

Copyright
by
Clarena Larrotta
2005

**The Dissertation Committee for Clarena Larrotta certifies that this is
the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**Using A Negotiated, Holistic, Inquiry-based Curriculum
With Hispanic Adults Developing English Literacy**

Committee:

David Schwarzer, Supervisor

George Blanco

Annie Brooks

Diane Schallert

Jo Worthy

**Using A Negotiated, Holistic, Inquiry-based Curriculum
With Hispanic Adults Developing English Literacy**

by

Clarena Larrotta, B.A, M.A.E.E.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2005

To My Only Lord

- 1 Blessed be the Lord my rock!
Who trains my hands to fight and my fingers to battle;
- 2 My help and my fortress, my stronghold and my
deliverer, my shield in Whom I trust...
- 9 O God, I will sing to you a new song;
I will play to you on a ten-string lyre.
- 16 ...happy are the people
Whose God is the LORD! Psalm 114

Me agrada hacer tu voluntad, Dios mío...

Señor y Dios mío, muchas son las maravillas que tú haz hecho y las consideraciones que nos tienes. ¡Nada es comparable a ti! Quisiera anunciarlas, hablar de ellas, pero son más de las que puedo contar. Salmo 40(5)

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. George Blanco, Dr. Ann Brooks, Dr. Diane Schallert, and Dr. Jo Worthy for trusting me and for their collaboration and valuable feedback through the process of putting together this piece of research. I also would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. David Schwarzer for his mentorship and friendship. I met him at a time when I was feeling really lost in my doctoral program. He took me under his wing and has helped me to grow as a person, as a professional, and as a researcher.

I would be remiss if I did not thank Dr. Eileen Blau and Dr. Betsy Morales of the English Department at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez. Eileen's good work and friendship inspired me to continue with my graduate studies. Betsy played an instrumental role in bringing me to the University of Texas at Austin. When we were colleagues at the University of Puerto Rico, she showed up to my office one afternoon with the UT graduate catalogue and application packet for me. She was really the first person to motivate me to become a Longhorn.

I would like to thank the students that attended the ESL-3 literacy classes I taught at LI and the administrative personnel at LI. They were very kind to me and made possible this research study to happen. The students in my classes were learners and they were also my teachers at different points while conducting the

study. I am thankful because they helped me grow as a person, as a professional, and as a human being.

There is a special person that I also would like to acknowledge. His name is Pedro Torres. He is not my husband nor my boyfriend nor my relative. However, he voluntarily and simultaneously has performed the roles of friend, brother, and sometimes father to make me feel welcome and supported since my arrival in Austin.

Kimberley Cuero and Verónica Valdez have been my intellectual companions and friends throughout the doctoral program. We supported and helped each other during the different stages of our doctoral program. I am glad to have met you, Kim and Vero. Thank you!

I would like to thank Gerardo Carrillos. Contrary to what other people have done, he helped me to stay “off task” and gave me the distance from my work that I unknowingly needed. He inspired me in a different way. ¡Gracias!

Of course, there are many friends and colleagues who have helped to make the dissertation process more enjoyable and less painful. Thank you!

**Using a Negotiated, Holistic, Inquiry-based Curriculum
With Hispanic Adults developing English Literacy**

Publication No. _____

Clarena Larrotta, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2005

Supervisor: David Schwarzer

This was a one-semester qualitative research study implemented in an Intermediate ESL-Literacy class at an adult literacy program in Central Texas. The students, all of Hispanic origin, were invited to negotiate the ESL-Literacy curriculum with the teacher-researcher. The negotiation of the curriculum allowed the students and the teacher-researcher to switch roles as learners and teachers. Based on their language learning needs, the students helped the teacher-researcher design and implement the curriculum. They made decisions in terms of content and learning experiences and selected topics of inquiry. As a result, the students became independent learners capable of directing their own learning. A

community of learners was built and the innovative curriculum facilitated the development of a student-centered learning environment.

Data was generated from a series of formal, semi-structured interviews, interview transcriptions, student-teacher dialogue journals, midterm and final evaluations of the class, the teacher-researcher's log, and anecdotal records of the lessons. The three research questions guiding the study were: First, what is the journey of the teacher-researcher conducting the study? Second, what happens in a class where a negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum is implemented? And third, how do Hispanic adults developing English literacy respond to the use of this innovative curriculum? Each question was addressed in the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters respectively.

In addition to the introduction and methodology chapters, the third chapter provides a descriptive account of the class and its happenings in order to give the reader insight into how the suggested curriculum was implemented. The fourth chapter addresses how the teacher-researcher examined her journey as a qualitative researcher. The fifth chapter explores critical events, lessons learned, and challenges and tensions of the implemented curriculum. The sixth chapter presents the students' educational and linguistic gains over the course of the study. The seventh and final chapter discusses conclusions and implications for teachers and teacher-researchers.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	xii
Chapter 1 Rationale	1
Introduction: A Look at the Last Decade	2
Definitions of Literacy	10
My Definition of Literacy	13
Teacher Research	14
Research Questions	15
Definition of Terms	16
Summary	22
Chapter 2 Research Methods.....	24
Pilot Study	25
Participants and Setting	26
Our Classroom: A Case Study	30
Researcher's Perspective	31
Nature of the Curriculum in the Present Study	40
Data Collection.....	43
Data Analysis	51
Building Trustworthiness	53
Summary	54
Chapter 3 Context of the Study	57
The Literacy Program.....	58
The Pilot Study: Lessons Learned.....	62
The Teacher Researcher	77
The Students in the Study.....	81
Our Class: ESL-3 Literacy	86
Summary	97

Chapter 4 What is the Journey of the Teacher Researcher?.....	99
Poem: A Teacher by Accident	100
Researcher's Background	106
Embarking on Doing Qualitative Research.....	116
Phases I Went Through as a Teacher Researcher.....	121
Recommendations for Teacher Researchers	136
Summary	137
Chapter 5 What Happens in a Class Where a Negotiated, Holistic, Inquiry- based Curriculum is Implemented?.....	139
Description of a Typical ESL-3 Lesson at LI	139
A Typical Week of Class in Our ESL-3 Course	145
Exploration of Class Events	155
Tensions and Challenges	168
Lessons Learned	180
Summary	182
Chapter 6 How do Hispanic Adults Developing English Literacy Respond to the Innovative Curriculum?.....	184
The Basic English Skills Test (BEST)	185
Description of the Four Focal Students of The Class.....	190
Arturo	191
Federico	203
Flora	214
Pablo	220
Students' Assessment of the Class.....	225
Summary	231
Chapter 7 Discussion	233
State of Adult Literacy Education	234
ESL Adult Literacy Education	236
Implications for Adult Literacy Programs	237

Negotiating the Curriculum	239
Developing Holistic Curriculum	246
Developing Inquiry-based Learning	248
Conducting Research in the Classroom	249
Implications for Teachers	252
Implications for Teacher-Researchers.....	255
Contribution to the Field of Adult ESL-Literacy Education	257
Summary	259
Appendix A: Inquiry Cycle	261
Appendix B: ESL-3 Literacy Class Curricular Guidelines Provided by LI.....	262
Appendix C: First Interview About Past Experiences	263
Appendix D: Second Interview About Present Experiences.....	264
Appendix E: Third Interview About Future Experiences	265
Appendix F: Pablo's Dialogue Journal Entries.....	266
Appendix G: Dialogue Journal Guidelines	272
Appendix H: Dialogue Journal Self-Evaluation.....	273
Appendix I: Map it Out Strategy.....	275
Appendix J: Make-believe Postcards	276
Appendix K: Arturo's Second Journal Entry September 22, 2003.....	277
Appendix L: Arturo's Journal Entry October 22, 2003	278
Appendix M: Arturo's Journal Entry November 24, 2003	280
Appendix N: Basic English Skills Test (Form B): Literacy Skills Section Scoring Sheet.....	281
References	284
Vita.....	299

List of Tables

Table 1: Typical Class Segments	91, 146
Table 2: Relevant Class Events	156
Table 3: BEST-test Students' Scores	187
Table 4: Analysis of Three of Arturo's Dialogue Journal Entries	198

CHAPTER 1

RATIONALE

In all the stages of decoding, people exteriorize their view of the world. And in the way they think about and face the world –fatalistically, dynamically, or statistically- their generative themes may be found. A group which does not concretely express a generative thematic –a fact which might appear to imply the nonexistence of themes- is, on the contrary, suggesting a very dramatic theme: the theme of silence. The theme of silence suggests a structure of mutism in face of the overwhelming force of the limit-situations (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 106).

This dissertation document is product of a qualitative research study I conducted at an Intermediate ESL-Literacy class with Hispanic adults at a Literacy Center (LI) in Central Texas. Three major components delimited the study: The adult literacy program, Hispanic-adult learners developing English literacy skills, and the negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum that I implemented with the help of the learners. In this first chapter I describe some of the complexities of the phenomenon under study and present concepts relevant to framing the study. At this point, it is important to clarify that this dissertation document does not have a separate chapter of literature review, as the reader would expect to find in a traditional dissertation type. I chose to discuss the literature relevant to the different issues related to the study interwoven in the description of the implementation of the study and findings. Therefore, I present each chapter as a complete unit in which theory, research, and practice are integrated.

The present chapter is divided into six sections: 1) introduction, 2) definitions of literacy, 3) teacher research, 4) research questions, 5) definition of terms, and 6) conclusion. First, in the introduction I discuss the state of adult ESL-literacy education during the last decade. Second, I present different definitions of literacy provided by other researchers and I state my own definition of literacy as it is connected to my research study. Third, I explain the importance of having teachers conducting research in their classrooms and on their teaching practices. Fourth, I introduce the research questions guiding my dissertation research study. Fifth, I provide definition of terms particularly relevant in the study. Finally, in the conclusion of the chapter I talk about the importance of doing research in the adult ESL-literacy classroom.

Introduction: A Look at the Last Decade

The National Literacy Act of 1991 defined literacy as “an individual’s ability to read, write and speak in English and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and one’s knowledge and potential.” In other words, it discussed the need to enhance the literacy skills of adults. The main goal was to ensure that all adults in the United States acquire what is needed in order to function effectively and achieve the greatest possible success in their work and in their lives. Even though this National Literacy Act also discussed the need to strengthen and

coordinate adult literacy programs, its view of literacy was incomplete and inappropriate in the context of delivering literacy services. On the one hand, this definition did not build on existing literacies. On the other hand, it did not seem to include linguistic minorities or immigrant communities and their various types of literacies.

To determine the literacy skills of American adults, the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) used test items that resembled everyday life tasks involving prose, document, and quantitative skills. The NALS classified the results into five levels that are now commonly used to describe adults' literacy skills. According to this survey, almost all adults in level 1 can read a little but not well enough to fill out an application, read a food label, or read a simple story to a child; between 21% and 23% of adults read at level 1 (approximately 44 million people). Adults in level 2 can usually perform more complex tasks such as comparing, contrasting, or integrating pieces of information, but, usually, they are not able to perform tasks requiring higher level reading and problem-solving skills. Another 25% to 28% of the adult population read at level 2 (45 to 50 million people). Adults in levels 3 through 5 can usually perform the same types of more complex tasks on increasingly lengthy and dense texts and documents.

The NALS is a survey testing English as a native language. However, it was administered to a wide range of population regardless of their ethnic origin, age, cognitive and physical skills, or socio-cultural background. As a result, in 2002 the National Assessment of Adult Literacy reported, again, that more than one out of every five adults lacks a sufficient foundation of basic skills to function successfully in our society. However, there are important factors to be considered before accepting these results. This test is administered to adults; however, the

levels for classifying the outcomes of the test translate into a scale from K to 12. In other words, these adult literacy skills are being compared to those of children. Affirming that an adult reads at level 3 means that s/he reads at the level of a child in third grade. Nevertheless, adult literacy instruction differs from children instruction in many ways because the literacy demands and background knowledge of these two populations are very different. For instance, the reading demands of an adult are not the same ones that a child might experience and the environments in which both interact are also different.

The 2002 National Assessment of Adult Literacy provided another explanation of why a relatively large number of adults scored at level 1. First of all, 25% of the adults being tested were immigrants who may have just been learning to speak English. Also, more than 60% had not completed high school and more than 30% were over 65. In addition, more than 25% had physical or mental conditions that kept them from fully participating in work, school, housework, or other activities, and almost 20% had vision problems that affected their ability to read print. In other words, the NALS classification and results do not seem to be an accurate means to describe these adults' literacy skills if other factors such as the ones presented above are not taken into account.

After the National Literacy Act of 1991, many adult literacy programs have been implemented throughout the nation; however, the quality of research on adult literacy has been limited as stated by Amstutz, 2000:

The research, however, has been inconclusive as to the impact of these programs [adult literacy programs]. The research has suffered from many methodological problems. That is not to say that adult literacy programs are not effective, only that the existing research has not determined their effectiveness (p. 218-219).

There is little concrete evidence about the ways in which adult literacy instruction should be conducted with success. For Chu (1999), “Data on the literacy of linguistic minorities are often unavailable or inaccurate. Such flaws encountered in the data are often due to problems in data collection” (p. 348). There is still need for conducting systematic data collection that aims to good quality research in literacy instruction for adults. For example, Greenberg et al. (2002) reported on how “[they] were unable to locate any program for adults with empirical evidence of its success” (p. 627). In other words, these researchers did not find a systematic report about the efficacy of reading programs for adults based on experiment and observation.

Furthermore, the socio-cultural aspect of literacy is sometimes neglected and underestimated. Home literacy habits and attitudes towards literacy, community literacy expectations and practices are important contexts of literacy development (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002; Otto, 2002; Brisk & Harrington, 2000; Chu, 1999; Hiebert, 1993). According to Moll (1986):

Humans are inescapably social beings. Because all learning occurs in social and historical environments, these environments play a critical role in an individual's learning and development. Human beings themselves, through their social interaction, create the social environments in which they function and in which they learn; thus, social interactions are the primary mechanisms through which human beings create change in environments and in themselves (p. 103).

In other words, all learning takes place in a social context. Learning begins in the social environment and moves from the social to the individual.

Rogers (1999) has identified two main problems with adult literacy programs: Motivation and transferability to participants' daily life. Motivating adults for participation in adult literacy learning programs is a challenging task. These programs have not been able to help the participants to transfer the literacy skills they learn in the classroom or literacy center into use in their daily lives. Therefore, Rogers (1999) suggested the *real literacies approach*. This researcher believes that stressing the positive not the negative is the first step towards successful literacy lessons and the next step is to start with what the participants are already doing in their daily lives. Rogers (1999) highlighted the fact that learners bring their own literacy strategies to the classroom since they have been functioning in society for many years before coming to take formal literacy classes. It is important to provide this type of students with the opportunity to

learn from real literacy tasks by opening room to adult experiential learning where the participants identify what they want/need to read and write.

Rogers' (1999) real literacies approach is compatible with Ullman and Becker's (1997) idea of the importance of involving students in choosing content and developing materials. For these researchers, listening to learners is an essential element leading to change and innovation of the curriculum. Ullman and Becker believed that teachers should learn more about their learners so that the classroom activities relate most appropriately to their daily lives and needs. Since students come to the classroom with both correct and inaccurate information, teachers should take the time to find out about their students' ideas and needs to better serve them. Therefore, teachers and students should work together to become well informed.

Learners come to adult ESL literacy programs for many reasons (Weddel & VanDuzer, 1997). They have specific learning goals and needs. Therefore, needs assessment for adult ESL learners means to determine what (from the learner's point of view) the learner wants and needs to know to function in their particular context. For Weddel and VanDuzer (1997), needs assessment is a continual process that takes place throughout the instructional program. Metz (1990) agrees with these two researchers about comprehensive adult literacy assessment:

Assessment of the adult learner can be conducted on an informal, non-threatening basis. The cultural, physiological, psychological, and

educational characteristics of the learner can be noted through a series of informal interviews over a period of several sessions. Learner interests and goals can be discussed on an ongoing basis by the tutor and learner. Reading level can be determined through an informal reading inventory and the learner's reading strategies can be assessed using miscue analysis (p. 55).

Consequently, the curriculum content and learning experiences should be negotiated between learners and teacher at the beginning of the project and renegotiated regularly during the project.

According to Weddel and VanDuzer (1997) and Santoprieto (1991) types of needs assessment tools and activities include: Survey questionnaires; learner-compiled inventories of language and literacy use; learner interviews; review of reading materials; class discussions; personal or dialogue journals; timelines and future goals. These authors state that: First, needs assessment helps to establish learner placement when they just begin in a program. Second, it is useful in developing materials, curricula, skills-assessment, teaching approaches, and teacher training. Third, it assures a flexible, responsive curriculum rather than a fixed, linear curriculum determined ahead of time by instructors. Finally, it provides information about what the learner brings to the class.

Grabe (1991) discussed the importance of using students' prior knowledge in the lessons. Prior knowledge is the cultural and background knowledge the student already possesses and that can help to establish connections in order to facilitate learning of new topics and concepts. An effective reader uses prior knowledge to solve reading problems and to make predictions about the new written text. Moll and Ruiz (2002) and Gonzales et al. (1995) presented another concept related to prior knowledge, a more global concept: *Funds of knowledge*.

Funds of knowledge are the bodies of knowledge developed socially and historically by households. The idea is to build upon the resources of the students and their communities while doing academic work. On the one hand, using students' funds of knowledge in the lessons will help teachers to approach, understand, and define their classrooms in terms of these funds of knowledge. On the other hand, viewing households as possessing valuable resources for learning changes how students are perceived, talked about, and taught. For example, Moll and Greenberg 1990's analysis of funds of knowledge presented a positive realistic view of households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources with great potential utility for classroom instruction. This view of households contrasts with prevailing accepted perceptions of working class families as somehow socially disorganized and intellectually deficient.

Greenberg et al. (2002) pointed to specific positive characteristics of adult instruction and adult corrective reading programs. To summarize their findings, adults need to: Have instructors who believe that they can learn; be provided with specific, prompt, frequent, and positive feedback; be grouped with students in class based on their strengths and weaknesses; be introduced to tasks gradually; be exposed only to material they are ready to master; be in a class size that varies from 5 to 15 students; and be taught based on generalizations, not rote learning.

In brief, this first section of the chapter presents some of the complexities related to adult literacy education. It challenges the definition of literacy provided by the 1991 National Literacy Act. It also challenges the adult literacy classification scale provided by the NALS and questions the results presented by the National Assessment of Adult Literacy of 2003. More importantly, it

discusses the need to conduct systematic data collection leading to good quality research on adult literacy development. Finally, it concludes that literacy teaching and learning is a complex field of education because of the sociopolitical, cultural, and economic connotations attached to it (Greenberg et al., 2002; Baker, 2001; Brisk & Harrington, 2000; Taylor et al., 2000; Chu, 1999; Freire & Macedo 1987/1994; and Powell-Newman & Beverstock, 1990). Consequently, this first section of the chapter compels to suggest a definition of literacy that suits the purposes of the present research study.

Definitions of literacy

Because literacy practices and purposes vary from culture to culture and from household to household (Perez & Torres-Guzman, 1996; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988), literacy acquires different dimensions, definitions, and goals according to the socio-cultural environment. Literacy is part of our daily life and routines. No matter what the socioeconomic status of the person or the family, literacy is present to a higher or lower level of frequency and fashion in every household. However, historically, the social, cultural, political, and economic forces favoring the dominant culture have determined the type and quality of literacy education offered to a population (Baker, 2001; Freire & Macedo 1987/1994; Luke, 1991; and Powell-Newman & Beverstock, 1990).

In the past, literacy has been defined in simplistic terms as the ability to read and write. According to Perez and Torres-Guzman (1996) the traditional definition of literacy encompasses a set of cultural practices that include the encoding and decoding of print and is used to convey a message that has a

specific shared meaning for a group of individuals in a particular context. Powell-Newman and Beverstock (1990) provided further explanation about the traditional definition of literacy: “In the past a person who could barely read and write was judged to be literate” (p.7). These two authors explained how the definition of literacy has to accommodate to modern times:

As a nation, we are now coming to realize that literacy involves the many dimensions of our many cultures, and we are redefining literacy accordingly. To acknowledge the richness of American cultural pluralism is to reaffirm its Constitutional basis and the freedoms of communication that are guaranteed in the Bill of Rights: freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion (Powell-Newman and Beverstock, 1990, p.7).

For these authors, literacy is a demand that the American society imposes on her citizens and it is a requirement for these citizens’ full participation in the economic life of the Nation.

Conversely, Freire and Macedo (1987/1994) discussed the concept of “emancipatory literacy” and suggested two dimensions of literacy. On the one hand, students have to become literate about their immediate environment histories, experiences, and culture. On the other hand, they must also appropriate the codes and cultures of the dominant spheres so they can transcend their own environments. Even though the social aspect is really important, there is an individual dimension interwoven between the two dimensions. The student’s comprehension of the world, dreams and judgments are part of the individual

practice. However, the student needs to interact and understand both dimensions in order to understand himself/herself more fully.

Chu (1999) supported the need for redefining literacy in order to comprehend the totality of what it is to become a literate person. Her definition of literacy challenged the traditional conceptualization of the term and included:

- (1) Expanding the definition of literacy that takes into account the language and cultural knowledge of linguistic minorities, (2) examining the socially contextualized nature of literacy and literacy practices of linguistic minorities, and (3) understanding how the literacy of linguistic minorities is measured (p.5).

According to Chu (1999), many factors determine the extent to which a person is literate in the heritage or other languages depending on the culture, social role, education, economic status, and length of residence in the person's native or adoptive country.

Literacy is social in nature and it has been assigned different definitions according to the historical periods, the situation or social context. For Taylor et al. (2000) reading is a social practice. It is neither a passive nor an isolated activity. The reader needs to interact with the text, the writer, colleagues, or a partner as part of the reading comprehension process. Baker (2001) stated that literacy is a source of emancipation and empowerment; it provides enjoyment and emotional development, critical awareness, foster religious devotion, community development, and not least is central to academic success across the curriculum. According to Baker (2001), "in developed and developing countries, literacy is often associated with progress, civilization, social mobility and economic

advancement” (p. 319). Literacy is a tool to access knowledge and socio-cultural power. As stated by Powell-Newman and Beverstock (1990),

The debate over the nature of literacy can turn into a political harangue over the uses of literacy, especially the elitist uses of literacy to keep the underclass “in their place” or to let them into “our place” but only on “our terms” (p. 30).

Luke (1991) also stated that historically, literacy in schooling is in fact tied to questions of equality of educational opportunity, and to the distribution of political and social power. The life possibilities and social experiences of a person, in respect to literacy, depend on this relation of sociopolitical power. On this matter, Baker (2001) asserted that the future of language minorities is interwoven in their literacy practices since literacy is related to values, culture, and power.

My Definition of Literacy

As illustrated above, there are many different definitions of literacy. I borrowed elements from these many definitions in order to arrive at a definition of literacy that fits the purposes and characteristics of the present study. The way literacy is defined in the present study envisions literacy as going beyond the decoding/encoding process presupposed in the act of reading and writing. Literacy is a tool to access knowledge and power. It is the means to expressing ideas and depicting the world through the written symbols of the language making

connections to the real world. It implies to develop and foster skills of reading the word from a critical point of view because it is a source of emancipation and empowerment. Moreover, the student's language, cultural knowledge, and contexts constitute the space where the class curriculum starts to develop. Given that literacy is social in nature, it is about making and communicating meaning in context.

Teacher Research

Teacher research directly addresses issues that teachers are concerned with because it focuses on problems identified by teachers and it provides a means of enabling teachers to reflect on their own practice (Ellis, 1997). Usually, when teachers research their practice they want to implement some change and innovation or they want to improve a particular aspect of their teaching. Therefore, teacher research encourages teachers to be collaborators in revising curriculum, improving their work environment, professionalizing teaching, and developing policy (Johnson, 1993).

Teacher research requires a conscious effort and a systematic implementation of a plan to investigate one's classroom (Kincheloe, 2003). Teacher research requires documentation and systematic collection of data in order to gather data to inform and to establish findings relevant to the teaching practice. As teacher researchers we need to document our questions and findings about the issues that we want to investigate.

Teacher research attempts to improve classroom practice and promote quality learning (Loughran, 2002; Patterson et al., 1993; Delamont, 1992). Of course, "being a teacher-researcher illustrates professionalism in terms of a willingness to accept that one's own experience is the major source of

improvement in practice” (Loughran, 2000, p. 16). This is why some authors believe that teaching-research is a personal and a professional journey. Doing research is mainly an experiential journey (Loughran, 2002; Delamont, 1992); the experience of researching is fundamental to understanding and learning what it is. At some point and to a certain degree, many teachers are scared of doing research because it implies taking risks and putting themselves on the spot.

Research Questions

I acknowledge the importance of fostering and developing language listening, speaking, and culture in the literacy classroom. Therefore, the innovative curriculum implementation addresses these language skills; in addition, especial emphasis is placed on the development of literacy skills. I explored, learned, and did research on adult literacy practices because I believe this topic is of crucial importance in the historical moment we are living here in Central Texas. Literacy teaching and learning is an area of education that offers many possibilities for doing research. Consequently, the purpose of the present research is to study and describe what happens when an innovative curriculum (negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum) is implemented in an English as second language (ESL) literacy class. The students in the class are Hispanic adults developing English literacy within the frame of an adult literacy program in Central Texas. Therefore, the following three research questions guide the present study:

1. What is the journey of the teacher-researcher conducting the study?

2. What happens in a class where a negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum is implemented?
3. How do Hispanic adults developing English literacy respond to the use of this innovative curriculum?

Definition of Terms

It is important to provide the definition of terms relevant to the understanding of the concepts framing the present research study. These are the terms that I think need to be defined: Curriculum, Curricular innovation, curriculum negotiation, holistic curriculum, inquiry-based curriculum, and dialogue journals.

Curriculum

The curriculum is an organizational device that teachers and learners use to think about their classrooms. It is the means to discovery and learning about the lives they want to live and the people they want to become (Whitin & Whitin, 1997; Short et al., 1996). Writing the curriculum is an act of reflection, not a dry description of activities or a recipe to be followed in a step-by-step manner. The curriculum becomes a tool to facilitate discovery and learning (Schwarzer, 2001; Whitin & Whitin, 1997; Short et al., 1996). It is a collection of appropriate learning/teaching experiences (Dewey 1938/1998) aiming to fulfill and achieve specific learning/teaching needs and goals planned in collaboration and with the help of the learners. More importantly, the curriculum should be adapted to the

learning community needs and characteristics. It should focus on and support the underlying processes of inquiry because

Activities that are planned should do more than keep learners busy. They need to go somewhere. While they might highlight a particular process (help learners build from the known, find their own inquiry question, gain a new perspective, and so forth), they need to fit a larger purpose (Short et al., 1996, p.48).

In other words, the activities in the curriculum should nurture and promote the learner's natural curiosity and focus on long-term goals.

Curricular Innovation

As I will explain in more detail in the following chapter, with the help of the learners, I developed and implemented a negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum encompassing the use of dialogue journals and inquiry cycles. The adult Literacy Center (LI) where I conducted the study already had a set of curricular guidelines for each class level. We (the students and I) followed the existent curricular guidelines; however, the curriculum was created by us centering attention on the adult learners' needs and socio-cultural context. The students proposed their own learning goals and worked on achieving them as well. An important curricular innovation was to use alternative ways of evaluation (dialogue journal, inquiry cycle, and presentations) in order to assess students' progress. The idea was to evaluate the students from a holistic point of view and

give equal importance to process and product. In contrast, as I will explain in a later chapter, at LI students' progress was evaluated through a standard test that the students had to take every four months.

Curriculum Negotiation

The meaning of negotiation in the present study translates into including the students in the process of designing and implementing the curriculum (Cook, 1992; Boomer 1978/1992). Overall, curriculum negotiation refers to providing the learners with the possibility of making decisions and changes to the lesson plans. In other words, the students appropriate the curriculum and make it their own. As stated by Boomer (1992):

[negotiation means]...deliberately planning to invite students to contribute to, and to modify, the educational program, so that they will have real investment both in the learning journey and in the outcomes. Negotiation also means making explicit, and then confronting, the constraints of the learning context and the non-negotiable requirements that apply (p. 14).

From this point of view, curriculum negotiation refers to providing the learners with the possibility of making decisions and changes to the lesson plan.

Nevertheless, boundaries have to be established and made explicit. As stated by Boomer 1978/1992, "negotiation also means making explicit, and then confronting, the constraints of the learning context and the non-negotiable requirements that apply" (p. 14).

Holistic Curriculum

On one hand, Miller (1988) presented holism as based on the philosophy that “all things are part of an indivisible unity or whole” (p. 17). For Miller (1992), “...holistic thinking views every phenomenon in relation to its meaningful context” (p. 57). According to this author, the whole is always greater (more complex, more integrated, more meaningful) than the sum of its parts. Therefore, the “holistic” component of the innovative curriculum means knowledge and learning are not segmented into pieces and learning/teaching takes place in context. Language is a whole and is approached as such (Goodman, 1986).

The “holistic” component of the innovative curriculum also means that learners are viewed as complete human beings not as numbers in a list or as elements in a classroom. Holism is an alternative worldview that observes every phenomenon in relation to its meaningful context (Short et al., 1996; Miller, 1992; Miller, 1988). Miller (1992) defines holism as:

...an implicit spiritual worldview... an awareness that our lives have a purpose, a direction, a meaning, a goal that transcends our particular physical and cultural conditioning. It is the recognition that human beings are indeed connected, in profound ways, to the continuing evolution of life and the universe (p. 58).

I envision the students in my classes as complete human beings learning in a classroom that is connected and extended to the real world: The students’ world outside the walls of the classroom. These students are rational, intelligent individuals capable of assertive problem solving and question posing (Short et al., 1996; Miller, 1988).

Inquiry-based Curriculum

The term “inquiry” means different things for different people. For some people it means having students investigate topics of their interest; for others, it means experimentation even if the teacher is the one providing the questions and steps of the process (Alvarado & Herr, 2003). According to Whitin and Whitin (1997), inquiry based lessons celebrate surprise and invite students to learn; provide choice and freedom to create, think, and make decisions and provide room for change and negotiation. For these authors inquiry based lessons change people’s vision of the world and present students and teachers as “learners.” Other researchers have suggested that good curricula have to support the underlying processes in inquiry. For Short et al. (1996) inquiry processes are: Building from the known through voice and connection; taking time to find questions for inquiry through observation, conversation, and selection; gaining new perspectives through collaboration, investigation, and transmediation; attending to difference through tension, revision, and unity; sharing what was learned through transformation and presentation; planning new inquiries through reflexivity; taking thoughtful new action through invitation and reposition. The inquiry cycle is a process that looks at how learners actually go about inquiry about their lives outside of schools (see Appendix A).

In the present research study, inquiry refers to the learners’ act of asking questions. The students provide questions and pursue answers to their own questions, and through this process they draw the path toward learning. The learners are provided with time and opportunities to come up with questions through the different activities and moments of the lessons. Inquiry is translated into the students’ curiosity towards learning and towards the world around them (Whitin & Whitin, 1997; Short et al., 1996). I envision the students as motivated individuals eager to learn and investigate their own questions. I believe inquiry is a human characteristic and a natural activity present in our daily lives. We are

constantly asking questions and wondering about every thing and situation around us. For all of these reasons, it makes sense that inquiry processes and student-centered learning serve as the theoretical and pedagogical basis for our class (Luke, 2004; and Schwarzer and Luke, 2001).

Dialogue Journals

The dialogue journal is a written conversation between the students and the teacher, me (Peyton & Reed, 1990). We, the students and teacher, write back and forth on spontaneously chosen topics as a weekly activity. The goal is to provide the students with individualized assistance and a setting to develop and improve their English literacy in an authentic and communicative manner. There is plenty of research about the use of dialogue journals in the language classroom supporting the use of this activity as a means to learn correct language structures (Peyton & Reed, 1990; Martin, 1989; Popkin, 1985). However, for the innovative curriculum suggested for the present study, the focus of the activity is authentic communication and fluency not correctness. About composing in a second language, Ramírez (1995) stated that:

The most effective writing practice is that which places writing within a communicative perspective (writing to inform, persuade, and describe personal experiences). Grammar teaching and error correction, therefore, should be limited to simple learnable rules (p. 276).

The idea is to encourage the students to make mistakes in order to learn from them. Mistakes are a source of learning. The students are also encouraged to rely on their background knowledge as language users and learners in order to become fluent writers.

Summary

Due to the increasing interest in adult literacy thorough adult literacy programs and the need for Hispanic populations to improve English literacy skills, I believe that exploration of the research questions guiding the present study can make significant contributions to the field of education. The results could be transferable and provide insights into the ways of conducting successful literacy instruction for similar educational settings. Moreover, findings may contribute to the field of teaching research and could inspire other teachers to embark in researching their classroom practice.

There is little concrete evidence on the ways in which adult literacy should be conducted successfully in the ESL literacy classroom. There is also an increasing need to extend the definition of literacy to one that fits better the modern world's social demands (Greenberg et al., 2002; Baker, 2001; Brisk & Harrington, 2000; Taylor et al., 2000; Chu, 1999; Freire & Macedo 1987/1994; and Powell-Newman & Beverstock, 1990). The next chapters provide a documented description of what happened during the implementation of the innovative curriculum (negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum). The present document provides answers to the main research questions guiding the study: 1) What is the journey of the teacher-researcher conducting the study? 2) What happens in a class where a negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum is implemented? And 3) How do Hispanic adults developing English literacy

respond to the use of this innovative curriculum? More importantly, conclusions and implications for teachers and teacher-researchers are provided.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODS

In the following chapters I describe a case study that I conducted at an adult Literacy Center (LI) in Central Texas. In the present chapter I explain in detail the methodology that I used to generate and collect data in order to inform my dissertation research study. I conducted a qualitative teacher-researcher study during the Fall 2003 through a semester of adult ESL literacy lessons. It was an intermediate ESL literacy class with Hispanic adults. I used the following sources to generate and collect data: A series of formal semi-structured interviews with the participants, students' dialogue journals, midterm and final evaluations of the class, and the teacher-researcher's log and anecdotal records. The three research questions guiding the study were: First, what is the journey of the teacher-researcher conducting the study? Second, what happens in a class where a negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum is implemented? And third, how do Hispanic adults developing English literacy respond to the use of this innovative curriculum? Each question is answered in a separate chapter and is supported with relevant data.

In the present chapter I provide relevant details about the methodology I used to generate and collect data. The chapter includes: 1) Pilot study, 2) Participants and setting, 3) Case study, 4) Researcher's perspective, 5) Nature of

the curriculum, 6) Data collection, 7) Data analysis, 8) Trustworthiness, and 9) Conclusion.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study in order to test some of the elements of the innovative curriculum. The pilot study lasted a full semester and was also conducted in an intermediate (ESL-3) literacy class with Hispanic adults during the spring semester 2003. It was a first step to initiating the research process. Some of the elements of the innovative curriculum were tested such as the inquiry cycles and the dialogue journals as well as some methodological aspects such as interviewing the students and identifying documents for the data collection stage. It is important to mention that conducting a pilot study was of great help in the process of giving shape to ideas on how to better design and implement the actual study. In the following chapter I will describe in detail what I tested and learned during the pilot study. For example, doing the pilot study gave me the opportunity to meet and identify the characteristics of the staff, the students, and the volunteer instructors at LI. Moreover, I could observe closely the students' attitudes towards the classes, the teachers, the program, and the center.

According to Kidder (1981), observation is a research tool when it "...serves a formulated research purpose, is planned deliberately, and is recorded systematically" (p. 264). During the pilot study I observed the routines of the

participants, the instructors and the staff. I paid attention to important details about how the literacy program and the center functioned. All of this helped me to understand better the context of the case. Furthermore, I experienced teaching at an adult literacy program in Central Texas for the first time. I acquired knowledge of the context and specific incidents, behaviors, and information (Merriam, 2001) useful as reference points for the subsequent implementation of the actual research study. Finally, the experiences gained through the pilot helped me shape the design of the actual research study. Next, I will continue describing the actual study. I implemented the study the semester right after the pilot.

Participants and Setting

Participants

I conducted the present study in an ESL-3-literacy class with Hispanic adult learners developing literacy skills in English. A total of 17 adult learners attended our class. As I will explain later, attendance was a crucial factor while selecting the focal students in order to write the present document. The purposive sampling approach as explained by Berg (2001) was also another important factor. For Berg (2001),

When developing a purposive sample, researchers use their special knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent this population. In some instances, purposive samples are selected after field investigations on some group, in order to ensure that certain types of

individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study (p. 32).

The participants for the present study were Hispanic adults attending classes at LI and willing to improve their English literacy skills. An important factor shaping the characteristics of the present research had to do with participants' attendance. The participants were people who worked, had families and responsibilities that many times interfered with their willingness to attend the literacy center. Some of these people had just arrived in the U.S., had different job shifts every week, or changed jobs two or three times during the semester. Since the center recruits students the first and the third week of each month, there were people coming in and leaving our class every month. Thus, the student population was likely to shift quickly and unpredictably.

Setting

I taught an intermediate English literacy class (ESL-3) at an adult literacy center in central Texas (LI). It is the rule that the center coordinator and the director establish a list of topics to be taught and objectives to be attained for each course (see Appendix B for the curricular guidelines established for ESL-3). The mission of LI is to provide basic literacy and ESL instruction for adults, ages 17 or older reading below the fifth grade level. It provides instruction to approximately 1000 students each year. New students come in every week to sign up for one-to-one tutoring and classes. There are student orientation meetings

once or twice a month. New students go into the classrooms the first and the third weeks of the month. The literacy center trains from 500 to 1000 tutors every year. Volunteers complete 15 hours of training and make a six-month commitment. However, only about 200 stay and work for a semester or two. These tutors come from different places and professions. Most of them are native English speakers and few of them are teachers. Twenty percent of the tutors meet with students at the center teaching a regular class of 3 to 6 students and following a schedule of two-hour lessons twice a week. The rest of the tutors provide one-to-one tutoring once or twice a week at public libraries and schools.

Classroom Setting. The class met twice a week for periods of two hours as established by the administration at LI. The learners and I had to rearrange the classroom so that it fit the class characteristics. Organizing the physical environment was helpful in offering different possibilities for different learning experiences. Different ways of knowing and learning are supported through planning, the way learning supplies are made available, and the type of activities (individual, small groups, entire class) held in the classroom (Pérez & Torres-Guzmán, 1996; Short et al., 1996). Since the space in the classrooms was a little bit limited, the learners and I chose to have only the amount of chairs and tables we needed for each class and the students helped me to arrange the classroom accordingly every night. Usually, there were three or four tables stuck together in the middle of the classrooms and a pile of chairs, but that arrangement impeded

movement around. For example: If we had only one table that gave us some room to work in small groups. Research suggests that environmental print and print rich environments in general, promote reading and literacy development (Pérez & Torres-Guzmán, 1996; Krashen, 1993). We arranged and furnished the classroom with the learners' work to help them build confidence and pride of their work and create a stronger sense of literacy community (Otto, 2002). One of the students, Flora, built a system of strings on one of the walls in order to be able to display their work and magazines. The students also helped me to set a bank of vocabulary words to be learned from the readings by sticking cards with bilingual meanings on the walls. These vocabulary cards changed from time to time according to the topics or themes being discussed in the classes. "These environmental print materials involve students in reading the print that constantly surrounds them as they go about their daily lives" (Short et al., 1996, p. 173). We accommodated the classroom for our own teaching and learning purposes.

Resources: We had access to the library at LI (ESL and literacy textbooks, literacy and language games, monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, and fiction and non-fiction books). We also got newspapers, magazines, health pamphlets, and all other kind of printed material present in the students' daily life situations. We did not follow just one textbook or basal reader in our class. However, in order to clarify the learners' doubts and questions about language usage and conventions (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, etc.), we used several textbooks such as (1) Azar, B. (1992). *Fundamentals of English Grammar*. 2nd Ed.; (2)

McCloskey & Stack (1997). *Voices in Literature –Student Journal*; and (3) Paterson, P. (1999). *English exercises in Context*. 2nd Ed. The students brought magazines and other reading material from home to keep it in the classroom and share with their classmates. We also visited a local library to get an ID to be able to borrow books and work with computers at the different public libraries in the city.

Class Activities: Whitmore and Crowell (1994) suggest the negotiation of curricular decision making with the learners. However, these authors recommend the teacher to draw the boundaries of the negotiation based on his or her professional teaching experience. In other words, for the curriculum, we negotiated topics, themes, learning experiences, learning styles, dates, presentation formats, and tasks. However, there were some elements that were not negotiable such as the dialogue journals, and inquiry cycles. Every participant had to go through the process of keeping a dialogue journal and doing an inquiry cycle.

Our Classroom: A Case Study

I conducted research on my own teaching practice and in my own classroom within the boundaries of the curricular guidelines already established by the administration at LI. I had a particular interest in understanding what happened in the ESL-3-literacy classroom where I was teaching. Stake (1994) explains that a “case study is defined by interest in individual cases... It draws attention to the question of what specifically can be learned from the single case”

(p. 236). Creswell (1994) also defines the case study as the exploration of a single entity or phenomenon:

[The case] is bounded by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution, or social group) and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time (p. 12).

The current research project is a case study because my research interest was focused on the class I taught: our class is the case. In Chapter 5, I provide a detailed description of what happened in our class while implementing the innovative curriculum (negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum).

Researcher's Perspective

In qualitative research, the researcher plays different roles. These roles are determined by factors such as the researcher's philosophy, worldview, research goals, and personal and professional background. Some of the teacher-researchers I have met through reading introduce their research work by stating the roles they are enacting as teachers researching their own teaching practice or those of their colleagues in education. Here I present five examples illustrating how different researchers envision and enact different roles while doing and presenting research work. In the following paragraphs I discuss in a brief manner the work of

Freeman and Freeman (1994), Pérez and Torres-Guzmán (1996), Whitin and Whitin (1997), Whitin (1997), and Goldstein (2002).

Freeman and Freeman (1994) introduce themselves as teacher educators oriented in holistic and learner-centered philosophy. They are university professors offering courses to and working with teachers of English language learners (ELLs). These two authors present the research journey of several teachers conducting investigation in their classrooms and about their teaching practice. Both Freeman and Freeman and the teachers describe themselves as curriculum innovators and catalysts of their students' learning. They envision themselves as *action researchers* because their main goal is to address social and cultural factors that influence students' learning.

Pérez and Torres-Guzmán (1996) are professors of teacher education. They are interested in curriculum and learning environment to enhance growth in literacy in both Spanish and English. These two authors introduce themselves as *teacher-researchers*, *explorers*, and *innovators* who use their knowledge and their students' knowledge in order to design integrated biliterate curriculum for ELLs.

Phyllis Whitin and David Whitin (1997) present themselves as *collaborators*, *inquirers*, and *learners*. Phyllis is a 4th grade teacher and Davis is a university professor in South Carolina. In the introduction to their book and throughout the findings of their research, these authors acknowledge their uncertainty about what the outcomes of their research are going to be. They are

convinced that “observing” and “wondering” are two activities attributed to researchers. They do not know the answers to all the questions in their journey for building a classroom of inquiring voices. However, they are on the right truck while asking questions and wondering.

Goldstein (2002) is a teacher-researcher and a professor of pre-service teachers and educators. This author describes herself as an educator committed to help other teachers become caring teachers. In her book, *Reclaiming caring in teaching and teacher education* (2002), Goldstein examines her education practices with a critical eye. She realizes how as the teacher-researcher she is the tool and filter of information in her own research study and how this affects her report and findings.

As illustrated above, different researchers and teachers who study their professional practice identify different roles enacted by the researcher. For the present dissertation study, I assumed the following four roles as a qualitative researcher:

1) researcher as researcher, 2) researcher as learner, 3) researcher as teacher-researcher, and 4) researcher as tool and filter of information.

Researcher as Researcher

The pilot study was my second time conducting a qualitative research study. It was my opportunity to get to know as much as possible about the nature

of the phenomenon I wanted to study, and it was also an opportunity to identify data sources to inform the study. According to Glesne (1999), “All of the places in which you present yourself communicate to others how a researcher acts” (p. 41). I behaved as a researcher from the moment I introduced myself to the people at LI. I attempted to make myself visible and began asking questions, meeting people, talking about my program of study and interests, and striving to find out as much as possible about my object of study. The administrators, the staff, and the students knew that I was there doing research. I was a volunteer English instructor and I was a researcher collecting data and investigating in the classroom.

Researcher as Learner

A researcher is also a learner. For Glesne (1999) a researcher becomes a learner when s/he acknowledges that has questions and others can help him/her answer them.

...You are a curious student who comes to learn from and with research participants. You do not come as an expert or authority. If you are so perceived, then your respondents will not feel encouraged to be as forthcoming as they can be. As a learner, you are expected to listen; as an expert or authority, you are expected to talk. The differences between these two roles are enormous (p. 41).

The pilot study allowed me to start investigating and learning about LI and its students. Also, important details in the methodology of the actual study began to take shape. It was possible for me to make decisions and come up with a feasible plan to carry out during the actual study. For example, during the pilot I tried to use children's books as a major activity in the classroom, but it did not work. Therefore, I decided not to use this activity during the actual study. In my case, this role of researcher as learner is the one that I identify with the most. Even though this was not the first time I was involved with adult language learners, I learned a lot about adult learning and adult language learning while teaching at LI.

I taught ESL classes in Colombia for six years in an environment where the status of the English language is prestigious and a sign of high socio-economic status. I also taught ESL classes in Puerto Rico for four years. In Puerto Rico, people learn English because they want to use it for academic purposes, for the pleasure of spending vacation time or visiting relatives, or because of the cultural and socio-economic and political influence of the United States upon the island. However, the adult population at LI was very different from these two groups of students I had taught before. At least half of the population of students at LI was immigrants who came to the U.S. to improve their economic status. Most of the students were people struggling in a culture and a language new to them and that sometimes was not too welcoming for them. The students at LI

were developing their ESL literacy skills because of their immediate need for using the language in daily life activities such as their job, the community with the people around them, at their children's school, and on their visits to the doctor. As I explained before, these unique circumstances were different from my previous teaching experiences. Therefore, I knew from the beginning that I was going to learn as much as the participants in my study.

Researcher as a Teacher Researcher

The concept of teacher as researcher is included in recent literature on educational reform encouraging teachers to be collaborators in revising curriculum, improving their work environment, professionalizing teaching, and developing policy (Johnson, 1993). The role of teacher-researcher was one of my main roles while implementing the study. It helped me expand my role as an inquirer about teaching.

I had the opportunity to get more experience on being critical about my teaching practices and my students' performance. I realized how much I enjoy being a language teacher, and it was difficult to be constantly reflecting on everything the students and I did. During the pilot, sometimes, it was frightening to realize how much data could be generated in every encounter with my students even though I was testing only a portion of my actual study. I learned that everything should be planned in detail before starting the implementation of the

study, and that I should expect the unexpected. I also learned that as a teacher, I possess knowledge that helps me understand/identify findings and conduct research on my own teaching practices. Teacher research directly addresses issues that teachers are concerned with because it focuses on problems identified by teachers and it provides a means of enabling teachers to reflect on their own practice (Ellis, 1997).

An important issue in teacher-research is addressed by Lather (1991), reciprocity: “[it] implies give and take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power. It operates at two primary points... the junctures between researcher and researched and data and theory” (p. 57). This concept resonates in two ways in my research study: 1) I offered literacy classes to my students and they offered information and collaboration in exchange. 2) Reciprocity was also a data gathering technique (Lather, 1991); I moved from the status of stranger to teacher and friend, and that allowed me to gather personal knowledge from the participants. My students informed me about their learning experiences and their needs in relation to our class. Similar to what happened during the pilot study, my students took turns to give me a ride home after class. While doing this we had conversations that would not usually take place inside the classroom but that were invaluable in my research agenda.

Researcher as a Tool and Filter of the Information

In qualitative research, it is common to think of the researcher as a tool, instrument, and means to gather and analyze data. Qualitative research is value laden and the researcher brings his/her biases and subjective views to the study.

As Merriam (1998) reminds us,

In a qualitative study the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data, and as such can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information. Conversely, the investigator as human instrument is limited by being human –that is, mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, and personal biases interfere. Human instruments are as fallible as any other research instrument... (p. 20).

I am a bilingual and biliterate person who believes in the benefits of becoming literate in more than one language. As a professional who cares about education and literacy, I have a passion for and connection to the topic being studied here. I am deeply interested in gaining a better understanding of the complexities related to Spanish speaking adults developing English literacy in an English-speaking environment.

My experiences as a language instructor to adult learners and my interest in bilingual issues have exposed me to adults of all ages facing the need to become skillful users of both the Spanish and English languages. In the classes I

have participated in as both a teacher and a graduate student, I have experienced the importance and increasing need to find answers through research about bilingual adults' language learning needs and development. I was surprised to learn about the high number of adults who have not fully developed their English literacy and are functioning in a predominant English-speaking country like the United States. In this context, becoming a successful bilingual means gaining a better socioeconomic status and better living conditions for family members. It also means gaining access to and incorporating yourself as a member of the surrounding social environment.

I started learning English as an adult and I can relate to some of the learning difficulties adults face when trying to acquire and develop language skills in a language that is not their own. For example, I understand the frustration that ESL learners feel when they are not able to get the meaning across or when they are not proficient enough to understand a written text or a conversation in English. Of course, my learning experiences are colored by learning English in a Spanish-speaking country and thus they are totally different from those of the people trying to learn English in an English-speaking country (Freeman & Freeman, 1994). While I learned English as a foreign language, the adult participants in the study were learning English as a second language (Krashen, 1982). In other words, I learned English in a country where the official language is Spanish and English is not spoken. However, the students in the present study

are Spanish-speaking adults who live, work, and interact everyday in an English-speaking community.

Nature of the Curriculum in the Present Study

I believe adults best learn when they feel respected, their prior knowledge is valued and used, they feel productive and engaged, and their own learning goals and needs are central to the curriculum. I envision the curriculum as a series of experiences that are planned before, during, and after the actual learning is taking place. However, as Dewey (1938/1998) reminds us, not all experiences are equally educative and everything depends on the quality of experiences. From my point of view, the curriculum is a flexible plan in which the teacher-researcher and the learners make decisions together. Therefore, learners' immediate needs and interests are addressed. As the teacher-researcher, I might be able to identify some of the needs of the learners and provide my professional experience to guide them towards learning, but ultimately, they are the ones who really know what their needs are. Consequently, I decided to base the curriculum in our class on negotiation, holistic instruction, and inquiry. Decisions about the learning experiences that were to take place in our classroom were made through the process of negotiation by both, the learners and me. As the teacher-researcher and as a professional I drew the boundaries of the negotiation based on my teaching experience (Whitmore & Crowell, 1994; Boomer et al., 1992).

The curriculum in our class aimed for concept development and deep understanding; therefore, it was in direct opposition to behaviorist practices. This is why some people may think about this curriculum as having a constructivist approach. Constructivism is a theory of learning that views learning as development and disequilibrium as a means to facilitate learning. According to Fosnot (1996),

Errors need to be perceived as a result of learner's conception and therefore not minimized or avoided. Challenging, open-ended investigations in realistic, meaningful contexts need to be offered, thus allowing learners to explore and generate many possibilities both affirming and contradictory. Contradictions, in particular, need to be illuminated, explored and discussed (p. 29).

The students in the study were viewed as active learners who built learning through the interaction with the physical and social world. Reflection and dialogue were two important elements in the development of teaching and learning (Fosnot, 1996). The adult learners in our class were perceived as real people with real lives and real needs having their own research and learning agenda that could differ from my ideas.

For purposes of this study, when I refer to the curriculum as “negotiated,” I am suggesting open discussion between the students and me, the teacher-researcher, in order to make arrangements for the lessons and to settle the curriculum by reaching an agreement of what should be learned and taught in

each lesson. This includes learning topics, learning objectives and activities. As Cook (1992) states: “In educational terms, the result of negotiation may come to a meshing of minds, an interlocking of intentions, an agreement about means and ends between teacher and learners” (p. 15). We rarely invite/include our students to participate in the dialogue of curriculum design. Usually, teachers, not learners, make the important decisions about the learning experiences to be shared by the class.

On the one hand, it is important to establish boundaries of the negotiation. As the teacher, I presented my students with a series of non-negotiable items and parameters. For example, everyone in class had to keep a dialogue journal and work on inquiry cycles. On the other hand, curriculum negotiation refers to providing the learners with the possibility of making decisions and changes to the lesson plan. Since the learners in our classroom were envisioned as thoughtful individuals, they could make decisions related to their learning. They provided their input to the lessons and they helped me design the curriculum. The adult learners and I had in class discussions to collaborate, reach agreement and settle together the main points to be included in our curriculum. In other words, we tried to teach and learn in dialogue making the classroom a social setting where we were jointly responsible for each other learning (Freire, 1970).

About holistic curriculum, language learning and teaching was approached as a complex process avoiding teaching and learning the language in a discrete way. Language is learned best and easiest when it is whole (Goodman, 1986). In our class we studied different grammatical points and language functions as they appeared in the readings and the language we were using and as requested by the students. Students worked on developing the skill of reading with a critical perspective translating and connecting learning and knowledge to their daily lives

and realities (Freire, 1970). Through this same perspective of holistic instruction, product was important and process was carefully examined and pondered.

The inquiry cycle process looked at how learners actually pursued inquiry about their lives outside of the classroom. The questions that the students decided to investigate came from their own experiences, interests, and learning needs. My role was to help them articulate their questions and to guide them in the process of pursuing answers to those questions. We started the inquiry cycle by brainstorming for topics or themes and the students determined what the focus for their inquiry was going to be. I helped the students to identify the different sources of information they could use in order to find answers and more questions about their topics of inquiry. The students periodically informed the rest of the class about their partial findings and experiences while implementing the inquiry cycles. They prepared oral presentations, a written report, and a poster presentation to the whole class on the outcomes of the activity.

Data Collection

The study was a one semester-long journey. The class met twice a week for two hour-classes. Data was gathered from participants' individually taped interviews, anecdotal records of the class, the researcher's log, documents such as the students' dialogue journals, inquiry cycle written products, written goals attained by the institution, midterm and final evaluations of the class written by the students, and the analysis of these documents.

Interviews

According to Merriam (1998), it is common for qualitative studies in education to employ only one or more of these data collection method:

Conducting interviews, observing, and analyzing documents. In qualitative case studies all three means of data collection are frequently used.

Understanding the case in its totality, as well as the intensive, *holistic* description and analysis characteristic of a case study, mandates both breadth and depth of data collection (Merriam, 1998, p. 134).

Interviewing the students helped me to have access to my students' perceptions and attitudes towards our class and the literacy activities we were implementing. Moreover, I got to know about their previous language learning experiences, the impact of the present learning experience and other related factors. Weiss (1994) discusses some of the many reasons for interviewing:

Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others... We can learn about the work of occupations and how people fashion careers, about cultures and the values they sponsor, and about the challenges people confront as they lead their lives. ...We can learn also, through interviewing, about people's interior experiences. We can learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions. We can learn how events affected their thoughts and feelings (p. 1).

For the current study, all of the participants were interviewed at least once and four of them were interviewed three times, at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the study. As stated by Weiss (1994) "It is almost always desirable, to interview respondents, more than once" (p. 57). However, due to the nature of the

population in the study, interviewing all the participants three times was not always possible.

These were semi-structured formal interviews following the model of interviewing suggested by Seidman (1991):

[The Three-Interview Series is an in-depth, phenomenological interviewing model that involves:] ...conducting a series of three separate interviews with each participant. People's behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them (p. 10).

About the character of this model, Seidman (1991) explains:

In the first interview, the interviewer's task is to put the participants' experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time.

The purpose of the second interview is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present experience in the topic area of the study. We ask them to reconstruct these details... We do not ask for opinions but rather the details of their experience, upon which their opinions may be built (p. 11).

In the third interview, participants are asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience... (p. 12).

The participants in the present study were asked to describe and tell about their experiences with adult literacy programs in the past, the literacy program in the present, and their expectations about adult literacy programs in the future and his

language learning experiences in the past, present and future (See Appendixes C, D, and E).

Anecdotal Records

These are the written records of what happened in our class. The lessons were tape-recorded. I also kept a notebook and index cards with me all the time when I was at LI. I used the notebook when the circumstances allowed me to write longer accounts and the index cards when time and events constrained my writing. I took notes about events such as my performance as a teacher-researcher, the students' attitude and responses towards literacy, and class critical events. I paid close attention to curriculum negotiation and students' inquiry. Emerson et al. (1995) see this type of written records as a way to "...providing the primary means for deeper appreciation of how field researchers come to grasp and interpret the actions and concerns of others" (p. 13). For Berg (2001) this type of recording is called field notes and they "represent an attempt to record everything about an observation period in the field" (p. 159). Berg also discusses the different ways a researcher can take field notes depending on factors such as memory, the setting, the participants and the researcher's familiarity and relationship to them. This author talks about "mental notes" and "jotted notes" as two possible techniques to help the researcher's note taking task. After each class-session I went home and typed a report in my laptop about what I observed,

did, and thought of as well as an account of the main events that took place during the class. I used the tapes of the class as a tool to remember important dialogues and issues that happened during the lessons. I usually wrote the full notes immediately after exiting the field, and got my notes written before sharing them with others.

The Researcher's Log

This was a separate record different from the anecdotal records. In the researcher's log, I wrote my reflections on what was going on in our class, the students' response to the curriculum, and critical events related to the class, the students and my journey as a teacher-researcher. This was a useful means for me to reflect on observations, thoughts, and ideas about what occurred in the classroom (Crawford, 1997; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Strieb, 1993).

Documents

Documents are a ready-made source of data easily accessible (Merriam, 2001; Trochim, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). "This term includes materials "in the broader sense of any communication" –for example, novels, newspapers, songs, diaries, psychiatry interviews and the like" (Merriam, 2001. p. 112). I collected and examined documents such as the curriculum, lesson plans, written goals attained by the literacy center, and writing samples from the dialogue

journals and the inquiry cycles. These documents helped to corroborate the information gathered in the field notes, my anecdotal records, and the interviews and thus contribute to trustworthiness. Glesne (1999) describes the benefits of using documents as a source of information:

Beyond corroboration, they may raise questions about your hunches and thereby shape new directions for observations and interviews. They also provide you with historical, demographic, and sometimes personal information that is unavailable from other sources (p. 58).

The documents I collected helped me monitor and enforce consistency between the proposed curriculum and philosophy and its actual implementation. They constitute another data source informing my research study.

Dialogue Journal Entries

This activity was a weekly written conversation between the students and I. The dialogue journal was collected at the beginning of class on Mondays. I gave it back to the students with my answers on Wednesdays. Through the dialogue journal the students received individualized assistance and a setting to develop and improve their English literacy in an authentic and communicative manner. The topics for the dialogue journal entries came from both, personal experiences and themes discussed in class. The following excerpts illustrate the dynamics of

the dialogue journal and were actually handwritten during the implementation of the study (see Appendix F for the original version of these entries).

September 22, 2003

Hello dear, "Clarena"
Well let me tell you I was on vacation, //three years ago I went to Mexico to visit my family, // I was single and I went to dance at different places, // I was swimming on the beach but I did spend a lot money and I had come back to USA, and now I make plans for to go again visit to my family and my wife parents, and take my little girl with us and let her know our families and culture.
One of your questions was where I go to swimming. Sometimes I go to Zilker park at river there is very cold the water but is fun. Sometimes I go to the lake Travis lake. there is very beautiful also, OK this time is what I can tell you. See you in the class.
Pablo.

September 24, 2003

Hi, again ☺
Pablo, you forgot to ask me questions in your letter ☺
Wow! It sounds like you had lots of fun during your last vacation time ☺. You're right; it is a nice idea that your family and your wife's parents get to know your little daughter. I'm sure that will be a fun vacation time for you ☺.
I know! The water in Zilker Park is really cold ☺ brrrr!
That's why I don't go there.
What was the last movie you saw?
Tell me more about the sport you practice.
See you soon,
Clarena

September 28, 2003

Hi Clarena. How are you doing?
I'm glad of answer to you the questions.
Well the last movie I saw was "the fast & furious" like five moth ago // I don't see movies frequently because in the week day I have to work //sometimes I stay late working //now I have to work of 7:30 to 6:00 the Mondays //because I need to go to school on Tuesday I start to work 7:30 to 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. and the weekends I watch the soccer games. Is why.
Let me tell you about my favorite sport, 2 year ago I was the champion and last year I was the second. I always try to be the best // Clarena, if I invite you to see the game of my team can you go (irías)? Some times my wife go with me. And some time myself. Do you have many friends in Austin?
I hope to see you soon.

Pablo.

September 30, 2003

Dear Pablo:

I know what you're saying! During the week is really difficult to do fun activities. I work from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. when I don't come to your class.

Wow! You indeed love soccer ☺.

Yes, I would go (Yo iría) depending on the day and time ☺.

Yes, I have friends from school and friends I met here when I arrived in Austin. My friends from school are my classmates in the doctoral program and my office-mates. My friends from outside school are from different places.

Tell me about your job. What are some of your responsibilities / duties? Also, tell me about your wife and daughter. What do you do together to have fun?

Have a nice weekend ☺. Clarena.

The dialogue journal served as a tool helping the learners to develop their ability to convey messages through the written word. I did not mark or correct the students' written mistakes directly in their writing pieces. Instead, I modeled correct language structures in my responses to the students' entries. Since it was almost impossible to provide a correct model for every single written mistake made by the student, I chose only two or three structures each time. Students were allowed to use the native language while writing to avoid interrupting the flow of communication and to ask in their native language about the English language when necessary. The very first day of class, the students received a set of guidelines to carry out the dialogue journal activity as illustrated in Appendix G. At the end of the academic term, the students also received a rubric in order to self-evaluate their work in the dialogue journal (see Appendix H).

Mini-lessons

The lessons were delivered through mini-lessons about the core class topics and topics suggested by the students. Since the goal was to provide intense, direct instruction in a skill or understanding that learners would use immediately after the moment of instruction (Hoyt, 2000) these mini-lessons were focused and strategic. Miller (2002) states that mini-lessons provide teachers with opportunities to think aloud, model, and show how strategies and learning activities are used to access knowledge.

Data Analysis

The purposes of this dissertation study were to examine the students' response to the suggested curriculum and my journey as a teacher doing research on her own teaching practice. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, data analysis was a process that started as soon as the implementation of the study began (Merriam, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As mentioned before, interviews with the participants, anecdotal records, the researcher's log, and documents constituted the primary data source informing the study. These instruments provided supportive evidence to answer the research questions posed for the current study.

About how to identify the coding procedure to be used to reduce the information to themes or categories, Creswell (1994) states that:

Flexible rules govern how one goes about sorting through interview transcriptions, observational notes, documents, and visual material. It is clear, however, that one forms categories of information and attaches codes to these categories. These categories and codes form the basis for the emergent story to be told by the qualitative researcher (p. 154).

Open coding was the first step to analyze the data collected in my study. I read all the written data and made notes on the margins about what the data was telling me. I also paid attention to what information was helpful in answering the research questions guiding the study. Therefore, I had to go back to the data many times to look for examples and to make sure that my interpretation of the data was appropriate. Many times I read the written data with specific purposes; for example, making a whole depiction of each student profile, performance and his/her response to the curriculum.

To analyze the information gathered through the interviews, anecdotal records, the researcher's log, and documents, I tried to follow the systematic process of analyzing textual data suggested by Tesch (1990). This researcher proposes eight steps: 1) Get a sense of the whole. 2) Go over each document (interview) and write your thoughts on the margin. 3) Make a list of topics and cluster together similar topics. 4) Go back to your data. Abbreviate topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. See if new categories and codes emerge. 5) Find the most descriptive wording for your

topics and turn them into categories. Look for reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships. 6) Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes. 7) Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis. 8) If necessary, recode your existing data (Tesch, 1990, pp. 142-145).

Building Trustworthiness

In the following chapters, enough details are provided in the reconstruction of what happened during the implementation of the study in order to offer the reader the most complete picture possible. “A central question for any inquiry relates to the degree of confidence in the “truth” that the findings of a particular inquiry have for the subjects with which –and the context within which– the inquiry was carried out” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 29). Different data sources were used in order to inform the different aspects of the study and provide a description of the phenomenon as complete as possible. As stated by Trochim (2001), “the credibility criteria involve establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participant in the research” (p. 162). In the present study, credibility was also established through the diligent creation of anecdotal records of class sessions using tapes and existent documents, and transcription of the interviews with the participants.

Experts also believe that prolonged engagement contributes to establish credibility (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Merriam, 1998). The study took place during an entire semester and a semester-long pilot study was conducted before. In other words, I spent enough time at LI and that enabled me to understand daily events, the participants' response to the program and the innovative curriculum, and implement the study to its fullest extent. Moreover, the students that became the focus of the study were interviewed three times.

In qualitative research, it is important to observe and study the same event from different points of view (Walker, 1985). As Erlandson et al. (1993) reminds us: "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). Therefore, triangulation of the data through students' interviews, class evaluations written by the students, anecdotal records, the researcher's log, and existent documents served as an important factor to bring credibility to the present research study. "Especially in terms of using multiple methods of data collection and analysis, triangulation strengthens reliability as well as internal validity" (Merriam, 1998).

Summary

This is a qualitative study in which I, the teacher-researcher, served as the tool to collect and analyze data. I studied the phenomenon, my classroom (ESL-3

literacy class), in order to gain understanding about the students' response to the innovative curriculum (a negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum), and my journey as a teacher researching my own teaching practice.

Data was gathered through students' interviews, class evaluations written by the students, anecdotal records, the researcher's log, and documents. Data was read and analyzed several times making sure to include examples to illustrate findings and to include the participants' voice in the written account of the study. Data gathering and analysis was recurrent and dynamic (Merriam, 1998) and that helped me, the researcher, to make sense of the information in the chaos of the multiple sources of data.

In the present chapter I explain in detail the methodology used to generate and collect data in order to better understand the case: Our classroom. Therefore, it is divided into eight sections, the conclusion included. First, participants and setting: This section elaborates on the characteristics of the students attending LI and my class. It also provides a brief description of the literacy program. However, in the following chapter I present a more complete description of these two aspects of the study. Second, case study: In this section the study is framed within the boundaries of a case study and explains why our ESL-3 literacy class is the case under study. Third, researcher's perspective: It describes the different roles I assumed as a teacher-researcher while conducting the study (researcher as researcher, researcher as learner, researcher as teacher-researcher, and researcher

as tool and filter of information). Fourth, nature of the curriculum: This section discusses the philosophy and the characteristics of the innovative curriculum. Fifth, data collection: Provides a description of how data was collected through interviews with the participants, anecdotal records, the researcher's log, and existent documents. Sixth, data analysis: In this section, a explanation of how data was organized and analyzed through open and focused coding and by following a systematic process of analyzing textual data as suggested by Tesch (1990). Finally, the section entitled "trustworthiness" describes triangulation of data and the different ways I used in order to guarantee the credibility of the findings. In the next chapter, Context of the Study, I offer ample description of the nature of the literacy program, the gains from the pilot study, and the students and our class.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

In the present chapter I offer a detailed description of the study setting and participants. The goal is to provide the readers with relevant information to help them make sense of the findings (Erlandson et al., 1993) that are presented in the following chapters. As Merriam (1998) reminds us: “Descriptive means that the end product of a case study is a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study” (p. 29). More importantly the phenomenon in the present research is studied in context (Creswell, 1998). With this thick description, I am allowing the readers to determine how closely their educational setting matches the one in the present research situation. The readers can decide what is transferable in case that they are interested in experimenting with the implementation of elements from the innovative curriculum or its full extent. “Perhaps the major point about case studies to keep in mind is that they are richly descriptive in order to afford the reader the vicarious experience of having been there” (Merriam, 1998, p. 238). Therefore, the present chapter describes the context in which the study took place.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, this study took place at an adult literacy center in Central Texas (LI). It was conducted during the fall of 2003 through a semester-long adult ESL literacy course. In the present chapter you will find a detailed description of the following: 1) the literacy program, 2) the pilot

study, 3) the teacher researcher as a tool and filter of the information, 4), the students in the study, and 5) the ESL-3 literacy class.

The Literacy Program

The adult literacy program (LI) where the pilot study and the actual study were conducted is located in Central Texas. LI is a one-floor building with seven small classrooms, a computer room, a large conference room, a small kitchen and library, five rooms used for administration personnel offices, and a small reception area. The facilities at LI are small; however, it serves from 500 to 1000 students every year. Eighty percent of the student population attending ESL classes is of Hispanic origin. The rest of the student population attending ESL classes is made up of students of diverse background such as Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Indian. Students and tutors usually meet at the public libraries and public schools around the city.

Every year, about 260 prospective volunteer instructors attend the orientation workshop offered by LI and about 150 become active tutors. Only twenty percent of the volunteer instructors are actually teachers; the rest of them come from a wide range of professions and occupations. Tutors are required to serve at LI for at least six months. This situation of the volunteer instructors not being teachers is a common characteristic of this type of educational settings. Many times the instructors are native speakers who have some free time in their hands and want to do something productive with that time.

LI offers basic literacy classes, ESL classes, and math classes. Instruction is offered to adults (age 17 and older) who read or write below the fifth-grade level. The students are required to take the “Basic English Skills Test” (BEST) and they are placed in courses according to the score they obtain in this test. The

BEST (Online: <http://www.cal.org/public/bestest.htm>) was developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC. It was designed as a measurement tool for adult ESL learners at the survival and pre-employment skills level. It consists of an Oral Interview Section and a Literacy Skills Section that are scored separately. The Oral Interview Section provides scores for communication, fluency, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. The Literacy Skills Section provides scores for reading and writing.

Even though many institutions consider the BEST, the better choice to use in adult literacy programs (Sawyer, 2000), it is a controversial test for many reasons. For example, it does not include any aspect considering the student background knowledge or workplace literacy. The test does not include any elements from the student's context and community. As Short and Grognet (1988) remind us, the BEST is inappropriate to the work environment and workplace literacy. It does not contain job related vocabulary or tasks nor relate to the actual demands placed upon a worker. Moreover, it is a paper and pencil exam and it is not performance-based. What is more shocking, the BEST does not require the examinee to interpret and analyze. The test is easy to use and its reliability has been tested; however, it may not measure what has been taught in the classroom, and it may have little applicability to specific workplace tasks (Burt & Saccomano, 1995). Due to the limitations of commercially available tests, a complete evaluation of learner progress requires using tests created for the

program (Sticht, 1990). In other words, I believe LI should create its own test to evaluate more accurately the literacy performance and progress of its students.

Approximately twenty-five percent of the students receive literacy instruction and seventy-five percent receive ESL instruction. ESL classes are offered to adults who cannot speak English at a functional level and who have not studied at the university level in the US or in their home country. Emphasis is on English-only instruction taught with life skills as a focus. Instruction is offered in two ways: small group instruction and one-on-one instruction. Small groups generally contain three to eight students. Small group tutors are given an instruction packet outlining specific student objectives to be used as a basis for curriculum. Classes meet twice a week from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. or from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

In a formal interview with the volunteer coordinator at LI, she reported that adults attending the center prefer one-on-one instruction because they feel shy about being in the small group classes. According to her explanation, these students often feel embarrassed about letting other adults know they are not literate. Lesson planning and goal setting for the one-on-one classes are designed to meet the individual needs of the learner. Tutor and student meet for periods of one hour or two hours once or twice a week at a public library or school at a time that is convenient for both of them. The amount of time they meet depends on the

availability of the student and the tutor. The one-on-one classes do not have a predetermined curriculum; however, the small group classes do (see Appendix B).

There are four levels of ESL courses: ESL 1, ESL 2, ESL 3, and ESL 4. Students' performance in the ESL classes is evaluated using the BEST. As I explained before, this is a standard test with two sections, Oral Skills and Literacy Skills. At LI, the students are required to take it every four months until they reach the exiting score of 70. LI requires that the students take the written portion of the test first, and it must be repeated until they obtain the exiting score of 70. When they have obtained the required score, students start taking the oral test. Again, they take the oral test as many times as necessary until they reach an exiting score of 70. The students take the same test every time. When they show some improvement, they are promoted to the next ESL level. Students graduate from LI when they obtain an exiting score of 70 in both the written and the oral portions of the test. Since LI offers only four ESL courses, students end up repeating the same class level until they show enough progress to be promoted to the next ESL level or until they graduate from the program. Through informal interviews with the students during the pilot and the study, I learned that sometimes students fail the test intentionally so that they can stay in the same class and level. The students do this because they do not want to be promoted to a higher level and they want to remain in the program and have the opportunity to receive more instruction. The BEST is not an accurate measure of the students'

progress in this case. It is not congruent with the students and the program reality. Also, the criteria to make decisions about student-placement based on the test score are not clear at LI. Two students obtaining two far apart scores may be placed at the same course level. I will discuss this particular incident with more details in a latter chapter (see Ch. 6).

The Pilot Study: Lessons Learned

In the process of exploration for what could become my dissertation research study, I carried out a pilot study the semester prior to my dissertation proposal. Since most of what I was proposing to do was somewhat new to me, and since I was going to be researching my own teaching practices, I considered it appropriate to do a pilot study to test some of my ideas, the design and implementation of the suggested curriculum. The pilot study took place over four months at LI, the same place where I was going to implement the actual study. The pilot study experience was of great importance to me as a teacher researcher. First, it allowed me to create a safe learning environment. Second, it allowed me to test the innovative curriculum. Finally, it made possible to try out the research methodology.

Creating a Safe Learning Environment

I taught an intermediate English class (ESL 3) to Hispanic adults. Although the name of the institute may suggest that all classes include literacy, some ESL classes do not. From previous observations I did of these classes before beginning the pilot study, I realized that most ESL instructors at LI tend to emphasize oral and listening competencies more than reading and writing. The instructors used a behaviorist approach to teach the classes; they used pronunciation drills, oral and written repetition of language structures, and grammar worksheets. Students did not do much reading, writing, discussion, or connections between their learning inside the classroom and their daily experiences outside the classroom.

Even though the class I was going to teach was an ESL 3 class in which most teachers in the program would emphasize oral skills, I decided to make literacy instruction the focus of the pilot study. I believe literacy is a more holistic way of approaching ESL teaching/learning. Through literacy all language skills are simultaneously developed. Also, through literacy students learn more than language; they learn to make connections between what they are learning and what is going on in their lives, their community, and the world. Students become reflective readers/writers and critical thinkers. As stated by Freire (1970), the students learn to read the word in order to be able to read the world.

Doing the pilot study helped me better understand the context of the phenomenon I wanted to examine. It was my first time teaching at an adult literacy program in central Texas. Even though I had many years of teaching experience, I did not have experience teaching English to second language

learners with limited schooling or long-term language learners (Freeman & Freeman, 2002). This was also the first time I was teaching ESL in a place where English was the dominant language and the language of everyday use. For four years I taught English to university students doing undergraduate studies in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. I learned a few important facts about Puerto Rican history that helped me better understand about the resistance some people in the island show about teaching and learning English.

Puerto Rico was a Spanish colony for four hundred years. In January 1898 Spain granted Puerto Rico insular political economy. However, in August of that same year, Spain ceded the island to the United States through the Treaty of Paris and The American military government assumed full command over Puerto Rico in October. The Jones Act granted Puerto Ricans American citizenship in 1917. Since 1948, Puerto Ricans have elected their governors, but Island residents still cannot vote for President and the Resident Commissioner in Washington, an elected Island representative to Congress, has a voice but no vote in congressional affairs. Because of the nature of the political relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States, teaching English became an issue (Algren de Gutiérrez, 1987). For example, there is a movement against teaching English in Puerto Rico, and there is a strong connection between language and politics due to the historical background of the island. Algren de Gutiérrez, 1987 states that:

Puerto Rican politicians, educators, and the general public have been debating the question of teaching in English ever since Puerto Rico, after the Spanish American War, became a territory of the United States. Although various language policies and programs for teaching English have advanced over the years, language continues to be an issue in Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States (p. 1).

Although the island citizens elect their own governor, Puerto Rico is a commonwealth, a territory under the jurisdiction of the United States Federal Government. In 1898 English became the medium of instruction in Puerto Rico and remained so until 1949 when Spanish became the official language of instruction in the island public school system. Nowadays, although Spanish is the everyday language, official documents are written in English. There are three political parties: (1) one of them advocates for Puerto Ricans' independence [PIP: Partido Independentista], (2) a second party advocates for Puerto Rico to become a state of the United States [PNP: Partido Nacional Progresista], and (3) a third party advocates for Puerto Rico to remain a commonwealth [PPD: Partido Popular Democrático].

I also taught ESL, EFL, and ESP classes for six years in Colombia, where the English language has a status of prestige and is viewed as a marker of belonging to a high socioeconomic status or at least to the middle class. In Colombia I taught English at the university level and at an informal language

institute to professional adults seeking a diploma to study or work abroad. Students paid considerable amounts of money to attend the classes, were literate in their first language, and were considered to belong to the middle class. In contrast to the places where I had previously taught, Puerto Rico and Colombia, at LI classes are free of cost, students are assumed to have a low socio-economic status, and most of them are not literate in their first language. Because of this my expectations teaching at LI were different, and I knew I was going to encounter a different teaching context.

Testing the Innovative Curriculum

The pilot study provided me with the opportunity of trying out the design and implementation of the innovative curriculum. I wanted to experiment with the following: Set-up of the classroom, curriculum negotiation, dialogue journals, and inquiry cycles. I was not sure about how to approach the idea that students had to appropriate their classroom and their curriculum. Moreover, curriculum negotiation per-se was a concept that was not clear in my mind yet. I needed to make sure I was willing to give up some of my power as the teacher of the class and let go and to put the class in the hands of my students with negotiation practices. I also needed to learn how to establish the boundaries for negotiation with the students.

I had experimented with dialogue journals at the college level where students receive a grade and therefore the outcomes of implementing the activity are different. These students were taking Spanish foreign language classes as a requirement for their programs of study. They were people with experience as academic writers. Their motivation to follow the rules for the activity was mainly to obtain a good grade. The students at LI do not receive grades for their work in class and some of them do not have much experience as English writers. Finally, the inquiry cycles were a total new concept for me. This is a process that has been tried mainly with children and I was going to try it with adults. The only piece of work I know so far using inquiry cycles with adults is Luke (2004)'s. Luke's dissertation study is about the implementation of inquiry cycles at the college level with Anglo students learning Spanish as a foreign language. In other words, I had a lot to learn about the methodology I was going to suggest for the study and the pilot study was a great opportunity to do that.

Set-up of the classroom. It took the students a long time to understand that “transforming the classroom into their own learning environment” does not mean, “decorating” the classroom. During the pilot, it took students six weeks to start taking action to arrange the classroom and make it look like the place where their work as ESL learners should be displayed and where they should feel inspired to learn. They needed to understand that their classroom was a place in which they

could safely reflect and learn. There was a critical event that marked the awakening of the students, a change in their attitude and behavior (Whitmore & Crowell, 1994). Before the event students were passively waiting for me to make the changes and adjustments in the classroom. One of the students, Ismael, brought a bookshelf to class that he had made himself.

Ismael works as a carpenter for a company here in central Texas. Ismael looked for the appropriate wood to be used, drew a sketch, and built the bookshelf with the perfect measurements to fit the space limitations we had in our classroom. He was shy about bringing the shelf inside the classroom, and he asked me for permission. I invited the other two students who were in class that night to go outside to the parking lot, and we brought the bookshelf from Ismael's truck into our classroom. Ismael did not want to use the front door to bring the bookshelf in, and he went to the back door and waited for one of us to open the door for him. When I realized his intention, I explained to him that I was not going to let him enter by that door. For me and for his classmates it was clear that he had done an excellent job, and we were proud of him. Therefore, all of us were going to use the front door, and everybody at LI was going to see us carrying the piece of furniture inside. It was a very exciting moment because since then I was able to record many instances in which the students took charge and started helping me design the set-up of the classroom and create a learning community. Ismael was setting the "example" for his fellow classmates. He helped me make

the point that all of us had something to offer and share with the class to make the learning process richer and more gratifying. The students understood that each of them had talents and resources that we could use to enhance our learning experiences and build our own learning environment. The next class, a student brought magazines and put them in the bookshelf. Another student brought a case full of pencils and markers, and I brought some books. The students began to see their classroom as a place to learn and see proof of their learning. In other words, they began to build a learning community.

Curriculum negotiation. This is an invitation to the students to help design and develop the curriculum within the boundaries of class goals, the predetermined curriculum, and the school environment and norms (Weston, 1979; Boomer, 1992; Cook, 1992; Short et al., 1996). This was a new idea for me as a teacher. I started experimenting to see what would happen when students were provided with room to make decisions and changes to the curriculum. As a teacher who was used to have a curriculum and lesson plans ready to be implemented I went through many difficult moments. During the pilot study, I started learning how to deal with students' suggestions and changes to the curriculum and the lesson plans. I always arrived in class with two or three activities ready to be implemented, bearing in mind that some or maybe none of them would not be used. When I planned for the class, I knew that I needed to

have more than one option at hand because of the nature of the class and the characteristics of LI. Sometimes I had five students in class, at other times I had one or none, and other times I had to substitute for another teacher and put my group together with somebody else's group to teach the class. I learned I could not count on having a predetermined lesson plan if I intended to respond to the needs and characteristics of the students and the literacy program. Although I always had a plan for every class session, I had to learn to leave room for moments of uncertainty, adjustments, and changes (Short et al., 1996). Sometimes, students proposed plausible ideas that we could implement right away or in the next class and other times I had to decline or postpone students' suggestions. Either way I always had to use my judgment and teaching experience to make these decisions. In other words, as the teacher of the class I had to draw boundaries for the negotiation based on my professional experience (Whitmore & Crowell, 1994). I wanted to develop the class content according to the petitions and needs that the students communicated to me; I also had to make decisions on what was most beneficial to their learning and the class goals.

The students were very hesitant for the first six weeks of class to make suggestions and ask questions. By the sixth week of classes another critical event had taken place. Pedro, one of the three students that attended class regularly, asked me specific questions about buying a new truck. He wanted to learn structures and vocabulary that could help him during a truck-buying transaction at a car dealer. His request was in agreement with the class goals, it was at the level of ESL 3, and what is more important, the topic was related to his personal

language needs outside the classroom. That night I spent thirty minutes of class answering his questions, writing phrases on the blackboard, and talking about how to ask questions and communicate during a transaction. Pedro's classmates got excited about the idea of him buying a new truck and also asked him questions. Through the questions they asked Pedro, we learned that he wanted a new truck because he was ready to start his own business. His work required him to transport people and construction material to places where new roads were being built or repaired. All the students participated in the conversation, and they asked me questions about grammatical structures and functions of the language pertinent to buying and selling. Although this might look like a regular grammar instruction class, it was not because it was product of the negotiation between the student's language needs and my agenda as the teacher of the class.

Since that night students took a different perspective of the class. They began to understand that their English class could be useful and have an impact on their daily life needs. The next class, a second student, Ismael, said in class he needed to learn about how to rent a new apartment because he wanted to leave his old one. That same class, another student, Carlos, asked me to go over numbers because he was having trouble writing checks. The week before, two of his checks had bounced. The amount he wrote in letters did not match the amount he had written in numbers, and he had been required by the bank to pay an extra fee because of that mistake. What I want to illustrate with these two examples is that students began to realize that they could provide topics for conversation and learning according to their real life needs. They started counting on me to provide them with room to learn about what they needed to know for the next day or week and I started counting on them to help me make the class interesting, useful, and motivating for them.

As students informed me in an interview, in other ESL classes they had taken at LI, they studied grammar and they did class activities that were not

related to their reality outside of the classroom. Students were used to relying on their teachers to provide worksheets, grammar points, and conversation topics. However, in our class, it was the students who suggested the grammar points to be studied and the topics of conversation so that they could work on their personal/individual language needs and difficulties. We used grammar exercises and worksheets in our class but they were based on students' immediate learning needs and contextualized to the students' world outside the classroom. Also, these grammar discussions were not the focus of the class because we always had a plan of the day. The students realized that their language learning needs could be addressed in class as they encountered them and as they communicated them to me. Although I had a lesson plan ready and class activities to guide their learning experiences, there was always room for students' suggestions. I learned how to make decisions about when and under what conditions to accept those suggestions and ideas to modify the lesson plan and the curriculum. In other words, the boundaries for negotiation were always present. In order to accept the students' suggestions, their requests had to be related to a real life language need, fit with the goals for the class and my teaching agenda, in sum, be beneficial for all of us.

Dialogue journal. The dialogue journal was viewed as a written conversation between the teacher and the students (Schwarzer, 2004; Payton & Reed, 1990; Staton et al., 1988). The focus of this activity was authentic

communication, not correctness. The goal was to provide students with a space to use the English language in written form and the purpose was to communicate ideas and messages derived from the individual conversation with their teacher. The students and I provided the journal topics and these topics evolved spontaneously through out the semester while writing back and forth. During the pilot and during the actual study, we started working on this activity on the very first day of class. I prepared a first letter to start the correspondence with the students. We discussed the rules for the activity and we began the correspondence. At first there was some confusion among the students about how to do the activity. For example, they were not sure about the length and topics for the journal, what questions to ask and how to actually start the correspondence with their teacher. Also, some of them had not written a letter in English before.

Inquiry cycles. Students formulated questions about topics that were interesting to them and they pursued answers to those questions using different resources. The inquiry cycle was viewed as a process and as a tool to help students make the connection between what they wanted to learn about their world and the class objectives (Luke, 2004; Whitin & Whitin 1997; Short et al., 1996). We were learners helping each other learn about topics that were relevant to all of us. We made use of all our resources, both inside and outside the classroom. The inquiry cycle served as a bridge and a channel to guide the

acquisition and learning of the L2. The inquiry cycle was introduced in the middle of the course. This was very challenging for the students and me, it was time-consuming and difficult for the students. It was also the first time I had experimented with inquiry cycles myself, and I was not sure about how to guide the students to do it. Only two of the five students managed to find a question and go through the entire process of doing research, consulting different sources of information, and reporting their findings to the class.

Because I did not have experience implementing inquiry cycle in the language classroom I had to explain it to my students multiple times. Therefore, it took them some time to understand the concept. The following is a summary of what I learned as a teacher researcher implementing inquiry cycles for the first time. First, it is important to adopt, adapt, and create your own definition of inquiry cycles for your language class. Second, establish the criteria to define what a “good/appropriate question” for research is in your class and use your students’ help to do that. Third, provide examples of “good/appropriate” questions to guide your students. Fourth, follow and guide the students through the process; do not trust them too much. They will get lost in a mountain of information and new vocabulary. Fifth, be patient! It will take time and energy. Sixth, make sure that your students’ expectations are in agreement with your expectations as the teacher of the class. Seventh, adult students learn a lot through the use of inquiry

cycles. All language skills connect and a bridge between the classroom and the outside world gets built.

Trying Out the Research Methodology

The pilot study made me aware of research procedures I needed to perform, such as keeping a researcher's journal, observing and taking notes of students' learning processes, reactions, and behaviors, and interviewing the participants. I learned not to trust my memory and to make little notes for myself at the moment to convert them into detailed paragraphs later. If the information is not written down and dated, it is not data. I learned to illustrate my notes with examples so that the notes would make sense in the future and I could use them when writing for a third reader.

The pilot study provided me with the opportunity to have the experience of interviewing the participants. Although I performed only one interview with each participant, it was a good experience because I could come up with better questions for future interviews. I also confirmed that one interview was not enough to succeed in getting a complete picture of the participants' opinions and ideas. Moreover, I learned that open-ended interviews were hard to do. You really had to be listening to your interviewee to come up with pertinent questions that would fill in the blanks they left out. Sometimes the right questions came to me later, after the interview was over. It was also true that some people are poor

interviewees; they give you a word or a sentence for an answer and you have to keep asking repeatedly until you feel bad because you think they do not want to talk although they had agreed to do the interview.

It is not easy to identify your own aims or faults as a teacher. You should make a conscious effort to pay attention to your teaching performance and biases. A back-up system such as a tape-recorder, notebook, or videotape is necessary. During the pilot study, I did not tape the classes, and I had many difficulties reconstructing specific moments of the class when I was writing my anecdotal records. This made me realize the usefulness and importance of tape-recording and videotaping the class.

In summary, doing the pilot study provided me with the opportunity to realize the difficulties and challenges the students and I needed to face while implementing the innovations I was suggesting. I also learned that attendance was a main issue. The students were not required to pay, and they did not receive a grade, so their motivation to attend the English classes was purely personal. Many times their job shifts, family problems, childcare issues, and other external factors made it difficult for the students to attend class for a whole term. Through the pilot study I gained confidence and practical experience on what to expect and on how to do or not to do things while implementing the actual study.

The Teacher Researcher

The pilot study also allowed me to explore some of the roles that I was going to enact as a teacher researcher during the actual study. As explained in the research methods, Chapter 2, these roles are: Researcher as a researcher, researcher as a learner, researcher as a teacher researcher, and researcher as a tool and filter of information. In this section of the chapter I want to expand on my role as a tool and filter of the information because I consider it crucial in the understanding of the information that I present as data and the decisions I made while conducting the study and writing this dissertation document.

Researcher as a Tool and Filter of Information

In qualitative research, it is common to think of the researcher as tool, instrument, and the means to gather and analyze data (Kincheloe, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the research instrument the researcher's background plays a significant role while s/he is implementing the research study, analyzing data, and reporting findings. Therefore, the following section provides an account of my educational background and my previous experiences conducting research.

I obtained a bachelor's degree in language teaching in my country, Colombia in 1990. I started working as a homeroom teacher and as an ESL teacher at two private bilingual schools in Armenia, Colombia, right after

graduating from The University of Quindio. A month after my graduation, I was invited by my ex-professors to apply for a part time teaching position at the English department to begin teaching ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses and I was hired. However, I still retained my job working as an English instructor at the language institute where I used to work before graduation. In other words, I had three different but complementary jobs at three different settings, I was teaching elementary school children, college students, and professional adults. Although it was hard work, these working experiences shaped me as a language teacher and as a human being. I was very active but I was immersed in a traditional and rigid teaching style that did not fulfill my desire to experiment with innovative teaching practices. Six years later, in 1996, I decided to leave my country and go to Puerto Rico to do a Master's in English Education at The University of Puerto Rico. Over there, my inclination to make English classes more communicative and more student centered developed with more clarity. After I graduated from the master's program, I worked as an English instructor for a year and gave myself some time to think about the idea of continuing doing doctoral studies. I examined my options and I decided I to register at The University of Texas in the year 2000.

My experience as a teacher researcher is not extensive but has increased with time. The first of them took place during my Master's program, and the other two took place while doing doctoral studies. ESL vocabulary teaching and

learning strategies was the topic for my Master's thesis. My motivation to do this study was an immediate need I observed in my students' learning process as I was teaching ESL classes at The University of Puerto Rico. My goal was to identify students and teachers' vocabulary learning and teaching strategies and propose a third group of strategies in order to establish a bridge between students and teachers' strategies.

While teaching undergraduate Spanish classes at The University of Texas, I conducted research in my classroom on the effects of using communicative dialogue journals. The goal was to provide my students with individualized assistance and a setting to learn the Spanish language in an authentic and communicative manner. Students were provided with freedom to choose the topic of "conversation" and determine their learning pace. As a result of this two-semester long study, I presented a paper at AERA, the American English Research Association in April 2003. This experience was of great help later when I proposed to use dialogue journals with the adult ESL students I had at LI. I learned about how to implement dialogue journals and the importance of establishing rules to develop the activity. I also realized that the dialogue journal was an excellent source of learning for the students and a helpful tool for me to get to know my students better.

During my second year in the doctoral program, I published an article in collaboration with my dissertation adviser and a visiting scholar from Ukraine.

Creating and Innovative ESL in the Workplace Program (ESLWP) was the result of a four-month-long preparation process to propose a plan of action for implementing a program guided by constructivist views of teaching and learning a second language. This article was the result of a current need that many non-English speakers have while working at a predominantly English-speaking environment. Implications for other ESLWP designers are provided in the article as well as theoretical principles, steps and guidelines, and details about the use of alternative assessment and portfolios while developing this type of ESL programs. Later, this effort translated into my research study by helping me consider the many factors Hispanic adult students have to face when learning the English language within an English speaking society.

These three stories about my work as a teacher researcher help to illustrate the type of experiences that I have had doing research in the language classroom. These experiences have helped me understand that I am a teacher who works better within a structure where there is room for flexibility, negotiation, and where inquiry is promoted. My job as a teacher and my career as a student have occupied a big portion of my life. I have come to understand and view my students as complete human beings with lives outside the classroom, individual learning needs and experiences that should be part of the lesson planning and the class activities and learning processes. If the curriculum is for the students they should be offered the opportunity to help design and implement it.

The Students in the Study

As stated before, students' attendance rate is usually low at LI. Therefore, in the class I taught this was another factor to consider while selecting the main informants of my study. During the fall semester of 2003, a total of 17 students attended the class I taught; however, the focus of the study will be only on four of these students (Arturo, Federico, Flora, and Pablo). A star appears by their names, so that the reader can identify them. These four students attended at least 80% of the classes. The following is a short description of all the students that attended class at least once. Each description provides the age of the participant, country of origin, occupation, the amount of time the participant attended class, and information relevant to each participant explaining about their background and the possible reasons why he/she stopped attending class. The purpose of all this information is to help the reader understand the characteristics of the student population involved in the study. Of course, the names provided here are pseudonyms.

Alejandro is 36 years old. He is from Mexico but he lived in the US most of his life. He works in construction. He just went back to school to finish his high school education. He attended class three times, a week and a half. I requested him to be removed from the class and LI because he violated the rules of social appropriateness. This incident will be explained in more detail in a later chapter.

Antonio is 36 years old. He is from Mexico and he is Arturo's brother in law. He also works a carpenter. He has a six-month old son. Antonio attended class three times. He stopped attending class because he had to attend AA meetings.

***Arturo** is 21 years old. He is from Cuernavaca, Morelos in Mexico. He works as a carpenter and has lived in the US for three years. He is single and lives with his family here. His family immigrated to the US in small groups until all of them got here. Arturo missed only one class because he was with a cold.

Cesar is 40 years old. He is from Mexico. He works selling natural products to help Hispanic people loose weight. He has lived in the US for seven years. He attended class fifty percent of the time of the duration of the term. He tried to come back to class many times but his occupation prevented him from doing so. He got trapped between meetings and training because he was a leader trainer of new employees. He also converted to a new philosophy of living that required him to attend religious meetings and activities.

***Federico** is 43 years old. He is from Pereira, Colombia. He works part-time with insurance companies and part-time doing any other type of jobs. He has lived in the US for four years. He is married and has a 16-year old son. He attended class 80% of the time because there was a time when he was required to work extra time at his job.

***Flora** is 28 years old. She is from Mexico. She works as a cook at a hotel. She has lived in the US for six years. She has a two-year old daughter. Flora is married to Pablo, a student in our class. She attended class the entire term. She missed only two classes.

Francis is 27 years old. She is from Mexico. She works as an accountant. She has lived in the US for three years. She attended class only once. I called her home many times and left messages in her answering machine but she never called me back.

Gloria is 26 years old. She is from Mexico and is single. She started working as a maid at different cleaning companies and she is the manager of her own cleaning company right now. She did not finish her high school education because she has lived between Mexico and the US since she was a teenager. Her two sisters live in different cities in the US. However, she is still struggling to learn the English language.

José is 28 years old. He is from Cuba. He attended class only once. This was his third month living in the US and his first night attending LI.

Juana is 29 years old. She is from Venezuela. She has two teen-aged children. She attended class only once. She continued attending class in the morning because it worked better with her job schedule.

Lieu is 25 years old. She is from Vietnam. She is a housewife. She is married and has no children. She attended class only once. I requested the

volunteer coordinator to placed her in the other ESL 3 with another teacher because she did not speak Spanish.

Maricela is 25 years old. She is from Tecupilco, Mexico. She has lived in the US for 3 years. She is married and has two small children. She attended class for two weeks, one time each week. She stopped attending class because of different reasons. At first she or her children were sick and the next thing was a conflict of schedule with her job.

Marlene is 23 years old. She is from Monterrey, Mexico. She works at a fast food restaurant. She is recently married and has just arrived in the US. She attended class for a week and a half because of a schedule conflict with her job.

Meejung is 40 years old. She is from Korea. She is married and has a 16-year old son. She attended class only once. I requested the volunteer coordinator to placed her in the other ESL 3 with another teacher because she did not speak Spanish.

***Pablo** is 26 years old. He is from Acapulco, Mexico. He works in a company that sells watches and watch products. He has lived for seven years in the US. He is married and has a two-year old daughter. Pablo attended class the entire term. He missed only three classes.

Richard is 26 years old. He is from Bogotá, Colombia. He is not currently employed. He came to this city to attend a school for the blind because he is going blind. He attended class twelve times, six weeks, during the last months of classes.

Sergio is 29 years old. He is from Guanajuato, Mexico. He works in construction. He has lived in the US for 8 years. He attended class only once because he was experimenting to see if he liked attending classes at LI but he had not gone through the process of being admitted as a student. When he did it, he was placed in ESL 2.

As illustrated above, the student population described here is between the ages of 21 and 43. Many factors influence these people's reality in the U.S. These factors are for example, lack of mastery of the English language, their unstable immigration status, and the differences in educational systems between their country of origin and the U.S. In other words, credentials as a teacher or as a medical doctor are not the same here than in Mexico, Venezuela, or Colombia. LI recruits new students the first and the third week of every month. Therefore, there were people coming in and leaving the classroom every month. The student population at LI is likely to shift quickly and unpredictably. They are people who have recently moved to the U.S, are trying to get a job, have legal migratory difficulties, have different job shifts every week, or change jobs and homes two or three times during the semester.

Our Class: ESL-3 Literacy

As explained before, the class I taught (ESL 3) had curricular objectives predetermined by the administration at LI (see Appendix B). In our class, we covered these predetermined curricular objectives and we added new topics and objectives as suggested by the students in the negotiation of class content, learning goals, leaning processes, and activities. We, the students and I, designed and implemented a negotiated, holistic, inquiry based curriculum. The students developed English literacy and work on the accomplishment of their own goals and the curricular goals established by LI through the dialogue journal writing, the exploration of newspaper articles, reading fiction and non-fiction, the inquiry cycle process, and class discussions and presentations.

Because the first step was to identify the students' learning needs and goals, I asked the students to think and write down what they considered were their goals for the class and what they thought they needed to learn. The following is a summary of what students communicated me in writing and in class discussion:

(1) I want to talk to anybody freely. (2) I need to read and talk. (3) I want to learn English grammar, vocabulary and practice. (4) I need to talk and understand English. (5) My goal is to read and write better to get a good job. (6) Learn more English and writing. (7) Come to class on Monday and Wednesday. (8) I need to learn more verbs. (9) I want to read and

speak English better because that is very important for my job. (10) I want to improve my pronunciation. (11) I would like to speak more fluently. (12) I need to listen to more English because sometimes I have difficulty understanding other people. (13) I need to learn to construct longer sentences. (14) My goal is to learn/focus on grammar.

I gave the students a handout with this summary of goals and learning needs and I asked them to identify with a check mark the ones that applied to them individually. I also told them they could come up with more items if necessary but they should keep track of this list and the ways to accomplish what they have established as their goals.

 A second step was to let students come up with suggestions on what to do to enhance their learning possibilities. This implied to listen to students and do what they proposed using my teaching experience regarding what was productive and good for the class. It also implied using the students' funds of knowledge and resources. It is how Federico, a student in the class who worked as a volunteer at a public library, came up with the idea of visiting the library where he worked as a volunteer and find out the services that his classmates could profit from. During the second month of classes and in an effort to extend the students' learning opportunities outside the classroom, we went on a field trip to a local public library to obtain a library ID so that students could borrow and use material and the facilities of any of the 22 existing public libraries in the city.

A third step was to implement the dialogue journal as a written conversation between the teacher and the students (Schwarzer, 2004; Payton & Reed, 1990; Staton et al., 1988). This activity served as a means to provide room for authentic communication in the second language and as a way for me to model correct structures in English for each student. Part of the innovation was not to correct students' mistakes in their writing but to foster students' confidence and fluency while writing in English. It was a challenge for most of them because according to what they expressed in the next class meeting, they had not written much in English before. However, by the third entry, which means the third week of classes, students had figured out how to keep the journal and how to interact with me through the journal. The last day of class and in an informal interview, the students let me know they enjoyed and liked this activity a lot. The activity was difficult for them at the beginning but with time, they started looking at it as an extra space for learning English and exploring different topics in English that maybe were not addressed in class.

A fourth step was to implement inquiry cycles as part of the teaching/learning process. The goal was to provide room for students to investigate topics of their individual interest and further develop the skills of doing inquiry and reflection (Luke, 2004; Whitin & Whitin 1997; Short et al., 1996). Each student should come up with a question that was motivating enough for him/her in order to spend time and effort answering the question. More

importantly, the inquiry cycle process should provide opportunities outside the classroom for the students to exercise and develop the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

Class activities, processes, and materials implemented and used in the class were innovative in the sense that they attempted to establish a bridge between the classroom and students' reality outside the walls of the classroom. They were also innovative because they were not used at all in the classes taught at LI. For example, the dialogue journal created a space for the students and teacher to communicate and establish a more open and close relationship. Topics from class and other topics that were not discussed in class were explored through the journal. Writing was used to communicate meaning and was student centered because they provided the topics for discussion. The focus of this activity was content not correction of students' writing mistakes. The inquiry cycle allowed students to have the opportunity to use the English language with people and sources outside the classroom. Students made decisions on what and how to investigate. The inquiry cycle process provided students with audiences in and outside the classroom. It also provided room for students to develop their inquiry and reflection skills. Student evaluation, students' progress was based on a holistic perspective. In other words, students were evaluated through a variety of assessment measures such as student self-evaluations, in class presentations,

students' reports on how they used the English language outside the classroom, and written products created in class and out of class.

With regard to class materials, students used the library at the literacy center and the public library close to their houses. Students brought magazines that they wanted to read in class. I brought the newspaper of the day once a week. Usually, if we did not have time to read the newspaper in class, students took it home and read an article to share with their classmates next time. We also read fiction stories that I chose for them. We used different reading sources because the students and I brought different reading materials to class as they popped up in our daily lives. As far as English grammar, we did not follow just one textbook. We used the following textbooks: Azar, B. (1992). *Fundamentals of English Grammar*. 2nd Ed.; McCloskey & Stack (1997). *Voices in Literature –Student Journal*; Paterson, P. (1999). *English Exercises in Context*. 2nd Ed. As the teacher of the class, I also designed some handouts useful to our purposes and class activities such as (a) a handout to discuss the characteristics of a good question, (b) the rules to be followed while keeping the dialogue journal, (c) class evaluation, and (d) the dialogue journal evaluation. In order to allow students type their autobiographies, I took three laptops to class three times and students took the whole class period to use the laptops.

The following table illustrates the moments of a typical lesson in our classroom. However, time spent at the different class segments changed according to students' attendance, punctuality, and the circumstances at LI

Time	Segment	Details to be considered
15 min.	Greetings	Class started at 6:30 p.m. but students arrived in class at different times.
10-15 min.	Announcements	We talked about news in general, upcoming events, students' ideas for future classes, personal issues to be shared with the group.
5 min.	Collecting assignments	This happened at different times depending on the type of assignment.
20 min.	Students' presentations	Some days we did not have this portion of class because students were not ready to present their work.
10-15 min.	Mini-lessons	I lectured on grammatical items or functional uses of the language according to class events and as required by the students.
25-40 min.	Reading	We had both silent sustained reading and shared reading in class. Sometimes, students read as homework and they reported in class. We had group discussions if we had read the same text.
10 min.	Break	These were usually restroom breaks because students returned soon to the classroom and during this time we had informal talks about different topics. We often shared a snack.
20 min.	Writing workshop	These were different writing tasks such as written reports on readings, students' experiences in the US, and students' autobiographies.
5-10 min.	Assigning homework	This happened sometimes at the beginning of class and some other times at the end of class depending on students' attendance and the type of assignment.

Table 1: Typical Class Segments

In brief, the moments of the class were: greetings, announcements, collecting assignments, students' presentations, mini-lesson, reading time, break, reading report, writing workshop, and assigning homework. The time spent on

each class segment as provided in the chart below is an estimate of the actual time. Sometimes class segments took longer or shorter periods of time to take place. Some other times we did not have one or two of these class segments. For example, if students were not ready to do their presentations we spent more time reading or writing or reporting on reading and writing activities. Also, we did not always have mini-lessons because they were not required or they did not fit into what we were doing and instead students took longer doing presentations or practicing reading and writing.

Greetings

Not all the students arrived on time to class, but I used to start class at 6:30 p.m. with whoever was in the classroom at the moment. Some students were always early to class and we had individual conversations on different topics often related to their learning and personal lives. The first fifteen minutes of class were devoted to getting to know about what was going on in everybody's life, the city, the community, and the world. We talked about topics such as our jobs, families, illnesses, problems, good news, the weather, and outstanding local and world's news. This was an important moment of the class because we got to know more about each other and we did follow up to certain matters such as somebody being sick in the family or somebody getting a new job or any other new events.

Announcements

The students and I usually announced on coming events and plans affecting our class and our lives here in the US. They also shared about their experiences, difficulties, and accomplishments doing their assignments. New topics for class discussion and study originated here. I took notes on topics for possible future mini-lessons or students suggested them. Students let me know what they were doing in terms of learning and using the language outside of the classroom and that helped me know what to plan for a next time. This also helped me keep track of how much they had improved with the use of the language outside of the classroom.

Collecting Assignments

If the assignment was something to be shared or discussed with the rest of the class, we did it right away if not, I just collected the homework of the day. Sometimes, students were so excited to show me their assignment or to show off what they have done that they could not wait until this moment and they just turned in their assignments as soon as they stepped into the classroom. At this point, I also returned students' work from the previous class.

Students' Presentations

Each student presented at least four times during the four months of duration of the course. The first presentation they did was on a photo-collage I

assigned them to do the second week of classes. The second presentation was on a free topic. The third and fourth presentations were on the students' individual inquiry cycles. I never assigned turns or dates to determine when each student should present to the class. I waited until students volunteered to present their work or the topics we had agreed for them to present. Sometimes students were not ready to present and they asked for a time extension and some other times other class events took longer and we had to postpone students' presentations for a next class.

Mini-lessons

The idea with mini-lessons was to provide intense, direct instruction in a grammar point or a language function that students will use immediately after the moment of instruction (Hoyt, 2000). These mini-lessons were focused and strategic. They took place according to class events and as required by the students. There was not a specific time for this. Sometimes, mini-lessons happened at the beginning, the middle, or the end of class. It all depended on the discussion topics and teachable moments produced by the students' questions or the circumstances of the lesson.

Reading

Silent sustained reading and shared reading: Students spent 25 to 40 minutes reading silently at the library or in the classroom. They read alone or in pairs. We also had some class sessions when all of us read the same text as a group. Twenty percent of the times I assigned the reading topics and the other eighty percent of the times the students chose what to read. As explained before students read fiction texts that I supplied or they found at the library at LI. I took the newspaper of the day to class once a week. Students brought magazine and newspaper articles to class that they wanted to read or they visited their favorite public library. Students shared impressions about the readings. This was an oral activity eighty percent of the times. The other twenty percent was a written report I collected from the students. I gave them a worksheet to follow the same pattern all the time when reporting in what they have read (see Appendix I). Using what they have written on their worksheet, students reported on the main idea of the reading and supporting ideas. They were also required to write a seven-line paragraph summarizing the reading in their own words.

Break

It was often a ten-minute break. Depending on the activities of each class, we had a ten-minute break at 7:30 p.m. or at 7:45 p.m. A few times we did not

have a break because students were too tired and wanted to finish class earlier or because they were so into what we were doing in class that they did not want to interrupt the activity. For example, the days when I brought the laptops to class students did not take a break. As a matter of fact, they did not even want to leave the classroom. They were excited about typing their autobiographies and trying to finish them to see the final product printed out.

Writing Workshop

Students were always writing. They usually had writing that was in progress. They wrote on different topics; sometimes they wrote reports on what they had read and some other times they wrote towards accomplishing a section in their autobiographies or any other writing task they had pending. I used to collect their writing to underline their mistakes so that they could fix them in the next writing session. While students were writing they helped each other with spelling, punctuation, and feedback on content. I used to circulate among students and help answering specific questions or posing questions to help them convey their messages. This writing workshop was different from the dialogue journal writing. Students never wrote their dialogue journal entries in class. It was always homework that they did on their spare time.

Assigning Homework

This did not necessarily happen at the end of class; it sometimes happened at the beginning of class. However, I always used a couple of minutes to summarize assignments with the students and make clear who was doing what for next time. More than often people had different assignments to do.

Summary

The present chapter provided a detailed description of important aspects of the context of the study such as 1) the literacy program, 2) the pilot study, 3) the teacher researcher, 4) the students in the study, and 5) the ESL-3 literacy class. Each of these sections provided specific details aiming to help the reader become familiar with the context of the research study. The description of the literacy program provides details about the facilities of the literacy center, the program, the student population and instructors, the curricular guidelines suggested by the literacy center, and the standards followed by LI in order to evaluate students' progress. The section devoted to describe the pilot study explains about the importance and significance of doing a pilot study. It also provides an account on the class activities and processes tested during the pilot. The description of the teacher researcher presents the background of the researcher as a teacher and as a teacher researcher. A general description of all the students in the study that attended class at least once is given in order to help the reader understand the

characteristics of the participants. Finally, the description of the ESL-3 literacy class summarizes the goals for the class as stated by the students and the steps to implement the innovative curriculum. Class materials, activities, and an outline of the moments of a typical lesson during the implementation of the study are also provided in this section.

The main goal of the present chapter was to contextualize the phenomenon under study by providing a detailed description of the study setting and participants. It introduces relevant information to help the readers make sense of the findings that are presented in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT IS THE JOURNEY OF THE TEACHER-RESEARCHER CONDUCTING THE STUDY?

This chapter is the product of reflection about my experiences, goals, and my search as a woman of Hispanic origin, as a language teacher, and as a researcher. With this chapter I address the first question guiding the study: What is the journey of the teacher researcher conducting the study?

The journey is important because it influences what I saw as data and the way I analyzed and interpreted it because, as Wolcott (2001) states, “interpretation invites the examination, the ‘pondering,’ of data in terms of what people make of it” (p. 33). This chapter attempts to contribute to the theory building on teacher research since I am providing an account of my journey in the path of teaching research. I present this account in two ways; one is an alternative way of illustrating the complexities of my journey: A poem, the other follows the academic rules of reporting research. Finally, I describe the phases I went through while researching my own teaching practices.

Because we are the sum of our experiences, I will discuss the following sections in this chapter: 1) the depiction of my background as a person, as a teacher, and as a teacher-researcher; 2) an account of why and how I embarked on doing qualitative research; 3) the description of the different phases I went through as a teacher researcher while implementing the research study at LI; and 4) recommendations for teacher-researchers.

I will open the discussion of this chapter with the poem “A Teacher by Accident.” I wrote this poem in order to provide an alternative description of my journey as a teacher-researcher. The poem tells the story of who I am, where I

come from, and the motives that compelled me to become an English language teacher fifteen years ago.

A Teacher by Accident

When I look inside I go to the past.
I visit those memories sleeping in there.
I remember the days, the tears, the dreams,
the laughs, the plans, the naïve girl.
The girl who believed she did not,
could not, share and work with the people
outside of her world.

She was eighteen years old.
She had finished high school but she was at home.
She had to take care of her two little brothers,
one and two years old.
She was always at home, cleaning, cooking,
and helping her family to grow.
She was a lovely daughter, a good sister,
and a good girl.

One day she decided to continue to study,
and to become a professional.
One of those weird people respected by men.
Many men in her life.
Some in favor some against.
It was a world full of them.
Her father who says:
“Women don’t need to know,
they get married. That’s all!”

Father...
Who is father?
My Achilles heel,
my handicap, my scar,
my big source of trouble.

He is also the source for
my unknown courage and bravery.
My antagonist...

You are my daughter.
You are living under my roof.
You cannot make decisions.
Because you are a girl,
you will do as I say
and you will be okay.
Besides, in a year or two,
you will get married
and you will forget.

She had to escape,
To run away from home.
To escape from her father.
To avoid the fate of the wives.
She was dying at home.
She had dreams she didn't even know.

She is aware, she believes,
there should be something more.
The girl dreams of a future
perhaps in the lab
with the cells, the substances,
the experiments, the formulas,
the white apron, the silence,
and the smells.

But college is not an option,
suddenly a chance!
She convinces her father to
let her try her fortune.
First registration
in a place seven hours from home.
This would be good for her in many ways,
but her father doesn't believe it.

Now a big interview.
It is a second step to accomplish
before getting enrolled.
In groups of five
the applicants enter the room.
Four wise men sit expecting to hear:
“Why are you here?”

As a group we were to defend the rationale.
But she did not know how to collaborate.
The others had a lot to say but
she was just a little girl,
inexperienced and timid.
This door is closed for her.
She was too stupid to stay.

What to do?
Go back home and let her father know?
That he is right? But he is not!
No matter what it takes she'll try again.
What to do? Ce qu'elle va faire?
She speaks French!

Translator?
Translator of text, of course!
Another door opens.
No need to talk,
no need to explain out loud in words.
This is perfect.
I can do it. I'll do it.
She passes the test!
Good! No need to mention to father
the earlier failed attempt.
She can wait to change majors later on.

There is this voice inside.
I can do it. I'll do it.
My father is wrong!
I have potential,
potential for what?
A chemist assistant,

a translator, a teacher?
God knows!

The search begins.
Surprise, surprise
English is the need.
“Me no espeak Englesh!”
Who cares?
You have to learn!
Or do you prefer to go back home?
Of course not!
Learn the dictionary by heart.
Repeat after me, and
Do whatever you have to do.

A semester is gone.
What to do? What to do?
French doesn't help anymore!
Father won't give me permission to change
because... “You finish what you start.”

Another semester.
Maybe I can change my major now.
But father didn't send any money.
I'll borrow from his aunt!
It is too late to make the change.
What a fate!
My professor says I should stay.

I have potential, potential for what?
Translator? Not any more.
The program did not get certified.
What else can I do?
What would “I” like to do?
Become an English teacher?
But I barely say “hello.”

Hard times are to come.
No money, no help, nobody cares.
At least nobody from home!
Her parents think she
should not pursue the goal.

Father believes she is lost.

I am the black sheep.
I will put him in disgrace.
Mother believes I am pregnant.
I am not. I am still a little girl.
From college I go home.
I haven't made any friends,
I am too scared.
I am scared of the world.
I have never been outside alone.

I just want...
some freedom. Freedom to think,
to become a person, to change my fate,
to see new landscapes.
Maybe I want the life of a man!
To be able to have my own thoughts.
I don't want to be like my mother or sisters.

My mother...
Sweet woman, dedicated wife, loving mother.
She never said "no" to her husband.
She disregarded her husband's mistreatment,
she will die by his side. Marriage is forever.
Always putting her daughters first.
They need a father, a home, and a family.
They will have a better future.
They will find a better husband.

My sisters...
My sisters will follow my mother's example.
They are happy to work in simple chores.
Caring, giving, cleaning, not thinking at all.
They will leave their parents' home
to build their own homes.
They will learn the lesson:
"Women follow their men wherever they go."

Women...
Women are daughters,
sisters, wives, and mothers.

Women don't have opinions,
They keep their ideas in secret.
Women suffer in silence.
They are the strength of their men.
Women keep the house clean and tight.
They are responsible for the marriage to last.
Divorce is never an option.
That's out of the question!

I have to find a job.
I need to pay tuition.
I am going to show them that I can.
I'll do whatever it takes to help myself.
My pride, my youth, my strength,
My God will help. I am in my second semester.
There are six more to come but
I'll continue to pursue the goal.

I have changed!
I am not afraid of my father anymore.
I have managed to stay far...
Far away from home and survive.
I do not ask for permission.
Now, I am making decisions.

One job, then another.
Of all the jobs
there is this one I can do better.
Teaching little kids to learn their words.
It is not that bad!
I can do it for some time.
It is even fun.

But I am not good at people.
I hate the grown-ups that come with the kids.
They believe to know what their children lack.
Do I really want to work in a team with other
teachers and touch little people's lives?
I don't know. I am lost.

My last semester...
I will have to leave,

to start working in the real world,
and grow.

I talk to my professor.
She believes that I can.
She is so good in her field,
so knowledgeable that
I want to be like her.
I enjoy teaching that's true
but could I become as good?

Graduation comes.
I proudly invite my family.
I want them to see
that I did it.
Father was wrong!

Everyone came:
my brothers –four and five years old-,
my sisters and their husbands,
my aunts and my mother.
My father is the last to arrive.
A memorable day! He acted in his usual way.
But I graduate anyway so who cares?

I start working.
I am teaching adults.
I don't need to fight with the principal,
the coordinator or the parents anymore.
I love this profession.
People have dreams.
They believe I can help them succeed
and I will.

Researcher's Background

The above poem is meant to reveal dimensions that may not be explored
in depth in the academic version of my journey that comes next. In order to have a

better understanding of the forces that gave shape to this dissertation study, it is necessary to provide a description of the different facets I went through while implementing the study. I choose to present myself as a human being and as a professional; therefore, I will provide an account of the important experiences that have driven me as a person, as a teacher, and as a teacher-researcher.

The Researcher as a Person

I have been searching my whole life for something better, never content with the status quo in my society and not willing to accept what was seen as “normal.” I am the second child in a family of five children, three girls and two boys. My family is a patriarchal family in which women were assigned very specific roles; women were expected to be daughters, wives, and mothers. In other words, women were not supposed to study or have professional goals. My mother’s schooling reached only the fifth grade and none of the women in her family finished secondary school or attended college. My father made the personal decision to quit school when he was finishing his first year of middle school because he wanted to start making money. However, his father wanted him to pursue a degree, which most of the men in his family did. Women in my father’s family were a different story; they were only allowed to continue their education through the fifth grade. My grandfather used to say: “Las mujeres sólo

tienen cabellos largos e ideas cortas” [Women have perfect hair and imperfect ideas].

My parents followed their parents’ model, and so they did not encourage my sisters and me to study. For example, my older sister did not finish middle school because she used to think that she was not good at school; she also wanted to start making money soon in order to earn her independence from our father. My younger sister finished high school at night school; she started working in sales at the age of 17. Contrary to what may perhaps happen in other Colombian families, where education is a must, our parents never encouraged their daughters to study beyond middle school or to think of attending college. However, I managed to attend college and obtained a bachelor’s degree in education. I was a very dedicated student and that helped me to get a teaching job when I was finishing my third year at college. I started working at The Bi-National Center – Colombo Americano (BNC) teaching English to children.

The Researcher as a Teacher

My first teaching experience took place at the Binational Center Colombo- Americano (BNC). I was hired as a part-time English teacher for children between three and nine years of age. I always say that these children were my true “teachers.” I believe they helped me learn how to teach; they were a very demanding and challenging audience. Of course, I was still taking classes

at the university, but my students at the BNC were my best training to become a language teacher. After graduating from college, I continued teaching at the BNC; however, I started teaching English at the university level as well and I also started working at a bilingual school as a homeroom teacher and as an English teacher. Although I gained a great deal of experience working with children for six years, I began to realize that my true passion was to teach adults. Teaching older students gave me more freedom to do my job, and I felt more confident when inviting my adult students to help me make curricular decisions. Therefore, during the last eight years I have only been working with adults.

As explained in Chapter 3, Context of the Study, my personal background is reflected in my classes and is connected with my teaching style. It also influences the way I respond to class discussions and some of the issues presented by the adult students in the classes I teach. For instance, the topic of the traditional roles assigned to women in society is one that repeatedly comes up during class discussion when one teaches Hispanic adults. I have strong personal feelings about the topic because I had to prove to my parents that they were wrong about my role as a woman. I become very upset when my adult students express their doubt that women are as capable professionals as men. This topic came up many times in discussions in the class I taught at LI. I remember one class session in particular when students were reporting on the readings they had chosen from the newspaper. I had instructed the students to choose an article, read

it carefully, and report to the class. The following is what I noted in my researcher's log:

...Tonight, a student reported on the recent Women's Soccer World Cup. His name is Carmelo. He said he had chosen that article from the newspaper because he loves soccer. When he was finished presenting his ideas about the article, I prompted the other students to ask him questions about the article he had read. One of the students, Federico, asked Carmelo what he thought about women playing soccer. Carmelo did not answer the question because another student, Julio, interrupted him in order to provide his opinion. Julio said women could do whatever they put effort into. He also said that some people think women are not as capable as men but in his opinion they are. Another student, Cesar, interrupted him and said he thought they are almost capable of doing anything, but they are different. I couldn't help asking Cesar what he meant by "different." He replied that these women have more testosterone than they can handle (October 1, 2003).

Cesar's comment really disappointed me because it reminded me of my parents' way of thinking. I told my students about what my father used to say about educating women and they realized that I did not appreciate this kind of comment. Everybody was embarrassed although my tone of voice was not threatening. However, it was clear that I was affected because I did not let the conversation continue without giving my opinion. That same night, there was another episode of the same kind. I noted the following in my researcher's log:

A student, Julio, asked me if I wanted to have children and I answered: "No, I don't want to have children." Then, he asked: "Are you afraid of the pain?" I answered: "No, it is not that. It's that I have plans. I want to travel around the world and do other things." Cesar and Pablo looked at him and said almost in chorus: "She has a different philosophy of life; she thinks different" (October 1, 2003).

Eight students attended class that night and except for me, Flora was the only woman in the group; she did not participate in the discussion about women's education or about the right women have to decide not to have children. She just

frowned and had a very serious look on her face. I felt compelled to talk in the name of all women and explain that not all of us are supposed to get married and have children. I was and I am conscious that I do not necessarily have to like the topics my students choose for discussion and I do want us to be mature enough to carry out a conversation on any topic. As a matter of fact, similar topics came up in our discussions during the entire term. Although the students knew I did not agree with the point of view that underestimates or diminishes the power and capacity of women, the students continued bringing up these topics in class discussions.

To go back to the idea that my personal background reflects on my teaching, the type of family I come from and the personal experiences I have influence the type of response I give to some of the topics the students choose for discussion. For example, if I had not lacked support from my parents when trying to obtain more education and do other things that in my society were not acceptable in women, I would not react so drastically in front of my students.

The following entry is another example to illustrate how my personal background has an effect on my performance as a teacher. It also explains how the experiences I went through while trying to obtain a profession make me have high expectations towards my students.

Tonight, one of the students was late for class and I was about to scold him for being late when I realized he had just arrived from work. He had dirt all over his pants and boots and his hand were covered with paint and dirt. I can't help to get emotional about this. It reminded me of my hard

times in the past. Many times I had to go to attend class wearing my filthy clothes after working in a kitchen at a restaurant or after cleaning somebody's house. I felt really bad because my classmates were wearing nice clean clothes and I... I was not like them... (Researcher's log – March 6, 2003)

I could identify myself with this student because I also had to deal with many difficulties when trying to obtain formal education when I was a young adult. I excused him for being late that night and I asked him to try harder to be on time for class. In Chapter 3, I described the socio-economic and cultural background of the students in our class. Although I was aware that they had a life full of other responsibilities and obligations, and none of them belonged to the middle class, I always envisioned them as capable individuals who can accomplish whatever they put themselves into if they make the effort. Coming from a family of lower socioeconomic class did not stop me from obtaining an education. I put all my effort into obtaining a college degree and I did it. If I could do it by working hard and doing all kinds of jobs, my students can also accomplish their goals no matter how challenging they are or how many obstacles they have to overcome. It may be that I am wrestling with the idea of why my students cannot have the same drive I had when I was trying to obtain formal education. The truth is, I am sympathetic to my students, but I also have very high expectations for them.

The first day of classes at LI, September 3, 2003, two of the students made me realize that the way I usually introduce myself to the students generates a positive reaction from them, and it also illustrates the way my students and I perceive each other. The students at LI saw me as a role model and I saw them as

equals, as people with equal capacities and abilities. I set the example for what they can become, and I believe they can become better people and more effective language learners through building a relationship of trust. Telling the students that I started from “nothing” has a positive effect on the way they react to me as the teacher of the class and to their performance in the class because they realize that if I could accomplish so much they also can. The following excerpt from the researcher’s log illustrates what I just explained:

...When I described to the students the kind of life I lived in Puerto Rico and am living in the United States, one of the students said: “Usted ha vivido mucho! Ojalá yo hubiera podido hacer todas esas cosas que usted ha hecho” [You have experienced a lot! I wish I could have done all those things you have].

When I finished reading my letter to start correspondence in the dialogue journal another student said: “Así es que yo quiero aprender a escribir en inglés... A mí me gustaría poder escribir así como usted escribe” [That’s how I want to learn how to write in English... I would like to be able to write like you].

(Researcher’s log - September 4, 2003).

To a certain degree the students saw me as one of them, one of them who has succeeded. Of course I am “the teacher” of the class and I am a doctoral student at a prestigious university; however, I also come from a humble origin. The students knew that English is my second language and like them I learned English as an adult. Many times, Hispanic students think that becoming fluent English readers and writers is too difficult a task to accomplish as an adult. To a certain degree I am like a role model for them. Moreover, letting students know about my personal background helped us build a relationship of understanding and trust. Also, telling the students about me makes me look back and realize how much I

have grown and helps me identify some characteristics of my teaching style and the possible biases and strengths I may have as a teacher researcher.

The Researcher as a Teacher-Researcher

Similar to my personal search for a better lifestyle, research is an aspect that has been active part of my life as a language teacher and as a graduate student for a long time. Innovative teaching practices have always caught my attention. I have always been willing to try new and more effective teaching/learning practices in the classes I teach. Innovative teaching practice is by nature linked to research and I have always been looking to arrive at a better understanding of the way students learn best. Teacher research attempts to improve classroom practice and promote quality learning (Loughran, 2002; Patterson et al., 1993; Delamont, 1992). Therefore, it makes sense to do research on my own teaching practices and in my classroom. Although my inclination to do research is not the result of having taken doctoral classes, the classes I took as a doctoral student made it possible for me to acquire formal instruction on the theory, trends, and methods of research.

I have worked on several research projects with colleagues and individually in my classroom. For my master's thesis "Strategies for the teaching and learning of vocabulary in ESL," I trained six ESL teachers to implement a set of three different vocabulary strategies in their classes. This one-year quantitative

study tested the effectiveness of three approaches to vocabulary acquisition. In the Spring Semester of 2002, I worked with two colleagues designing a program for ESL in the workplace. Our efforts led to an article that was published in the fall of that same year in The Texas Papers in Foreign Language Education Journal. During the summer of 2002, I worked with a group of educators as an assistant researcher for “Just for the Kids,” a federally funded program through the National Center for Educational Accountability. After receiving training, I carried out data collection and wrote a formal report. During the fall of 2002, I conducted research on the effects of using communicative dialogue journals in the university Spanish classes I was teaching. I presented the findings of this one-semester qualitative study at the 84th Annual Meeting of The American Educational Research Association (AERA) in Chicago in April 2003.

To summarize this section and after reflecting on my background as a person, as a teacher, and as a teacher researcher I believe I have learned more about myself while performing these three roles and about what happened in the journey and how that reflects back on the three roles. As a person I realize that I am willing to face challenges; life is more interesting that way. I am not content with doing things the easy way because I am aware of the complexities involved in my interaction with the people around me and I am aware of the different levels at which this interaction takes place. As a teacher I am more conscious of my biases and strengths and how my personal background influences my teaching

and the way I envision the students in the classes I teach. Evidently, this awareness did not happen overnight. It is the result of having different teaching experiences, some more gratifying than others, reflection and a conscious effort to become more effective in my job and to better serve my students. Finally, as a researcher I know I will do things differently next time because I have learned from my mistakes. I know I will continue making mistakes but I also know I can trust my practical knowledge (Wien, 1995) as a teacher and as a researcher.

Embarking on Doing Qualitative Research

Doing research is a personal and a professional journey in which the researcher invests time and energy and is willing to take risks, make mistakes and overcome them. The researcher goes on an expedition, hunting for answers to questions and many times encountering even more questions. Embarking on the research journey requires courage and commitment; sometimes one must take the risk of trying something new, and other times one must admit failures as a teacher and/or as a researcher. The researcher's previous experiences, background knowledge, biases, and personal issues are clearly involved in the development of the journey since the researcher is the tool, instrument, and filter for generating and gathering information (Kincheloe, 2003; Merriam, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

It is only through the actual design and implementation of research that one acquires the knowledge and the skills attributed to researchers; e.g., skills such as learning to distinguish between data and noise cannot be taught, they are acquired only through practice. As stated by Stark and Watson, 1999:

Learning for qualitative research, at whatever academic level, should not be homogenizing experience, as it ultimately can become when we learn how to do an interview, or how to fill in an interview, and so on. We advocate a more colorful landscape in relation to teaching and learning for qualitative research, and we dare to use words such as passion, desire, and eros when we talk about being involved in the process. Developing the sensual qualities (e.g., seeing, listening, feeling, stretching) inherent in this type of research, developing meaning and understanding through this medium, and then recognizing similarities, gaps, and differences when visiting the textbooks will enable the students to understand (as we did) the questions that need to be asked instead of being given the answers (the manual) before engaging in the experience (p. 729).

Doing research is mainly an experiential journey; the experience of researching is fundamental to understanding and learning what it is. Undertaking research is similar to going on a voyage of discovery, and many times the stories in the journey cannot just be told; they must also be experienced (Loughran, 2002; Delamont, 1992). In other words, one can read, take research classes, and be told about doing research; however, one learns to do research only by doing it.

It is important to clarify that most of my academic life has been informed by quantitative research. For example, my Master's thesis was a quantitative study. I tested three different groups of vocabulary learning strategies to find out which strategies were more effective and which the students preferred. The population for the study was made up of students from six sections of English I

classes at a major university in Puerto Rico. Students and teachers were trained to use the strategies during a semester. The students took a pre-test and a post-test. When I entered the Master's program my goal was to become a more effective language teacher. However, doing research was inherent to my work in the classroom for many reasons. One of them is that I was in a foreign country teaching ESL to people from a culture different from mine. While in Puerto Rico, my research was driven by the desire to better serve my students and understand their learning needs.

It was only at the doctoral level that I started opening my mind to understanding and studying a different type of paradigm, qualitative research. I have to confess that before entering the doctoral program, I did not have much respect for qualitative research. Nevertheless, I have never been satisfied with what is on the surface and since I have been searching my whole life for improvement, I decided I would give qualitative research a try. At first, my long academic training in the positivist world made it difficult for me to appreciate and understand the importance, usefulness, and nature of qualitative research. During the process of implementing my dissertation research study, I struggled quite a bit with the habit of viewing issues from a quantitative point of view. I constantly went back and forth from one paradigm to the other while trying to do qualitative research. It was neurotic!

My adviser, Dr. David Schwarzer, witnessed my "researcher's schizophrenia." For example, my first attempts at writing the account for the anecdotal records of my study were a mess. While writing my first anecdotal record entries, I put all kinds of different data sources together: description of events, researcher's reflection, transcription of students' dialogues, and interviews. It was a mistaken attempt on my part to keep "objectivity" as the

focus of the research account. I felt like I needed to give proof of every single event happening in the phenomenon under study. I was too worried about telling “the truth” as it is framed within quantitative research. Acknowledging my role as the tool and filter of the information (Merriam, 1998) was not an easy task to accomplish. Perhaps the difficulties I encountered while assuming my role as a teacher researcher can be explained through my educational background as a teacher and researcher since both my research agenda and my teaching practices are informed by who I am.

Qualitative research turned out to be very complex, more complex than what I had previously thought. It was more profound than interviewing a bunch of people and speculating about events that did not include numbers. The readings, class discussions, and interaction with my professors broadened my horizon of qualitative research and awakened my interest in this type of research. For example, I implemented dialogue journals with the students at the Spanish class I was teaching that semester. I went through the process of obtaining Institutional Research Bureau (IRB) approval for the project, kept a journal reflecting on the whole experience, the students’ progress and reactions, and kept records of the students’ work on the dialogue journal. The students evaluated the activity, I analyzed the data collected, and I presented a paper with findings at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) meeting in Chicago on April 4, 2003.

However, the story of my becoming a qualitative researcher is not a fairy tale in which everyone lives happily ever after. As the reader is about to discover, my enthusiasm to conduct and learn about qualitative research was not enough when it was time to actually implement the dissertation research study. The following illustrates some of the difficulties I faced when I was in the process of implementing the dissertation research study.

I’ve been thinking about the class at LI and I feel disappointed. This is not fun. I am not enjoying teaching this class at LI. This is supposed to be fun because I love teaching and I usually enjoy my work. However, I am too

worried about not losing information/data. I am worried about getting behind with the written report of the classes, the anecdotal records. I feel tense most of the time; this has become stressful. I worry too much when my students forget or lose what they needed to bring to/do for class or when I realize I am doing something wrong and by wrong I mean not in agreement with the qualitative paradigm. Having the written consent form signed by the students, for example, was particularly difficult. Three students lost it twice and three have signed on the wrong line a couple of times (Researcher's log – September 14, 2003).

Teaching is something I enjoy. I love it because it gave purpose to my professional life when I was young; teaching is what I do as a profession; besides, it is therapeutic. When I am in the classroom with my students I forget about my preoccupations and I concentrate on what we are doing in class. I prepare the lessons and I go to class expecting to see what works well to do it again or to improve it if it did not work. I did not have much practice documenting what happened in my classroom and whenever I did it was for personal reasons as part of my desire to do good teaching. However, this time I had a clear purpose in mind and specific tasks to accomplish. Apparently, that was overwhelming and I forgot about enjoying my job.

Also, it is difficult to take notes in class and not distract the students and myself from what we are doing. I guess I am learning to deal with the difficulties of studying my own teaching. I need to start making more mental notes and rely more on the tape recorder. I need to relax a little bit and I think that I need to focus on reconciling my two roles as a teacher and as a teacher researcher. Besides, making mistakes is part of learning and I am a good learner! (Researcher's log – September 14, 2003)

I was overly conscious about how important it was to take advantage of the moment because when the study arrived at its end and the students moved on, I was not going to be able to go back and get the information I missed. Making mistakes is part of learning but making mistakes implied a lot more this time. I was terrified to make mistakes although my adviser kept telling me that good

qualitative research unveils the mistakes one makes because we are people doing research on people and with people. This is what I wrote in my researcher's log:

Dr. Schwarzer says this is not the first "cake" I bake and it is not the last. However, I cannot help thinking this is a very important cake! This is the cake for my doctoral dissertation. I fear that I won't do it right. I'm afraid that I won't measure up to his expectations. He expects a lot from me. I agree this is not my first or last cake, but this cake is extremely important for me and I know it, and that causes lots of stress (September 14, 2003).

This entry clearly describes my feelings as "an impostor" who is terrified by the idea of being caught. Making the transition to enact my role as a qualitative researcher produced a lot of anxiety and uncertainties in me. I am conscious there will be more opportunities for doing research, but this was a unique experience because I was proving to deserve my professors' respect and trust. In summary, embarking on doing qualitative research was a process and as such it presupposes phases. Therefore, in the following section I will describe what phases I identified through the data I generated and gathered while implementing the study.

Phases I Went Through As a Teacher Researcher

During the process of implementing the study and collecting data, I realized there were certain learning "phases" I was going through. It has been difficult to assign a label to these "learning experiences" because I do not want people to get the impression that they are "steps" or "stages" that have a beginning and an end. Actually, as a teacher researcher I have found myself returning to some of the phases and/or experiencing two or three of them at the same time. Moreover, I am not sure they are "over" now that the study is finished. I am able to distinguish these phases now that the class I taught at LI is over. They were identified through data in the researcher's log, anecdotal records, and the interaction with the participants of the study through interviews, the dialogue

journal, and the classes. Although these phases appear to be presented chronologically, they did not happen that way.

While looking into the literature about the journey of the teacher researcher I did not find any discussion of “phases, steps, or stages” a teacher researcher goes through. However, Lougran et al. (2002) identifies four areas where the teacher-researcher’s personal experience is needed:

One is to personally experience the failure of apparently successful teaching. A second is the extent to which risks usually pay off –one has to take a risk of one’s own. A third is to experience lessons that demonstrate what is possible in one’s own classroom in terms of student engagement in quality learning. The fourth is to experience the importance and value of developing one’s own variations and extensions of other people’s ideas; to shift from a search for recipes that can be used intact to more generic ideas that must be customized to one’s particular context. Communicative teacher research needs to provide teachers with opportunities to gain all four types of experience (p. 263).

Lougran et al., do not talk about “phases” while doing teaching research, but rather about “symptoms” that a teacher should experience in order to be able to do research in his/her classroom. These authors also imply that teachers have to reconcile theory and practice in order to do teaching research.

Next, I am going to describe the phases I went through while researching my own teaching practices. These phases took place in a cyclical way; they sometimes repeated, some never arrived at an end, and some still may be in progress. I will describe the phases in detail; however, I suggest that the reader keep in mind that the phases I am presenting here are those that I personally went through. Other teacher researchers may experience some of these phases as well, or they may encounter different ones. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, doing research is a personal journey one embarks on. What was obvious (or

difficult) for me, as a teacher researcher might look obscure (or easy) to some other teacher researchers with a different background and teaching experience. I do not know for sure. There are no recipes to be followed in a step-by-step manner in this discipline. The phases I went through while doing qualitative research for my dissertation study were: 1) frustration and confusion, 2) loneliness in the process, 3) struggling for balance, 4) facing the unexpected, and 5) reconciliation and understanding.

Frustration and Confusion

The week after the meeting of my dissertation proposal defense, I started the implementation of the study. I remember very well the first class meeting with the students at LI because that night I was anxious and scared. I feared that none of the students would want to participate in the study. I feared they would not come back to class after I explained to them what I was planning to do. One of the first dilemmas I faced was to decide how much information to disclose to them. I needed to give the students enough information so that they could understand the characteristics of the class, but not so much as to overwhelm them. Moreover, it was urgent for me to distribute the participant consent form so that the students could take it home and clarify their doubts as soon as possible. I was starting to feel confused about how to do things “the right” way.

From my point of view, my professors’ attitude at the dissertation defense meeting reflected their certainty that I was ready to go into the field and put the plan I presented to them in action. For that reason, all of a sudden, I felt overwhelmed by responsibility. It was a weird sensation because many times during the implementation of the research study I felt lost and I had to go back and read my dissertation proposal to “remember” what I was supposed to be

doing. In the following entry from my researcher's log I describe my confusion and concerns.

Sometimes I feel like I am losing focus. I have to keep on going back to the proposal document in order to remember what I am supposed to be doing. I guess this is the time at which I am beginning to digest most of what I have learned in my graduate classes and more questions pop up in my mind. Doing qualitative research is complex and like other activities it requires practice and commitment. What looks easy and clear to my adviser and other experts does not necessarily look easy or clear to me (October 5, 2003).

The dissertation defense meeting was a really good experience; my professors treated me like a colleague. They expressed their trust, approval, and support for the new step I was about to take. Somehow, and for the first time during the dissertation process, I believed I knew what I was doing. However, realizing I was supposed to continue on my own and call myself a "researcher" was scary and I started feeling timid asking for my professors' help. I was thinking: "My professors have been with me for three years, they have taught me well, and it is my turn now." They had done their job already and it was my turn to do mine.

Most of the time I felt I needed to provide a disclaimer, and so when I introduced myself to the students I presented myself as a teacher with a long teaching experience as well as a researcher. The idea was to offer them the best of my fourteen years of teaching experience and at the same time let them know that I was also a learner. They were going to help me learn about them and about doing research in our classroom, and I was going to use their support, advice and help while implementing the methodology and research agenda of the study. Hence, I invited my students to become my partners in research. I have to confess

that the idea of making them my partners in research comforted me a lot. It was a way of avoiding loneliness during the process of becoming an experienced teacher researcher. As a result, a channel of dialogue and reflection began to open between the students and me.

In reference to my feelings of frustration and confusion, I need to refer to what I explained before about the forces that have shaped who I am and the origin of my traditional views about research because “there is a direct connection between the shape of our professional lives as teachers, our schools, and how we consider the research act” (Kincheloe, 2003. p. 88). My professional background by the time I started doing my dissertation research was more inclined towards teaching. Qualitative research was rather new to me and I felt that being called “a qualitative researcher” was too much of a responsibility for me to accept. I was conscious that I was a novice researcher. However, my professors seemed to be so confident in my abilities that many times during the implementation of the study I did not know what to think. They seemed to be sure I was going to survive the experience and that I was a capable qualitative researcher; however, I remember that I constantly needed to re-read the dissertation proposal document in order to “refresh” my memory and make sure I was keeping focused and on track.

Part of my frustration and confusion was thinking that I was more a teacher than a researcher. I started looking for reasons to help me explain why I could not just accept the fact that I was a teacher researcher, since all teachers are

researchers (Patterson et al., 1993). Then I encountered a book by Kincheloe (2003). This author asserts that teachers are not trained to be researchers:

Even when teachers have taken research courses, which are often offered at the graduate level, few ever recognize the relationship between their research experience and their lives as teachers. Most of the research courses taken involve a survey of quantitative, statistical techniques of data analysis. Neither the on-the-job socializing forces of schooling nor in-service education are committed to the cultivation of the teacher's role as researcher (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 37).

This statement helped me somewhat to understand my feelings of confusion. It was not that I did not consider myself capable of doing qualitative research. The reality was that I had taken just a few courses on qualitative research and I knew there was still a lot for me to learn about this type of research. I was scared to make mistakes and I knew I was going to make many of them due to my lack of experience and lack of academic authority in the field of qualitative research.

Loneliness in the Process

Although my adviser was always there for me and he was willing to listen to my concerns, to provide guidance, and to share his wisdom with me, loneliness was a feeling that accompanied me for a long time during the implementation of the dissertation research study. I noted the following in my researcher's log:

I do not know exactly what is happening. I cannot understand why I feel like there is no one to help me survive this experience. I constantly need to consult someone about my doubts concerning the project. I need somebody to listen to my stories about what is going on in the class that I am teaching. It is not that I do not have support from my adviser; I see him every two weeks for an hour or two. However, it does not seem to be enough (October 5, 2003).

As I explained before, this was not a physical loneliness; I felt alone intellectually. I had questions and doubts that I was not able to put into words. I felt confident as a teacher, but sometimes I did not feel competent as a qualitative researcher. I felt I had to earn my professors' trust and to prove they were right when, after the dissertation proposal defense, they decided I was ready to take the plunge. I did not want to let them down or disappoint them, and I was frightened that I might not measure up to their expectations.

Many times throughout this dissertation document, I have stated that as a qualitative researcher I am the tool used to generate and gather data. I am also the filter used to analyze, interpret, and report on that data (Kincheloe, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is understandable then, that I felt alone. Of all the people involved in this research study, I am the only one who knows all the details about it. I am the "expert" of my study. I make the connections; I put the pieces together. I know the data in my study better than any other person. I am in charge of processing and digesting the data and what is going on inside my mind is complex. Therefore, intellectual loneliness is a normal sentiment to experience while implementing a qualitative dissertation research study. I met with my adviser and colleagues once or twice a month; however, I was thinking of the study, implementing the study, making decisions, and putting the pieces together all the time. It was my own research study and my own responsibility.

Since I felt more confident as a teacher, I looked for the support of other teachers. According to Loughran (2000),

Being a teacher-researcher illustrates professionalism in terms of a willingness to accept that one's own experience is the major source of improvement in practice. However, this is not to suggest that it should be viewed as an individual and isolated activity, for the process of teacher research is enhanced if it is a collaborative venture. When teachers meet to share their knowledge and understanding about teaching and learning, they share their concerns and respond readily to each other's ideas (p. 16).

For some reason, during the second month of the implementation of the study, I started feeling the need to connect with other teachers doing teaching research. This came from my intuition as an academic person, but later I learned that experts do recommend connecting with one's colleagues and looking for allies when performing and/or writing research. For example, Wolcott (2001) discusses what to do when you feel you are having difficulties keeping focused while writing about research you have done:

...Solicit help for your problem of focus. Your colleague may not prove as helpful as you hoped, but giving words to previously unexpressed thoughts may help you. When other people, with other thoughts on their minds, offer feedback, even if what they say widely misses the mark, you may discover that you are closer than you realized to pinpoint your ideas. Do consider drawing upon a wider network of colleagues than those who may first come to mind... (p. 39).

I began meeting with two graduate classmates who were in the process of designing and defending their dissertation proposals. Although they were not at the same phase as I was at the moment; they were good listeners and they gave me the opportunity to listen to myself. The following is from an entry in my researcher's log:

...I have been talking with two of my graduate classmates and that alleviates my anxiety a little bit. It seems that they also feel overwhelmed with information and the type of research we are doing. We are putting theory and practice together in something that is an important project for each of us (October 5, 2003).

My two classmates and I met for three hours every two weeks during the whole semester in which I was implementing the study. We offered each other comfort and advice; we shared the good and the bad news about our research studies and the processes we were witnessing and going through. Although they did not always have satisfactory answers to my doubts, they were of great help and I always had my adviser and the committee members to ask for help. My classmates gave me useful practical suggestions and the three of us learned from my mistakes. Now that I have finished implementing the study and am writing my dissertation, we still meet for three hours every two weeks. We get an hour each; we read, report, and ask questions about what we are doing. Right now, they are collecting data for their dissertation studies and I am analyzing and writing.

Struggling for Balance Between the Two Roles

Doing research in your classroom implies continual reflection on your performance as a teacher and as a researcher. However, I did not want to let one of the roles take over; I wanted to find balance and consider these two roles (teacher and teacher researcher) complementary. It is my opinion that not all teachers are researchers; I believe it is a misconception. I accept that all teachers question their teaching practices and wonder about their classrooms and their students' performance; however, that does not make them researchers. From my point of view, teachers enact different roles from the ones enacted by teacher researchers because teaching research requires a conscious effort and a systematic implementation of a plan to investigate your classroom (Kincheloe, 2003). Teaching research requires documentation and systematic collection of data in order to gather data to inform and to establish findings relevant to the teaching practice.

Through the following example, I want to illustrate how sometimes I had to act as a researcher although I was having conflicts as a teacher. The first night implementing the study at LI, a Vietnamese student and a Korean student were assigned to the class I was going to teach. After interacting with them for the first 30 minutes of class, they seemed to be motivated and committed students. Their positive attitude and willingness to learn made it difficult for me to decide what to do. I felt like I was discriminating against them. Although I knew it was crucial that all my students were Spanish speakers, for a moment, I considered the possibility of modifying the study and accepting these two students in class. However, the participant consent form was written in Spanish and in the flyer I gave to the volunteer coordinator at LI the characteristics of the class were well explained. I wanted to have only Spanish speakers in the class I was going to teach. I had made that explicit in the informative flyer that was never distributed to the students.

I had already prepared class material and documents for the students written in Spanish and accepting these two students (the Vietnamese and the Korean students) translated into changing the structure of the class. I was not going to be able to use Spanish as a tool for instruction as originally planned. It was an embarrassing situation. I did not make any decision for the first hour of class. When students took a break I took that time to think and I made a decision. I was not going to have people in class who did not speak Spanish because accepting them in my classroom meant doing a different type of research study. That first night of class, I did everything possible for the students to feel comfortable and welcome and I talked to the two students at the end of class. I explained to them in detail what was going on and they were transferred to a parallel ESL 3 class.

A month later this same student from Vietnam talked to me again to let her get in my class and again I had to say “No” and it was really hard because I am a teacher. When a student comes to me asking for my help as a teacher I feel obligated to reach out that student and act on the student’s best interest. Unfortunately, I could not do it this time. The following is what I wrote in the anecdotal records:

The students in the other ESL 3 class have to pass by my door in order to go to their classroom. They usually greet me through the glass at the door. I have substituted for their teacher a couple of times already. They usually look through the window with curiosity to find out what we are doing in our class...

Tonight, something else happened... the Vietnamese lady came early to the literacy center to look for me. She looked for me in the classroom and after saying “hello” she told me she wanted to be transferred to the class I am teaching. She was complaining about her teacher and the way she conducts the class. I just smiled at her and I explained again that she couldn’t be in our class. I felt terrible when I said to her: “I know you want to be here with us but it is not possible because you do not speak Spanish.” (Monday, October 6, 2003).

I frequently engaged in an intellectual battle looking for balance; I did not want to compromise my work as a teacher or as a researcher. Although many times I felt the pressure of collecting data for my dissertation, I tried not to sacrifice teaching. I have to confess it was difficult to do. Collecting data for my dissertation was crucial in order to continue advancing in the culmination of doctoral studies and sometimes, I could not avoid feeling trapped by the need to generate data.

Facing the Unexpected

It is necessary to learn how to keep calm and in control when things do not go as planned on paper. The best advice is to have a plan “A” and a plan “B.” This will help you to still be in control of new situations and use your professional experience as a resource in moments of challenge. However,

The complexity of classrooms means that no significant change to practice can be neatly planned in advance. A teacher-researcher can react to unexpected events with immediate changes to the new practice...[and] often his/her reaction *must* be immediate (Loughran, 2002. p. 259).

As a teacher and as a researcher one should plan for the unexpected. By “plan” I am suggesting leaving room and being psychologically prepared for things to go wrong and of course fixing them the best you can when difficulties arise. One will never be totally prepared to face the unexpected but being aware of it will help when necessary. “Most researchers are self-taught, and possibly fall into errors” (Delamont, 1992, p. 54). All teaching and research situations are different and unexpected events will always happen. I will share an anecdote to illustrate what I want to communicate.

Tonight when I just arrived in the center to teach class, one of the girls at the reception desk informed me I was supposed to substitute for another teacher. She asked me to put the two ESL 3 groups together because the other teacher was not coming tonight. I asked if it was just for one night and the receptionist said “yes” (Anecdotal records - September 17, 2003).

I was scared to accept because I overheard a conversation between the volunteer coordinator and the missing teacher the previous week. The teacher said that she needed them to get somebody else to help her teach the class because she was not going to be able to continue teaching the class twice a week. I was hoping it not to become a habit. Actually, I had to substitute for this teacher three times. At the moment, it was an embarrassing situation because the students come to class and they expect to have a teacher. However, I did not want to feel guilty about the center's bad management of matters and I needed to continue teaching my own class. I went to my classroom to leave my two bags with the material for class and then I went to check my mailbox to pick up the folder for attendance and I found a handwritten note signed by one of the administrators. The following is the message in the note:

Clarena, we have a small crisis. Sylvie (the other ESL 3) isn't going to be in tonight. Could you please take her class? I know that this will throw off your "experiment" but we really need you. Ale. (Anecdotal records - September 17, 2003).

I had many thoughts about that note. She put the word experiment in quotation marks like resting importance to what I was doing in my classroom. I began to wonder about what this coordinator thought of the study I was implementing. Apparently, what I was doing did not seem serious to her. I was not sure if she knew that what she was asking me to do was going to affect my study in a negative way, and if she knew for sure, why was she asking me to do it? There were other teachers that could teach the class or maybe one of the

coordinators could do it. However, as I wrote in the anecdotal records, I had to continue teaching and I needed to cope with the situation.

I read the note and I went back in the classroom and the other teacher's classroom to write an announcement on the blackboard telling students where to go if they were late for class. Federico and Cesar were the first to arrive in class and I informed them of the news. I asked them to help me move our class materials to the other room.

I had to think quickly what to do to adjust to the new situation and how to take advantage of it. I decided to ask everybody in class to do the same activity so that nobody felt uncomfortable. I quickly made enough copies for both groups of students of the handout for guided reading that we had been using. (September 17, 2003).

I substituted for this other teacher for three times and that implied us to get behind in our class projects and activities. We had to interrupt the pace of our class and put into practice our philosophy of negotiation, holistic practice and inquiry-based learning in order to deal with the situation. Also as the teacher of the class I had to make use of my practical knowledge (Wien, 1995) in order to cope with the situation.

Reconciliation and Understanding

My level of frustration has lowered in a considerable way now that I can look back and realize that the time invested doing the project and the work we did together have brought gains to both the students and myself. The students have become more confident and reflective; as they told me in the final interview, they have learned to appreciate the value of thinking critically, evaluate their work, collaborate with their teacher, and become more independent learners. In retrospect, I realize the value of my knowledge as a teacher and the advantages of possessing that knowledge while doing research on my own teaching. The many times I felt more competent as a teacher than as a researcher and when I relied on

that knowledge it helped me a lot in order to continue doing my job as a teacher researcher. As stated by Wein, 1995:

Practical knowledge is a broad term that encompasses all a teacher does in her setting. [In other words,] ...practical knowledge includes all that the teacher brings of herself to the moment of teaching –beliefs, attitudes, feelings, reflection, gestures, temperament, and personal history (p. 12).

As teachers we possess knowledge about our classrooms that is of great value when attempting to do research in our classes. For that reason, I have arrived to the conclusion that all teachers can become researchers if they decide to do so. However, it is important to establish that teacher research involves systematic and intentional inquiry connected to relevant academic literature (Clarke & Erickson, 2003). As stated by Anderson and Burns, 1989: “As a form of disciplined inquiry, classroom research is purposeful, systematic, and involves the collection, and analysis of evidence” (p. 83). In addition, there are phases the teacher researcher has to experience while doing qualitative research. These phases will manifest themselves in different ways because doing research is a personal and a professional journey and changes are produced in the teacher doing research as well. Important and permanent changes happened in my teaching style; for example, I cannot imagine a class in which the student is not invited to do reflection and collaboration. I guess I am at a different phase of the journey right now. The journey; however, I have come to realize is irreversible. Once one has gone through the experience of doing research in the classroom, new ideas and projects begin to take shape in the every day “to do list.” After the data collection is over, a desire to continue doing research right away is inevitable. More than before, research has become an important part of my professional agenda.

Recommendations for Teacher-Researchers

After going through the process of doing research in the classroom with my students I am able to identify some guidelines useful to other teachers interested in doing research in their classrooms. First, doing research is a personal/professional journey. It takes courage to recognize that some aspect of your teaching needs improvement. Doing research on your own teaching practices require personal and professional investment. Second, a teacher researcher will need to plan for making mistakes and overcoming them. It is crucial to create a safe research environment so that one can learn from making mistakes. Testing and experimenting ideas at a small scale is a wise thing to do. Third, it is crucial for teachers to select what to study and design a systematic plan to collect data. There are different means to collect data; however, field notes, a researcher's log, interviews to participants, and written documents are advisable. Fourth, it is very helpful to talk to other teachers doing teaching research. This helps to make the research process more productive, easier, and more enjoyable and interesting. Fifth, with time and practice the teacher researcher will learn to distinguish between data and noise. The skills attributed to researchers are acquired through practice. Finally, it is necessary for the teacher doing research to plan for doing extra reading and learning more about research theory, methods, and strategies. Personally, I will continue doing research in my classroom because teaching makes more sense that way; reflecting on one's teaching practices becomes an

essential part of one's daily routine as a teacher researcher and doing research becomes addictive. There are new ideas and projects to put into work because new questions and curiosities have awakened after the culmination of this study.

Summary

In this chapter I provided a detailed description of important aspects related to my journey as a teacher-researcher in four main sections: 1) the poem, 2) the researcher's background, 3) embarking on doing research, and 4) the phases I went through as a teacher-researcher. First, the poem provides a more complex account of my journey. The purpose of the poem is to better illustrate the multifaceted features of the journey. In the second section of the chapter I present myself as a person, as a professional teacher, and as a researcher. I explain how my personal background colors these three facets of my life. I also explain how these personal experiences affect the way I respond to my students and my performance as a teacher. In the third section I introduce the double standards I faced while doing qualitative research after being immersed for a lifetime in the quantitative paradigm. I also describe the different steps and the progression I went through into the process of conducting qualitative research. In the last section of the chapter I discuss in detail the different phases I went through as a teacher researching my classroom and my own teaching practices. I present the stages I experienced while going through the research journey. The way I

presented the account might suggest that the stages are a step-by-step process, a linear process; however it is not that way. I still do not have all the answers and I am still in a learning stage. Although I made my best effort to illustrate and describe my journey as a teacher researcher, I need to say that the journey is not over and it is not as simple as to put into labeled boxes.

CHAPTER 5

WHAT HAPPENS IN A CLASS WHERE A NEGOTIATED, HOLISTIC, INQUIRY-BASED CURRICULUM IS IMPLEMENTED?

My goal with the present chapter is to provide a description and discussion of the class in which I conducted the study. I will describe the most salient critical events and issues that evolved during the class term. I want to address the second research question guiding the study: What happens in a class where a negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum is implemented? As stated by Ritchie and Lewis (2003), "...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). Furthermore, the information that I am providing here aims towards adding credibility to the research findings. The present chapter includes: 1) a description of a typical ESL-3 lesson at LI, 2) a typical week of class in our ESL-3 course, 3) an exploration of class events 4) tensions and challenges, and 5) lessons learned.

Description of a Typical ESL-3 Lesson at LI

Before providing a description of the class I taught, I find it necessary to provide a description of a typical lesson at the literacy center, LI. This will help

the readers to compare and contrast what was different in the class I taught. Therefore, the following is the description of a typical ESL-3 lesson at LI. This observation took place before I started teaching at the literacy center. Starting in September 2002, I observed classes for a couple of months. I wanted to have a clear idea of the type of work the volunteer instructors were doing and the way lessons were delivered at the center. In the following lesson, the volunteer English instructor teaching the class, Katie, was in her middle 30's; she did not speak Spanish and was not a teacher in real life. She was a secretary at an office downtown. However, by the time I visited her class she had been a volunteer instructor at LI for a year and a half. This is one of the reasons why I chose to observe her class. I thought Katie should have enough teaching experience at LI so that I could get a good idea of what was expected from me as a volunteer English instructor at the center. There were eight students registered for this class; however, only four were present: Francisco, Martha, Roberto, and Jorge.

Monday - September 30, 2002

6:20 p.m.

I arrived in LI and looked for the volunteer coordinator. I wanted her to introduce me to Katie, the instructor of the class that I was going to be observing. We went to the classroom but Katie was not there yet. The coordinator had other things to do and she asked me to wait for Katie outside the classroom and introduce myself to her when she arrived.

6:35 p.m.

Katie arrived in class. I introduced myself and we went into the classroom. Two students were inside waiting for her, Francisco and Martha. Katie greeted them and they answered.

She started class by writing the following group of words on the blackboard.

Trip	Throw	Tin
Trick	Thrill	Time
Truck	Threat	Tiger
treat	Thread	Tick
true	Throttle	Tie

Another student, Roberto, arrived in class while Katie was writing on the blackboard.

When she finished writing on the blackboard, Katie pointed at each word and asked the students individually to pronounce the words. She corrected the students' pronunciation when they made mistakes. Next, the students repeat after her and she makes sure that they are pronouncing the words correctly.

6:45 p.m.

Another student, Jorge, arrives to class. He immediately started participating in the pronunciation exercise.

The students sometimes asked Katie for the meaning of the words and she answered them by giving synonyms in English. Some other times, they looked for the definitions in their electronic translators and dictionaries. They also whispered in Spanish the meaning of the words when another student asked for it. Katie seemed not to be disturbed by that and she just let them chat in Spanish. After the students felt that the meaning of the word was clear, they continue pronouncing the words out-loud.

6:55 p.m.

Katie started asking the students what they did during the weekend. She wrote on the blackboard: "What did you do during the weekend?"

Katie asked Martha to answer the question and Martha answered by saying: "I goed to the Mall" Katie corrects her by writing on the blackboard: "I went to the Mall."

Martha continued talking: "I buy presents for my brothers, sobrino [nephew], and my mother." Then Martha asked: "¿Cómo se dice sobrino?" [How do you say "sobrino"?] Another student answers: "nephew." Katie corrected his pronunciation. Then, she asked Martha what else she did at the Mall and Martha answered: "I shop in different stores."

Katie wrote: "Which stores did you shop at?" Martha replied: Sears and Gap.

Katie wrote the following two sentences and elicited the students to provide appropriate verbs to complete the sentences.

“Martha _____ at Sears and Gap.”

“Martha _____ to Sears and Gap”

The students could guess the verb for the first sentence “shopped” and Katie wrote it in the blank. Then she asked for the past tense of “go” and she wrote the word “went” in the blank. Katie asked Martha another question: “How did you pay?” and Martha answered: “I pay pero plastic... my card and credit...” [I guessed she wanted to say: “I paid with plastic, with my credit card”]. Another student, Francisco, said: “credit card.” Then, Katie wrote on the blackboard: “She paid by credit card.”

7:10 p.m.

Now, it was Roberto’s turn to tell about what he did during the weekend.

Katie: Roberto, what did you do on the weekend?

Roberto: I went to my uncle’s home in Austin.

Katie: What did you do there?

Roberto: I drank tequila and ate fajitas and dancing.

Katie: I danced.

I went dancing.

I also danced.

Katie: What kind of music? CDs?

Roberto: No, Mariachi. Mexican music, ellos los contrataron, not me. [they hired them, not me]. My uncle has a big house.

Katie: Where was the party? Inside or outside the house?

Roberto: Outside.

Katie: So, your uncle has a lot of land? A big yard?

Roberto: Yes, yes, a big patio.

Katie: How long did it last?

Roberto: Start at 7:00 and finish at 2:00 in the morning.

Katie: Ah, the party started at 7:00 and ended at 2:00 a.m.

Katie: So, what did the neighbor say?

Roberto: Neighbor? Neighbor... ah vecino! The neighbor... invited!

Katie: That’s smart. Your uncle invited the neighbor to the party!

During the next fifteen minutes, similar conversations followed with the other two students present in class. They told what they did during the weekend and the teacher corrected the use of verbs in past tense.

7:30 p.m. Restroom-break

7:35 p.m.

Katie, the teacher, distributed a piece of paper with the following exercises. There was not a title or instructions written on the paper, just ten sentences to fill in the blank.

1. Psychology _____ a fun course. (is) (are)
2. All of the students who took Dave's ESL Class _____ passed. (has) (have)
3. The area _____ dangerous. (was) (were)
4. There _____ my wife! (go) (goes)
5. Here _____ some new students. (are) (is)
6. There _____ a lovely person over there. (are) (is)
7. _____ you in love? (are) (is)
8. Dave always _____ nice shoes. (wear) (wears)
9. There _____ one child in Dave's family. (is) (are)
10. Benjamin _____ funny. (is) (are)

While distributing the handout, Katie said: "Let's do some work with verbs. Pay attention to the subject-verb agreement." Then, during the following thirty minutes, the class did the fill in the blank exercise as a group. Answers were discussed one by one.

Katie started with item #1. She said: "Psychology is a class. It is a singular subject. "Is" is singular and "are" is plural. Then, the correct answer is "is." Psychology is a fun course."

The students wrote the correct answer in the blank and Katie started reading item #2 in the worksheet. Martha volunteered the answer: "Have?" Katie said: "Yes, it's a group!" Next, Katie asked: "What is the opposite of passed?" Jorge said: "No pass?" Katie explains to the students that the opposite of "pass" is "fail."

While she was explaining that the grading system in the U.S. is based in letters (A, B, C, D, F), Francisco interrupted her and said: "In my country is 10, 9, 8... My cousin once got a 10! He was happy. In my country he was good student pero no here [but not here]." Katie did not make any comments about what Francisco said and she continued with the next item in the worksheet, item #3. She read it out-loud and elicited an answer from Roberto. He said: "was." Then, Martha looked at the teacher with an interrogative face. So, Katie explained: "Yes, "was" ...It was dangerous... the area. Roberto spoke in Spanish to Martha and said: "es tercera persona, "it" es tercera persona singular, "area" es "it." Por eso la respuesta es

“was”... singular. [“It” is a third person singular, “area” is “it.” that’s why the answer is “was” singular].” Martha seemed to understand his explanation. Katie asked for the translation of “dangerous” in Spanish. The students answered immediately: “peligroso.” Katie did not repeat the word and said: “That sounds prettier than in English.” Next, she asked the students if they know dangerous areas and Francisco replied: “When my wife cook!” Everybody laughed at his joke and Katie continued with item #4. The class continued like this and similar conversations took place until they got item #10 and Katie dismissed the class at 8:00 p.m. because she has to leave early. She did not assign any homework and left the room.

8:00 p.m.

Even though the teacher left the classroom, the students stayed inside. Martha asked Francisco the name of the woman that teaches them on Wednesdays and what they did in class last Wednesday because she was absent. They were speaking in Spanish at this point. Francisco told Martha that the teacher’s name is Cynthia. He gave her his notebook. Martha looked at the pages in the notebook and started asking Francisco questions about his notes. The other two students have already left. Francisco and Martha continued chatting for about five minutes and then they also leave. I stayed in the classroom for a while checking my notes for the observation.

Listening to the students’ conversation at the end of class I learned that Katie only taught the class on Mondays and the students had another instructor on Wednesdays, Cynthia. After observing classes and working at the center, I learned that having two instructors teaching the same class was a common practice at LI. It was also common that each instructor prepared his/her lessons individually and without consulting what the other instructor was teaching although they were teaching the same group of students.

A Typical Week of Class in Our ESL-3 Course

As explained in Chapter 3, the class I taught (ESL 3) had predetermined curricular guidelines established by the administration at LI. In our class, we followed these curricular guidelines; however, we designed and implemented our own curriculum through learning needs, topics and goals suggested by the students while negotiating class content and class activities, learning goals and learning processes. A class routine was established by the second week of the semester. The idea was to help students become independent learners and provide them with a safe learning environment. As stated by Freeman et al., 2002:

When there is a classroom routine, English learners feel more relaxed because they know the kinds of activities they should be engaged in and what it is they are supposed to do during certain times of the day or the period. As they become familiar with the structure of the school day and the daily activities, they spend less mental energy figuring out what they are supposed to be doing. This leaves more mental space for them to comprehend the language and content of the class (p. 104).

Consequently, the segments established to be followed as our class routine were: greetings, announcements, collecting assignments, students' presentations, mini-lessons, reading, break, writing workshop, and assigning homework. Although we followed a class routine, the time spent on each segment varied from day to day.

Time	Segment	Details to be considered
15 min.	Greetings	Class started at 6:30 p.m. but students arrived in class at different times.
10-15 min.	Announcements	We talked about news in general, upcoming events, students' ideas for future classes, personal issues to be shared with the group.
5 min.	Collecting assignments	This happened at different times depending on the type of assignment.
20 min.	Students' presentations	Some days we did not have this portion of class because students were not ready to present their work.
10-15 min.	Mini-lessons	I lectured on grammatical items or functional uses of the language according to class events and as required by the students.
25-40 min.	Reading	We had both silent sustained reading and shared reading in class. Sometimes, students read as homework and they reported in class. We had group discussions if we had read the same text.
10 min.	Break	These were usually restroom breaks because students returned soon to the classroom and during this time we had informal talks about different topics. We often shared a snack.
20 min.	Writing workshop	These were different writing tasks such as written reports on readings, students' experiences in the US, and students' autobiographies.
5-10 min.	Assigning homework	This happened sometimes at the beginning of class and some other times at the end of class depending on students' attendance and the type of assignment.

Table 1: Typical Class Segments

The table above illustrates the segments of a typical day of class. The time we spent on each class segment, as shown in the chart below, was flexible.

Sometimes class segments took longer or shorter periods of time; at other times one or two were eliminated. For example, if students were not ready to do their presentations, we spent more time on the reading/writing workshop. Also, we did not always have mini-lessons because they were not required or they did not fit into what we were doing and instead students took longer doing presentations or

practicing reading and writing. Time spent on the different class segments changed according to class events, students' attendance and punctuality, and the circumstances at LI.

Due to the changing class environment, describing a complete week of classes will illustrate the continuation of ideas and class activities. It will help form a clearer picture of what classes looked like while we were trying to follow our class routine and at the same time cope with uncertainty and the unstable circumstances of the program. The description will also help to present class events in context. In the following pages, the description of a complete week of classes will appear uninterrupted. Relevant class events will appear in bold type and will be explored in further detail after the description. The purpose is to highlight the pedagogical implications of these events.

Monday - September 22, 2003

6:15 p.m.

Getting started... I arrived at LI. I greeted the people at the reception desk and I was kind of expecting to hear from them that something was going to be different or wrong tonight. However, they did not say anything. I went to my classroom to get ready for class. I set up the tape recorder, picked up the folder for attendance, and checked my notes for the assignments and tonight's lesson plan. When I was picking up the attendance folder from my mailbox I saw a letter on top of the folder and I felt like... here we go... this is it! This was the weird part I was expecting to start the week with... it was a letter from the new student coordinator. She was informing us that in the next month we would start doing the students' progress reports using a different form and following a list of objectives that LI was trying to adopt in order to regulate and standardize the classes with the state requirements for English literacy programs.

6:30 p.m.

I saw Sylvie, the other ESL 3 instructor, arriving. Our classrooms are next to each other. She was in a hurry for class. She saw me and I thought she was going to say hello but she didn't. I thought she should be thankful that I substituted for her last week and I was at least expecting her to greet me. She ran to her classroom with the attendance folder in her hands and she did not look at me. Whatever! I did what I did because of the students, not because of her. It would have been nice to become friends, but the volunteers at LI did not really want to make friends with their colleagues. At least that was my impression. We never spoke; we did not share our teaching experiences or anything like that. The class I was teaching, the work the students and I did, and our classroom itself functioned as if it were an island.

6:35 p.m.

Class started with Cesar, Arturo, Flora, and Pablo. The first thing we did was to check in and make announcements. I was the first one to start. I told the students about my tragedy trying to go to the movies last Friday. The friend that went to the movies with me hit another car that was parked at the parking lot because he did not look behind when he was going in reverse. I also announced that Federico wouldn't be with us in class this week because he had to put in some extra time at work. He called me at home last night to inform me about that.

Next, students took turns talking. As students reported what they did for the weekend, we reviewed pronunciation of irregular verbs in the past tense. Arturo said he did not do anything of importance. Pablo worked a lot and he could not spend much time with Flora and their child. Flora went to church on Sunday. Cesar also worked a lot. He called me on the phone because he had lost his assignment and he asked me for instructions on how to do it.

6:50 p.m.

As part of the announcements section of class, Pablo brought postcards with landscapes of Acapulco because that was his birthplace. He showed the postcards to all of us and then he explained each of them. He explained about the divers, "los clavadistas," and how they dive into the water from the top of a cliff into the ocean and the tourists give them money. Listening to Pablo's presentation about Acapulco was interesting because only he and Cesar had been there. The rest of us did not know much about the attractions in Acapulco. It was Pablo's initiative to do this mini-presentation about Acapulco. We asked him questions about his place

of birth and he answered them with Cesar's help. Next, Pablo put his postcards on the bulletin board in the classroom.

7:05 p.m.

Following Pablo's presentation, we had a conversation about their thoughts about how to arrange the classroom. Tonight was our sixth class meeting. The conversation did not last more than 5 minutes because students were still thinking about what to do.

7:10 p.m.

Next, Arturo presented his **photo-collage**. He talked about Alex Lora, his favorite rock singer, and Shakira. He loves motorcycles, and he used to have one in Mexico. In his photo-collage, he also had pictures of friends and girls meaning he loves making friends and meeting girls. While listening to students' presentations of the photo-collage project, it was interesting to hear from them what they miss about their country of origin. They always make reference to something from their past in Mexico, and there is always a nostalgic tone into what they say. Even though they feel they have a better life here in the USA, they always mention what they used to have in Mexico that they lost when they came here.

The second student to present his photo-collage was Pablo. He had a picture of an amusement park because he has a two-year old daughter. His daughter is very important in his life. Pablo also talked about his family. He has ten brothers and three sisters. In his free time he plays soccer and goes swimming. He did not mention anything about his present job because he does not like it. In the past, he was a cook at an Italian restaurant and also at a Chinese restaurant.

The third student to present her photo-collage was Flora. She had a picture of a river because she said she likes cooking by the river and going on trips to the river with her family. She works as a cook and she loves cooking. Her specialties are salads, beef, and Mexican food. She explained about the type of food she cooks at the hotel where she works.

Since both of them are good cooks, I asked Pablo and Flora to think of recipes they would like to teach us how to cook. We talked about food for some minutes. We talked about typical food in Mexico and Colombia.

Arturo took advantage of the moment and he announced that his aunt makes tamales every Friday for sale. We talked about the differences between Mexican tamales and Colombian tamales. I said I wanted to try Mexican tamales, and I offered to give Arturo some money to buy some for me next week.

7:40 p.m.

We took a ten-minute break. I asked Flora how she was feeling in class and she told me an interesting story about her uneasiness and preoccupation about being placed in my class. It was a confusing process but she feels more settled now that she has attended our class for the fifth time.

7:50 p.m.

The next activity was to read the make-believe postcards the students were supposed to have written for homework (see Appendix J). Students took turns reading their assignments and I corrected their mistakes after they had finished reading. I wrote the words that were problematic for them on the blackboard.

8:10 p.m.

Then, we had the **reading workshop**; as usual, the students went to the library to choose something to read and report orally afterwards what they had read. We had a good discussion of the readings. This activity is much easier for the students to do now that they have done it several times. The students used the “Map It Out Strategy” handout whenever they read something to report later to class (see Appendix I).

8:30 p.m.

I made sure everybody knew what his/her assignment was for the next meeting and the upcoming class activities. Then, the students left.

8:50 p.m.

I left the literacy center.

Some of my routines before leaving the center included the following: (1) filling in the LI form to explain what the lesson plan was about, (2) making photocopies of this form and putting one copy inside the folder of each students who had attended class that day, (3) marking students’ attendance in the class roster provided by LI, (4) arranging the classroom, keeping in mind that other teachers would be using the same classroom the next day, and (5) collecting my supplies and class material.

Wednesday - September 24, 2003

6:20 p.m.

I arrived at LI and I went to my classroom immediately. I turned on the lights and arranged the classroom a little bit. Our magazines and materials for class were on the floor. I always leave them on the table and I find them on the floor whenever I come back to teach class. I got ready to

receive students. I set up the tape recorder, I picked up the folder for attendance, and I checked my notes for the class to remember what the students' assignments and the lesson plan were for tonight.

6:35 p.m.

Cesar was the first student to arrive. He said hello and he sat down at the usual place. I greeted him and I mentioned having seen him a couple of times watching videos in the computer room. Then, I asked what he was watching. He said he was watching a video from his job "Success Started." It is a training course on how to motivate yourself when sales are not going well. Later in class he would expand about that idea and his job. After this, I gave him back his dialogue journal. He smiled and he started reading it.

6:40 p.m.

Arturo arrived and he greeted us. I asked him if he was ready to present about Alex Lora and he said he was. I also asked him about the documents he wanted me to help him read. He showed me the documents and we agreed we were going to discuss them during the break or after class. It was not going to take much time but it was personal business and I wanted him to have privacy when talking to me about the issue and when discussing the information in the documents. Arturo had called me over the telephone last night and he had told me a little about a car accident he had last year. He recently received some legal documents regarding that and those were the documents he wanted me to help him read.

6:45 p.m.

Flora and Pablo arrived. They were late to class, again. Last time they **gave me a ride home**, they told me it was difficult for them to arrive on time because they have a little daughter and they need to pick her up and leave her with the babysitter before going to class. They both work from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. when they have to go to class. The rest of the week they work from 8:00 a.m. to 6:30 or 7:00 p.m. As always, they knocked at the door and said their hellos. They were very excited because they brought Mexican tamales for all of us to eat during the break. It was funny because Flora asked me in Spanish: "Adivine qué traemos para comer hoy?" ("Guess what we brought to eat today?") And I answered: "¡¡¡Tamales mexicanos!!!" ("Mexican tamales!") I was joking! Flora laughed and I asked her why she was laughing. Then, she replied: "Sí, pues!" (Of course!) It was a surprise for me. I did not think I was guessing right. We had talked about the differences between Mexican tamales and Colombian tamales in the previous class. However, I didn't think we were

going to actually eat **Mexican tamales in class** so soon. After this short conversation in Spanish, we switched to English.

I asked the class what time we wanted to have a break to eat our tamales and some people said 7:30 and others said 7:50. So, we agreed on 7:50 p.m.

Tonight, I brought a disposable camera to class to take pictures of the students.

6:55 p.m.

I asked who wanted to take the pictures and Flora volunteered to do it.

While she was doing, that Cesar left the classroom. When he came back he had a digital camera and plugged it in to his cell-phone and he also took pictures because he also wanted to have pictures of us.

We continued with the announcements. I announced the Oscar de León concert in October and I also wrote the address of a Colombian restaurant we had talked about previously on the blackboard.

Cesar told the class that he is probably going to Chicago for the week of October 9th. His company is awarding a week of vacation to the employees who sell the most and he is planning to win this prize. Cesar works for a company that sells natural products to help people lose weight. He told us he was convinced of the effectiveness of the products he sells because he tried them and he lost about 25 pounds in two months. He also started talking about the video he was watching in the orientation room. He had it on the table and he explained it was a kind of workshop for increasing your self-esteem and motivation to work. Cesar explained that sometimes sales were very good but some other times he did not sell anything. He said the video is good to help keep him motivated to continue selling, to continue working. He said we should watch the video in class. I suggested that he prepare a portion of it and share it with us in a future class. He said he was going to think about it. He talked more about the benefits of his job. He can work part-time or full-time as he wishes and it is the bridge to looking for a permanent job. His classmates and I asked him questions about how he started working at that company and his duties in the company. Cesar made a joke in Spanish about the profits at his job: “Esa es la vida del pato... a veces el pato nada y veces ni agua bebe!” (“That is the duck’s life... sometimes the duck swims in the water and other times the duck does not even have water to drink!”) All of us laughed at his joke. Then, he continued talking in English: “Sometimes I sell \$850 in a day and some other days I don’t sell nothing.” I added to the conversation that I believe you need to have good selling skills in order to be a successful salesman. However, Cesar did not agree with me on that.

(Using code-switching) he explained: “The company prepares you with a

workshop for a month to *llegar a ser* (become) a good salesman. It doesn't matter if you know how to read or not." Then he said in Spanish: "Ahí hay una señora que no sabe leer ni escribir y vende mucho..." ("There is a lady who does not know how to read and write and she sells a lot...") Pablo interrupted him in English and said he agreed with me about the necessity of good selling skills. I talked about my experience with sales and how terrible I am at selling or persuading people to buy things. I do not have the patience to sell anything. Carlos said it was not difficult for him to do. He continued talking in English and sometimes switched to Spanish when he did not know the words. He explained one should be self-confident in order to become a good salesman. I wrote on the blackboard words like "true," "truth," "trust," "self-esteem," and "patience" to explain the difference in meaning, use, and pronunciation.

7:15 p.m.

Arturo, Flora, and Pablo said they did not have anything to announce or share with the class tonight. Their week has been a regular week so far. However, I noticed that Flora put a **hammer, two nails**, and a string on the table, next to her notebook. I asked her what that was about and she said it was her idea in order to hang the magazines that Federico brought. I said it was a very good idea and I told her to go ahead and do what she had in mind. She, and her classmates as well, were surprised to hear my words. Everybody was in class and we were going to interrupt the other classes if we hammered on the wall. Since I insisted that she do it, Pablo helped her and everybody hung the magazines on the string when it was set on the wall.

Next, I returned Arturo, Flora, and Pablo's dialogue journals and I asked for homework. Arturo said he was ready to present on Alex Lora. Flora and Pablo had written two recipes in English they wanted to share with us, and Cesar turned in his journal entry.

7:25 p.m.

Flora and Pablo wrote their recipes on the blackboard. Flora used one half of the blackboard and Pablo used the other half. **Flora's recipe** was "ranch steak" and **Pablo's** was "Chinese fried rice." Arturo and Cesar copied the recipes. They did not ask questions about the preparation process. I asked a couple of questions and elicited questions from Arturo and Cesar. We used Cesar's dictionary to check the spelling of two words. I asked Cesar and Arturo to help Flora and Pablo correct their spelling mistakes.

Arturo stood up in front of the class with his notebook and started doing his presentation about Alex Lora. He brought a CD and he played it to the

class. I noticed he prepared a written report in his notebook in order to be able to present the information. I was the only one who did not know anything about this Mexican singer. I asked Arturo and Cesar some questions, and Flora and Pablo **helped them answer** my questions. This was nice because Arturo did not feel like he was doing his presentation alone. He seems to be a little shy speaking English in front of the class, but he did a good job. We had a discussion about the word “chilango” because I asked about its meaning and the students worked together to reconstruct a definition for me. They discussed the meaning of the terms “chicano,” “pocho,” and “chilango.”

7:50 p.m.

We stopped for a break. Cesar and Arturo went to the kitchen to heat the tamales, and Flora and Pablo stayed in the classroom with me. **Arturo offered to buy sodas** for all of us. I wanted a Diet Coke because I knew they did not have water in the vending machine in the kitchen. However, there was not Diet Coke. Then, I asked Arturo to share his regular Coke with me because I just wanted a sip. Flora asked me why I did not want to drink an entire Coke and I told her I was doing the Weight Watcher’s diet. I explained to her how it works and she said she would like me to share my copies of the glossary of the system of food points so she could try it. She talked about her work and how people eat a lot in the kitchen because they try each other’s dishes and culinary creations. She has gained weight lately and she would like to lose some. The 10-minute break became a 20-minute break because we ate and we told each other stories. We spoke half in English and half in Spanish.

8:10 p.m.

Students continued working on the writing of their **autobiographies**.

8:30 p.m.

We discussed everybody’s assignment for next time. Arturo, Flora, and Pablo will write their bluebook entries, and Cesar will prepare an oral presentation for next time. He will present on **health and nutrition** because that is a topic very related to what he does at his work. Finally, the students left, but Arturo stayed. I helped him understand the documents about the payments he has to make in order to settle the dispute for the car accidents he had last year. It did not take us long. He was glad I helped him understand the document and I was glad he trusted me enough to let me know about such a private matter. We also wrote a short letter for him to send in response to the documents.

8:50 p.m. I left the literacy center.

Exploration of Class Events

If the reader goes back to compare and contrast the description of both classes a typical class at the literacy center and our class, s/he will notice some differences in the structure and development of both classes. In the following pages, I will focus on the class I taught and I will present a detailed explanation of the different events that took place in our ESL-3 literacy class. Of course I am using my professional expertise while choosing what class events to address here. The reader might see and find other events in my description that would like to explore; however, I decided to present the events I chose as divided into three big categories: Planned class activity, unexpected critical events, and students' contributions. The category "planned class activity" refers to class events that were planned in advance by me, the teacher of the class. I will explain why these class events are relevant. The category "unexpected critical events" refers to class events that were not planned ahead and that I identified as important events in the progression of the class and the students' learning. I identified these critical events in the data in the anecdotal records, the researcher's log, student-interviews, and the students' class evaluations. The category "students' contributions" refers to class events that show students' involvement and investment in the class. In the table below, I summarize the class events that I will address in the following pages.

Planned Class Activity	Unexpected Critical Events	Students' Contributions
Getting started and Announcements	Flora's hammer and nails	Students' voluntary class presentations and topics
Photocollage and Reading workshop	Arturo's documents about his car accident	Students helping each other while presenting a topic
Students' autobiography	Library fieldtrip	Mexican tamales and sodas
Use of code- switching	Last class meeting	Giving me a ride home

Table 2: Relevant Class Events

Planned Class Activity

About **getting started and announcements**, these were two very important class segments because it was at these moments that we set the tone of the class and we made decisions on class activities and learning experiences. During **the announcements** portion of class the students shared their daily life concerns, made suggestions, considered new ideas for the class, and participated in spontaneous collaboration. The announcements also helped us grow as a community because we could learn more about each other and we released some stress while sharing whatever problems and difficulties we had in our daily lives. People talked about topics that were of common interest such as work, family, the weather, the news, upcoming social events, general concerns, and worries. During this portion of class, the students' anxiety (Horwitz, 1995) and affective filter

(Krashen & Terrel, 1983) lowered down to a minimum and therefore it was a good way to start class. It is common knowledge that the affective filter is an imaginary wall that is placed between a learner and language input; if the filter is up, the learner is blocking out input. The filter is up when anxiety is high, self-esteem is low, or motivation is low. Hence, low-anxiety classes are better suited for language acquisition (Horwitz, 1995; Krashen & Terrel, 1983). In sum, the announcements section of class served as a springboard to set up a safe atmosphere in our classroom and to unveil potential class discussion topics and learning ideas.

The photo-collage activity and the **students' autobiography** were two of the many writing activities the students did during the term in order to make the connection between their personal lives and developing their language skills. These activities were two long-term writing projects that served as a means to get to know more about the students as individuals (Freeman & Freeman, 2001). The activities were flexible enough to allow the students to work at their own pace but were challenging enough to let them use their language skills and still learn more. Most of the activities and processes we explored in our class were based on the notion of ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development), the difference between what a learner can do with help and what he or she can do without help (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, the information unveiled by Flora and Pablo presenting their

photo-collage allowed us to know that both of them had experience working as cooks. Therefore, it was reasonable to ask them to do some writing using their knowledge about cooking and also teach us how to prepare something new to us. As a result, they wrote and shared with us the recipes for ranch steak and Chinese fried rice.

The **reading workshop** segment of class was very important in terms of language development and learning. Sometimes, I chose the reading topics, but it was usually the students who chose what to read. At the beginning of the term they chose very short and easy to read texts; however, as our class evolved they started choosing more complex, longer readings. We did both silent sustained reading and shared reading. We usually had group discussions to share what we had learned from the readings. The students had the opportunity to develop reading strategies as well as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar learning strategies. As illustrated in Appendix I, the students used a worksheet in order to report on their reading more efficiently. This worksheet served as guidance to the students to help them keep focused on the reading and to facilitate the task of reporting what they had read to the rest of the class.

Code switching was used a lot in our class by all of us. When Cesar explained to us what his job was about, he did not know some of the words in

English. Thus, he used Spanish and English alternately as needed in order to get his message across. For example, in the class description provided above, Cesar made a joke in Spanish about the profits at his job: “Esa es la vida del pato... a veces el pato nada y veces ni agua bebe!” (“That is the duck’s life... sometimes the duck swims in fresh water and other times the duck does not even have water to drink!”) Then, he continued talking in English: “Sometimes I sell \$850 in a day and some other days I don’t sell nothing.” What he was doing was to add emphasis to his talk by using a phrase in Spanish and then going back to English. Sometimes, Cesar just used a word or two in Spanish in his sentences. For instance, when he explained: “The company prepares you with a workshop for a month to *llegar a ser* [to become] a good salesman.” This practice was very common in our classroom.

The type of code switching we used was intrasentential code switching. Intrasentential code switching implies switching at the clause, phrase level, or at word level with no morphological adaptations (Hammink, 2000). As bilingual speakers we had a positive view of the use of code switching in our classroom. As bilingual people, we made use of all language resources we had available (Spanish and English in this case). Hammink (2000) describes intrasentential code switching as a sophisticated ability requiring adequate knowledge about the two grammars being switched. The purpose of using code switching in our class interactions was to help communication flow and avoid interruption of ideas.

Code switching was viewed from the perspective of providing a linguistic advantage rather than an obstruction to communication and it provided us an opportunity for language development (Skiba, 1997). We used code switching as a socio-linguistic tool and as a way to help us lower the affective filter.

Unexpected Critical Events

Critical events are students' actions or class episodes, incidents, and experiences that produced a change in the students' attitude and behavior (Whitmore & Crowell, 1994). In other words, these events are critical because they produce a change in the dynamics of the classroom and the students' behavior from that point on. As explained in Chapter 3, a critical event involves an awakening that provokes a change in students' attitude and behavior (Whitmore & Crowell, 1994). Flora brought a **hammer, a string, and nails** to class in order to contribute to the arrangement of our classroom. This was a critical event because Flora's idea proved her understanding of the meaning of arranging the classroom and adapting it to our learning/teaching needs. She demonstrated that arranging the classroom did not mean "decorating" the classroom or spending a lot of money. A thoughtful idea like providing a mechanism to display our reading materials was the answer to use our resources in an efficient manner. Before Flora's idea the students were passively waiting for me to make the changes and adjustments in the classroom. After her idea of

hanging up the class reading materials on a string, Flora inspired her fellow classmates to come up with practical ideas in order to better equip the learning environment (e.g., in another class meeting a student brought a bookshelf, another student brought index cards to post vocabulary words, etc.).

About **Arturo's documents**, he showed his trust in me when he asked for my help to resolve a personal difficulty he had with a legal document. He knew he could count on my help. He also realized that his English class was the appropriate place to look for help in order to solve a real life problem directly related to language usage.

Field trip to the public library: Federico worked as a volunteer at a public library, and he suggested that we go there to obtain library cards. So, on October 29, 2003, we went to that library during class time. The library card gave the students access to the material and services available through the 22 local public libraries. The following is what I noted in the anecdotal records of the class:

Once at the library, Federico talked to the woman in charge of issuing the library cards... It was really nice to see Federico playing the role of the leader of the class. He works as a volunteer at this library. I acknowledged him as the expert tonight and I let him take charge. All of us filled in the application form and we immediately received a library card that gives access to service at the 22 public libraries of our city. We were given a tour of the different sections of the library and we were also instructed on the different services available through the library. The students seemed surprised to find out how easy and convenient it was for them to start using all these libraries... The experience as a whole was very positive

because the students realized that I was going to support all their good ideas... (October 29, 2003). Our field trip to the public library was in response to a discussion we had had in class a week before. Cesar, another student in our class, was complaining about not being able to use the resources in the library at LI. Federico asked him why he did not use another library, maybe the one in his own neighborhood. Cesar answered that he did not know how to do that. Federico told us that he was a volunteer at a public library and he knew that anybody with a library card could have access to the services offered at different public libraries in the city. Then, Federico suggested that we go to his library and request a card and I supported his idea immediately. His assignment was to serve as our guide to obtain the library card. In sum, this is a critical event because students realized that their teacher was listening to their suggestions and fulfilling her promises from the beginning of the course. Also, I could confirm the idea I had before about the mismatch in description of the characteristics of the students at LI.

It is a common believe to think that these students are illiterate; however, one of the students in my class was a volunteer at a public library. This makes a point while saying that as teachers we should get to know our students better and let them contribute and enrich our classes. Deficit thinking ideology (Valdés, 1996) does not help much when coming to use students' resources in curriculum development. Before this event the students did not believe that I was going to let them actually carry out their suggestions doing learning activities outside the

classroom. After this fieldtrip other students suggested more outside activities related to learning and practicing their English. For example, Cesar invited the group to attend a workshop on nutrition (delivered in English) sponsored by his company.

Last class meeting: For our last meeting as a group, all of us brought food in order to share it, evaluate the class as a group, and have a nice time while saying our goodbyes. I prepared a Power Point presentation with topics to discuss and evaluate what had happened during the course. The last day of class turned into a “critical event” in itself because the discussion we had that day helped in the development of future events. It was time for all of us to move on. I had to start working on the next stage of the study, writing the dissertation document. The students had to examine their learning experiences up to that point and they had to establish new goals in order to continue with their learning. They had to get used to the idea of having a new teacher and classmates. The students took the literacy program standardized test in order to be placed in a new course for the next term and they went on vacation for the Christmas break on December 15, 2003. They had three weeks off and during that time I talked to them at least once because they called me at home or because I interviewed them for the last time. The first week of classes in January, I received three telephone calls, one from Pablo, another from Flora, and another from Federico.

Pablo was the first one to communicate with me on Monday, January 12, 2004. He called me over the telephone at night, right after he arrived home from class. He wanted to find out what I was doing and to tell me about his new class. He was placed in ESL 4. We talked for thirty minutes and he also told me about his vacation time. Pablo expressed his feelings about the new group. He said it was a different group in the sense that they were not as close as we used to be and his teacher was different as well. She was not bilingual and of course her methodology to approach teaching differed from what we used to do in our class. However, Pablo told me he was willing to try to adjust to the new situation.

Flora called me on Wednesday of that same week. She wanted to complain about the teaching style of her new teacher and me quitting my job at the literacy center. We talked for fifty minutes and she told me that she was asked to stay for another term in ESL 3. She was in a new group where she did not know anybody. Flora attended this class for three weeks and then she quit the program, as she informed me in another telephone conversation on March 23, 2004. Apparently, she does not have a person to take care of her little daughter anymore. Flora and her husband (Pablo) decided that it was better for him to continue attending the literacy center because he needs to use English at his job more than Flora and therefore, he needs to continue advancing in the language. His job depends on it, whereas Flora can do her job efficiently with the English she already knows. Flora and Pablo's situation illustrate the lack of support that

many parents interested in pursuing ESL instruction go through (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Valdés, 1996).

Federico called me over the telephone on January 13, 2004. He told me about his disappointment when he realized he had not been promoted to ESL 4 but was placed in ESL 3 again and for the fourth time. When he was taking the class with me it was his third time taking ESL 3. He said that his new teacher was a very inexperienced instructor. She did not seem to have a plan for the class and he missed the structure we used to have in our class with routines that we followed at every meeting. Three weeks later, Federico informed me that he had gotten a new instructor and he had decided not to attend the literacy center as often as he used to. He started attending an after school English program that his son's school is offering and he also continued attending tutoring hours with a volunteer at the library where he works.

On February 16, 2004, I sent a letter in English through regular mail to Richard, Arturo, Flora, Pablo and Federico as part of a promise I made the last day of classes back in December. In the letter I told them about my activities during Christmas and my new routine teaching. I also asked them a few questions. The format of the letter was very similar to our letters in the dialogue journal. As a result, Flora gave me a call on February 25, and Federico sent me a letter written in English on March 21. Up till now, students continue calling me over the telephone. They talk to me on the telephone about twice a month.

Students' Contributions

The **students' voluntary class presentations and the topics they chose** for the presentations illustrate their engagement in the class. Pablo's initiative to present about his hometown and share his knowledge about Acapulco was his spontaneous contribution to class. Flora and Pablo also shared their favorite recipes with their classmates. Arturo presented on Alex Lora who is a Mexican singer of Spanish Rock and his favorite rock star. In the same vein, Cesar prepared an oral presentation for class about health and nutrition because it was a topic closely related to his job. Most of the time, the topics guiding class discussions were familiar to the students and they could make use of their ZPD in order to further develop their language skills while at the same time contributing to the knowledge base of the class. Class topics and discussions unfolded as students revealed their talents, funds of knowledge (Moll & Ruiz, 2002; Gonzales et al., 1995; Moll et al., 1992), and skills through class interactions.

About **students helping each other in class**, when the students made their individual presentations, we all helped the presenter do his/her talk. We were all learners helping each other succeed. We were always trying to help and collaborate with each other because we envisioned ourselves as members of a community working towards similar and shared learning goals. Class activities and assignments captured different student interests and goals, and encouraged

students to assess what was learned. I believe that in collaborative classrooms, teachers share authority with students, encourage students' use of their own knowledge, ensure that students share their knowledge and their learning strategies, engage in mutually respectful relationships with students, and model a focus on high levels of understanding (Tinzmann et al., 1990).

About the **Mexican tamales** that Flora and Pablo brought to class, food served as a way to make us become closer through learning about each other, and it provided room for dialogue and the sharing of ideas and experiences in an informal way. Food helped us become more engaged as a group and it gave us a sense of community as when Flora and Pablo brought Mexican tamales to class. That day we told stories to each other and we used both languages, Spanish and English, back and forth. Sharing food was also a means for me as the teacher of the class to learn more about the students so that classroom activities related most appropriately to the adult learners, their daily lives and needs (Ullman & Becker, 1997). Through dialogue and interaction, curriculum objectives came to life (Tinzmann et al., 1990).

The fact that **students gave me rides home** was a sign of how reciprocity worked between us. It is said that: "...qualitative researchers need to give participants something in return for their time, effort, cooperation, and just tolerating their extended presence..." (Ary et al., 2002, p. 438); however, I

believe this concept can also work the other way around. I was a volunteer English instructor and the students did not pay anything for attending class. I was providing them a service and they reciprocated by providing me other services, information, collaboration, and transportation, in return. While making this statement, I may agree with the argument of feminist approaches suggesting that a more intimate reciprocity takes place in the research relationship through sharing information and exchanging services (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The students helped me teach the class many times and I was a learner many times also. We collaborated with each other helping ourselves accomplish our goals and do our work.

Tensions and Challenges

Up to this point everything sounds perfect and the class I taught looks like a wonderful learning environment. Well that is not the whole picture. The students and I went through difficult moments while negotiating the curriculum and attempting to find common ground where everybody's interests were satisfied. First of all, we were surrounded by the chaos governing LI. Important dates, events, cancellations, and messages arrived late to us most of the time. The placement exam procedures and the way the students were assigned to a certain class level was confusing and frustrating for the students and the instructors (see the next chapter for further details on this). The program evaluation form that the students were supposed to fill out every month became a routinely thing to do and the students were tired of doing it. It had lost its purpose a long time ago. I was

often asked to substitute for other teachers and as a result I had to put the two groups together in order to teach the class whenever I was asked to do that.

These are some examples to illustrate the outside environment we dealt with every night that we attended class at LI. Second, the students' attendance and punctuality were always problematic. We rarely started class on time. Class routines and activities varied depending on these two factors. It was frustrating many times for me as the instructor and for the students who were on time and ready to follow our class routine and assignments. Some times the students did not have their assignments for class and they had very good excuses such as extra time at work, children care, sickness, family issues, tiredness, lack of time, or confusion since many of the class activities were new to them.

Third, at the very beginning of class, some of the students abused the use of Spanish in class. The classmates and I had to call their attention three or four times during the announcements segment of class and remind them that the primary purpose of the class was to develop their second language, English. Some other times students abused knowing that our class routines were flexible and were not ready for class without a good excuse. The inquiry cycles project was a major class activity that can help illustrate in detail many of the complexities and the different factors embedded in the development of the curriculum.

Even though I knew how inquiry cycles worked in theory, this was the first time I implemented them in a class. I read and discussed about inquiry cycles with some graduate classmates in the ESL methods class I had taken two years ago. However, my classmates and I did not face any challenges while "proposing on paper" what the inquiry cycle could look like in an ESL class or the procedures we would follow while implementing them in a real classroom. The following paragraphs describe some of the challenges my students and I at LI faced when we used inquiry cycles as a means to develop language learning.

On the second week of classes, I introduced the inquiry cycle to the students. I asked them to think of a question they would like to answer. In order to illustrate the type of questions I was expecting them to come up with, I shared with them some of the questions I had when I first moved in to the U.S. I wrote the following in the anecdotal records.

I shared with the students how I felt when I just arrived in the U.S. and how I had many questions in my mind because everything was new to me. I also explained how I asked myself questions about what was around me in my daily routine because that is what we humans do. One of my questions was why everybody in this city had a car if there was public transportation available to everyone. I also wondered about why there were so many squirrels in my neighborhood and why people did not go home to have lunch. I explained to the students how I found out answers to many of my questions by talking to people that have lived here longer than me or who were born here and how while on that process of finding answers new questions aroused. Next, I prompted the students to think of possible topics of inquiry, the questions they already had and which ones were appealing to them so that they felt motivated to invest time finding answers (September 8, 2003).

As stated in the previous paragraph, I did not write down my sample questions on the blackboard or in a handout for the students. I just mentioned the topics that troubled me when I arrived in the U. S. Moreover, I did not ask the students to write down their ideas and possible questions. Everything was left on the air. Since our class was an intermediate English class (ESL 3) and since the students were between 20 and 45 years old, I assumed they knew how to formulate a question and had an understanding of what kinds of questions were right for our class. This was the biggest mistake I made; I assumed too many things. The next

mistake I made was to let the students think that any question and any topic was going to work fine for the purposes of the inquiry cycle. I asked them to think of topics and questions and bring them to class next time. It was after they had given thought to these issues that I discussed with the students what “a good question” needed to encompass. As I noted in the anecdotal records, on the next class,

Some of the students commented on the topics they would like to investigate (racism, education, vocabulary strategies). Then, I asked the students what they thought a good question was. I took notes on the blackboard about their comments. I also gave them a handout explaining what I thought the characteristics of a good question for the purposes of our class were. The handout provided blank lines for the students to write down their definitions and characteristics for a question to be a good question. After this discussion, I delivered a 10-minute mini-lesson on the structure to be followed in order to make questions in English. Finally, I asked the student to take some time to write down their questions for the inquiry cycle. However, after the long discussion we had on what a good question was; the students started asking questions showing they were confused. Therefore, we started discussing again about what the question for the inquiry cycle should accomplish. (September 10, 2003).

There was already a mismatch of information and expectations when I guided the discussion about what type of questions were “good” for the purposes of our class and the students’ language learning development. To add to the confusion, I gave a brief mini-lesson on how to formulate questions in English because according to my assumptions, students in the ESL 3 level already know how to ask questions in English. Therefore, they did not need much explanation on the topic and of course they were not going to have any difficulties while writing down their questions. My impatience to have the students formulating “the right” questions

to get the inquiry cycle process started was obvious. Nevertheless, I did not seem to realize it and I continued to blame it on the students.

I noticed, as I circulated among students, that they were writing questions that were too general, too broad, about unfamiliar topics, or too abstract. Some of the students had three or four questions and they could not decide which one they wanted to pursue. Another student could not think of anything interesting to ask.

I tried not to despair but it was hard. I could not understand why it was so difficult for the students to come up with “a good” question. I did not think it was going to be that difficult for them. As I saw the students struggling to find the question they wanted to investigate I decided to let them take the handout home and give it more thought on their own. I told the students to take their time and re-read the class handout and then bring their question ready for the next class (Anecdotal records September 10, 2003).

The students needed more time to first, understand the concept and the purpose of “inquiry cycles” and second, to experiment formulating questions without having the pressure of thinking and formulating “the question” for the project. However, I did not give them that time they needed and they were required to bring their question ready for next class. As a result, they handed in questions that were not good for the purposes of the class or the project with many grammar problems and everybody started to feel frustrated. The students were confused about their teacher’s expectations and I was exhausted trying to make them understand what the project was about.

The students turned in their questions for the inquiry cycle today. However, none of the questions seem to be researchable or practical for

the purposes of the class or the project. I will have to explain every thing again and we will have to take class time to actually help each other formulate the questions. I am thinking about how I am going to let them know that they need to give it more thought. It is kind of difficult to tell an adult that you think that s/he does not know how to ask questions (Researcher's log September 17, 2003).

It took us two more weeks to finally arrive at an agreement on what questions to pursue in order to continue working on the inquiry cycles project. This explains why it took us a month to decide on formulating "the question." The topics chosen by the students were: racism, terrorism, cancer, nutrition, and parenting.

The next step, after formulating the questions, was to identify sources to gather information in order to find answers to the students' questions. This step was not as problematic as the previous one. However, some of the students started to feel overwhelmed with the amount of information they found when looking for written material that could help them answer their questions. They started getting lost and feeling confused. Through the second series of interviews, I learned that again there was a mismatch in expectations between us. The following are excerpts of the second series of interviews that illustrate the students' opinion about the inquiry cycle:

Interview with Pablo

The inquiry cycle is a good idea but difficult to do... 'cause we don't have the ability for find the answers or we don't have ability to ask questions...Because I try to find the answer but sometimes I think about you. What you will think about the answer. This is the right answer or it doesn't go with the question ... and what if you don't like my answer? Because you are waiting for me to give an important answer. What if the answer is wrong? (October 29, 2003)

Interview with Arturo

The inquiry cycle? Oh, it's good homework, but it's hard because... it's when you looking for the answer to the question. The question one asks... and you expect an important answer, a report with important information... Because that's what you expect, no? ... pues... I've been looking for information on Martin Luther King. I made copies... this is the first time I do this project, it is confusing and I make it more complicated myself... but I'm trying, I'm trying... (November 2, 2003)

Interview with Federico

El proyecto de la pregunta es un ejercicio diferente de lo tradicional. No hay repeticion y es interesante porque es algo nuevo y es una forma diferente de aprender... Para los compañeros ha sido complicado... es lo que he visto... porque nuestro nivel de lengua no es el mismo. Estamos disperejos... Creo que usted debe volver a repetir el objetivo del proyecto. Usted nos dio opción de escoger un tema de interés personal, nadie nos obligó a que tema investigar.... pero no sé porque a ellos se les ha hecho tan difícil. Tal vez están confundidos... (October 27, 2003)

Translation:

The inquiry cycle project is not traditional it's different. There is no repetition and is interesting because it's new and it's a different way of learning... It has been complicated for my classmates... that's what I've observed... because our language level is not the same. We are at different levels... i think you should repeat the objective of the project again. You gave us the opportunity to choose a topic of our personal interest, nobody imposed on us what topic to investigate... but I don't know why it's been so difficult for them. Maybe they are confused...

By mid October, students informally reported in class what they were doing and what decisions they were making in order to keep focused on their topics and their questions. The first report in order to share their findings and their learning experiences took place on November 3, 2003. The following is an excerpt from my notes in the researcher's log:

Students presented their first report on the inquiry cycle tonight. They are doing great even though they are having trouble keeping focused on answering their questions. It was amazing to see how responsible of their assignments they have become. Tonight, students took turns to present to the class what they have done for their inquiry cycles so far. It was evident that they prepared their presentations carefully. However, I am concerned about two things after listening to the students' presentations: 1) they are using vocabulary very specific to their topics that they do not know yet, and 2) some of the students have gathered too much information and there is the risk that they get lost into it without being able to feel satisfied when preparing their final reports (Researcher's log – Nov. 3, 2003).

Each student received feedback from their classmates and me on the work they still have to do in order to finish the project. I gave them advice on how to study and prepare the specific vocabulary they will be using when presenting their topics next time. I also gave them advice to help them keep focused on answering their questions and keeping up with the purposes of the inquiry cycle process.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the students and I went through difficult moments while negotiating the curriculum and attempting to find common ground where everybody's interests were satisfied. Next, I am going to describe a challenging situation I had to deal with while implementing the study. On November 3, 2003, two new students were added to our classroom, Richard and Alex. By this time, we had already been working together in our class for two months. Alex Martinez attended three classes in a row. During the week and a half he attended our class, he got access to my personal information in class and through the dialogue journal. This short time was enough for him to get to know that our group worked as a community where everybody helped everybody. For

example, he found out that his classmates gave me rides home as a gesture to reciprocate my teaching and he volunteered to give me a ride home beginning the very first night he attended our class. I did not accept his offer the first time because another student had already offered me a ride that night. However, I accepted his offer the third night he attended class. Unlike other occasions with other students where they simply drop me off at home, this man drove me home, and then without my consent, pushed his way into my apartment and made sexual advances (verbal and physical) towards me. Although I was finally able to push him out of my home, I was very disturbed by his behavior and the entire incident.

This event took place on Monday, November 10, 2003. The next day, I did not know what to do. I was in denial and I could not understand what happened. I could not think of an explanation for this person's behavior. The first thing I did was to write a letter to the staff at LI to inform them of the incident and to ask for their support. Here is an excerpt of the letter:

...I am requesting your assistance in handling this matter. First, I need for Mr. Martinez to be removed from my group immediately. Second, I need to make sure that this written record is filed in your offices. Third, I request that no new students be assigned to my group. Finally, I expect you to take whatever action is needed in order to make sure that Mr. Martinez does not do this to anyone else at LI. For the Wednesday, November 12, 2003 class, I have scheduled a field trip for the group as a way to provide time for you to address this issue...

The answer to my letter was immediate. The director of LI and the coordinators expressed their concern and support. The director offered to supply transportation

for me so that I did not have to go through another bad experience again. I did not accept her offer because I wanted to continue showing trust towards my old students. I also received a letter from her through regular mail on November 24. In the letter the director of LI expressed her support and informed me of the new measures to be implemented due to the incident. For instance, safety measures will be included in the volunteer training manual and addressed during the orientation session for new volunteers.

Although the incident with Alex was a bad experience, it served as an opportunity to make me feel part of the body of people working at LI. The support showed by the director and the coordinators of the literacy program meant a lot to me as member of a group of educators. Also, the relationship with my students changed in a positive way. The students helped me embrace the situation and we became closer than before. There was more cooperation and collaboration among the students and towards me as they acknowledged me as another member of the class. The students realized I was vulnerable and I needed their help and support. The following two pieces of data illustrate the students' response toward the incident and their support afterwards.

November 13, 2003

Federico called me over the phone tonight to check that I was okay. He told me he talked to his wife and they are willing to offer me a room to stay in their home for some days until I start feeling safer at my own place. I thanked Federico for the nice offer; however, I did not accept it. I let him know how much his offer meant to me but I think I should stay at my own apartment because I am not going to let anyone to intimidate me and take control of the situation.

November 16, 2003

Flora called me early in the morning today, Sunday. She wanted to express her sympathy for me because of what just happened with Alex. She said she felt terrible when she heard what happened to me on Monday. She said it affected her a lot because her older sister went through something similar but worse. She told me a moving story about her sister and how she was kidnapped and raped when Flora was a teenager. Flora promised that she and her husband will never leave me alone after class and I could ask them for a ride whenever I need it in the future. I thanked her and I am sincere when I say that she made me feel appreciated and motivated to keep up my position of continuing to teach the class and keep my daily routine the way it has been until now.

Federico behaved like a protective father with me. He and his wife kept on calling me every week for a month to find out how I was doing. Flora and I became closer and we started having “girls talk” like regular friends do. The rest of the students were also very supportive towards me. It is worthwhile to mention this unfortunate incident because it worked as a factor to help us consolidate as a community, as a group of people working together towards achieving the same goals. It also made me reflect on the consequences of having students in class who do not understand the principles of how a community should function. As a teacher and as a teacher researcher I should prepare for unexpected events to take place and be aware of that.

After this terrible experience with Alex, Arturo, one of the regular members of the group, started to participate more in class orally and to share more about himself with his classmates and with me. For instance, a week after the incident

Arturo gave me a ride home and he volunteered to talk about the inquiry cycles project and the impact that this project has had on his learning.

Arturo gave me a ride home tonight. We usually talk about his family or soccer, his favorite topic, on the way home. However, tonight, Arturo volunteered to talk about his experiences doing the inquiry cycle project. He said he likes the project because it is something different and he has learned more than English. Arturo's question deals with the differences between blacks and whites during the last 50 years in the USA. He finds this assignment interesting because he did not know anything about Martin Luther King or racism problems in this country in the past. He also likes the project because he does not need to repeat or memorize things while he is doing it. He also envisions the inquiry cycle as a challenge while attempting to answer the question he formulated because it becomes a complex process. There is not a single answer to his question and he encounters more questions as he reads and as he finds out new information. (Researcher's log - November 17, 2003).

I thought that this particular conversation was an interesting contribution from Arturo's part because I was not asking him for this information. I assume he knew I was interested in finding out what his opinion was about the project and he realized that I was constantly analyzing and observing him and his classmates' learning processes because I was not only a teacher but also a researcher. After the incident with Alex, Arturo became more open and collaborated more with his classmates and me. Another important event that took place was an invitation Arturo made me.

Today, Arturo called me over the telephone to invite me to go to "El Mirador." We have been "talking" about this place for a long time in his dialogue journal because I asked him once about his favorite place was in the city. He wrote a nice description of "El Mirador" in his dialogue journal. For sure it sounds like a nice place to go on a Sunday afternoon.

However, after the incident I had with Alex I am not sure I want to do extracurricular activities on a personal basis with any of my male students. Arturo called me at home at 10:00 am and invited me to go to “El Mirador” with him. Even though I did not have plans for the afternoon, I decided to decline the invitation (Researcher’s November 15, 2003).

I felt bad about the situation, but I couldn’t help it. I invented an excuse because I did not want Arturo to know the truth. I was afraid of creating opportunities for more bad incidents to happen between my male students and me. I was afraid of trusting my male students again. I considered his invitation for a while and when he called me at home two weeks later, I accepted to go to “El Mirador” with him and we spent a wonderful afternoon together. I was a little reserved at first but as the afternoon unfolded I recovered confidence and I started to feel more comfortable. We were in a public place with many people around and he began to share with me significant stories related to how and why he migrated to the USA. The stories he told me are the kind of stories one shares only with close friend, with people one trusts.

Lessons Learned

After providing a description and discussion of the class in which the study took place and the most salient critical events and issues that evolved during the class term, I am able to identify some lessons I learned as a teacher-researcher that might be helpful to other teachers working in similar educational settings.

- Class routines are important in the second or foreign language class. They help to make students feel safe and become independent learners.
- Providing room for dialogue and students' suggestions and ideas is a good method in order to improve class content and engage students in their own learning.
- Making the connection between the students' personal lives and classroom activities results in a better appreciation of the usefulness and authentic purposes of learning a language.
- Allowing the students to use their background knowledge as input towards the development of class activities also helps make the connection between class content and the students' world outside the classroom.
- Reciprocity is a concept that should be present in any teaching/learning situation. Teachers and students should feel free to make use of and share the resources they have in order to enrich their classes. Both, the teacher and the students have something to offer one another and needs to satisfy.
- Code switching could be used as a tool to foster second language development; however, one should be careful to use it in a balanced proportion.
- Reflecting on one's teaching practices, student performance, and using one's practical knowledge as a teacher could be helpful when attempting to enrich classroom teaching/learning experiences.

In order to summarize this section of the chapter, I would like to mention that the principal lessons I learned as a teacher researching her teaching practice are: (1) it is crucial to accomplish what one promises to the students, and (2) as a teacher, one should be consistent on how one teaches and what one believes is an appropriate teaching and learning philosophy should be reflected in the classroom. If one takes the risk to accomplish what one promises and teach a class based on one's beliefs, many *critical events* could happen. However, one should set the stage and take advantage of the opportunity when these events take place. If one proposes to the students at the beginning of a course to come up with suggestions and to contribute to the class development, then one has to provide room for that to actually happen. More importantly, when students come up with suggestions, one should implement them in the class using one's practical knowledge as a teacher. If one envisions the classroom as a community of learners one should allow that to happen.

Summary

In brief, in this chapter, I provided a detailed description of a typical class at the literacy center and a typical week of classes in our class. I introduced the characteristics and routines of the class and how events had a sequence and the way students' participation and contributions took place. I also described and explore relevant class issues and critical events in order to present a more

complete picture of the class. The critical events illustrated the changes in the dynamics of the classroom and the students' behavior from that point on. In addition, I presented tensions and challenges the students and I had to face throughout the duration of the course. This was my attempt to acknowledge that not everything was perfect and worked well while implementing the study. There were failures from my part as the teacher of the class and conflicts between the students and I took place. Many times the students' and my expectations differed. Finally, the section about lessons learned aims to provide recommendations to other teachers working in similar educational settings.

CHAPTER 6

HOW DO HISPANIC ADULTS DEVELOPING ENGLISH LITERACY RESPOND TO THE INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM?

The current chapter presents a detailed description of the four focal students in the study, their performance in our class, and their response to the innovative curriculum. Merriam (1998) calls this type of account “a multiple case” because it involves collecting and analyzing data from several cases; each student is a case. “The more cases included in a study, and the greater the variations across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be” (Merriam, 1998, p. 40). Hence, I am using different data sources and instruments in order to illustrate the students’ performance and responses.

In this chapter I would like to address question number three guiding the research study: How do Hispanic adults developing English literacy respond to the innovative curriculum? Therefore, I present a detailed description of the four focal students of the study as well as findings about the students’ class performance, linguistic gains, and educational gains. Thus, this chapter includes: 1) the Basic English Skills Test (BEST), 2) the four focal students, and 3) the students’ assessment of the class.

The Basic English Skills Test: BEST

I will discuss the students' Basic English Skills Test (BEST) scores before describing their language knowledge and performance as evaluated through the different sources of alternative assessment used in our class. The purpose is to illustrate the way the students' performance was typically tested at the literacy center. I also would like to make emphasis on how the BEST measured only one dimension of the students' language performance (See Appendix N) and it was used as a single measure to evaluate the students at the literacy center. In contrast, in the innovative curriculum the students were evaluated through alternative ways of assessment (e.g., dialogue journals, inquiry cycles, and oral/written reports) that illustrated the different dimensions of the students' language performance and knowledge.

As I explained in Chapter 3, at LI the students' performance was evaluated using a standard test: The BEST. This test was developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC. It was designed as a measurement tool for adult ESL learners at the survival and pre-employment skills level. It consisted of an Oral Interview Section and a Literacy Skills Section that were scored separately. The Oral Interview Section provided scores for communication, fluency, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. The Literacy Skills Section provided scores for reading and writing.

At LI the students were required to take the BEST test every four months until they reached the exit score of 70. The test has two components: The written and the oral. The students at LI were required to take the written component of the test first. The students took the test repeatedly until they obtained the exit score. When they had obtained the required score, students started taking the oral test. Again, they took the oral test as many times as necessary until they reached the exit score of 70. The students took the same test every time and when they showed some improvement, they were promoted to the next ESL level. Students graduated from LI when they obtained the exiting score (70) in both the written test and the oral test. Since LI offered only four levels of ESL courses, students ended up repeating the same class level until they showed enough progress to be promoted to the next ESL level or until they graduated from the program.

Through informal interviews with the students during the pilot and the study, I learned that sometimes the students intentionally failed the test so that they could stay at the same level and prolong their graduation from the center. The students did this so that they could remain in the program and have the opportunity to receive more cost-free instruction. The academic coordinator at LI provided me with the following scores of the BEST as taken by my students at the beginning and at the end of the course.

Student Name	BEST at he beginning of the course	BEST at the end of the course	Improve Yes/No
	Date, Exam type & Score	Date, Exam type & Score	
Arturo	7/28/2003 Written C	12/15/2003 Written B	No
	SS: 52	SS: 49	
Federico	6/12/2003 Oral B	12/15/2003 Oral C	No
	SS: 69	SS: 60	
Pablo	6/12/2003 Written B	12/15/2003 Written C	Yes
	SS: 51	SS: 64	
Flora	6/12/2003 Written B	12/15/2003 Written C	No
	SS: 48	SS: 45	
*Richard	10/31/2003 Written B	12/15/2003 Written C	Yes
	SS: 49	SS: 55	
*Gloria	10/24/2003 Written B	12/15/2003 Written C	Yes
	SS: 47	SS: 56	

Table 3: BEST-test Students' Scores

In the table above, I am including the data of the four focal students in the study and I am including two more students who added our class late in the semester. I am including Richard and Gloria's scores in order to illustrate that this test did not really measure what the students were learning in their classes and the inconsistencies when placing students in a class based on the score they obtain in the test.

Arturo had taken the same written test four times in a row; however, after taking the same class with different instructors for a year and a half, he still did not reach the exit score of 70. While I noted a significant improvement in his writing and reading skills, the test results do not reflect these improvements.

Federico was the only student in our group taking the oral test because he had already scored over 70 on the written test. The table shows that he did not improve his score. However, along with the test results, I received a note from the coordinator telling me that: “Oral exams are subjective and vary between assessors” (December 16, 2003). I was at LI when Federico took the test. He talked to me after taking the test and he was very excited thinking that he had passed it. He said: “Creo que me fue bien! Respondí todas las preguntas menos una. Ella dijo algo y no entendí la pregunta” [I think I did good. I answer all the questions but one. She said something and I did not understand the question]. He wanted to be promoted to ESL 4 and I thought that he was ready to advance. Nevertheless, a week after classes began again at LI (January 19, 2004), Federico called me on the telephone and told me how disappointed he was to remain in ESL 3 again. He was sad and concerned about his score.

Pablo’s score at the end of the course was 64. According to the test there was a significant improvement in his performance since he scored 51 at the beginning of the course. Even though he did not make the exit score of 70, Pablo was promoted to ESL 4. Why was Pablo promoted to the next level and Federico was not? I do not know. The coordinator made these decisions. Pablo and Flora talked to me on the telephone the second week of classes in January 2004 to let me know that Pablo was placed in ESL 4 and Flora in ESL 3. I never talked to the coordinator to ask for an explanation because I stopped teaching at LI in December 2003. Moreover, I was expecting to be asked about my assessment of the students’ performance in order to make a decision about their placement for the next academic term, but I was never asked to give my professional opinion. The coordinator based on the test scores made the decision. However, two months later, in March, Federico was taking classes with Pablo in the same class level. How did that happen? According to what Federico informed me on the telephone,

he talked to the coordinator and asked her to let him attend ESL 4 because he felt he was ready for it.

Flora's score at the beginning of the course was 48. Due to the score she made, Flora was placed in ESL 1; however, Gloria scored 47 and she was placed in ESL 3 with our group. Flora was in ESL 1 for one lesson and her instructor sent her to ESL 2 the next class meeting. She was there for her second day of classes at LI. Then, her new instructor told her to go to ESL 3 with another instructor. Since I requested to have Spanish-speaking students, her new instructor in ESL 3 asked Flora to go to my classroom. When Flora came to our class, it was her fourth day attending classes at LI. This shows some inconsistency in terms of the criteria used at LI in order to place students based on the test scores.

According to my experience working at LI and informal interviews with students, it is not unusual that the students take the test and then, they are placed in a course level that does not match their language skills. Sometimes students are placed in a class because there are not enough students for a teacher or the opposite; there are too many students in a class. Some other times there are not enough teachers or classrooms.

Richard and Gloria were taking classes at LI for the first time. They took the placement exam in October and started attending our class on November 3. Since they entered at such a late date, they were in class with us just for six weeks. Even though it was not their time to take the test (students are required to take the test every four months), they took it and the score shows some improvement.

The format of the BEST test (multiple choice items, fill in the blanks, and cloze paragraphs, see Appendix N) and the students' test scores do not let us appreciate the students' language performance and improvement in full. It does

not allow assessing the students' language and knowledge at different levels and the students' test score is based on a single performance sample.

To summarize this first section, I would like to clarify that this was just a brief visit to the test because I am more interested in presenting my students' performance through the learning experiences using the innovative curriculum. For that reason, I will continue with a more detailed description of the students and their class achievements.

Description of the Four Focal Students of the Class

In Chapter 3, I explained that the class I taught (ESL 3) had curricular objectives predetermined by the administration at LI. In our class, we covered these predetermined curricular objectives, we added new topics and objectives as suggested by the students in the negotiation of class content, learning goals, learning processes, and activities. The methodology used to help the students improve and further develop their language skills was based on identification of students' learning needs, weekly dialogue journal writing, the exploration of newspaper articles, reading fiction and non-fiction, the inquiry cycle process, class discussions and presentations.

During the Fall Semester 2003, a total of 17 students attended the class I taught at LI. However, only four of these students were selected as focus of the study (Arturo, Federico, Flora, and Pablo). As explained in Chapter 3, this

selection was based on attendance and the purposive sampling approach suggested by Berg (2001). In other words, I made use of my expertise and professional knowledge to select the participants that best represented the population in the study. The participants were people who worked, had families and responsibilities that many times interfered with their ability and willingness to attend the classes at LI. Some of the students had just arrived in the U.S., had different job shifts every week, or changed jobs two or three times during the semester. Since the center recruits students the first and the third week of each month, there were people coming in and leaving our class every month. The student population was likely to shift quickly and unpredictably. Arturo, Federico, Flora, and Pablo attended approximately eighty percent of the course meetings. In the next pages, I will provide a description of these four students using the following structure: Rationale, biographical information, language learning background, linguistic gains, and educational gains.

Arturo

Rationale

I chose Arturo as a focal student of the study because he attended 98% of the class meetings. He was the youngest person in our group and he went through an interesting process while adapting to the new teaching methodology we were developing in our class. Arturo had attended classes at LI for a year and a half

before attending the class I taught. In other words, he had experimented and witnessed the implementation of the core syllabus suggested by the center through other language instructors.

According to what he said while introducing himself the first day of class, Arturo had gotten used to the idea of having two or three different instructors for the duration of each academic term. He was also very familiar with the evaluation system at LI because he had taken the same standard test for the last year and a half. In an informal conversation while driving me home, Arturo told me he sometimes provided wrong answers to the test so that he fail and could stay enrolled longer in the literacy program. For all of these reasons he became a key informant. His case was of interest to me as a researcher and as a teacher.

Biographical Information

Arturo is 21 years old and he was born in Mexico. He works as a carpenter and had lived in the U.S. for three years by the time the study began. Carpentry is a skill he learned in the U.S. after migrating here. He is single and lives with his family that migrated to the U.S. in small groups at different occasions until all of them got here. Arturo has a big family, and all his relatives have children, he constantly talked about his desire to postpone marriage and having children of his own. In one of his entries in the dialogue journal, Arturo wrote about his plans for the future. The following excerpt was handwritten in his dialogue journal:

I would be a father. 10 year is long but here in USA is very, very, very fast. only working. I don not to be inginner, boss, doctor. Only I want to be father but I don't have hurry. I need save time and money (October 20, 2003).

Arturo usually talked about children and marriage as two big responsibilities he did not feel ready to have. Many times in class discussions, Arturo shared with us his preoccupation about his relatives not being able to study and do other activities to prepare themselves better for obtaining better life conditions because of having to take care of their children. He used to drive his aunt and uncle to LI to attend English classes. However, they quit the program in two months because they had to take care of their children. They worked during the day and took English classes at night.

The following excerpt was taken from the autobiography Arturo wrote in class. He talks about Mexico and his pride for his origin and culture.

...Mexico has a huge cultural history...Pyramids, the God of the rain, La Serpiente Emplumada, and the Aztec calendar. The eagle eating the serpent on top of the *nopal* tree and... how Tenochtitlan was founded. It also has various museums... Now Mexico City is **Chilangolandia** (Sep. 29 to Dec. 3, 2003).

During class discussions and in the dialogue journal written conversations, Arturo used to talk about Mexico and its culture as part of what he missed while living in the U.S. He acknowledges having a better life style in the U.S.; however, he is aware of the cultural differences between the two countries and what he would like to preserve from his Mexican background.

Language Learning Background

In his autobiography, Arturo wrote about his parents' teachings and the value of getting educated:

...My mom first taught me how to write the letters and for me it was boring. When I was 5 years old, I just wanted to play, and play, but my *jefe* (my dad) he was very, very angry until now. He does not change. He punished me and he said: "You learn or I'll punish you." He put me to read a book but I used to fall asleep when I read too much. My first teacher at school I do not forget because her name was the same as my mom's name. I thank my teacher for teaching me how to read and write though my handwriting is horrible. I do not send even a short letter to my girlfriend (Sep. 29 to Dec. 3, 2003).

Learning his ABC's at home and the memories Arturo has about both of his parents being involved in his education can be translated into the value his family placed on education. Apparently, Arturo preferred playing more than studying. He does not portray himself as a talented student; however, he is aware of the importance of knowing how to read and write in his mother tongue and he acknowledges his teacher's work.

According to the information I gathered from the student application form filled out by Arturo when he entered LI, he did not finish high school. Due to his migration to the U.S. at age 17, he obtained only nine years of formal education in his country. Even though this might sound like little formal schooling, Arturo seems to have assimilated the characteristics of successful students. For example, in the class I taught, Arturo was a very dedicated student. He missed class only once during the whole term because of food poisoning. Most of the time, Arturo

had his assignment ready for class and when he did not, it was because he was confused about what he was expected to do. In those cases, he usually called me over the telephone to clarify his doubts. He was not very outgoing in class but he usually volunteered to participate in class activities such as reading out loud or sharing his assignment with his classmates.

When I interviewed him for the first time, Arturo told me he learned some English in Mexico when he was in high school. He said:

It was confusing because...in Mexico they teach English but it's different... I don't know why. Example, my teacher in Mexico... *ella decía*... say... "casa" is "house" *y aquí le dicen* [here people say] "home" (First Interview - Sep. 17, 2003).

When I explained to him that "home" is where you live and "house" is the building, he said: "That is why it is different... uno aprende una cosa allá y es otra acá [one learns one thing over there and it is something else over here]." Arturo was referring to the practical use of the language and how language takes a different dimension when you use it outside of school and how sometimes students are not taught those subtleties at school. Even though he studied some English while in high school, Arturo's experiences learning English in the U.S. were limited to the year and a half he had attended LI. When asked about the occasions when he reads in English outside the classroom he said:

When? *Cuando* [when] buy the newspaper... I read in the afternoon... When looking in the newspaper for movies... the new movies or looking for job... or how do you say car... *ventas?* [car... sales?] And...to learn English easy... Watching TV and movies is good because when you want to learn pronunciation... it's good. It's effective. Captions help

also...Watching TV and watching movies is good for learning (First interview - Sep. 17, 2003).

Arturo's experiences learning English outside the classroom are linked to his personal interests and activities related to his age. He reads the newspaper with two objectives in mind; one is to find out about entertainment, the last movies playing on theaters, and the second one is business. In this same interview Arturo told me he helps a friend to find used cars, his friend buys them, repairs them, and then sells these cars again.

Linguistic Gains

In order to present a glimpse of Arturo's linguistic gains during the class, I decided to analyze three pieces of writing taken from his dialogue journal. These pieces are: The second journal entry written on September 22, 2003, the entry he wrote a month after, October 22, 2003, and the entry before the last, written on November 24, 2003 (see Appendixes K, L, and M). I chose the second journal entry and not the first because what students usually do in the first one is to copy the style I used while writing my first letter to them. In their first entry the students usually write a mechanical response to my first letter. They write controlled sentences and use the same type of vocabulary I used in my letter. From my experience implementing dialogue journals with different students and classes, I know that from the second entry on, the students start developing their own writing "style." They begin to experiment using words they do not know for

sure but that they think they need in order to convey their message. They also begin to understand that the dialogue journal is a written conversation and we give follow up to our ideas, questions, comments, and the different parts of the written dialogue. Moreover, I chose the entry before the last because usually the last entry is an evaluation of the class, the students write their farewells and they tell about how they are feeling because the class is over. In other words, the last entry is not a typical dialogue journal entry.

For the analysis of Arturo's linguistic gains, I will follow the example provided by Lanteigne and Schwarzer (1997). These authors examined writing samples created by their informant, Rafael, during four months. In the analysis they present in their article they look at punctuation, capitalization, spelling, word substitution, self-correction and verb tense. I am also going to borrow from Bachman's language competence theory in order to analyze Arturo's dialogue journal entries (see Appendix K, L, and M). Bachman (1990) states, and I agree with him, that language is more than its parts. He proposes to look at language competence from two broader points of view: Organizational Competence (Grammatical and Contextual) and Pragmatic Competence (Illocutionary and Sociolinguistics). Therefore, the following table discusses the grammatical aspect of the organizational competence in Arturo's journal entries and it examines conventional/correct verb tense usage, spelling mistakes, use of auxiliaries, and length.

Date of dialogue journal entry	Conventional (Correct) verb usage / overall verb total	Spelling mistakes / total number of words	Number of auxiliaries used / auxiliaries needed	Total number of sentences and word total
Sep. 22, 2003	5 / 13	8 / 116	1 / 2	7 sentences 116 words
Oct. 22, 2003	15 / 24	2 / 127	7 / 6	11 sentences 127 words
Nov. 24, 2003	12 / 19	2 / 77	2 / 4	10 sentences 77 words

Table 4: Analysis of Three of Arturo's Dialogue Journal Entries

Under the category Correct Verb Usage, I counted the times Arturo used the correct verb tense out of the total number of verbs he needed to use in his sentences. Under Spelling Mistakes, I counted all the misspelled words in each entry. Under the category Use of Auxiliaries, I counted how many times he used auxiliaries in negative and interrogative sentences and I compared that number to the number of times he actually needed to use them. Finally, the category Length provides the number of sentences he wrote for each entry and the total number of words.

Analysis of the category correct verb illustrates how from one entry to the other Arturo increased the use of verbal forms in his writing. He continued making mistakes; however, he started using more and more verbs while constructing his sentences. The category spelling mistakes shows that as his writing progressed, Arturo became more careful spelling words correctly. He made less spelling mistakes in the October and November entries than in the one in September. The information in the table illustrates that Arturo was constantly experimenting with the written English language and he took risks.

The category use of auxiliaries illustrates how Arturo went from almost not using auxiliary verbs to over-using them and back to using them less. Auxiliary verbs, modal verbs, and verb tenses were three aspects that Arturo increasingly explored from one entry to the other. In the entry on September 22, he used mostly simple present and present progressive. In the entry on October 22, he used simple past, simple present, and the conditional. For the November 24 entry, he used simple present, and verbal phrases with two and three verbs. Finally, the length of the entries became longer in terms of sentences. Even though, Arturo wrote more sentences each time, the number of words he used in his sentences was not congruent with the number of sentences. The September entry has 7 sentences and 116 words; the October entry has 11 sentences and 127 words, and the November entry has 10 sentences and 77 words. Nevertheless, Arturo's sentences became more structured each time. For example, the elements

required in negative sentences and questions (such as auxiliaries, negation particle, and verb in infinitive) were present in the October and November entries; also, each affirmative sentence included at least one conjugated verb.

According to Bachman (1990)'s Theory of Language Competence, Arturo's writing also shows progress in terms of his pragmatic use of the language. Pragmatic Competence includes the Illocutionary and Socio-Linguistics aspects of the language. About the Illocutionary Competence, Arturo's writing shows that he started to expand his use of language functions. He seemed to have understood that his responses in the dialogue journal should go beyond answering the questions I asked to him in the previous entry and he started to converse with me in writing. He started to use the letter to give me advice, tell me about his free time activities, and ask me personal questions. In regard to Socio-Linguistic Competence, his sensitivity to register improved from one letter to the next. He seemed to realize that letters have a specific format (e.g., date, greeting, message, etc.). Arturo's writing seems to flow better and his entries look more like letters (a written conversation) with time.

Educational Gains

Through out the class and the learning experiences he went through while participating in the study, Arturo started to appreciate reading from a different point of view. He started to find some value on reading had in the improvement of

his language skills and to feel curious about it. In the first interview on September 17, 2003, Arturo commented about his feelings towards reading: *"I'm not good reader... It's boring. I sleep when read much... I prefer movies."* Apparently Arturo had the idea that reading was so boring that he could fall asleep if he attempted to read for a long time. When I was interviewing him for the second time on November 2, 2003, Arturo asked me: *"¿Cómo aprendió inglés? al principio, cuando no sabía nada..."* [How did you learn English? at the beginning when you didn't know anything...]" My answer was: "I used to read a lot. I started reading short stories. Those stories that are labeled by the number of words they contain. I started reading small books of 200 words and then little by little I increased the number of words." Then, I asked him if he knew about that kind of books and he said he did not. I told him he could get them at the different bookstores and I volunteered to help him find one of these books.

On November 3, 2003, the day right after the interview, during the announcements segment of class, I gave Arturo a book as a present. The name of the book is Jack. It is the story of a 17-year-old American boy who is trying to understand the complexities about family relationships and who is going through the challenges proper of his age. I thought this book could be interesting for Arturo because similar to the character in the book, he was also a young man trying to fit in the American culture. When I gave the book to Arturo he looked surprised and excited. He could not believe I was actually giving him a book. He

was also concerned that he had to read it. According to what he said in class that day, he had not read a whole piece of literature. This book aroused his curiosity to try to read a complete piece of reading for the first time. I know there was also the pressure from my part (as the teacher) towards him in the sense that he could feel obligated to read the book because I gave it to him after our conversation in the interview. In the dialogue journal entry for November 24, 2003, he commented about that: “*I’m promes I read Jack not all but si la mitad* [I promise I have been reading Jack. I have not read it all, but half of it].” He thinks I am expecting him to read the whole book and tell me his opinion.

Another factor that was influential in Arturo’s change of mind about reading was the work he did for the inquiry cycle. This project helped him realize that I was telling the truth when saying that reading could be beneficial for his learning. In the last interview we had on December 22, 2003, Arturo said the following:

Arturo’s answer:
...He aprendido inglés y otras cosas, como que leer puede ser interesante. No sabía todas esas cosas que pasaron con Martin Luther King ni de los problemas de racismo en este país antes. El proyecto de la pregunta me gusto por eso y porque es diferente de otras cosas que he hecho en otras clases... es como un reto y uno mismo decide que leer y cuando.

Translation:
...I’ve learned English and other things such as reading can be interesting. I didn’t know all those things that happened with Martin Luther King or the problems of racism in this country before. That’s why I liked the inquiry cycle project and because it’s different from other activities I’ve done in other classes... it’s like a challenge and you yourself can decide what to read and when.

Arturo started to realize that reading could be useful and interesting. The activities we were doing in our class promoted reading as a means to find information and learning English. He was reading with a specific purpose in mind. He wanted to find answers to his question and information that could help him report his findings to the class. He was reading from books and the Internet and he was not conscious about the amount of reading he was doing. Reading was no longer a passive activity and became an active task for him.

Arturo was a dedicated student and a cooperative participant. He was quiet in class at first, but later, he began to make suggestions and participate actively in class. Arturo was always willing to participate and do all class activities and projects. He seems to be aware of the importance of fully developing his English language skills.

Federico

Rationale

Federico was chosen as a focal student for several reasons. He was highly educated and literate in Spanish. He was a history teacher. He was also the oldest person in the group. He had a pre-established notion about how the ESL class should be conducted through worksheets, repetition drills, and pronunciation exercises. From his point of view, the class should be conducted and controlled by the teacher. In an interview he communicated me his doubts about what I was

proposing to do in our class the very first day of class. Even though he thought about leaving the class he decided to stay in our classroom and make the decision of leaving us the second week of classes or so. However, he never left and he participated with enthusiasm in all the class activities. He usually did twice the amount of work he was required to do. Federico had been taking classes at LI for 14 months and had four different instructors during that time. He was also taking individual English tutoring with a volunteer instructor at a public library. Federico attended 80% of the course meetings in our class. There was a time in the middle of the academic term when he was required to work extra shifts at his job and he could not go to class.

Biographical Information

Federico was 43 years old at the time the study began. He is from Pereira, a small city in Colombia. He works part-time with different insurance companies and part-time doing any other type of jobs. He had lived in the U.S. for four years when the study began. He is married and has a 16-year old son. In his country of origin, Federico was a History teacher. He has a big family in Colombia and he misses them a lot; however, he does not want to go back to them soon because he wants his son to get educated here where he believes there are many more educational opportunities for him.

Language Learning Background

Federico's discipline to study English could be explained through his parents' teachings when he was a child: "My parents always thought that learning something new every day was the way to progress and they struggled to educate all their children" (autobiography - Sep. 29 to Dec. 3, 2003). Even though obtaining education was important in his family, Federico does not recall receiving help at home with his school assignments during his first years. According to his parents, it was at school where he should be educated.

I began elementary school when I was seven years old. In my town, preschool did not exist. I did not have instruction in my family about my first numbers and letters. My father and mother lived busy lives and my older siblings did not like to teach me. At home, they thought that it was not necessary because at school I would learn (Sep. 29 to Dec. 3, 2003).

As mentioned before, Federico used to be a history teacher in his country of origin before coming to the U.S. As a teacher, he understands the value of getting educated and has discipline to study and learn. When I asked him about his experiences learning English as a second language, he answered the following:

Interview #1 with Federico:

En mi país de origen, yo no estudiaba inglés porque nunca pensé que lo fuera a usar. Nunca creí que fuera a tener la oportunidad de vivir en los E.E.U.U.
Hace cuatro años vivo en este país. El inglés que sé lo aprendí aquí... en el trabajo e interactuando en la

Translation:

In my country of origin, I did not study English because I never thought I was going to use it. I never thought I was going to have the opportunity of living in the U.S.
I have been living in this country for four years. I have learned here the English I know... at work and interacting with people on the street. I

calle con las personas. He hecho mucho trabajo voluntario en las bibliotecas públicas y eso me ha ayudado mucho a poder practicar. También con mi familia... hemos hecho el propósito de hablar lo que más podamos en inglés en la casa. Hablo con mi hijo que es adolescente y está en highschool. Él me ha ayudado mucho a aprender porque él es joven y se le facilita más aprender... A veces se hace difícil hablar todo en inglés porque hay palabras que uno no conoce y es más rápido hablar en español cuando uno no tiene mucho tiempo y para no enredarse en lo que uno dice (Sep. 10, 2003).

have worked as a volunteer at the public libraries for a long time and that has helped me to be able to practice the language. Also, at home, we have decided to talk in English as much as possible. I speak English with my son who is a teenager and is in high school. He has helped me a lot with my learning since he is young and it is easier for him to learn.... Sometimes, it is difficult to talk in English because there are words that we do not know and it is faster to speak in Spanish when we do not have much time and to avoid misunderstandings (Sep. 10, 2003).

Federico's experiences learning the English language outside the classroom are product of his personal and conscious effort for improving his language skills.

When I asked Federico to tell me about the times when he read in English, he said:

Interview #1 with Federico:
Leo en inglés obviamente en el trabajo pero en mi tiempo libre... yo tengo una colección de revistas que me gusta leer. Leo de temas que me interesan y ya los tengo clasificadas e identificados en las revistas. Leo sobre cultura general y sobre educación. Yo era maestro de historia en Colombia antes de venir aquí. Me gusta leer las revistas de "Muy Interesante." Leo artículos que no tengan un lenguaje muy complicado (Sep. 10, 2003).

Translation:
Of course I read in English at work; however, in my free time... I have a collection of magazines that I like to read. I read about topics of my interest. I have classified and identified the topics in the magazines. I read about issues regarding culture in general and education. I was a history teacher in Colombia before coming here. I like to read articles from the magazine "Muy Interesante." I read articles that do not have a very complex language.

Due to his previous profession, history teacher, Federico knows about the value of reading. Even though he is not a teacher anymore, he enjoys reading about issues related to his profession. He reads in English about topics related to education.

Linguistic Gains

When I interviewed Federico the second time he told me about his preoccupations about writing in English. He told me he had never written more than a paragraph or two in English before and he was a little concerned and excited at the same time about the writing component in our class. The following excerpt illustrates what Federico answered when I asked his opinion about keeping a dialogue journal:

Interview #2 with Federico:

La actividad del dialogue journal me parece buena... es personalizada. No había escrito tanto en inglés antes y al principio tenía temor. Entre mas escribe uno más errores comete y eso me asustaba un poco. Antes sólo escribía un párrafo o dos y ya, pero ahora escribo el doble y cometo errores pero sé que ud me va a entender y va a responder con estructuras correctas...
...He aprendido a expresar cosas como yo he hecho tal cosa o tal otra... y ud me da la opción de repetir esas estructuras en la nueva carta cada vez... ha sido más efectivo para mí porque hablo de mí mismo... La

Translation:

The dialogue journal activity is good... it is personalized. I have not written so much in English before and at the very beginning I was scared. The more you write the more mistakes you make and that scared me a little. Before, I just used to write a paragraph or two, and now I write twice that amount. I still make mistakes; however, I know you will understand and you will answer using correct language structures...
...I have learned to express things like I have done this and that... and you give me the opportunity to repeat those structures in the new letter... it has been more effective

respuesta que ud me da me ayuda a identificar errores y confirmo como es la forma correcta de decir cosas en inglés... A través del journal he aprendido estructuras básicas también... ...Cuando le hago preguntas ud me responde con puntualidad... Este otra forma de repetir las estructuras (Oct. 27, 2003).

for me because I talk about myself... The answer you give me helps me to identify mistakes and I check for the right way of expressing ideas in English... Through the journal I have learned basic structures also... ...When I ask you questions, your answers are punctual... this is another way of repeating the language structures.

Federico became a more fluent writer in English. He learned to relax a little when writing and he learned that writing is a social activity and a process. He began to understand that he needed to experiment with writing in order to lose his fear of making mistakes. The more he wrote the more mistakes he was he going to make and the more he learned. He started to be less worried about making mistakes and more focused on communicating ideas in English. The following excerpt comes from interview #3 with Federico:

Interview #3 on Dec. 15, 2003

En la próxima clase me gustaría seguir escribiendo... porque pienso es la única manera de aprender vocabulario y gramática. La gramática de memoria a veces se hace difícil de aprender. Seguir escribiendo es importante porque escribir facilita leer. También ayuda a relacionar la pronunciación y la gramática y a interpretar lo que le digan a uno... porque mientras uno no sepa mucha gramática ni mucho vocabulario es más difícil entender el idioma.

Translation:

I would like to continue writing in the next class I take. I think it is the only way to learn vocabulary and grammar. Sometimes learning grammar by heart is difficult. It is important to continue writing because it makes reading easier. It also helps to make the connection between pronunciation and grammar and to interpret what people say... not knowing grammar and vocabulary makes it difficult to understand the language.

Federico also mentioned the following in the final evaluation of the class:

Final evaluation of the class written by Federico: Translation:

El intercambio de cartas a través del dialogue journal me ha sido de gran utilidad para el manejo de vocabulario y acorde con mi forma de pensar (hay que aprender palabras nuevas cada día). Esta fue mi primera experiencia en escribir mas de tres lineas en inglés en un mismo texto (Dec. 10, 2003).

The exchange of letters through the dialogue journal has been really useful in order to learn how to use vocabulary and in accordance with my way of thinking (it is necessary to learn new words every day). This was my first experience writing more than three lines in a row in English in one same writing piece.

After our class was over, I sent a personalized computer typed letter to all the students whose mailing address I had available. I send the letters because some students suggested in the last class meeting that we should try to continue the dialogue journal through informal letters by regular mail. The idea was to provide them with the opportunity of writing for a real purpose and to keep in contact. Federico answered my letter by regular mail. I sent the following letter to Federico.

February 16, 2004

Dear Federico:

Hi! How are you? I meant to write before but I have been really busy with school. I am teaching only one class this semester at UT but I am writing my dissertation and it takes all my time and energy. I see my adviser every two weeks and every time I see him, I have to report on what I have been working.

I want you to know that it was a really good surprise to receive your phone calls. I am glad you still continue taking classes at Literacy Austin ☺! Tell me about your job, your son, Sebastian, and your wife, by the way... what's her name?

How did you like the snow we just had? Did you make a snowman?

This weekend, I stayed home most of the time. I was hiding from the cold weather. I went out for lunch on Saturday and that was all I did outside. The rest of the time, I graded my students' papers, read a book, and watched TV. It was not boring at all. I like being home and relaxing from people and school. It was a good weekend. I also talked to my mom on the telephone. All my family is fine in Colombia.

Well, this was just a short greeting. I hope to hear from you soon ☺!!!

Regards,
Clarena.

Federico's original letter was handwritten. I typed it keeping the English structures, spelling and grammar he used. In other words, I did not correct anything while typing it. The following text is Federico's letter in response to my letter.

03-21-04
Dear Clarena.

I felt very happy when I found your letter in my mail box (one month ago). I don't receive many letters from friends.

In my family everything fine. My son is studying very much because in March 27, he will take the S.A.T. He is looking for scholarships and aid for the university.

I still work in the same company and attend the English classes in LI. I miss your class a lot.

Nowadays I'm attending the fourth level with Pablo. I think that the teacher is good and I hope to learn more everyday. Practice is very important and my problem is that I don't have to speak a lot of English in my work.

You told me about how beautiful snow is. I also enjoy those days; there is only one or two a year. I walked through the neighborhood and recorded the yards and trees

I worries me that sometimes I feel I'm not learning English Quic enough, but I try to advance everyday.

I hope that your academic activities are going well.

I apologize because of my late respond to your letter. I will try to answer quicker on the next one.

I wish you good luck.

Good bye.

Federico.

Educational Gains

As he told me in one of the interviews, Federico did not have much experience creating long pieces of writing before starting working in the dialogue journal. He learned that composing requires going through the process of drafting and preparing outlines. I was amazed to hear from him that what he presented me as the first dialogue journal entry was not his first attempt to answer my first letter. He did a draft and he showed it to his 16-year old son who marked some of his mistakes. According to Federico, his son corrected just a few mistakes so that I did not get disappointed because he looked for help to do his assignment. I explained to Federico that looking for help and drafting when writing a composition was a smart thing to do. Therefore, he continued using his son's help to do this particular assignment and other assignments involving writing and conversation. At the end of the term, Federico was satisfied and proud of the work he had done during the semester and his progress in writing in English.

Another important educational gain worth mentioning has to do with Federico's curiosity about the effects of reading in Spanish while trying to

improve his reading skills in English. In class, we discussed about the importance of reading in both languages and how skills transfer from one language to the other. The following excerpt was taken from the anecdotal records from October 15, 2003.

Federico said the following in class:

Lo que voy a preguntar está relacionado con la clase. Me sucede algo que considero para mí es un problema. Hace algún tiempo dejé de leer en español porque me dijeron que eso no me permitiría avanzar en mi aprendizaje del inglés. Eso me lo dijeron la primera vez que yo asistí a una clase de inglés en este país. Dejé entonces de leer las cosas que me gustan o que me interesan en español. Estuve en una librería esta semana y vi una cantidad de libros nuevos que no he leído y entonces me puse a pensar... no estoy leyendo en español porque tengo que leer en inglés... pero está mal porque a mí me hace falta y necesito leer todas esas cosas que me interesan y que están en español. ¿Qué me recomienda usted que haga?

Translation:

What I am going to ask next is related to the class. There is something happening that I think is a problem for me. Some time ago I stop reading in Spanish because somebody told me that it was not helpful to my progress learning English. I was told that the first time I attended an English class in this country. I stop reading in Spanish about the topics I like and are of interest to me.

This week, I was at a bookstore and saw new books that I have not read and that made me think... I am not reading in Spanish because I have to read in English... however, that is not correct because I miss reading in Spanish and I need to read about all those topics that are interesting and are written in Spanish. What do you recommend me to do?

After this particular discussion in class and a conversation we had in an interview, Federico went back to reading in Spanish. At first, he was worried to read just in English but he was unhappy for not allowing himself to read in Spanish as much as he used to before starting to learn English. The following comment comes from interview #3 with Federico.

Interview #3 on Dec. 15, 2003.

Translation:

...Es un error que nos prohiban usar el español cuando estamos aprendiendo inglés. Hay información que uno necesita acceder en español para mejor comprensión. Gracias a usted he entendido que está bien leer en español porque ese es mi primer idioma y ¡cómo no lo voy a usar! Tenía esa preocupación. Me sentía culpable de leer algo en español y no leer en inglés todo el tiempo como me habían dicho...

...To prohibit us to read in Spanish while we are learning English is a mistake. We need to have access to certain information in Spanish in order to have a better understanding of it. Thanks to you I have understood that it is fine to read in Spanish because that is my first language and how comes I am not going to use it! I had that preoccupation. I felt guilty about reading something in Spanish instead of reading every thing in English as I was told...

I also noted the following information in the anecdotal records on October 27, 2003:

Federico was the first person to arrive in class tonight. He brought the last two issues of the Discover magazine. He said he was going to replace the two oldest magazines from our class collection. I think he is really trying to motivate his classmates to read about the same kind of topics he likes to read. This is a good response from his part. It shows his motivation to read and to involve his classmates in reading. Federico is a volunteer at a public library here in Austin. We were talking about this when Arturo arrived in class. Federico explained he helps repairing books and putting them back in the shelves. He said he gets some books and magazines for free and sometimes he just buys them because they are very cheap, from 50 cents to \$1.00. I asked him to invite us to the library so we can buy books/magazines.

Federico realized he could be a leader in our class and motivate his classmates to do other type of reading. He assumed his role as a member of our learning community while showing his interest in providing different topics and resources

for his classmates to read. He periodically updated the magazine collection in our classroom during the academic term and it was his own initiative to do so.

Federico was a good student and a good informant. He was a critical thinker and insightful. He usually asked for the purpose of the activities we were doing in our class. He also contributed his opinion about what was going on in class. Federico was always ready to self-evaluate his performance and the performance of his classmates. He questioned the decisions we made in class and he gave us suggestions and ideas.

Flora

Rationale

Flora was the only female student who stayed long enough in our class in order to become a member of the group. She attended class the entire term and she missed only two class sessions. Flora encouraged Pablo (her husband) to continue attending our class when he started to feel too tired to go to class after work. She also became Pablo's external motivation to come to class. Flora usually scolded Pablo in front of me so that he felt compelled to do his assignments and come to class every night. This was the first time that Flora attended formal English classes in the U.S. She had lived in the country for six years; however, this was the first time she actually got enrolled in English classes. For all of these reasons, she was an interesting case for my study.

Biographical Information

Flora was 28 years old by the time she enrolled in our class. She is from Michuacán, Mexico. She works as a cook at a hotel and has a two-year old daughter. Flora is married to Pablo, another student in our class. Flora wrote the following information in her autobiography.

I am from Michoacan, Mexico. My language is Spanish...Mine is a big family; in total we are 10 children, 6 girls and 4 boys. We are all Mexican...I am good at cooking and baking cakes. Every Sunday we (my husband, my daughter, and I) go to the mass... I miss my family; I miss the food. It is very different. It has a different flavor; Mexican food is delicious. There is clean air. It does not have a lot of contamination. The meats and vegetables are all natural and fresh. Over there we have different highways but highways in the US are better (Sep. 29 to Dec. 3, 2003).

Flora comes from a large family. She is proud of being Mexican. Even though she acknowledges the difference between the two life styles, she knows what she misses from her country.

Language Learning Background

Flora has good memories of elementary school. She remembers she was a good student. However, she did not finish high school. The following excerpt was taken from her autobiography:

I remember when I was going to school as a child. I loved my teacher. She always told my father that I was a good student. She used to say: "Yes, no problem. She is a good student." School was fine until I got to high school. Then, something happened and I was not a good student (Sep. 29 to Dec. 3, 2003).

The following excerpt comes from the first interview with Flora. I asked her to tell me about her experiences learning English as an adult here in the U.S. and in her country of origin.

My experiences? Umm,
I learned a little more English here... to speak and to write, but it's different than in my country.
Yo tome clases de inglés cuando estaba en secundaria pero es diferente porque uno no tiene que aprender de verdad como aquí. [I took English classes in high school and it was different because you donot feel the need to learn.] It's a little different. This is my first English class.
Yo tomé el examen el primer día que vine aquí a la orientación. Entonces me mandaron al salón del nivel 1 y esa maestra dijo que yo sabía más y que me fuera al salón 2. En el salón 2 estuve dos días y de ahí me mandaron al 3. [I took the exam the first day that I attended the orientation meeting and I was sent to the room for level 1. The teacher said I had enough knowledge to be in level 2. Then, I was in level 2 for two days and I was asked to start attending level 3].
My new teacher... she said that night: "You are not in this room more. You are in the level 3 with Sylvie." But... The next class I have a new teacher, you (Interview #1 on September 17, 2003).

This is what I noted in the anecdotal records the first time Flora attended the class I was teaching:

I realized Flora had not talked the entire class. I asked for her name and I asked her about her experiences attending classes at the center. She said tonight was not her first class, and that was all she said (September 8, 2003).

Linguistic Gains

At the beginning of the academic term Flora took advantage of whatever opportunity she was given to speak Spanish in class. She used to say that she did not feel able to speak in English without making mistakes and was afraid of not

being understood by her classmates. However, after the third week of classes she started to realize that she needed to test her English in class in order to feel comfortable using it outside the classroom. Our group was welcoming and a safe environment to make mistakes. Nobody made fun of her if she made mistakes and she could always ask questions to her classmates and I in order to clarify her doubts about the English language.

As time went by, Flora started to take more risks to speak in English in front of the class. For example, the following transcription is an excerpt from the videotape we prepared for one of the last class sessions. Her task was to explain what the dialogue journal is about.

I speak del [about the] dialogue journal...
It's a good idea because I no write in English before. So...
...First it was difficult.
I don't know write or what to write.
What question to write for my teacher. So... I don't know...
Very difficult for me because I never write a letter in English before.
Maybe I write a little but not mucho [much].
(Flora points at her notebook and she shows the camera each letter in the dialogue journal and she goes on explaining the mechanics of the activity...)
The first letter is my teacher's letter.
(Flora is pointing at her letter) I made this one. I write this letter.
(She points at the next page in her journal and says...)
The next writes my teacher... then me... So, one and one...
So... the teacher writes to me and I write my teacher.
For me, it's a very good activity.
Now is more good because I write a little more... I write more... So... It's fine! ...Right now it's fine... For me, it's a good idea! (Videotape – Dec. 1, 2003).

It is important to mention that Flora's participation in the making of this video was totally voluntary. She offered to explain the dialogue journal activity in English and she was not scared of the camera or her audience.

Educational Gains

At the end of class Flora felt more confident presenting in English in front of the class. She became more confident to use English orally. Her confidence using the English language in public increased to the point that she started volunteering to go first to do class presentations and sharing opinions with the class out loud. For example, the day that my adviser, Dr. Schwarzer, attended our class Flora did not feel shy because of his presence and she did an excellent job presenting her finding for the inquiry cycle in English in front of him, a stranger, and the entire class.

Also, Flora was able to write a letter in English by herself at the end of the course. Now, she is not scared of writing her ideas on paper. She informed me in an interview that the dialogue journal activity intimidated her at first because this was the first time she tried to write a letter in English. She had never done it before and she was afraid it was a task too complex for her. This is what she said during interview #2 with her:

Interview #2 with Flora:

Cuando yo estaba en segundo con la otra maestra, nos pidieron llenar el papelito verde... las metas individuales del alumno para el mes. Yo escribí que no sabía escribir en inglés para ver si me pasaban a otra clase más principiante pero nada. Por eso cuando llegué a su clase y me tocó escribir la carta me sentí muy mal porque no sabía como escribir nada. ...Para la primera carta busqué en el diccionario y empecé a buscar palabras y palabras y luego las puse juntas... Había escrito muy poco en inglés antes, sólo palabras fáciles como perro o gato... (Oct. 28, 2003).

Translation:

When I was in level 2 with the other teacher, we had to fill in the green slip of paper for the student's monthly goals. I wrote that I did not know how to write in English. I wanted to be transferred to a class for true beginners but it did not happen. Therefore, when I came to your classroom and I was asked to write a letter, I felt really bad because I did not know how to write anything. ...In order to write the first letter, I looked for words in the dictionary. I looked for many words and I put them together... I had written very little in English before...just easy words like dog or cat...

Flora is a person who is not willing to give up; she is a strong woman. Pablo and Flora support each other in all their goals as individuals and as a couple. This is a value I saw in both of them and that brought positive experiences to our class. Flora invested lots of energy and time trying to keep up with her classmates' language level. She struggled the entire semester with her fear of writing in English through the dialogue journal. She also struggled speaking in English out loud to the class.

Pablo

Rationale

Pablo attended class the entire term. He missed only three classes. He had attended LI for a couple of years and was starting to get tired of attending the classes at the center. He thought it was time for him to stop attending classes at LI and let his wife start doing it. He had the feeling that the English level he had so far was good enough to perform at work and he could stay home taking care of his daughter while Flora started attending English classes. However, Pablo attended almost the entire academic term. He just misses a few classes. He participated in all class activities and he always did his assignment. He used to send his assignment with Flora when he could not make it to class.

Biographical Information

Pablo was 26 years old by the time the study began. He is from Acapulco, Mexico. Pablo had lived for 7 years in the U.S. He worked at a watches warehouse. He is Flora's husband and they have a two-year old daughter. Pablo had attended classes at LI for three months when we began our class. The following is what he commented when I asked him for the type of advice he would give to other Hispanic people thinking of coming to the U.S.

Interview #1 with Pablo:

...When you are coming to the US... you have to be prepared for everything... you are thinking of work... you not thinking of culture or you thinking I am gonna miss my family... prepare yourself for hard times

and easy times... keep a strong mind... cuidarse [watch out for] of bad friends y no caer en adicciones [and avoid addictive behavior] (Sep. 29, 2003).

When Pablo arrived in the U.S. seven years ago, he was in search of a better job and a better life style. According to his comments from the first interview, he seems to have gained some wisdom after these years living in the U.S. However, Pablo was usually a reserved type of person. He used to let Flora talk when they wanted to apologize for being late for class or for being absent. Many times Flora scolded at him in front of me for not finishing a class assignment or arriving late and he just smiled and kept quiet.

Language Learning Background

The following excerpt was taken from Pablo's autobiography. He tells about his first experiences at school:

I learned to read at school and at home. I learned to write at school, also practicing with my school partners and classmates.
I was between 3 and 4 years old when my older sister took me to school for the first time. She was in first grade and I sat next to her. I remember I listened to the teacher and all my sister's classmates sat around me. They were happy with my presence and that was my first experience at school. My sister gave me a piece of paper and taught me how to write. When I came back home, I showed my parents what I had done. I wrote everything my sister told me (Sep. 29 to Dec. 3, 2003).

This is what Pablo answered when I asked him about his English language learning experiences during the first interview with him.

I lived in Acapulco and the tourists use English and they want to communicate with you... I learned English here. Llevo seis años aquí en E.U. tratando de aprender. In LI only three months... before, I learned but with friends and at work (Interview #1 with Pablo on Sep. 29, 2003).

Most of Pablo's English learning experiences are related to his work and his interactions with people around him.

Linguistic Gains

Pablo was not used to read much outside the classroom. He read for information purposes or because he was required to do that at work. When I asked him about the times when he read in English, he said:

Interview #1 with Pablo:

Sometimes at night time when I receive correspondence at home and I need to read all that they say or what they want...

También, I need to read the e-mails... you know...that the office people send to us for tell all the group... I have to read the message in English and tell it to my co-workers in Spanish... (Sep. 29, 2003).

In our class, Pablo had the opportunity to get exposed to a variety of genres. We read fiction, non-fiction, short stories, newspaper articles, magazines, etc. Pablo was particularly excited in the lessons when we discussed short stories or fiction pieces that we had read for the class. For example, we read several short horror stories by Edgar Allan Poe. Pablo especially enjoyed "The Tell-Tale Heart." It is a very complex story with a large amount of descriptive language. Pablo asked many questions in class about all the details of how the main character killed and buried his housemate because he got obsessed with his glass eye. Since we read a

lot for the class, Pablo started to experiment and discover reading strategies that he did not use before because he was not used to read large pieces of text. For instance, he helped us in class to write down in index cards difficult or unknown words from the readings and posted them for us to remember the meaning.

Educational Gains

Pablo started to appreciate the importance of wondering about questions related to his personal life and experiences through the inquiry cycle process. At the beginning, it was difficult for him to find an appropriate question to start working on the inquiry cycle. He formulated complex questions that were not related to his background knowledge or his life style. The first question he came up with was about racism: “Why is there racism?”(Sep. 8, 2003). His second question was about abortion: “Why some people are against pro-abortion institutions?” (Oct. 6, 2003). His third question was still about abortion: “Why are people against abortion?” (Oct. 13, 2003). For the first deadline for the students to do their preliminary report on their findings for the inquiry cycle (Oct. 20, 2003) Pablo did not have anything to say. He was the only student who did not have anything to report. This is what I noted in the anecdotal records:

I collected the assignments and we started a discussion about the inquiry cycle. I asked the students how far they were in their investigations and they replied one by one.

Federico reported he had already made a selection of articles that can provide useful information on his topic. He also said he had decided on four main aspects to report because his topic, cancer, was too long.

Then, I asked him when would he be ready to report to class for the first time and he said in two classes.

Pablo said he has not done anything yet. He promised to work on that during the weekend and he promised to have something to report in a week.

Flora said she has been working a little. She interviewed two people but she did not make notes. She is planning to interview three people in total. I insisted on the need to read about the topic. Flora agreed but I do not think she has been looking for related material to read. I also suggested her to rent the movie on September 11th because her topic is terrorism. Flora will report for the first time in one week.

Arturo said he came to the literacy center last Saturday in order to do a search on the web and he showed me some material he printed out on Martin Luther King. He is going to focus on this historical character in order to report on racism and differences between blacks and whites in the USA. Arturo will make his first report on Monday (Anecdotal records on Oct. 20, 2003).

After this preliminary report on the inquiry cycles, it was time for having the second interview with the students. Therefore, I had the opportunity to talk to Pablo about the inquiry cycle process and his difficulties trying to find a question that could motivate him to work on it. I asked Pablo his opinion about the inquiry cycle. He answered the following:

The inquiry cycle is a good idea but difficult to do... 'cause we don't have the ability for find the answers or we don't have ability to ask questions...Because I try to find the answer but sometimes I think about you. What you will think about the answer. This is the right answer or it doesn't go with the question ... and what if you don't like my answer? Because you are waiting for me to give an important answer. What if the answer is wrong? (Interview #2 on Oct. 29, 2003).

Pablo was worried about finding an answer for me. He wanted to please me by doing the assignment. He did not understand that the goal of the inquiry cycle process was to give him the opportunity to find out about something that really

mattered to him. There was a mismatch of expectations between us. Again, I explained to Pablo what the inquiry cycle was about and this time he seemed to have understood the idea. On November 3, 2003, the students presented their first formal report on the inquiry cycles and Pablo came up with his last question. Now he was interested in finding out about the meaning of good parenting. His final question was: “What does it mean to be a good parent?” This question really put him to work. He started interviewing other parents and reading about parenting. He started asking other questions related to the same topic and that were connected to his personal life because he is a parent. He has a two-year old daughter. Some of his questions were: “What can I do as a parent to help my daughter become bilingual, to learn Spanish and English? Why do some of my friends’ children do not speak Spanish? What can I do to teach my daughter to appreciate the Mexican culture?”

Students’ Assessment of the Class

Arturo

As mentioned before, Arturo had been attending classes at LI for a year and a half. He was very familiar with class procedures and policies at the center. For example, he knew that every month students’ are required by their instructor to fill out a green slip of paper; it is a form called “student monthly goals.” Since Arturo had attended LI for several months, he started to notice that no matter what

he wrote on that form, nobody was doing anything about that. In the final

evaluation of the course written by Arturo he commented the following:

Final evaluation of the class written
by Arturo:

---Aún recuerdo el día en que usted llegó... pensé que sería una maestra más como las otras. Cada maestra que llegaba a dar clases nos decía: "What do you want to learn?" pero no pasaba de ahí. Se olvidaban después de lo que uno había dicho, pero usted no... Cada vez que empieza la clase usted nos pregunta: "Announcemets anyone?" Eso hace diferente la clase porque nadie sabe lo que uno va a contar ya sea una noticia buena o mala o que va a pasar en la clase con un nuevo tema que alguien proponga... (Dec. 11, 2003).

Translation:

---I still remember the day when you arrived... I thought you were going to be just another teacher like the rest. Every new teacher used to ask: "What do you want to learn?" but it never went farther than that. They usually forgot about what we had said but not you... Every time that class begins, you ask us: "Announcements anyone?" That makes class different because nobody knows what we are going to tell; it might be a good or a bad news, or what is going to happen in class with a new topic proposed by someone

Even though Arturo was expecting his new teacher to ask him about his goals for the class, he was also expecting the new teacher not to take into account whatever he proposed to learn in the class. Moreover, he did not expect the students to be allowed to make suggestion and guide the conversations, discussions, and class topics.

Del primer día de clase...
Cuando la clase anterior terminó porque el maestro, no me acuerdo como se llamaba él, se fue... me dijeron que iba a venir una maestra nueva y... pensé que usted iba a llegar como llegan todos los

About the first day of class... When the previous class finished because the teacher, I do not remember his name, he left... I was told that a new teacher was coming and... I thought you were going to be like the other teachers... they just teach... and when you arrived

maestros... que se limitan no más a enseñar... y cuando usted llegó pues me sorprendió que hablara español y pensé que ahora iba a entender un poco más en clase pero nunca pensé que nos fuera a dejar tarea y que nos iba a poner a hacer tantas cosas, cosas que nunca había visto... Así que yo pensé: “Y esta maestra... que será que se trae? Como nunca nos dejaban tarea y yo ya llevo un tiempo aquí tomando clases, yo pensé: “esta maestra que cree? que somo niños o que?” (Last day of class - December 10, 2003)

it surprised me that you speak Spanish and I thought that now I was going to understand a little bit more in class but I never thought that you were going to give us homework and you were going to make us do so many things, things that I have never seen... So, I thought: “And this teacher... what with her? Because we never had homework before and I have been here for a while, I thought: “What does this teacher think? That we are children or what? (Last day of class - December 10, 2003)

This is what Arturo said during the group oral evaluation of class during the last day of classes. He is telling about the expectations he had the first day of class and for the course. Arturo was surprised to hear that his new teacher was planning to do some innovations in the teaching style he had experimented so far through other instructors at LI. He was also surprised that his new teacher speaks Spanish and he believed it to be a positive characteristic.

Federico

By the time our class began, Federico had been attending classes at LI for eighteen months. Similar to Arturo, he was very familiar with class procedures and policies at the center. As I mentioned before, at the beginning of the course, Federico believed that the English class should be conducted through worksheets, repetition drills, and pronunciation exercises. The teacher of the class should be

“the authority” and the students should follow his/her guidance. However, in the second interview with him, Federico contradicted himself when I asked him to tell me what he thought about the class so far. Apparently he was not in favor of mechanical repetition and drills anymore.

Me gusta la manera espontanea como podemos participar. No es programada. No repetimos frases como en las otras clases en las que he estado. En su clase expresamos lo que estamos pensando. Los temas de conversación corresponden a nuestros intereses, lo que nos pasó en el día, nuestras opiniones y nuestras dudas. Por ejemplo, los anuncios... es un buen ejercicio... La clase está relacionada con nuestra vida cotidiana.(Second Interview - October 27, 2003).

Translation:

I like that we can participate in class spontaneously. Participation is not a programmed activity. We do not repeat phrases like in other classes I have attended. In your class we share our thoughts. Conversation topics correspond to our interests, what happened during the day, our opinions and doubts. For example, the announcements... it is a good exercise. The class is related to our daily needs in real life.

During the final evaluation of the class, Federico added the following:

...Creo que fue un buen cambio de metodología. Cuando pensaba en aprender inglés, pensaba en el esquema tradicional de clase... el professor hablando todo el tiempo y el estudiante escuchando y tomando nota y yo creo que en esta clase se dio una dinámica diferente. Podíamos participar libremente y no con esa presión de parte del professor preguntando todo el tiempo. Creo que ese ha sido uno de los grandes aciertos de este curso.

Translation:

I think it was a good change of methodology. When I thought about learning English, I used to think about the traditional class format where the teacher talks all the time and the students listen and take notes and I think we had a different dynamics in this class. We could participate freely and there was not pressure from the part of the teacher asking us questions all the time. I believe this is one of the assets of the class.

Federico was very receptive to the new methodology and even though he had some contradictory expectations; he participated in class discussions and class activities with enthusiasm.

Flora

This was the first time Flora attended classes at LI. As I said before, she did not have a good start in the program because she was placed in three different classrooms during her first week of classes. She was also very insecure about her capacity to use English to communicate orally. During the second interview, Flora said that:

Me siento mejor en la clase ahora. Algunas personas en clase saben más inglés que yo pero ya no me siento mal. Ya voy superando el miedo y los nervios. Además, todos nos ayudamos y nadie se burla de los otros en clase cuando cometemos errores... (October 28, 2003).

Translation:
I feel better in class, now. Some people in class know more English than me, but I do not feel bad anymore. I am getting over my fears. Besides, we help each other and nobody makes fun of the people in class when we make mistakes...

When I asked for her advice on what to improve, she said:

Usted debe ser mas exigente y darnos una fecha, sino cumplimos la fecha, nos debe dar un castigo de alguna manera... ser más estricta. Debe escribir nuestros nombres en la pizarra o darnos una calificación mala cuando no cumplimos con nuestras tareas (Second Interview - October 28, 2003).

Translation:
You should be more demanding with us and assign dates; if we don't accomplish the dates, you should punish us somehow... be more strict. You should write our names on the blackboard or give us a bad grade when we don't do our assignments.

We should remember that Flora is a mother. I believe that has a lot to do with her comments about the way I should reprimand her and her classmates when failing to accomplish their obligations as students. Apparently, she finally feels accepted by her classmates and she starts feeling more confident to participate in the class.

Pablo

This was Pablo's second month attending classes at LI. As explained before, he acquired most of his English at work and through interacting with the environment around him. However, he did not have clear expectations or goals when we started the class. During the first interview I asked him about his goals and expectations for the class and he just said: "My goal is learn English...very well!" (September 29, 2003). He did not have a fixed idea of what the class should be like. Nevertheless, at the end of the course, during the final evaluation of the class Pablo said that the activity he liked the most was the dialogue journal.

Para mí el journal fue lo que más me gustó. Si tenía que hacer otra tarea, hacía esta primero y si tenía tiempo hacía la otra y sino no, pero porque esta me gustaba más. Sabía que me ayudaba más para aprender a escribir y hablar mejor en inglés (December 10, 2003).

Translation:

What I liked the most was the dialogue journal. If I had another assignment, I used to do the journal first and only if I had time I would do the other one because I liked the journal better. I knew it was going to help me more with my English writing and speaking.

During the final evaluation we had on the last day of class he explained that one of the aspects of the class he valued the most was being able to use Spanish and to

develop the English language without having the pressure of not being allowed to use Spanish

Yo creo que para cada idioma tiene que haber un espacio... Uno tiene la capacidad de concentrarse en lo que uno esta haciendo, leyendo, o escuchando... Es importante tener disciplina y un espacio para para el inglés... pero no llenar todo el día con inglés porque es muy estresante... y al final no aprendes tanto...(December 10, 2003).

Translation:

I believe there should be a space for each language... One has the capacity to concentrate on what one is doing, reading, or listening... It is important to have discipline and a space to learn English, but not the entire day because it is stressful and at the end you don't learn as much...

Summary

The present chapter offers a detailed description of the four focal students of the study. Findings about the students' class performance, linguistic gains, and educational gains are provided as well as the students' assessment of the class. Accordingly, this chapter includes: First, a brief description and analysis of the students' performance in the Basic English Skills Test (BEST). Second, a description of the four focal students is provided through the following structure: Rationale, biographical information, language learning background, linguistic gains, and educational gains. Finally, the students' assessment of the class is presented.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide answer to question number three guiding the present research study: How do Hispanic adults developing English

literacy respond to the innovative curriculum? To summarize the answer provided to this question I could say that: The students' linguistic gains and educational gains are presented using concrete evidence from the dialogue journal, the inquiry cycle process, interviews with the students, and their evaluation of the class. Since emphasis was on meaning not correction, all the students improved in acquiring fluency in writing through the dialogue journal. They expanded their vocabulary knowledge and usage through class activities. The way I chose to present the students' linguistic gains examine different aspects of the innovative curriculum implementation. For example, Arturo's linguistic gains are discussed through three of his dialogue journal entries and Flora's are discussed through her progress in using oral language in public. This variations across the cases, attempt to depict the phenomenon under study from different points of view and using different data sources.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

I implemented a qualitative research study in the ESL-3 literacy class that I was teaching at an adult Literacy Center (LI) in Central Texas. The study was a curricular innovation in which I invited the students to negotiate and design the curriculum based on their language learning needs. I wanted to put into practice a true student-centered curriculum. Therefore, I designed and implemented a negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum with the help of the students. With this qualitative teacher-research study I explored my journey as a teacher-researcher and examined the main events that happened in our class and the students' response to the curriculum. I researched the following three questions:

1. What is the journey of the teacher-researcher conducting the study?
2. What happens in a class where a negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum is implemented?
3. How do Hispanic adults developing English literacy respond to the use of this innovative curriculum?

In order to find answers to these questions, I gathered information through multiple sources: Interviews, class evaluations, student-teacher dialogue journal, inquiry cycles, anecdotal records, researcher's log, and documents. I addressed the core questions guiding the study in chapters 4, 5, and 6 respectively. In the present chapter I will discuss the following topics: 1) The state of adult literacy education, 2) ESL adult literacy education, 3) implications for adult literacy programs, 4) negotiating the curriculum, 5) developing holistic curriculum, 6) developing inquiry-based curriculum, 7) conducting research in the classroom, 8) implications for teachers, 9) implications for teacher-researchers, and 10) contributions to the field of adult ESL literacy education.

State of Adult Literacy Education

As I will explain in the following paragraphs, many efforts have been made to address and find solutions to problems related to adult literacy education in this country. However, local literacy needs as well as the literacies of minorities have been neglected in these efforts. Second language literacy education in particular needs to be addressed in a more direct manner. For example, the 1991 National Literacy Act discussed the need to enhance the literacy skills of adults in the United States. Although this National Literacy Act also discussed the need to strengthen and coordinate adult literacy programs, its view of literacy was incomplete and inappropriate in the context of delivering literacy services. The National Literacy Act of 1991 defined literacy as “an individual’s ability to read, write and speak in English and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and one’s knowledge and potential.” This definition did not build on the adults’ existing literacies and/or local literacy needs. The 1991 National Literacy Act did not seem to include linguistic minorities or immigrant communities and their various types of literacies.

In 1992, the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) was used to determine the literacy skills of American adults. The NALS tested English as a native language. However, it was administered to a wide range of population regardless of their ethnic origin, age, cognitive and physical skills, or socio-cultural background. Conversely, in 2002 the National Assessment of Adult Literacy reported, again, that more than one out of every five adults lacks a sufficient foundation of basic skills to function successfully in our society. Nevertheless, there are important factors to be considered before accepting these results. This test is administered to adults; however, the levels for classifying the outcomes of the test translate into a scale from K to 12. In other words, these adult literacy skills are being compared to those of children. Affirming that an adult

reads at level 3 means that s/he reads at the level of a child in third grade. On the other hand, adult literacy instruction differs from children instruction in many ways because the literacy demands and background knowledge of these two populations are very different. For instance, the reading demands of an adult are not the same ones that a child might experience and the environments in which both interact are also different. Therefore, this scale of classification should be restructured and the test should be adapted to the particular context where it is administered.

Assessment of adult literacy needs to be looked at from a more holistic perspective and be adapted to the local language needs and context. The way adult literacy is typically assessed can be illustrated by the test that the center where I uses in order to evaluate the students. LI uses the Basic English Skills Test (BEST). The students are required to take the BEST every four months. This test serves as a placement test and as a means to decide weather a student should be promoted to a higher-class level. The BEST was created by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC. It was designed as a measurement tool for adult ESL learners at the survival and pre-employment skills level. It consists of an Oral Interview Section and a Literacy Skills Section scored separately. Even though many institutions consider the BEST, the better choice to use in adult literacy programs (Sawyer, 2000), it is a controversial test for many reasons. For example, it does not include any aspect considering the student background knowledge or workplace literacy. The BEST does not require the examinee to interpret and analyze. It is a paper and pencil exam and it is not performance-based. The test is easy to use and its reliability has been tested; however, it may not measure what has been taught in the classroom, and it may have little applicability to specific workplace tasks (Burt & Saccomano, 1995). Due to the limitations of commercially available tests, a complete evaluation of learner progress requires using tests created for the program and its particular students.

For all of these reasons, I believe each literacy program should create its own test to evaluate more accurately the literacy performance and progress of its students and adopt alternative ways of assessment.

ESL Adult Literacy Education

The multiple literacies originated by the cultural plurality of our society suggest the necessity of examining various definitions and perspectives of literacy and relate them specifically to second language learning. However, McKay (1993) points out how "... in many Anglophone countries literacy is frequently defined only in reference to English literacy with little value attached to mother-tongue literacy" (p. xv). Unfortunately, many times local sociopolitical contexts set second language literacy agenda through issues such as national language policies, immigration and naturalization requirements, and the official language used at schools. There is also a strong relationship between literacy and economic rewards. All these factors limit the ability of language minorities to develop mother-tongue literacy (Chu, 1999; Hayes, 1996; McKay, 1993). However, it is the task of educators, researchers, and policy makers to look at language minorities from a more inclusive perspective. We should not think of language minorities as a social problem. We need to look at them as a professional challenge and work in collaboration with them towards the attainment of their own literacy goals and needs so that they can fully participate in our society. In other words, these adult learners should be taken into account when establishing and deciding about literacy program goals.

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, it is a common characteristic of adult literacy programs to have volunteer instructors who are not actual teachers. Only a small percentage of the volunteer instructors have teaching preparation to deliver literacy lessons. Many times they are native English speakers who have some free time in their hands and want to do something productive with that time. They are

good citizens who want to provide a service to their community. However, they do not realize until later that tutoring is harder than they expect and that both learners and tutors face the challenges of adult literacy education (Hayes, 1996; Fallon, 1995). Frequently, there is a mismatch between tutor lifestyle/expectations and the students'. Tutors are not always aware of the unequal distribution of literacy among minority groups and the relation of economic disadvantage to literacy. "[They] need to gain a critical perspective on formal schooling (both for children and adults), and the extent to which literacy education might simply maintain the status quo" (Hayes, 1996, p. 393). Therefore, it is imperative to provide appropriate training and professional development to volunteer instructors. They need to receive training and professional development opportunities that help them better do their job as adult literacy teachers.

Implications for Adult ESL Literacy Programs

Throughout the world, efforts are being made to find new ways of developing more effective adult literacy programs. New more relevant methodologies are being tested and better training programs for literacy instruction are being devised, specially built on more participatory approaches. However, there is the need to continue conducting research on how to best serve adult students developing second language literacy. Research on adult ESL literacy needs to be conducted in the adult literacy classroom in the United States.

Motivating adults for participation in adult literacy learning programs is a challenging task. Many of these programs have not been able to help the participants to transfer the literacy skills they learn in the classroom or literacy center into use in their daily lives. There is not a clear connection between what

the students study in their literacy classes and what they need to learn in order to better perform in their jobs, lives, and communities. Learners bring their own literacy strategies to the classroom because they have been functioning in society for many years before coming to take formal literacy classes. However, this literacy knowledge they bring to the classroom has been neglected due to the way literacy programs are typically set up. It is necessary to provide this type of students with the opportunity to learn from real literacy tasks by opening room to adult experiential learning where the participants identify what they want/need to read and write. It is very important to start involving the students in choosing content and developing materials.

After having the experience of conducting research in an adult literacy center in Central Texas and as a teacher-researcher interested in the topic, I am able to identify some factors that will contribute to offer good quality adult literacy education. The following are important issues to be considered:

- Providing appropriate training and professional development to volunteer instructors.
- Taking careful consideration on the characteristics and background of the adult population attending these literacy programs.
- Establishing a clear connection between what the students study in the literacy classroom and their literacy needs outside the classroom.
- Creating and designing curriculum that goes in agreement with the adult students' language learning needs and socio-cultural background.

- Creating and using a wider range of assessment tools in order to evaluate the adult students' literacy performance.
- Inviting the learners to design and implement curricula that matches their language learning needs and goals.

Negotiating the Curriculum

I am aware that negotiation is not the solution to all teaching/learning problems in the adult second language literacy classroom. Curriculum negotiation is only one way of approaching students' and teachers' learning/teaching needs with the purpose of improving the quality of literacy instruction. From this point of view, negotiation is a means to design and customize the curriculum to a particular instructional setting.

Negotiation is an invitation extended to students to help design and develop the curriculum within the boundaries of the class goals, the predetermined curriculum, and the school environment and norms (Weston, 1979; Boomer, 1992; Cook, 1992; Short, K. G., Harste, J.C., and Burke, C. 1996). Overall, curriculum negotiation refers to providing the learners with the possibility of making decisions and changes to lesson plans. Thus, the students appropriate the curriculum and make it their own. Nevertheless, boundaries have to be established and made explicit. As stated by Boomer (1992), "negotiation also means making explicit, and then confronting, the constraints of the learning context and the non-negotiable requirements that apply" (p. 14). Consequently, the students and their teacher need to openly discuss and establish what is negotiable and what is not. Teachers are required to use their professional experience in order to make decisions based on what they think is best for their students' learning while keeping in mind that they also have to follow the curricular guidelines and rules at the institutions where they work and study.

Negotiation Principles

While implementing the negotiation of the ESL curriculum and after analyzing and triangulating the data I gathered through that process, I realized there are certain principles that applied to the curriculum negotiation we implemented in our class. These negotiation principles served as the framework of reference for our group to implement negotiation practices. I was inspired by Cook (1992) and Boomer (1992) to establish a list of negotiation principles and a negotiation model. Nevertheless, my students and I needed negotiation principles and a negotiation model that fit our unique teaching/learning context. Consequently, we followed the following four negotiation principles: Building trust, identifying participants' needs, establishing boundaries, and establishing ownership.

Building trust. An important principle in negotiation is to build trust between the students and the teacher and among the students. For this purpose, it is necessary to create a safe learning environment in which the students feel supported and respected by their teacher and their classmates as well. Therefore, at the very beginning and through the course, I explained to the students that I expected them to make mistakes. In our class mistakes were welcome and a source of learning. We also agreed that we were adults working together towards common goals and we should support each other to reach our goals. Moreover,

listening to a person's mistakes and being able to identify the mistakes was a sign of learning and one could help the other person correct the mistake.

Teaching and learning in a safe atmosphere makes possible that students and teacher get to know each other better. It also makes the teaching-learning process more effective and enjoyable. We know that this type of learning environment encourages students to share personal information and disclose their learning needs. Identification of students' needs emerge out of group cohesion and confidence to share with the teacher and the classmates the things that have changed in the students' daily lives, worlds, and realities. In negotiation the students and teacher listen to each other and collaborate together to commit to the accomplishment of common goals.

Identifying participants' needs. We have to start by considering that both, teachers and students have specific needs. In our class, as the teacher, I had particular needs such as following institutional guidelines, incorporating my knowledge of previous teaching experiences, and following my research agenda. Also, the students I was teaching were adult immigrants of Hispanic origin with specific learning needs. After interviewing the students and after requesting them to write down their learning goals, I was able to identify their particular learning needs. I realized that these learners come to the adult literacy program for many reasons: e.g., to start their own business, to be their own boss, to help their

children with school, to go back to school and obtain a degree or better employment, etc.

During the implementation of the study, I also learned that the students' learning needs changed continually according to the events that were taking place in their personal lives and at their workplaces. The announcements segment of class was very useful when trying to verify that the students' learning needs were still the same or had changed since last time and what new arrangements were necessary to be made. Finally, regardless the educational setting, it is necessary to establish what the needs of the students, the teacher, and the institution are. Both, the students' and the teachers' needs have to be taken into consideration. In following this principle, negotiation is enacted and boundaries to the negotiation process are established.

Establishing boundaries. In negotiation, it is crucial to establish what is negotiable and what is not. Negotiation needs to take place in terms of content, resources, learning styles, and learning experiences at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the project. Every thing needs to be negotiated and renegotiated regularly during the project (Reed, McCarthy, & Briley, 2002; Hodges, 1996; Whitmore & Crowell, 1994). For these purposes, open discussion between the students and their teacher is necessary. It is necessary to make explicit to the students that negotiation does not mean doing whatever they want. In negotiation parameters

and boundaries need to be followed and established with the help of the teacher and their fellow classmates.

The students have to know what the boundaries are and the teacher needs to establish those boundaries using his/her teaching experience and the students' help. In our class dates, topics, and activities were negotiable. However, there were rules to follow and fixed activities that were not negotiable. About the rules, topics and activities had to be directly related to the learning goals established by us at the beginning of the course. All learning experiences and activities had to be related to developing language skills. The topics chosen for discussion or for presentations had to be appropriate to the class and the members of the class. In other words, anything that might offend or make others uncomfortable was not welcome in our class because we ought respect to the class and the people in the class. Keeping a dialogue journal and doing inquiry cycles were two learning experiences that everybody in class had to do; that was not negotiable.

Establishing ownership. Commitment is possible when the students realize that they have a saying in the curriculum, that the curriculum is theirs. Students feel engaged and interested in the learning they are going to do when it serves their purposes not the teacher's (Boomer et al., 1992). From this point of view, curriculum negotiation refers to providing the learners with the possibility of making decisions and changes to the lesson plan. In our class, it took the students

some time to realize that the curriculum was theirs. It was only until the sixth week of classes that the students began to make suggestions for changes and new ideas to shape the curriculum to their needs. “The key to negotiation, both in theory and practice, lies in the ownership principle: people tend to strive hardest for things they wish to own, or to keep and enhance things they already own” (Cook, 1992, p. 15). The learners in our class provided their input to the lessons and they helped me develop and enrich the curriculum. We often had discussions and reflections in class in order to reach agreement and settle together the main points to be included in the lessons.

Our Negotiation Model

The negotiation principles explained above served as framework of reference for our group to implement negotiation practices and to develop our own negotiation model. The curriculum negotiation process allowed the students to develop a feeling of ownership and was based on encouraging the students to invest in the class and become active participants and collaborators. Together we established boundaries in order to guarantee the successful implementation of negotiation. In order to implement curriculum negotiation in our classroom we followed four steps that encompassed our negotiation model. These steps are: 1) Identify students’ learning needs and goals, 2) provide room for suggestions, 3) establish class routines, and 4) implement core-class activities.

In order to identify students' learning needs and goals, I asked the students to write down their goals for the class and we made an individual contract so that every student was in charged of monitoring the accomplishment of his/her own personal learning goals through out the semester. About providing room for suggestions, we actually took class time in order to discuss and suggest ideas related to class goals and class learning experiences. We had an announcement class segment and that was the time when students presented their ideas and suggestions to the members of the class. as a result of the need to provide room for students' suggestions, we needed to establish class routines. Class routines were established by the third week of classes. By that time, every one in class could tell what the segments or different moments of the class were. The segments established to be followed as our class routine were: greetings, announcements, collecting assignments, students' presentations, mini-lessons, reading, break, writing workshop, and assigning homework. Following class routines was helpful for the students because they knew what to expect in each lesson. Also, the students' level of anxiety was lower and that made possible for them to concentrate in class content and language (Freeman & Freeman, 2002). Finally, implementing core-class activities means to actually implement the learning experiences that I, as the teacher of the class, pre-planned and required the students to do. In our case dialogue journals and inquiry cycles were the two main learning experiences. I directed these two processes and established the rules and parameters in order to develop them during the entire term.

The four steps in our negotiation model were identified and established through a semester-long pilot study I conducted during the spring of 2003. The actual study took place during the fall of 2003 and also took place over the course of one semester. I was aware of the existence of other negotiation models and principles when I started to implement negotiation practices in our classroom. However, I was conscious that we needed to create a model that better fit our

teaching/learning context and boundaries. Therefore, the negotiation principles as well as the negotiation model that we followed in our class were identified and established in practice and are product of triangulating the different data sources that I used while implementing the research project.

Developing Holistic Curriculum

I envisioned the students in our class as individuals belonging to a unique socio-political, cultural, and historical context shaping their learning journey and their lives. In our class, we approached teaching and literacy development within the possibility of learning to read the word with a critical eye. All of us in our classroom were real people with families, jobs, skills, and a life outside the classroom. Adults need to know that their instructor believe that they can learn; be provided with frequent, and positive feedback; be taught based on generalizations, not rote learning. Therefore, the teaching/learning process focused on the following four principles: First, the adult students in our class were respected and valued by their teacher and classmates. Second, they had the opportunity to build literacy skills in a learner-centered curriculum. Third, the activities and learning experiences in our classroom were relevant to the learners' needs and guided by them. Finally, they were exposed to lots of hands-on activities in which they were active participants and collaborators.

The students' prior knowledge and funds of knowledge were central in our curriculum. We made use of everybody's resources in order to develop the students' language skills and build a community of learners. All of us had

something to contribute to the class and to share with one another. As a result, we incorporated art, carpentry, sales, cooking, soccer, music, nutrition and other resources to our class. Every one was an expert at something and all of us were teachers and learners at different times. Using the different resources and knowledge of the members in our classroom enriched our class and gave us the opportunity to have learning experiences that were student-centered.

From a holistic perspective, literacy is a tool to access knowledge and power. It is the means to expressing ideas and depicting the world through the written symbols of the language making connections to the real world. It implies to develop and foster skills of reading the word from a critical point of view because it is a source of emancipation and empowerment. Moreover, the student's language, cultural knowledge, and contexts constitute the space where the class curriculum starts to develop. Because literacy is social in nature, it is about making and communicating meaning in context. In our ESL-3 literacy class, we read and wrote in English communicating meaning that was relevant to the different individuals in our classroom community and the community around us. When the students made their in-class presentations and performed the different class activities, they made use of their background knowledge and expertise in the different areas they managed (e.g., art, carpentry, sales, cooking, soccer, music, nutrition, and insurance programs). At the same time that they were developing and exercising English literacy skills, the students shared/taught their knowledge to the other members of the class. Moreover, when we discussed the topics in the newspaper of the day, and the local and national current events in class, we were establishing the connection between our class and the world outside the classroom. We discussed the meaning of the news and at the same time we reflected on how they affected us and what we could do about it. As the teacher of

the class, I needed to come to the classroom open minded in order to discover the students' cultural knowledge, language skills, and personal resources.

Developing Inquiry-based Learning

In inquiry based lessons students are highly motivated since they provide their own questions and they arrive at important conclusions about the world and about learning (Whitin & Whitin, 1997). Inquiry based lessons help students to learn to make decisions and questions. A sense of community and integration is developed because learners help each other trying to find answers and sources of information to individual questions. Moreover, this type of lesson provides meaningful, authentic, and relevant learning experiences. Teachers need to provide appropriate tools; fulfill students needs as they appear; recognize teachable moments; guide students towards a focus and give them direction; and extend initial suggestions as well as narrow the focus of more general ideas.

Listening to learners is an essential element leading to change and innovation of the curriculum. Teachers should learn more about their learners so that the classroom activities relate most appropriately to their daily lives and needs. The inquiry cycle and the dialogue journal were the two main channels in our class to establish a bridge between the students' world and our classroom. Through the inquiry cycle process the students in our class could do both, develop English literacy and transfer classroom knowledge to their daily lives. This actually happened when the students started pursuing answers to questions that originated from their personal curiosity and experiences.

The type of questions the students investigated in our classroom was relevant to their lives and interests. Each student struggled to find a significant question that was in agreement with the class goals and their personal interests. Articulating the questions was a process because questions cannot be framed

ahead. Similar to what happens in formal research, in our daily life we often know the topic we want to do research about, but we do not always have a clear question in our mind. “Progress in inquiry is having new understandings and new questions to ask” (Short et al., 1996, p. 260); the inquiry cycle started with a topic or theme selected by each student in class. Also, the students determined the problem posing and the inquiry questions.

Conducting Research in the Classroom

I had doubts about my authority in the field of research at first. However, through reflection and dialogue with colleges and the students, I realized how much knowledge and wisdom I had accumulated through these fourteen years of teaching experience. Teacher research attempts to improve classroom practice and promote quality learning (Loughran, 2002; Patterson et al., 1993; Delamont, 1992). Of course, “being a teacher-researcher illustrates professionalism in terms of a willingness to accept that one’s own experience is the major source of improvement in practice” (Loughran, 2000, p. 16). This is why some authors believe that teacher-research is a personal and a professional journey. Doing research is mainly an experiential journey (Loughran, 2002; Delamont, 1992); the experience of researching is fundamental to understanding and learning what it is. At some point and to a certain degree, many teachers are scared of doing research because it implies taking risks and putting themselves on the spot. I had that same fear and I still feel a little scared; however, I believe I have grown a lot as a

professional, as a researcher, and as a person while conducting research in the classroom where I was teaching.

From the very beginning of the research implementation process, I was striving for finding balance between the roles I was enacting as teacher and researcher. I did not want to give more weight to one or the other. Reconciliation between the two roles, teacher and researcher, was a preoccupation that I had until the end of the data collection phase. I finally realized that teachers are researchers if they have a systematic plan of inquiry, and they document their questions and findings. I also learned that there was not need to think of the two roles as in opposition. They could become complementary and coexist in harmony when you are a reflective teacher.

Doing research can be a lonely task. It requires personal and professional investment. This is one reason why it is really important to pursue your own questions, the ones that awake your passion as a professional or deal with real needs connected to the classroom. The research topic should be interesting enough so that you want to take risks and invest energy and time on it. Therefore, Your questions need to be related to your classroom and the students in it. Finally, teachers can become good researchers if they document and plan systematically their investigations.

Mastering Researching Techniques

This was the first time I kept anecdotal records. It was very difficult to do at first because I did not have a system or a method to do it. I had to start discovering strategies, my own strategies to do it efficiently. I had to learn not to trust my memory and to rely on the tapes and the notes I took in the field. However, I also had to learn to be very careful with the equipment and take care of little details such as the position of the microphone, the volume, and the batteries. I had to become very disciplined with the note taking and type each report the same night after class even during the nights when I was exhausted. If I waited to the next day, I usually was not able to remember as many details about class events as if I wrote the anecdotal records right away after class. Interviewing was also a portion of the research process that was complex. I did formal semi-structured interviews. I had to learn to “listen to” the people I was interviewing and follow them in a conversation so that I could get useful information. Once, I remember being at home and listening to an interview with one of the participants and not making sense of the answers the person had given me. Apparently, I was not “listening” to the participant when we were doing the interview. I had to do that interview again. The second time, I had to concentrate on what the person was informing me so that I could make further questions, understand, and make connections. I learned that interviewing is not just to ask questions and to draw check marks next to the questions I had prepared in advance.

Finally, keeping the focus into what I had proposed to do versus what we were doing in class was difficult at times. It required a conscious effort from my part as a researcher. Three or four times, I had to go back to the proposal document in order to make sure that I was on the right track. This also applied to the times when I was making notes for the researcher's log and for the anecdotal records. I needed to focus my attention for data that was going to help me answer the initial research questions I had proposed.

Implications for Teachers

Although the present study was carried out in an ESL-3 literacy class with Hispanic adults, there are several classroom implications that go beyond that setting and take relevance in other educational language settings. For instance, the innovative curriculum (negotiated, holistic, inquiry-based curriculum) could be implemented at any instructional level (e.g., elementary school, college, etc.) and with students at different proficiency levels (e.g., beginners, intermediate, advanced language learners) and ages. However, teachers need to experiment with curriculum design and implementation and to invite their students to make decisions and become active participants in that process. The following are some implications that teachers interested in developing innovative curriculum might find helpful.

Establishing Class Routines

Class routines are important in the second or foreign language class. They help to make students feel safe and become independent learners. Moreover, within these routines, it is necessary to provide room for students' suggestions. In other words the students need to be given actual time from class in order to be able to communicate their ideas, suggestions and learning needs. Doing this improves class content and engages students in their own learning.

Accomplishing What You Promise

Listening to the students is not enough. It is crucial to accomplish what you promise. Your words need to be supported by actions. It should work the same way from the part of the students. They need to commit to their suggestions and promises. As teachers, if we want to make learning transferable to the students' real lives and contexts, we should encourage them to use their background knowledge as input towards the development of class activities.

Learning to Make Decisions

It is very important to learn how to make decisions, identify and take advantage of teachable moments, and establish boundaries. Negotiation provides choice and voice to the students, but it is necessary to establish the limits and

parameters for the transactions between the people involved in the negotiation process.

Planning for the Unexpected

Tensions and difficulties will arise when implementing innovative curricula. For instance, in our classroom we wanted to implement innovations within the frame of pre-established curricular guidelines and a language program. Most of the students had already taken classes at LI and were used to a “traditional” method of instruction that did not give much freedom for suggestions and changes. Therefore, they were used to be passive learners who expected to be told by the teacher what to do in the classroom. As a result, at first, there was some “resistance” from the part of the students to make themselves uncomfortable and start participating actively in the classes and their learning experiences.

Planning for Making Mistakes

Testing and implementing new methodologies might cause mistakes; teachers should plan for making mistakes and overcoming them. For example, some times I assumed the students and I were on the same page in terms of the innovations we were implementing in the class methodology. When starting doing the inquiry cycles there was lack of repetitive directions for performance that

resulted into a time-consuming activity. I trusted too much the students' judgment and understanding of directions. I also assumed they knew how to formulate questions in English since they were in an intermediate language level.

Taking Risks

Establishing relationships is a difficult and tricky step. There must be willingness to risk on both parts. We all know that traditionally the teacher is the person with most power in the classroom. Therefore, it is expected that trying to find a balance of power and transfer power to the students is not an easy transaction. However, establishing trust and building a relationship is key for effective negotiation. It is necessary to deal with the complexities of different relationships, but it is naïve to trust everyone in all negotiation situations.

Implications for Teacher-Researchers

Embarking on research is a personal and a professional journey. It takes courage to recognize that some aspect of your teaching needs improvement. Doing research on your own teaching practices require personal and professional investment. However, through research teachers are able to make informed decisions, decisions that are data driven. The following implications are product of my personal experience as a teacher researching her own teaching practices.

Experimenting the Research Process

There are no recipes to be followed in a step-by-step manner in this discipline. However, plan for going through different learning phases while conducting any teacher-research project. The phases I went through while doing qualitative research for my dissertation study were: 1) frustration and confusion, 2) loneliness in the process, 3) struggling for balance, 4) facing the unexpected, and 5) reconciliation and understanding. These phases took place in a cyclical way; they sometimes repeated, some never arrived at an end, and some still may be in progress.

Planning for Making Mistakes

A teacher researcher will need to plan for making mistakes and overcoming them. It is crucial to create a safe research environment so that one can learn from making mistakes. Testing and experimenting ideas at a small scale is a wise thing to do.

Planning What to Study

It is crucial for teachers to select what to study and design a systematic plan to collect data. There are different means to collect data; however, field notes, a researcher's log, interviews to participants, and written documents are advisable.

Working in Collaboration

It is very helpful to talk to other teachers doing teacher research. This helps to make the research process more productive, easier, and more enjoyable and interesting. Very often teacher research is a collaborative effort where practitioners work together to help one another design and carry out investigations in their classrooms.

Learning to Identify Data

With time and practice the teacher researcher will learn to distinguish between data and noise. The skills attributed to researchers are acquired through practice. The prevailing focus of teacher research is to expand the teacher's role as inquirer about teaching and learning.

Planning for Learning

It is necessary for the teacher doing research to plan for doing extra reading and learning more about research theory, methods, and strategies. In addition, engaging in research might result in increasing understanding of the schooling process.

Contribution to the Field of Adult ESL Literacy Education

I am interested in conducting classroom-based qualitative research on second language, literacy and biliteracy acquisition and development that

envisioning the curriculum as a negotiated, holistic, and inquiry-based learning experience with second language and minority language learners of different socio-cultural backgrounds and ages. As a teacher I possess practical knowledge and expertise valuable in the process of investigating issues related to the language classroom. Conducting classroom-based research means to explore for better ways to prepare the students for the demands established by society and their own communities and to strive for understanding and fulfilling the students' learning needs. Therefore, with the present research study I am suggesting the need of:

- Stepping away from the mainstream vision of what adult ESL literacy education should look like.
- Approaching adult ESL literacy education from a more holistic point of view that includes students' culture, knowledge, and context.
- Addressing some myths and misconceptions related to adult ESL education such as
 - ESL teachers should be English native speakers
 - The students' native language should not be used in the literacy classroom
 - Students do not know what they need to learn
 - Adult literacy classes should be teacher-centered
 - All Latino ESL students share the same culture

- Class routines are not that important in adult education
- Silent sustained reading is an exercise exclusive of the elementary school level as well as rich print environment
- Approaching adult second language literacy assessment through using alternative means of evaluating student language performance.
- Contributing to the body of research on adult ESL literacy instruction (Greenberg et al., 2002; Amstutz, 2000; Chu 1999).

Summary

In the present chapter I discussed the following topics: 1) The state of adult literacy education, 2) ESL adult literacy education, 3) implications for adult literacy programs, 4) negotiating the curriculum, 5) developing holistic curriculum, 6) developing inquiry-based curriculum, 7) conducting research in the classroom, 8) implications for teachers, 9) implications for teacher-researchers, and 10) contributions to the field of adult ESL literacy education. I plan to continue conducting research that encourages other teachers to embark in the research journey and to give voice to the students in our classes. My goal is to investigate issues related to second language, literacy and biliteracy acquisition and development striving for the development of programs, methods, and curricula that best meet the needs of second language learners and minority language learners. In other words, I am committed to conducting qualitative

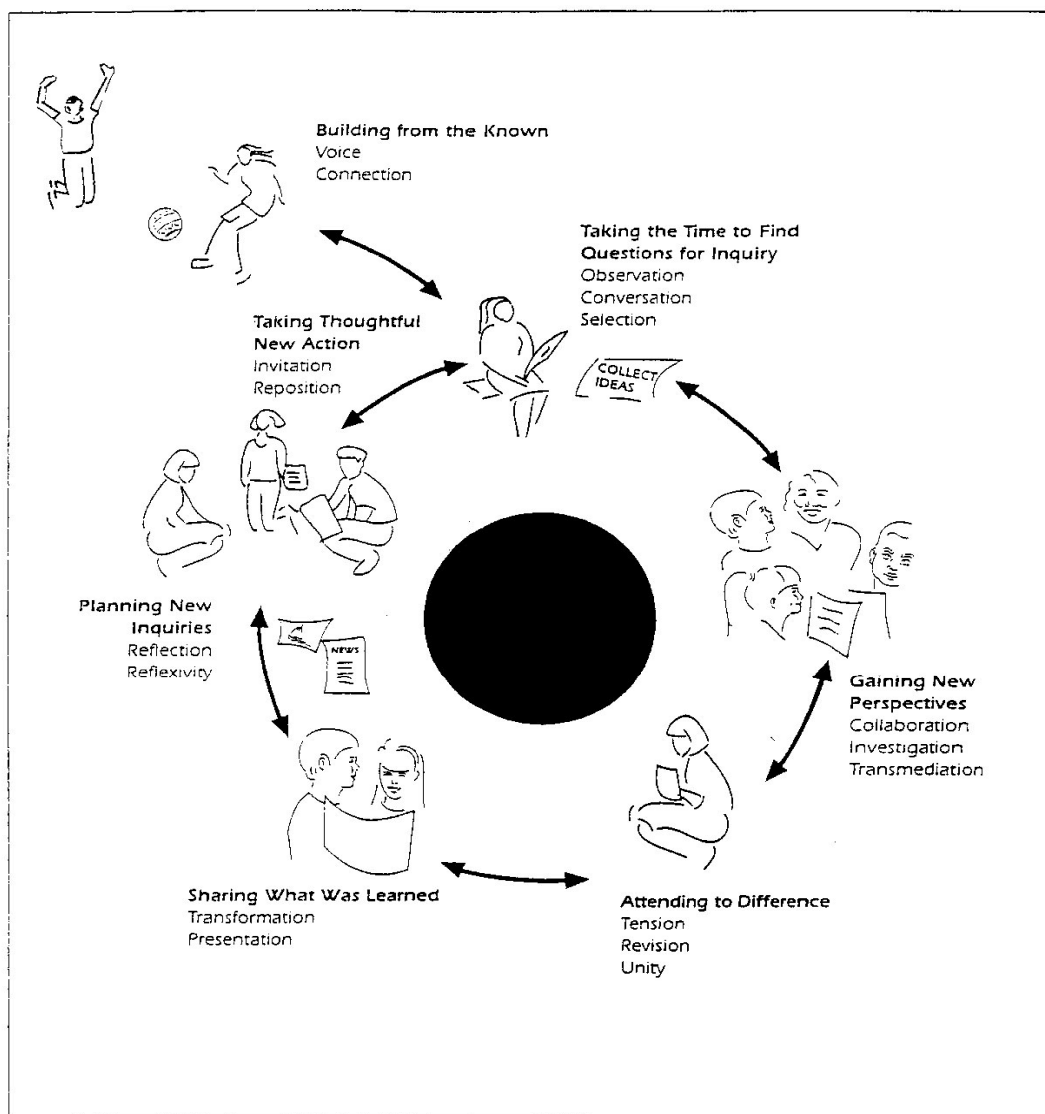
classroom-based research on curriculum development leading to the implementation of learner-centered pedagogies.

“Teachers often leave a mark on their students but they seldom leave a mark on their profession” (Wolfe, 1989). However, “...through the process and products of action research teachers will do both” (Johnson, 1993).

Appendix A

Inquiry Cycle

(Short et al., 1996, p. 52)



Appendix B

ESL-3 Literacy Class Curricular Guidelines provided by LI

Grammar:

- The verb “to be” in the past tense and questions “was” and “were.” (PEG, Book 2, pp. 12-15)
- Past tense of regular/irregular verbs. (PEG, Book 2)
- Adverbs of frequency, ie “always” to “never.” (IntIn. Unit 9; EslMsc, p. 29)
- Future tense “will” and “going to.” (PEG, Book 3)
- Prepositions of place –“in front of” and “next to,” etc. (IntIn. Unit 13, and preposition flash cards)
- Modals –“would”, “could”, “should.” (PEG, Book 3, pp. 25-27)
- Count/noncount, ex., “3 apples” vs. “some sugar.” (IntIn. Unit 9)
- Use of “can.” (PEG, Book 2, pp. 58-63)

Functions:

- Describing past activities
- Describing daily activities, likes and dislikes
- Future plans
- Asking permission
- Expressing abilities

Review from Level One:

- Alphabet pronunciation especially “a, e, and I”
- Number pronunciation especially differences between “13-30, 14-40, 15-50”
- Days of the week using “before, after, and next”

Reference Key:

These references are available in our resource center.

PEG –“Passwords to English Grammar”

IntIn –“Interchange Intro”

EslMsc –“An ESL Miscellany”

Appendix C

First Interview

About Past Experiences

1. As an adult, what are your experiences with the English language in this country or in your country of origin? [¿Como adulto, cuáles son sus experiencias con inglés en este país ó en su país de origen?]
2. Tell me about times when you have read any thing in English. [Cuénteme sobre ocasiones en las que usted ha leído algo en inglés.]
3. If you think about your experience in the US, what advice would you give someone planning to come to this country about the American language and culture? [Si piensa en su experiencia en los EEUU, ¿qué consejos acerca del idioma y la cultura americana le daría a alguien que este planeando venir a este país?]
4. What are some activities in which you have used English to communicate or interact with other people in or outside classes? Which experiences have been helpful? [¿Cuáles son algunas de las actividades en las que usted ha utilizado inglés para comunicarse con otras personas dentro y fuera del salón de clases?]
5. What have you found to be the most helpful way of learning English? [¿Cuál es la forma que usted considera es la más útil para aprender inglés?]
6. If you were given the chance to design the lessons, what would be the focus and the activities for your language class? [Si usted tuviera la oportunidad de diseñar las lecciones para la clase, ¿cuál sería el enfoque y las actividades que tendría en su clase de lengua?]

Appendix D

Second Interview

About Present Experiences

1. What has been our class like so far? [¿Cómo te ha parecido la clase hasta el momento?]
2. After being in my class for two months, tell me about some things you like about the class. Explain why. [Después de asistir a mi clase durante dos meses, cuénteme acerca de algunas cosas de la clase que a usted le han gustado. Explique porque.]
3. Now, tell me about some things you do not like about the class. Explain why. [Ahora, cuénteme acerca de algunas cosas de la clase que a usted no le han gustado. Explique porque.]
4. How do you like the inquiry cycle process and related activities we have been using in class, What do you think about the inquiry cycles? ¿Qué opina sobre los ciclos de investigación, las preguntas y actividades relacionadas a esto que hemos usado en clase? ¿Cómo le ha parecido esta actividad?]
5. What has been your experience like with the dialogue journal in our class? [¿Cómo ha sido su experiencia con el cuaderno comunicativo en nuestra clase?]
6. Is there any thing you would like to change or add to our class? Please explain. [¿Hay algo que le gustaría cambiar ó agregar a nuestra clase? Por favor explique.]

Appendix E

Third Interview

About Future Experiences

1. In the near future, which of the different activities we did in class do you think you would like to do again because you find them helpful for you to continue learning English? [En el futuro cercano, ¿cuáles de las diferentes actividades que hicimos en nuestra clase cree que le gustaría volver a hacer porque las encuentra útiles para seguir aprendiendo inglés?]
2. We learned to use the inquiry cycle process in our class, how did it affect your literacy habits outside the classroom? Explain. [¿Nosotros aprendimos a utilizar el proceso del ciclo de preguntas en nuestra clase, ¿cómo afectó esto sus hábitos de lecto-escritura fuera del salón de clases? Explique.]
3. Would you like to use dialogue journals in another class in the future? Why yes? or Why not? [¿Le gustaría usar cuadernos comunicativos en otra clase en el futuro? ¿Por qué sí? ó ¿Por qué no?]
4. Now that the class is over, what do you consider is a good way of preparing yourself to take this class? [Ahora que la clase ha terminado, ¿cuál cree usted es una buena forma de prepararse para tomar esta clase?]

Appendix F

Pablo's Dialogue Journal Entries

(September 22 to September 30, 2003)

September 22, 03

HELLO DEAR, "CLARENA"

well let me tell you what I was
on vacations, three years ago I went
to Mexico to visit my family, I was
single and I went to dance at different
places, I was swimming on the beach
but I did spend a lot of money and I had
what came back to USA, and now I
make plans for to go again visit to my family

* and my wife parents, and take my
little girl with us and let her know
our families and cultures.

one of my answers was, where I go to
swimming. sometime I go to Zilker park

© at river there is very cold the water
but is fun. sometime I go to the lake
travis lake there is very beautiful.

also, on this time is what I can tell you
see you in the class.

A.

September 24, 03

Hi, again ☺

Pablo, you forgot to ask me questions
in your letter. ☹

Wow! It sounds like you had lots of fun
during your last vacation time ☺. You're right,

it is a nice idea that your family and your

* wife's parents get to know your little daughter.

I'm sure that will be another fun vacation
time for you ☺.

☺ I know! The water in Zilker Park is really

cold ☹ brrr That's why I don't go there.

What was the last movie you saw?

Tell me more about the sport you practice ⚽

See you soon,

Clay

September 28, 03

Hi CLARENA HOW ARE YOU DOING

I'M GLAD TO ANSWER TO YOU THE QUESTIONS.

WELL THE LAST MOVIE I SAW WAS

THE FAST FURIOUS LIKE FIVE MONTH

AGO I DON'T SEE MOVIES FREQUENTLY

BECAUSE IN THE WEEK DAY I HAVE TO

WORK SOMETIMES I STAY LATE WORK-

ING NOW I HAVE TO WORK OF 7:30 TO

6:00 THE MONDAYS BECAUSE I NEED

GO TO SCHOOL ON TUESDAY I START TO

WORK 7:30 TO 8:00 OR 9:00 P.M. and

THE WEEKENDS I WATCH THE SOCCER

GAMES. IS WHY.

(2)

Sep 28, 03

LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT MY FAVORITE

SPORT, 12 YEAR AGO I WAS THE

CHAMPION AND LAST YEAR I WAS THE

SECOND. I ALWAYS TRY TO BE THE BEST

CLARENA. IF I INVITE TO YOU SEE THE

A GAME OF MY TEAM! (TRIAS) CAN YOU GO? SOME

TIMES MY WIFE GO WITH ME. AND SOME

TIME MYSELF? DO YOU HAVE MANY

@ FRIENDS IN AUSTIN?

I HOPE TO SEE YOU SOON

—
T.

September 30, 03

Dear Pablo, . -

★ I know what you're saying! During the week is really difficult to do fun activities. I work from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm when I don't come to your class.

Wow! You indeed love soccer "

★ Yes, I would go (yo iría) depending on the day and time "

© Yes, I have friends from school and friends I met here when I arrived in

Austin. My friends from school are

Sep 30, 03

(2)

my classmates in the doctoral program
and my office-mates. My friends
from outside school are from different
places.

Tell me about your job. What are
some of your responsibilities/duties?

Also, tell me more about your wife
and daughter. What do you do together
to have fun?

Have a nice weekend :)

Clam

Appendix G

Dialogue Journal Guidelines

- Read all the responses and continue the dialogue.
- Answer the questions I asked you in the previous entry. You have the right to refuse answering a question you consider too personal; provide a new topic for conversation, instead.
- Ask me one or two questions when writing a new entry. Be careful with the kind of questions you ask. Be respectful ☺.
- Try not to repeat the same mistake(s) in your next entries.
- Convey a message, converse, and take the risk to learn.
- Write a two-paragraph mid-term reflection in your native language.
- Write a two-page final reflection in your native language.
- Self-evaluate your work as a whole.

Appendix H

Dialogue Journal Self-Evaluation

Name: _____

Date: _____

Answer the following questions in order to self-evaluate your work in the dialogue journal.

1. Did you turn in the mid-term reflection for this activity?
Yes _____ No _____
2. Did you follow the rules for writing the entries in the dialogue journal?
Yes _____ No _____
3. Did you read your teacher 's response before writing your journal entry?
Yes _____ No _____
4. How many entries did you write? _____
5. Did you turn in the two-page final reflection about this activity?
Yes _____ No _____
6. As a whole, the quality of your work was:
Fair _____ Good _____ Very Good _____ Excellent _____

Ahora responda las siguientes preguntas. [Now, answer the following questions.]

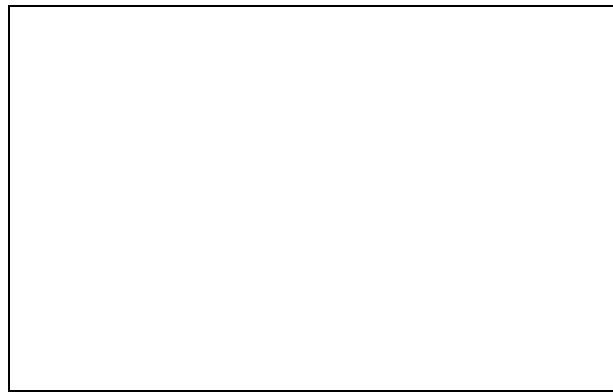
- ¿Siguió usted las reglas para escribir el dialogue journal? Por favor explique. [Did you follow the rules in order to write the dialogue journal?]

- Haga una lista de tres cosas que le gustaron del dialogue journal. [Make a list of three things you liked about doing the dialogue journal]
- Haga una lista de tres cosas que no le gustaron o piensa se deben cambiar con respecto a esta actividad. [Make a list of three things you did not like or that you think should be changed in relation to this writing activity]
- Compare tres de sus cartas: La primera, la del medio y la última. ¿Qué piensa de su trabajo? ¿Cómo ha cambiado su escritura en inglés?
[Compare three of your dialogue journal entries: The first one, the one in the middle, and the last one. What do you think about your work? How has your English writing changed?]
- En general, ¿qué opina del dialogue journal? [In general, what is your opinion about the dialogue journal?]
- Comentario libre... [Free comments...]

Appendix I
Map it Out Strategy

MAP IT OUT STRATEGY

Main Idea



Key Points:

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

My Summary:

Appendix J

Make –believe Postcards

Read Gloria's postcard to Jose... Where is she? Why is she there?

<p><i>Dear Jose:</i> <i>Angela and I are having a great time on our holiday. We're spending a few days in San Diego. Right now I'm lying on a beautiful sunny beach. I'm eating a huge ice cream cone and listening to the CD you gave me –it's great. Angela is swimming in the water and talking to some cute guys. It's perfect. Thinking of you. Come back soon!</i> <i>Love,</i> <i>Gloria.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: right;">LOVE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">α ≡ ☐</p> <p>Post card</p> <p><i>José López</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><u>2035 Lamar</u> <u>Austin, Tex</u> <u>78705</u></p>
---	---

<p>Dear...</p> <p>~~~~~</p> <p>~~~~~</p> <p>~~~~~...</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">LOVE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">α ≡</p> <p>Post card</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____.</p>
--	--

Appendix K

Arturo's Second Journal Entry

(September 22, 2003)

Sep 22, 03

Good

O.K. my favorite place is club the
Dance why I like to Dance to, And
when to be with me family on Saturday we are
going in different place the park. If when I take
with me friends we are going to river, to buy
* Anything and walk in street 6th. if when go
with me Anna friend we are going in the
Restorante And also a place better
For me, for to be with she is

El Mirador "o" one hundred ladder

is place pretty, more when is the night
why you can see the star and the light
the home

— each one you happy

"pasatiempos"

— what is do you like where lived before
in Colombia



Appendix L

Arturo's Journal Entry

(October 22, 2003)

Hello CLARENA

Oct. 22, 03

THIS IS



P

30 WATERMELON

When went Secundaria I'm not bad boy
but sometime not enter in classroom because

* is boring. sometime not enter the school.

you third wish is EASY to find
is only what, do you want you try change

© the man if do you not like change

again Hasta you found you Half orange
I think.

I would like. First arrive the 10 year
/Ugo I would be Father

10 Year is long but Here in USA

is Very, Very, Very Fast. only working

-A- I DON NOT to be Inginner, boss, Doctor

ONLY I WANT TO be Father but I DON'T

Have Hully. I need some Time and

money

Come Halloween Do you like This

Month? What is month enjoy more?

What do music listen?

Appendix M

Arturo's Journal Entry

(November 24, 2003)

10
Dave

Nov 24, 03

I like when is Friday Day
because. First is last day working
second I have money and Three
I go to dance with friend
* as say Mexican is Friday social
True Not he Read JACK
but I try Ansony Not try
because I Remember the person
this ^{muerto} dad in corner. I'm promes
I Read Jack not all but sila mitad
because this man maybe I sleep.
Do you know Dance "Cumbia"?
Do you like swim?

Form B

Appendix N
BASIC ENGLISH SKILLS TEST
LITERACY SKILLS SECTION SCORING SHEET

Name Pablo Date of Test _____
Testing Site _____ Examiner _____

Reading Comprehension
Writing

Total 34
Total 17

LITERACY SKILLS
Student Performance Level

TOTAL 51
BSL 3

READING
(Writing on reverse side)

Part 2--Calendar

1. October 31 circled.....(S)
2. August 19 circled.....(S)
3. March 7 circled.....(S)
4. December 25 circled.....(S)

Part 3--Food Labels

1. \$1.27.....(S)
2. \$2.54.....(S)
3. \$.79.....(S)

Part 4--Clothing Labels

1. Med(ium).....(S)
2. \$18.....(S)
3. 18.....(S)
4. \$6.50.....(S)

Part 7--Telephone Directory

1. 965-2756 circled.....(S)
2. 726-9116 circled.....(S)

Part 8--Train Schedule

1. 5 20P circled.....(S)
2. 1 15P circled.....(S)
3. 5 20P circled.....(S)

Part 9--Reading Passages

1. need must want.....(S)
2. answers driving try.....(S)
3. to can for.....(S)
4. other another each.....(S)
5. in to from.....(S)
6. license state driving.....(S)
7. have has is.....(S)

8. drive test drunk.....(S)
9. right test state.....(S)
10. not won't aren't.....(S)
11. time day here.....(S)
12. must should need.....(S)
13. in since by.....(S)
14. times phones numbers.....(S)
15. information notice appointment.....(S)

Part 10--Ads, Signs, Notices, etc.

- 1.....b.....(S)
- 2.....b.....(S)
- 3.....c.....(S)
- 4.....d.....(S)
- 5.....d.....(S)
- 6.....a.....(S)
- 7.....b.....(S)
- 8.....d.....(S)
- 9.....c.....(S)
- 10.....b.....(S)
- 11.....c.....(S)
- 12.....c.....(S)
- 13.....c.....(S)
- 14.....a.....(S)
- 15.....d.....(S)
- 16.....a.....(S)
- 17.....c.....(S)
- 18.....d.....(S)

READING COMPREHENSION TOTAL 34/49

Form B

WRITING

Pablo's test

Part 1 -- Personal Background Form

1. Name (last, first)..... (5)
2. Sex checked (1)
3. Street number..... (5)
4. Street name (5)
5. City (5)
6. State (5)
7. Zip Code (5)
8. Place of Birth (5)
9. Sign here (5)
10. Date (5)

Part 5 -- Rent Check

1. Date (last, first)..... (1)
2. (Mr.) Thomas Johnson (1)
3. 250.00 (1)
4. Two hundred fifty (5)
5. Signature (1)

Part 6 -- Envelope

1. Return address (0,2 points) (2)
2. Sending address (0,2 points) (2)

Part II -- Notes

1. To your English teacher (0,1,3,5) 0
2. To an American friend (0,1,3,5) 0

WRITING TOTAL 17/29

Tutor's Copy of Student's Assessment Detail

BEST - Basic English Skills Test

BEST - Basic English Skills Test		Tutor Notes
Name: <u>Pablo</u>		
Date: <u>6/11/03</u>		
Examiner:		
Life Skills - Oral Interview	CAN	CANNOT
Identify Self and Native Country (1-3)		
Describe Picture of Family (9-10)		
Tell Time by Digital Clock (11-12)		
Tell Time by Analog Clock (13-14)		
Read Map and Follow Directions (15-20)		
Count Money (21-28)		
Recognize Street Signs (29-32)		
Describe Doctors Visit (33-36)		
Describe Auto Accident (37-41)		
Recognize Restaurant Jobs (42-45)		
Fill Out Form (46-49)		
Life Skills - Literacy Skills	CAN	CANNOT
Fill Out Form	✓	
Recognize Alphabetic Dates	✓	
Recognize Numeric Dates	✓	
Read Grocery Prices	✓	
Read Store Price Tags	✓	
Write Rent Check	✓	
Address Envelope	✓	
Read Telephone Book		✓
Read Train Schedule	✓	
Reading - Complete Sentences	✓	
Reading - Understand Context		✓
Understand Store Sign 1-3	✓	
Understand Appointment Card 4-6	✓	
Understand Prescription Label 7-9		✓
Understand Part of Motor Vehicle Manual 10-11		✓
Understand Bus Notice 12-13	✓	
Understand Newspaper Ad 14-15	✓	
Understand Help Wanted Ad 16-18	✓	
Write notes		✓

REFERENCES

- Algren De Gutierrez, E. (1987). *The movement against teaching English in schools of Puerto Rico*. New York: University Press of America.
- Alvarado, A & Herr, P. (2003). Inquiry-based learning using everyday objects: hands-on instructional strategies that promote active learning in grades 3-8. Thousand Oaks, California.
- Amstutz, D. D. (2000). Family literacy: Implications for public school practice. *Education and Urban Society*, 32, 207-220.
- Anderson, L. & Burns, R. (1989). Research in classrooms: The study of teachers, teaching, and instruction. Anderson, Lorin W. 1st ed. Oxford, England.
- Ary, D. (1985/2002). Introduction to research in education. New York
- Ashton-Warner, S. (1963). *Teacher*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- August, D. & Hakuta, K. (Eds.) (1997). *Improving schools for language minority students*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Azar, B. (1992). *Fundamentals of English Grammar*. 2nd Ed.
- Bachman, L. F. (1990). Communicative language ability. In *Fundamental consideration in language testing* (pp. 82-99). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Baker, C. (2001). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism*. (Third Edition). Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.

- Barnes, D. (1995). Talking and learning in classrooms: An introduction. *Primary voices K-6*, 3 (1), 2-7.
- Barnes, D. (1992). *From communication to curriculum*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Bell, J. S. (2000). Literacy challenges for language learners in job-training programs. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 57 (1), 173-200.
- Berg, B. L. (2001). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Basic English Skills Test (BEST). <http://www.cal.org/public/bestest.htm> Center for Applied Linguistics. Washington, DC.
- Boomer, G.; Lester, N.; Onore, C. & Cook, J. (1992). *Negotiating the curriculum: Educating for the 21st century*. The Falmer Press. London.
- Boomer, G. (1978). Negotiating the curriculum. In Boomer, G.; Lester, N.; Onore, C. & Cook, J. (Eds.). (1992). *Negotiating the curriculum: Educating for the 21st century*. The Falmer Press. London; pp. 4-14.
- Brisk, M. E. & Harrington, M. M. (2000). *Literacy and bilingualism: A handbook for all teachers*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. Publishers.
- Brubacher, J. W.; Case, Ch. W. & Reagan, T. G. (1994). *Becoming a reflective educator: How to build a culture of inquiry in the schools*. Corwin Press, Inc. Thousand Oaks, California.

- Brubaker, D. L. & Simon, L. H. (1993). *Teacher as decision maker: Real life cases to hone your people skills*. Corwin Press, Inc. Newbury Park, California.
- Burnaford, G.; Fischer, J. & Hobson, D. (Eds.). (1996). *Teachers doing research: Practical possibilities*. LEA, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. Mahwah, New Jersey.
- Burt, M. & Saccomano, M. (1995). Evaluating workplace ESL instructional programs. (report No. EDO-LE-95-07) ED 386961.
- Chu, C. M. (1999). Literacy practices of linguistic minorities: Sociolinguistic issues and implications for literacy services. *Library Quarterly*, 69 (3), 339-357.
- Cochram-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. L. (1993). *Inside outside: Teacher research and knowledge*. New York: Teachers College.
- Cook, J. (1992). Negotiating the curriculum: Programing for learning. In Boomer, G.; Lester, N.; Onore, C. & Cook, J. (Eds.). (1992). *Negotiating the curriculum: Educating for the 21st century*. The Falmer Press. London; pp. 15-31.
- Crawford, J. (1997). *Bilingual education : Language, learning, and politics*.
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design and qualitative approaches*. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks, California.

- Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage.
- Dana, N. F. & Yendol-Silva, D. (2003). *The reflective educator's guide to classroom research: Learning to teach and teaching to learn through practitioner inquiry*. Corwin Press, Inc. Thousand Oaks, California.
- Darville, R. (1999). Knowledges of adult literacy: Surveying for competitiveness. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 19 (4-5), 273-285.
- Delamont, S. (1992). *Fieldwork in educational settings: Methods, pitfalls, and perspectives*. The Falmer Press. London.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children. Cultural conflict in the classroom*. The New Press. New York.
- Dewey. (1938/1998). *Experience and education*. New York: Collier.
- Ellis, R. (1997). *SLA Research and language teaching*. Great Clarendon Street, Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Emerson, R. M.; Fretz, R. I. & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Erlandson, D. A.; Harris, E. L.; Skipper, B. L. & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods*. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Fallon, D. (1995). Making dialogue dialogic: A dialogic approach to adult literacy instruction. *Journal of adolescent & adult literacy*. 39(2), pp. 138-147.

- Flickinger, G. G. (1984). Language, literacy, children's literature: The link to communicative competency for ESOL adults. (report No. CS 008 402) ED 268 504.
- Foorman, B. R. (1991). Adult literacy / Child literacy: One world or world apart? *Linguistics and education*, 3, 103-108.
- Fosnot, C. T. (1996). *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives, and practice*. New York, NY. Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Freeman, D. E. & Freeman, Y. S. (1994/2001). *Between worlds. Access to second language acquisition*. Heinemann. Portsmouth, NH.
- Freeman, D. (1998). *Doing teacher-research: From inquiry to understanding*. New York: Heinle and Heinle.
- Freeman, Y. S. & Freeman, D. E. (2002). *Closing the achievement gap: How to reach limited-formal-schooling and long-term English learners*. Heinemann. Portsmouth, NH.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1987/1994). *Literacy : Reading the word and the world*. South Hadley, Mass.
- Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1987). Rethinking literacy: A dialogue. In Vipond, D. L. & Strahl, R. *Literacy: Language and Power*. (1994). The University Press California State University Long Beach.

Frequently asked questions about adult literacy (n.d.). Retrieved November 10,

2002 from National Institute for Literacy Website

<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/faqs.html#literacy>

Garcia, G. (1998). *The emergent literacy development of linguistically and culturally diverse children who receive early childhood, special education services*. CLAS Institute. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. 2nd ed. Longman. New York.

Goodman, K. (1986). *What's whole in whole language?* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Goldstein, L. S. (2002). *Reclaiming caring in teaching and teacher education*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing. Inc.

Gonzalez, N., Moll, L. C., Tenery, M. F., Rivera, A., Rendon, P., Gonzales, R., & Amanti, C. (1995). Funds of knowledge for teaching in Latino households. *Urban Education*, 29, 443-70.

Grabe, W. (1991). Current developments in second language reading research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25 (3), 375-396.

Greenberg, D.; Fredrick, L. D.; Hughes, T. A. & Bunting, C. (2002). Implementation issues in a reading program for low reading adults. *Journal of adolescent & Adult literacy*, 45, 626-632.

- Gunderson, Lee. (1991). *ESL literacy instruction: A guidebook to theory and practice*. Regents/Prentice Hall. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
- Hammink, J. E. (2000). *A comparison of the code switching behavior and knowledge of adults and children*. Unpublished dissertation. The University of Texas at El Paso.
- Hayes, E. (1996). Learning about adult literacy: A case study of a college tutor. *Journal of adolescent & adult literacy*. 39(5), pp. 386-395.
- Hiebert, E. H. (1993). Young children's literacy experiences in home and school. In: S. R. Yussen & M. C. Smith (Eds.), *Reading across the life span* (pp. 35-55). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Hodges, L. (1996). The professor who knows his dahlias. *Times Educational Supplement*, 4164, p. A31(1).
- Hohn, M.D. (1998). *Empowerment health education in adult literacy: A guide for public health and adult literacy practitioners, policy makers, and founders*. Retrieved on November 10, 2002 from NIFL Literacy Leader Fellowship Project Website
<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/fellowship/reports/hohn/HOHN.HTM#terms>
- Hoyt, L. (2000). *Snapshots: Literacy minilessons up close*. Heinemann. Portsmouth, NH.

- Johnson, B. (1993). The teacher as a researcher. Retrieved on June 30, 2003 from
ERIC Digest, ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, Washington,
D.C. Web-site <http://www.dsea.org/teachingtips/tips/researcher.htm>
- Kidder, L. H. (1981). *Selltiz, Wrightsman & Cook's research methods in social relations*. (4th ed.) Austin, Tex.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2003). *Teachers as researchers: Qualitative inquiry as a path to empowerment*. 2nd ed. RoutledgeFalmer. London.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in SLA*. Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.
- Lanteigne, B. & Schwarzer, D. (1997). The progress of Rafael in English and family reading: A case study. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* V 41 p. 36-45.
- Lather, P. (1991). Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the post modern. New York: Routledge.
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Loughran, J.; Mitchell & Mitchell, J. (2002). *Learning from teacher research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Lindholm-Leary, K. (2001). *Dual language education*. Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.
- Luke, A. (1991). Literacies as social practices. *English education*, 23, 131-147.

- Luke, C. (2004). Inquiry-based learning in a university Spanish class: An evaluative case study of a curricular implementation. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin.
- Martin, J. (1989). Some practical suggestions for writing in a foreign language classroom. *Dialogue*, 6(2), 17-19.
- McCloskey & Stack (1997). *Voices in Literature –Student Journal*.
- McKay, S. L. (1993). *Agendas for second language literacy*. Cambridge Language Education. Cambridge University Press.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education: Revised and expanded from case study research in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Metz, E. (1990). Issues in adult literacy assessment. In Radencich (Ed.) (1994). *Adult literacy: A compendium of articles from the journal of reading*. International Reading Association, Inc.
- Miller, D. (2002). *Reading with meaning*. Stenhouse Publishers. Portland, Maine.
- Miller, J. P. (1988). *The holistic curriculum*. OISE Press. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Toronto, Ontario.
- Miller, R. (1992). *What are schools for? Holistic education in American culture*. (2nd ed.) Holistic Education Press. Brandon, VT.

- Moll, L.; Amanti, C.; Neff, D. & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into practice*, 31, 132-141.
- Moll, L. C. (1988). Some key issues in teaching Latino students. *Language Arts*. 65(5), pp. 465-472
- Moll, L. C. (1986). Writing as communication: Creating strategic learning environments for students. *Theory into practice*. 25(2), pp. 102-108.
- Moll, L. C.; Saez, R.; Dworin, J. (2001). Exploring biliteracy: Two student case examples of writing as a social practice. *The Elementary school journal*. 101(4).
- Omaggio-Hadley, A. (2001). *Teaching language in context*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Orellana, Ek & Hernandez (2000). Proposition 227 and bilingual education in a transnational community. In E. T. Trueba & L. I. Bartolomé (Eds.) *Immigrant voices: In search of educational equity*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Otto, B. (2002). *Language development in early childhood*. Upper Sadle River: New Jersey. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Owocki, G. (2001). *Make way for literacy! Teaching the way young children learn*. Heinemann. Portsmouth, NH.

- Padilla, A. M.; Aninao, J. & Sung, H. (1996). "Development and implementation of student portfolios in foreign language programs." *Foreign Language Annals*. 29(3), 428-438.
- Paterson, P. (1999). *English Exercises in Context*. 2nd Ed.
- Pérez, B. & Torres-Guzmán, M. E. (2002). *Learning in two worlds: An integrated Spanish/English biliteracy approach*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Perez, B. & Torres-Guzman, M. E. (1996). *Learning in two worlds: An integrated Spanish/English biliteracy approach*. 2nd ed. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Peyton, J. K. & Reed, L. (1990). *Dialogue journal writing with nonnative English speakers: A handbook for teachers*. TESOL.
- Popkin, D. (1985). Dialogue journals: A way to personalize communication in a foreign language. *Foreign Language Annals*, 18(2), 153-156.
- Powell Newman, A., & Beverstock, C. (1990). *Adult literacy: Contexts & Challenges*.
Bloomington, Indiana: International Reading Association, Inc.
- Ramirez, A. G. (1995). *Creating contexts for second language acquisition theory and methods*. Longman Publishers USA.
- Reed, C. J., McCarthy M., & Briley, B. L. (2002). Sharing assumptions and negotiating boundaries: Coauthorship as a tool for teaching and learning. *College Teaching*, 50 (1), 22-26.
- Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative Research Practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. London: Sage Publications.

- Rogers, A. (1999). Improving the quality of adult literacy programmes in developing countries: The real literacies approach. *Elsevier science ltd.*, 19 (3), 219-234.
- Santopietro, K. (1991). *Intake and Placement Guidelines*. Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Education, Office of Adult Education.
- Sawyer, P. (2000). *ESOL Assessment action research report. ESOL Action research assessment piloting project, 1999-2000*. Tennessee University. Knoxville Center for Literacy Studies. (BBB26851).
- Schmidt, P. R. & Mosenthal, P. B. (Eds.) (2001). *Reconceptualizing literacy in the new age of multiculturalism and pluralism*. Greenwich, Connecticut: IAP Information Age Publishing.
- Schwarzer, D. (2001). A whole language foreign language Hebrew class: From theory to practice. *Foreign language annals*. 34(1), 52-59.
- Schwarzer, D. & Luke, C. (2001). Inquiry cycles in a whole language foreign language class: Some theoretical and practical insights. *Texas papers for foreign language education*. 6(1), 83-100.
- Seidman, I. (1991). Interviewing as qualitative research. New York: Teachers College.
- Short, D. & Grognet, A. G. (1988). *A review of work-place literacy tests and testing*. Center for Applied Linguistics for the Hudson Institute. No place

of publication was indicated. Retrieved October 14, 2004 from

www.doleta.gov

- Short, K. G.; Harste, J. C. & Burke, C. (1996). *Creating Classrooms for Authors*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Smallwood, B. A. (1992). *Children's literature in adult ESL classes*. (Report No. FL 800 621) ED 353 864.
- Stake, R. E. (1994). Case Studies. In: Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. *Handbook of Qualitative research*. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA; pp. 236-247.
- Staton, J.; Shuy, R.W.; Peyton, J.K. & Reed, L. (1988). *Dialogue journal communication: Classroom, linguistic, social and cognitive views*. Norwood, N. J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Steers, K. Z. (1992). Starting with self-awareness: Basic experiences in foreign language writing. *Hispania*. 75, 421-423.
- Stewart, W. J. (1993). Facilitating holistic curriculum planning in schools. *The Clearing House*. Nov-Dec. Heldref Publications. 67(2), 112(4).
- Sticht, T. G. (1990). *Testing and assessment in adult basic education and English as a second language programs*. San Diego, CA.: Applied Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences, Inc.
- Taylor, D. & Dorsey-Gaines, C. (1988). *Growing up literate: Learning from inner city families*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

- Tesch, R. (1990). *Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools*. New York: Falmer Press.
- Ullman, C. & Becker, A. (1997). The process and the product: Involving students in choosing content and developing materials leads to change. Focus on basics, 1 (D).
- Valdés, G. (1996). *Con Respeto: Bridging the distances between culturally diverse families and schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Walker, R. (1985). *Doing research*. Great Britain. Cambridge: University Press.
- Weddel, K. S., & VanDuzer, C. (1997). *Needs assessment for ESL learners*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 407 882)
- Weinstein-Shr, G. (1994). Literacy and second language learners: A family agenda. In Spener, D. (Ed.) (1994). *Adult Biliteracy in the United States*. McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems Co., Inc.
- Weiss, R. S. (1994). *Learning from strangers*. New York, N. Y.: The Free Press
- Weston, P. (1979). *Negotiating the curriculum: A study in secondary schooling*. NFER Publishing Company Ltd. London.
- Whitin, P. & Whitin, D. J. (1997). *"Inquiry at the window: Pursuing the wonders of learners."* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Whitmore, K. F. & Crowell, C. G. (1994). *Inventing a classroom: Life in a bilingual whole language learning community*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

- Wolcott, H. F. (2001). *Writing up qualitative research* (2nd. Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Zeni, J. (Ed.) (2001). *Ethical issues in practitioner research*. Teachers College Press, Columbia University. New York and London.

Vita

Clarena Larrotta was born in Armenia, Colombia on July 3, 1968, the daughter of Rubiela Monsalve and Alirio Larrotta. After completing her work at San Vicente de Paul High School, Buenaventura, Colombia, in 1986, she entered The University of Quindio in Armenia, Colombia. She received the degree of Licenciado in Modern Languages in December 1990. During the following years she worked as an English teacher at two bilingual schools and at the local university in Armenia, Colombia. In 1996 she entered the Graduate School of The University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez where she received the degree of Master of Arts in English Education in June 1999. While working on her Masters degree she taught English at the university level. In August 2000 she entered the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Multilingual Studies/Bilingual Education at The University of Texas at Austin. While working on her doctoral degree, she taught Spanish as a foreign language at the same university. She was also a teaching assistant for literacy and second language acquisition classes during the summers. She has a publication in the journal *Texas Papers in Foreign Language Education* and a chapter in the anthology *Research as a tool for empowerment: Theory informing practice* that will be published by the series Research in Second Language Learning Volume IV (academic year 2005-2006).
Permanent Address: 2104 San Gabriel St. Apt. 214, Austin, Texas 78705
This dissertation was typed by the author.