a bilingual (Spanish/English) Pre-K and Special Education Resource teacher. While teaching, she worked on and received her Master's degree in Multicultural Special Education from UT-Austin in 1999. In August 2000, she began pursuing her doctoral degree in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction with a primary emphasis in Multilingual Studies/Bilingual Education and a secondary emphasis in Language and Literacy. As a doctorate student, she worked with students at the university level—as lecturer, assistant instructor, teaching assistant, and supervisor. In August 2005, she will begin teaching at the University of Texas-San Antonio as a tenure-track professor in Literacy Education.

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