Literacy from a Different Perspective: Listening to the Voices of Adolescents from a Multicultural Context

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Abstract

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The objective of this study was to listen to the perceptions of the experiences of adolescents from a multicultural background as those experiences related to their literacy learning acquisition. Each of the adolescent learners were enrolled in the English for Speakers of Other Languages program in one of the middle schools in the state of Virginia. The experiences, whether positive or negative, would inevitably shape the literacy learning of these multicultural learners as they interacted with family members, with members of the community, and in the academic setting at school.

Open ended interview questions were used to gather data for this qualitative, ethnographic research study. This type forum allowed for an open dialogue between the researcher and the adolescent learners. As the researcher, I examined the data to determine how the learners' perceived experiences impacted their literacy learning.

This study seeks to contribute to the knowledge base on adolescent literacy. The findings can be used by policy makers and educators who are dedicated to improving the quality of the educational lives of our multicultural learners. It is possible that the findings of this study could be used to inform guidelines for establishing future policies, practices, and strategies implemented in the English for Speakers of Other Languages program in the public schools.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late husband, Willie Cornelius Lucas, who encouraged me to begin to pursue my studies as a doctoral candidate. I only wish that he had lived to see it come to fruition. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my late father, James Willis McKoy, whose life was a testament to me, that I could achieve whatever goals I sought to pursue, no matter what the challenge, if I believed in myself. With the help of God, I realized my dream.

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CHAPTER 1

RATIONALE

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to contribute to the knowledge base on adolescent literacy. To do so, I framed the study against the life experiences of four eighth grade, middle school level learners in a multicultural context as they took on the challenge of learning a new language and adapting to a new culture. My immediate goal was to learn about the literacy experiences of these adolescent learners across various aspects of their lives and about the resources they made use of and challenges they faced as they confronted a new culture.

To achieve the general purpose and meet the immediate goal of the study, I examined the perspectives of selected students whose cultural heritages varied. Each student was attending or had completed an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program at their middle school. In particular, I interviewed students to explore their experiences: as newcomers to the United States, as participants in an ESOL program in a middle school setting, and as adolescents interacting with family and community members. I also inquired about their hopes, dreams, fears, and their plans for the future.

To clarify the use of the terms "literacy" and "multicultural" used in the title of this study and in other occurrences throughout this document, I draw on the views advanced by Heath (1989) and Au (1998). Heath's characterization of "literacy" and Au's definition of "multicultural" are more aptly applicable to my use of the terms relative to the nature of this research study.

Typically, literacy is understood as the practices of reading and writing as they are employed in school settings (Nieto, 2002). However, the definition of literacy, in the context with which I have used it, spans a much broader and a more comprehensive range of practices. In this study, I embrace the view of literacy as advanced by Heath (1989) who characterizes literacy as the knowledge of the learner's ways of living, eating, sleeping, worshiping, using space, and filling time with which he/she is surrounded each day of his/her life. As such, the learner's beliefs and values

are prominent components in literacy learning. Often, as educators, we fail to ask how literacy (as viewed by Heath) is already meaningful to these learners. Through the perceptions shared by the research participants of their lived experiences, this research study will attempt to address the issue of literacy in these adolescents' lives.

For the purpose of this research, I have adopted Au's (1998) explanation of the term "multicultural." Au identifies multicultural students as those whose cultural heritages stem from various backgrounds. Those students whose heritage languages are other than the collection of discourses that have come to be called Standard American English are identified by Au as multicultural learners. Included in this group are African-Americans, Asian Americans, Latina/o Americans, Native Americans, European Americans, and other such minority groups.

Over a span of several years, I have had the opportunity to observe many students with multicultural backgrounds as they enroll in the various public school systems of the United States. Having taught school in North Carolina, Missouri, West Virginia, and Virginia, I have watched as many of these learners face difficulties and challenges as they seek to become part of the various educational settings within the schools in which they have enrolled.

So often, the educational needs of these multicultural learners are inadequately addressed by our schools. As educators, we often lack the knowledge and training necessary to help these learners to succeed in school (Au, 1998; Nieto & Bode, 2008). The voices of these multicultural learners are often stifled and ignored. Educators may lack the background knowledge needed to comprehend the needs that are being conveyed through a language fueled by a need for recognition and acceptance (Jimenez, 2000). Sometimes, the language or discourse that is being used by the literacy learner is vocal, but more often it is a silent language. The student could very well attempt to convey his/her feelings through body language or by withdrawing from others. Such are the voices that yearn to be heard; they are the voices (verbal and non-verbal) that we must heed as we attempt to support our adolescents' educational and personal success (Poplin & Weeres, 1992a).

In this research study, I address the issues the four multicultural middle school learners face. The research participants in this study lend their voices by sharing their

perceptions of their literacy learning as they experience the acculturation process while adapting to a new culture and language as newcomers to the United States.

Background Information

When I first began this research project, I was drawn to a recurring image that played itself out in my mind, an image of a person whose face I have yet to see. This image has shadowed my thoughts, haunting me and, inevitably, shaping my views about literacy learning practices. To me, the image seemed surreal as it rewound itself over and over in my consciousness. At the time, I attributed the recurrence of the image to my intensive study of various research articles related to the methods and procedures used in the public schools to meet the needs of adolescents classified in one of several language deficiency categories (Nieto, 2002), such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and English Language Learners (ELL).

As I continued to study the conjured image, I could see that it clearly presented several people walking down a rather crowded sidewalk; yet, there was one rather prominent figure that seemed to stand out from the rest. She was a young woman dressed in clothing that appeared to be layered, quite unlike the others. However, no one seemed to notice her. She was pulling luggage or baggage behind her that seemed to be a bit heavy, giving her a halting gait. She seemed unsure about whether she should be going in the same direction as the others, as she made her way down the sidewalk in the same direction. As the image continued to unfold, I watched as the young woman stole brief glances from one side to the other and occasionally over her shoulder. Though I could not see her face, I sensed a feeling of discontent in the hunched shoulders and the shuffling, halting gait as her image gradually.faded away. The feeling I experienced as the vision unfolded and then faded away was rather unsettling.

As I reflected on the image, my thoughts were drawn to many of the adolescents with whom I have worked over the years. They are the English Language Learners who exhibit the uncertainty and the uneasiness that often come with being in an unfamiliar setting. They experience uncertainty about the direction in which their studies and social lives will take them as they struggle to understand a new language and a new culture. The people in the image with the prominent figure represent the

various cultural groups that have adapted or begun to adapt to the American education system as they endeavor to learn a new culture layered with their own prior experiences. Many of them have already been mainstreamed–placed in general education classes.

In contrast, the prominent figure in the image represents the adolescent who has not yet been mainstreamed. This student may very well become one for whom the education system will fail because it does not know how to effectively meet her needs. She wants to belong, yet she feels that she is different and won't fit in. The pain caused by the disparity between what she knows and can bring to the system and what English-speaking students know and bring to the system is palpable for her. What is most troubling to her, perhaps, is that those around her seem unaware that she exists. She has become "lost in the system," and no one seems to notice.

What a difference it would be if the young lady in my vision were to begin to speak to those around her, making them aware that not only does she exist, but she is able to voice her concerns about issues that directly affect her learning and suggest needed changes in the system that would make her educational life more meaningful, more productive, and less burdensome.

I have long believed that when a student embarks on his/her educational journey, one of the most effective methods used in helping the student to realize success is for the student to become a stakeholder, an active agent in the teaching-learning process (Nieto, 2000). One way to nurture this agency is to invite the student to share those feelings and experiences encountered at school, as well as those experienced as an adolescent newcomer to the United States. In responding to such an invitation, the adolescent will have an opportunity to explain his/her world as he/she sees it (Patton, 2002; Spradley, 1979). Such an opportunity can be a very positive, invigorating, and powerful step forward in the development of agency or the realization that one can influence one's surroundings (Nieto, 2002; Nieto & Bode, 2008).

Justification for the Study

Indeed, what matters most about education often happens inside the classroom (Au, 1998). The primary experts associated with the classroom are those who work there–mainly the teacher and the student. However, the voice of the student should be the one that is most frequently sought after, for it is the student who is the recipient of much that goes on in the classroom (Au, 1998; Heath, 1983). Allowing the student to give voice to the perceptions of the literacy learning environment will facilitate the possibility of identifying the varying educational needs.

Opportunities for adolescents to verbalize their experiences and to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching-learning processes as they unfold in the classroom are rare, indeed (Alvermann & Eakle, 2003). This is unfortunate, for it is certainly something that should be happening on a regular basis if we, as educators, are to improve the face of future educational ventures for our multicultural learners (Poplin & Weeres, 1992b).

Unfortunately, in our zeal to educate *all* youngsters, we tend to place them in prescriptive categories and apply a “one size fits all” educational program (Reyes, 1992). This approach occurs when the students’ specific cultural and linguistic characteristics are ignored. Inevitably, we use the "one size fits all" prescriptive solution when we fail to learn about and address the students’ individual needs, concerns, and hopes for the future and address those needs, concerns, and hopes in ways that enhance the students’ chances for success in the classroom and beyond (Reyes, 1992).

As educators, we must give our culturally and linguistically diverse students opportunities to speak and express their points of view, their ideas, their experiences, their passions, and their desires for learning. In short, we must give them opportunities to develop their voice. We must be willing to listen to their views on matters that pertain to them (Nieto, 2002). Who could better convey what their needs are than these students themselves? Who could better relate their level of comfort in a learning environment than the students involved?

Research Related to Method Used for the Study

I believe that when students are given an opportunity to voice their views and concerns about their learning environment, their input will allow us, as researchers and educators, to share a part of their innermost feelings. I further believe that what they impart will be a genuine sharing of their innermost beings. In fact, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) concluded that as qualitative researchers, we are offered the opportunity to gaze into the soul of another, and when that happens, a mutual understanding and support develop between the researcher and the participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

As a qualitative researcher, I seized the opportunity to allow the participants in this research study to genuinely share their innermost beings in an effort to gain a more meaningful, informed view of their lived experiences as literacy learners (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). I conducted my research through the art of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As detailed in Chapter 3 of this document, portraiture is a qualitative research process that involves gathering, examining, analyzing, and synthesizing the data, as well as presenting the research findings through the perceptual lenses of research participants.

In each phase of portraiture, the behaviors and experiences of the participants are considered within a social context. The use of portraiture allowed me to reveal the dynamic interaction of values, personality structure, and individual history of the research participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In my view, the use of portraiture allowed me to understand and present the perspectives of each of the research participants in context with their surroundings. In that regard, I strongly agree with Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) who posit that an effective way to interpret people’s actions and perspectives is to study them in context.

Moreover, the use of portraiture to present research findings differs with the traditional perspectives of social scientists who maintain that seeing or trying to study subjects in context is a major source of distraction and distortion. However, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) view seeing or studying the subject in context as a resource for understanding the complex being or nature of the subjects. Therefore, the narratives I used to present each portrait are "imbedded in particular contexts, including physical settings, cultural rituals, norms, and values which give rich cues

about how the subjects negotiate and understand their experiences" (p.12). I endeavored to reveal their personal traits, their lives in their heritage countries, their lives as newcomers to the United States, their adolescent experiences as ESOL students in a middle school setting, their adolescent experiences with family and community, and their hopes, dreams, fears, and plans for the future.

What I gained as the researcher, I wanted to share with my readers. I felt compelled to offer my readers the opportunity to cross boundaries of experiences while moving across cultures and family dramas. In essence, what that translated for me was that in order for my readers to seize upon this opportunity, they must be made to feel a sense of connection or identification (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) with the stories being told of each of research participants. The use of portraiture would allow me to accomplish this goal.

Focus of the Study

As educators, we must be committed to listening to the views of our multicultural students, allowing ourselves the opportunity to gain a more informed view of their lived experiences. Doing so will enable us to identify, more specifically, the challenges these students face as they work towards achieving success in a school environment which embraces English as the dominant language.

Students characterized as English Language Learners come from varied backgrounds, having encountered a variety of life experiences. Some of these learners are rather affluent, having experienced few adversities in life, while others have faced various difficulties, including war, political upheaval, illegal immigration, dire poverty and malnutrition, loss of social status, influence and wealth, and other such factors that may affect their learning and/or inhibit a smooth transition into the mainstream classroom (Middle School Guide Book, 2003; Seller & Weis, 1997). When these experiences are coupled with learning a new language and becoming part of a new learning environment and culture, the problem of achieving is exacerbated. When students come into the school depressed, angry, traumatized, and otherwise affected by negative experiences in their lives, they may not be particularly receptive to the type of learning environment they encounter at school. Therefore, it is imperative that students

be given the opportunity to verbally express such experiences as they will inevitably have an immeasurable impact on their literacy learning (Seller & Weis, 1997).

In essence, the purpose of this study was to learn about how multicultural adolescents are grappling with the problems of learning a new language and culture. To do so, I engaged four participants in conversations about various dimensions of their experiences. In particular I used five research questions to focus the study:

1. How do the adolescents perceive their experiences as newcomers to the United States in shaping their literacy learning?
2. How do the adolescents perceive their experiences as participants in the ESOL program in the middle school in helping to develop their literacy learning?
3. How do the adolescents perceive their experiences as literacy learners in shaping their views about the world in which they live?
4. How do the adolescents perceive their experiences as family and community members in shaping their literacy learning?
5. How do the adolescents perceive their hopes, dreams, fears, and plans for the future in view of their literacy learning experiences?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Very little research examines students' perceptions of their educational experiences. This is especially true for students who enter the American public school system speaking languages other than English (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). For the most part, many educational systems overlook the students' input. Students' perspectives are missing in discussions concerning strategies for confronting educational problems. The voices of students are rarely heard in the debates about school failure and success, and the perspectives of students from disempowered and dominated communities are even more invisible (Janks, 2000). However, as literacy educators, if we want students to learn that text and discourse matter, then we need to involve students in producing texts which matter to them and in voicing their perceptions about issues that concern them (Richardson, 1999). Several researchers have conducted studies which conclude that listening to the voices of our students is paramount if we are to reach the masses who are entrusted to our care in the various educational settings. In the following sections I discuss several studies that support the need to listen to our students share their perceptions of their learning experiences. I used each of the studies given as a model for conducting my research study.

Additionally, in each of the research studies discussed in this chapter, I found procedural information and strategies used that would be very beneficial to me as I talked with the research participants chosen to work with me on this research project. The research studies I reference in this chapter clearly present areas of interest and strategic methods to use to insure strong qualitative reporting. As I conducted my research, I focused on the following areas in presenting my findings:

- Listening to students in the classroom
- Listening to students outside the classroom
- Listening to students as co-researchers/participants
- Looking at cultural identity and school success

Studies: Listening to Students in the Classroom

Gee (2000), a socio theoretical researcher, noted in a paper that he presented to the National Council of Teachers of English, that the study of classroom interaction is essential for understanding curriculum and pedagogy because it reveals how teachers and students are positioned with respect to the curriculum, and it provides insights on who "owns" the curriculum. According to Gee, ownership of the curriculum is primarily built at the "micro level," the level which he described as "the moment-by-moment details of social interactions in school." He further stated that this is a feature needed if students are to connect what they are learning to the worlds they live in. In a study that advances this concept, Gee and Crawford (1998) conducted interviews with two teenage girls: Sandra, age 14 and Emily, age 15. In comparison, both girls interacted differently when they were with their peers, and their attitudes about academic achievement were strikingly different, as well. Sandra, from the working class, surrounded herself with friends who placated her feelings, saying what she wanted to hear. On the other hand, Emily, from the wealthy upper class, surrounded herself with peers who challenged her. Sandra tended to be self-centered, speaking of herself and her feelings and how what others said or did affected her. She did this, not seeking change but seeking, it seemed, to validate her actions or feelings–making such negative statements as this: "I didn't mean to say it like that…what I meant was…" (Gee & Crawford, 1998, p. 228). Sandra's manner of speech seemed to echo her attitude toward learning. She tended to blame others for her shortcomings. Contrary to Sandra's actions, Emily made positive statements, generally, making assertions related to knowledge and affirmations, speaking about how she felt or how things affected her–making positive statements such as this: "I know that…," or "I am sure that…" (p, 227). Emily's manner of speech seemed to echo her attitude toward learning, as well. She took full responsibility for her learning, seeking help when needed. The approach that both girls took in expressing their feelings indicated, to a degree, their approach to learning and the ownership of their learning (Gee & Crawford, 1998).

Inevitably, a student's outlook on achievement and acquisition of knowledge is based, to a great degree, on the identity the student brings to the classroom and the degree of relevance his/her identity has on school affiliation and achievement. An

equally important component is the interaction the student has with the teacher and others in the classroom (Heath, 1983). Therefore, it is important to build on a cooperative curriculum owned jointly by the teacher and the student, taking the student from where he/she is, as related to literacy learning, and building on that foundation to achieve success in the classroom (Gee, 2000; Heath, 1983; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Oliver & Lalik, 2000).

Comber (2002) studied classroom strategies used by four teachers: Jennifer O'Brien, who worked with five to eight year olds; Vivian Vasquez, who worked with kindergarteners; Marge Wells, who worked with five to nine year olds; and Helen Grant, who worked across grades with primary students. While each teacher developed different activities to support the curriculum in the classroom, they each listened carefully to students and used the students' concerns and intentions to create classroom tasks in which students became totally involved as they focused discussions on issues that were of interest to the students. They used the students' input to offer suggestions and instruction about strategies the teacher and students might use to accomplish their classroom goals.

In the classroom instruction conducted by O'Brien, students were assisted by the researcher in exploring classroom texts (commercial ads, mail, special occasion cards, etc.) by raising questions to promote summary and analysis. Using what they learned through inquiry, students were able to construct their own textual creations, showing a variety of innovation and creativity. These students were able to design their own commercial ads, communicate effectively through letters written and sent through regular mail to various groups of individuals, and create their own special occasion cards.

Vasquez's classroom instruction involved helping her students question their everyday experiences at school (having been left out of an event and denied the right to participate in a school activity). She assisted them in constructing an explanatory letter and developing a petition which addressed their specific concerns. These items were sent to those in charge of the activities for action. Once the items were received by the administration and favorably acted upon, the students were pleased with the outcome. Their concerns were recognized and immediate action was taken to rectify

the situation. Vasquez concluded that allowing students to participate in such activities encourages them to become motivated to develop sophisticated literacy skills.

Marge Wells' instruction involved disadvantaged learners who lived in very poorly kept neighborhoods. Wells wanted to capitalize on an attempt to improve the students' surroundings. To begin with, Wells invited her students to reflect on the best things in their lives–what made them really happy. Then, they were asked to respond to questions about what worried them, what angered them, what they would wish for if they could have three wishes, and what they would change, if they could, about the neighborhood school, the community, the world. Wells worked to show children that they could use their developing language skills to influence their surroundings. As the students responded to these questions, they revealed aspects of their lives and preferences that enlightened those who worked with them, enlightened them as to how to better assist these youngsters in their learning. The students were encouraged to work on improving aspects of their neighborhood and areas surrounding the school, including a neighboring park. Many of the areas were dilapidated and needed repair. The students developed landscape designs and offered suggestions for refurbishing the neighborhood, taking their suggestions and designs to the developers in the area. The task was very ambitious but well received by the developers. It is this type approach to literacy learning that is needed in our public schools to address the issues involving our educational communities in which many of our multicultural learners live (Comber, 2002).

In each of the case studies mentioned above, the teachers involved their students in focused discussions of issues that interested the students. They offered suggestions of and instructions about strategies students might use to accomplish their goals. Most importantly, they assisted their learners in considering and taking action on possible outcomes as they sought to work within the confines of their curriculum. All of these activities helped to strengthen the students' resolve and fill them with an awe-inspiring feeling of empowerment (Comber, 2002), an element crucial to being successful.

Student involvement is essential in any educational setting, but especially in the ESOL/ELL classrooms. Peregoy and Boyle (2005) stated that they believe that this

is the method to use to insure success in classrooms where English is not the primary language spoken by the student. From the standpoint of second language learning, one of the teacher's major responsibilities is to make sure a variety of functional language and literacies is incorporated into the projects and activities undertaken by the students. Further, Peregoy and Boyle noted that in addition to exposing students to a variety of literacy forms, the teacher must consider each student involved and make a concerted effort to tailor lessons around the interests and abilities of each student.

In another research project that looked at the effectual use of strategies in the classroom, Alvermann, Hagood, and Williams (2001) conducted a study that involved a 14 year old African-American eighth grader named Ned who became engrossed in acquiring a wealth of information about one of his favorite interests--rap music. The researchers made sure that Ned was able to access information related to his specific interest. By introducing Ned to text that interested him (namely internet web searches, song lyrics, and video clips), the researchers were able to connect with Ned in a way they had not anticipated. Once Ned felt comfortable conducting his own research on the web and writing to the researchers to share his findings, he began to develop his own strategies for completing assignments given to him by the researchers. Initially, they believed that Ned would be satisfied to just receive the information that the researchers gave to him. However, the more Ned became involved with his own research, the more independent he became of the researchers. In essence, though Ned appreciated the help they gave him, he was eager to venture out on his own. He wanted to show that he was capable of engaging in his own agenda with the various texts before him. He was given the opportunity to voice his preferences in quite a unique way. He responded favorably because someone was interested in what he had to contribute.

Several strategies were used by the researchers as they worked with Ned. These strategies included steering Ned into delving into that which interested him, engaging him in conversations about research with which he had become familiar and showing him that he was capable of becoming "the teacher" to others. These same strategies were used by Ned to benefit his own quest for knowledge in that he was able to use them to enhance his understandings of the various culture texts that related to

his specific interest. As a result, he was able to position himself as competent and literate. He demonstrated that he was a capable reader and writer in his uses of a variety of popular culture texts related to rap music. The strategies used by these researchers to reach Ned may be needed in most ESOL/ELL classes with those students who are sometimes difficult to reach or who seem not to be engaged in learning (Alvermann, Hagood, & Williams, 2001).

In another study, Poplin and Weeres (1992b) researched the need to listen to those on the inside–the principal, staff members, teachers, students, and parents. Over 100 participants were selected from two elementary schools, a high school, and a middle school. The variety of participants was chosen because the researchers believed that the voices of those inside the schools are those that matter most in an educational setting. The study, which lasted a little over a year during the early 1990's, revealed that what matters most in educational settings are essential human issues–concerns related to human relationships, racial and cultural differences, values, safety, and the aesthetic environment in the classroom.

During the study, several questions and responses related to the issues listed above were solicited. Administrators were asked to discuss their feelings about inclusion among their staff and fellow administrators. Overwhelmingly, responses revealed that they often felt isolated from colleagues at other schools and disconnected from their own staff. Staff members (including secretaries, maintenance workers, aides, etc.) were asked to comment on the issue of respect. They felt that their efforts often go unnoticed and that they are least respected in the school; though in many instances, they may be responsible for resolving and buffering issues that surface between the community and the school. Teachers were asked to comment on their classes and teaching materials. The responses the teachers gave were mostly concerned with the overload of class sizes and the bureaucratic demands on the overload of covering prescribed curriculum material within a limited span of time. Students, overwhelmingly, raised the issue of caring, or the lack of it, from the teachers, of being ignored, and negative treatment from teachers and staff members. The parents also felt isolated and not respected by personnel inside the school community.

The issues advanced by the students in the study became increasingly more important for them as they advanced in age. Students' voices sometimes reveal the great challenges and even the deep pain young people feel when schools are unresponsive, cold places. Ironically, those who spend the most time in schools and classrooms are often given the least opportunity to talk (Poplin & Weeres, 1992a). The participants in this study were able to come together to discuss their differences and concerns. Strategies were put in place that would address each of the concerns, and the schools began to make a concerted effort to change.

Felderman (2007), another researcher, reported a surprising outcome related to an incident which occurred in her second grade classroom as she prepared to take her students on a school sponsored field trip. She had planned to take her students to River Bend Park and needed her students to get permission slips signed by their parents. When she announced the planned field trip to the students, one of the students asked why they could not go to the Baltimore Aquarium. This was a coveted field trip that was denied to second graders. She explained that the field trip to the Aquarium would be too expensive and the school would not approve it. The students felt that this was not fair and began to voice their displeasure at not being allowed to go. Felderman knew that she had to become proactive to reign in the sounds of frustration, moaning, and complaining that she was getting from her students. She turned the negative energy she was receiving from them to a positive outflow of critical thinking and collaboration. In order to support the idea of visiting the Aquarium, students began to brainstorm ways that they could pay for the field trip since the school said that it was too expensive. At that moment, Felderman realized that her students were beginning to participate in critical literacy curriculum development (Vasquez, 2003). The students were actually advancing their opinions in an orderly way, taking the problem and turning it into a literacy learning experience. The next day, during class meeting time which was set aside for problem solving, the students continued to ask pertinent questions about the school's refusal to financially support the field trip. They were eager to start a petition to ask for support from other second grade classes to go to the Aquarium. With Felderman's guidance, signing the petition caused the students to feel empowered. They were going to make a difference, and change the course of events,

so to speak. Learning–critical literacy learning–was truly taking place in the classroom. The students assisted in building or designing the curriculum as opposed to being passive bystanders allowing something to be done to them or for them (Felderman, 2007). Such literacy learning experiences in the classroom are key in getting students involved in their learning in a meaningful, thought-provoking way.

Another study conducted by Brozo, Valerio, and Salazar (1996) included students in a junior high school in a low income, educationally impoverished community in Corpus Christi, Texas. The participants were eighth grade students who attended a school that was 90% Latino/a with 70% of the students speaking English as a second language. Salazar, one of the researchers, wanted to build a community of learners among her students: 19 Mexican-Americans, 1 Filipino-American, 1 African-American, and 1 Anglo. She planned a variety of literacy activities in the classroom, with the help of her co-authors, which culminated in a unit that encouraged her students to learn about each other's cultures. The unit incorporated a study of *Bless Me Ultima* by Anaya (1972), a novel about the traditional Mexican-American faith healing which she believed would allow the students to explore their own cultural resources in their community. Salazar made sure that she involved the students' parents, the local faith healer in the community, and other local resources that would help to bring the unit to life for the students. During the unit, students were introduced to many meaningful, thought-provoking activities related to the unit because they could identify with the knowledge base. One of the activities involved students journaling about their thoughts related to incidents in the novel. The unit was titled WINNER (Ways of Integrating the New to the kNown by Evoking Reflection). Students were issued journal/log sheets on which they responded to prompts related to the story. These prompts were used by students at the end of each chapter to write about how incidents in the chapter related to their own families' beliefs and practices. These reflections caused students to become more involved with the reading activity. The unit culminated with students taking a field trip to visit a local faith healer who explained his trade to the students. They were able to correlate the content of the novel to real life in their community. These type activities involved the use of scaffolding, using the base knowledge to support new knowledge, and they attributed to

meaningful, successful learning outcomes. The researchers concluded that students willingly participated in these learning activities because they felt a connection.

Another research study conducted by Heath (1983), which was done with two Appalachia families in the Carolinas, also supports the practice of scaffolding. The need for learners' literacy knowledge awareness and inclusion in the classroom was the focal point of the research. Their beliefs and values were prominent components in literacy learning in their classrooms. Heath advocates including the whole-child experience to make sure that effective learning takes place in the classroom. Missing from many classrooms is the inclusion of the knowledge of the learner's ways of living, eating, sleeping, worshiping, using space, and filling time with which he/she is surrounded each day of his/her life. These components must be accounted for, according to Heath, as part of the milieu in which the processes of language learning/literacy practice is taking place. Heath found, during her research in literacy and learning with the two Piedmont communities, as she focused on face-to-face networking (mostly with parents and teachers of the communities), that children learn the ways of acting, believing, and valuing of those about them (Heath, 1983). Opportunities, values, motivations, and resources available for communication in each community are influenced by that group's social history as well as by current environmental conditions. Thus, for each English Language Learner who comes into a different learning environment, struggling to compete in attaining the literacy goals that are set forth (Nieto, 2002), the same holds true. The communities in which these students live, work, and socialize are instrumental in getting these students to become successful learners. To enhance the literacy learning efforts of students in the Piedmont study, Heath made a concerted effort to highlight the use of the students' own words, as she worked with them. She noted, that students thrive when they are able to personalize their learning using family and social surroundings in a compatible environment, one that is not hostile, one with which they are thoroughly comfortable (Heath, 1983). Their literacy knowledge stemmed not only from prior schooling but also from experiences with the ways reading, writing, speaking, and listening were used in the homes and communities and how families and community members interacted within social groups.

Studies: Listening to Students Outside of the Classroom

Nieto (2002), one of the researchers who extensively studied the issue of student involvement, stated in an article titled "Lessons from Students on Creating a Chance Dream" that for the most part, discussions about developing strategies to solve educational problems lack the perspectives of one of the very groups they most affect: students. The simplicity, yet, profundity of this statement addressed the core issue facing the method in which our educational problems are approached by educators. As she conducted her research, Nieto interviewed 10 young people from a wide variety of ethnic, racial, linguistic, and social class backgrounds to get their first hand experiences on record. She used the interviews to help develop case studies of the participants. Once the study was underway, she noted that by focusing on the students' thoughts about school policies and practices as they related to the students' ESOL/ELL experiences, the emphasis was placed directly where it belonged. When students are treated as if they <u>do</u> know something (asking them to help advance practices and policies certainly falls into that category), they become energized and motivated (Nieto, 2002; Stein, 1971).

For the 10 people in Nieto's study, the very act of speaking about their schooling experiences seemed to act as a catalyst for more critical thinking about them. Nieto further asserted that students need to be included in the dialogue for change if educators are to reflect critically on school reform. However, Nieto noted that, in many instances, educators tend to simply look narrowly at the curriculum--the strategies used by teachers and the materials used in the classroom--rather than seek to include students' input to determine how to "fix" the problems related to the non-achievement of the affected students. Nieto's study supported the idea advanced by Stein (1971) years earlier that in order to address the needs of the students, the students must be given a chance to speak.

In another study very similar to Nieto's, Olsen (1988) concluded, after an extensive research project which was conducted in California with hundreds of immigrant students, that the students interviewed were gratified simply to have the opportunity to speak about their experiences. The students felt that adults did not take them seriously, and treated them as though they were incapable of making informed

decisions (Olsen, 1988). Being able to voice their opinions caused them to feel that what they had to say mattered.

Olsen discovered that the students in her study were eager to share their feelings about areas of their lives that were important to them. They clearly expressed a strong desire to maintain their native languages and cultures. They felt equally as strong about the need to pass this legacy on to their children. In the study, bilingual students expressed appreciation for opportunities to hear their home language in school, and they expressed a desire for an opportunity to learn in that language. With these students, there was a positive correlation between academic success and the variables associated with cultural appreciation, such as their traditional values, ethnic pride, and close social and cultural ties with members of the same group. By conducting this study with the students, the researcher allowed the students to voice their interests, revealing areas of reality that may have otherwise remained uncovered (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Olsen, 1988).

In the study done by activist researchers, Oliver and Lalik (2000), their research, involving four African-American girls, spanned over a 15-week period. The girls were engaged in extended conversations about their perceptions on a number of issues related to personal and social matters. The study used journal writing to extract responses from the girls.

One of the most poignant observations recorded during this research was the depth of feelings these girls displayed related to their cultural identity. One of the researchers, Oliver, participated in the journal writing along with the girls. In one session, Oliver asked the girls to explain the term "color blind" when the girls suggested that this be used as the title for one of the chapters of the study in which they were participating. The issue surfaced when they were discussing differences between Black people and White people. What impressed the researchers was that the girls freely expressed their views on the issue, and Oliver registered surprise that the girls held a totally different meaning of the term "color blind" than the one she held, which was "...not seeing color, just seeing children/people…"–an idea advanced by many White teachers (Oliver & Lalik, 2000). According to the girls, not only did "color blind" not mean that, it was far different from that. They explained that to be

"color blind" meant that people refused to or were unable to understand the differences between the two races of people. Because the girls were encouraged to voice their perceptions, the researchers developed a more enlightened understanding of the term whose meaning they had taken for granted. In fact, Oliver stated that the succinct definition advanced by the girls served as an awakening for her.

Oliver realized that the girls were not incapable of seeing differences based on race; rather, they experienced many differences in patterns of life that they related to race. For instance, the girls were eager for non-Blacks to learn about Black people's dress, hairstyles, body shapes, and language and to notice how these were different from those of non-Blacks. This assertion by the girls was the ultimate lesson the researchers learned about race from these adolescent girls. These young adolescents were able to share their perceptions about race and were eager to impart that knowledge to others when given the opportunity.

In the study done by Lalik, Dellinger, and Druggish (2003), the teachers used their mountain culture to develop curriculum to be used in their school. The curriculum that was developed at Mountain Elementary School was designed to respect children's home culture. Two storytelling clubs were formed in which students were able to share family stories through songs and other art forms. In addition, teachers developed interdisciplinary themes which included remedies, cooking, celebrations, tools, and other such topics that were implemented throughout the school year to help children learn about their Appalachian culture. The study was conducted on the premise that one essential aspect for understanding the worlds of teaching and learning is seeing those worlds from the perspectives of those teachers and learners who inhabit them (Lalik, Dellinger, & Druggish, 2003).

In an effort to recreate the actual representations of the lives of the mountain culture, one of the cases presented by the researchers included language used by Natalie, one of the students, as she described and explained her life at home and at school. Natalie connected storytelling to her Appalachian heritage and talked freely about how her grandmother, her primary caretaker, often told Natalie stories about their home life. These stories, generally told to her at bedtime, helped her to understand her surroundings better and supported her efforts in learning at school. It

seemed that Natalie flourished as a student because she was able to make a connection between her home life and her cultural background (Heath, 1983; Nieto, 2002).

Studies: Listening to Students as Co-Researchers/Participants

Often, when students are asked to share meaningful learning experiences that they have encountered in their various academic settings or share what some of the obstacles to their learning environments were, they seem eager and ready to respond. Therefore, research that studies the need to restructure an educational program so that it becomes more meaningful to the students it serves is a move in the right direction. Thus, a very practical assumption is that when students advance their perceptions about their educational program, those educators who work closely with them will listen attentively to what the students have to say. Studies show that students benefit greatly from the changes that are brought about as a result of their input (Alvermann, 2005; Stein, 1971).

Presenting what students have to say, allowing students to share their perceptions about their learning experiences may effectively be done by presenting these perceptions through a process known as portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis believe that the behaviors and experiences of research participants are best considered within a social context, especially when considered in a given learning environment. The use of portraiture allows the researcher to reveal the dynamic interaction of values, personality structure, and individual history of the research participants/participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

SooHoo (1993), an activist researcher, conducted her study using middle school students as co-researchers. SooHoo wanted to capture these students' perceptions of their learning experiences as they related to student-teacher relationships. The research was designed to uncover some nagging questions she had related to the meaningful relationships of students and teachers that occur in the teaching-learning environment in a typical classroom. Some of the questions she hoped to answer through her research involved the following: Were students empty vessels or meaning makers? Were they passive or actively engaged? Were they

immature children or responsible adults? Were they victims of their learning environment or change agents?

The research included observations of five classes with a total of 12 students chosen randomly from those classes who became her participants/co-researchers. The co-researchers were comprised of a variety of cultural backgrounds: one African-American female, two Latin-American males, one Asian-American female, one biracial Filipino-Anglo American male, four Euro-American females, one Bulgarian female immigrant, one Euro-American male, and one Russian male immigrant. The students were encouraged to record everyday life in the middle school by journaling, taking photos, drawing, conducting individual interviews, and engaging in group collaboration. Group meetings were important because they allowed the students to share their varied experiences.

Though SooHoo (1993) expected to learn a great deal from the research that was on-going among the 12 participants, what was not expected was that the students would begin to look at the data they were collecting and determine that they could effect a change, possibly, to attempt to correct several injustices/inadequacies that they had uncovered in the classrooms. The researcher had not expected the research participants to tamper with the status quo of the school's curriculum and its general governing procedure. However, that is exactly what evolved from this research. The students identified what they called violations in their learning environment in three major areas: learning, caring and connecting, and valuing one's self. These were later termed learning barriers.

When discussing violations related to their learning, the students used the reading activities in the classroom as an example. Reportedly, when students were asked to read, the teacher would interrupt to point out something that was thought to be important. For the student who had some difficulty with reading, this interruption negatively impacted the student's visual images that were being formed as the reading took place, negatively impacting what the student was straining to understand or comprehend as the reading unfolded.

As for the caring and connecting, as well as the valuing of one's self, the students in SooHoo's (1993) study observed that it was important to make a social

connection with one's teacher. They believed that there should be that connection between the student and teacher so that they could better understand the relationships that develop in the classroom. Conversations between students and teachers about what happens in the classroom would allow that connection to take place.

Further, the students felt that they should be allowed to share in making decisions about their learning because they were the recipients and could help guide the manner in which the lessons would be implemented. Once these ideas were shared with the teachers and administrators at the school, they worked with the co-researchers to effect a change in the way the school would be run in the future. The students' voices were heard, and changes related to their concerns were implemented. They felt empowered.

In another research project involving children, Nespor (1998) advanced the assertion that using children as both subjects and inquirers can provide more detailed and revealing data. During a two-year ethnographic study, Nespor worked with 9, 10, and 11 year old European-American students from an urban elementary school in a working-class neighborhood. Approximately 54% of the students at the school were European-Americans, 39% were African-Americans, and 7% were Asian-Americans. As researchers, the students were tasked with deciding on which project they would work on and follow through using interview questions to field opinions from fellow students. One student was assigned to get feedback on how students felt about homework folders. The responses he received from the majority of the students were that they hated the homework folders and felt that they should not have to do them. The responses were compiled and given to the teachers who assigned the homework folders, and students supplied reasoned critiques and suggestions for change.

Two other researchers, Oldfather and Thomas (1998), presented case studies of high school students involved in a year-long participatory research project on motivation for literacy learning. At the same time, two university researchers (students) studied the process and outcomes of Oldfather's and Thomas's projects. The research was situated in a small suburban community in Southern California. With the exception of one of the student researchers, the students attended the main local high school. The other student researcher attended an alternative high school in the

community. The data included transcripts of the student-conducted interviews of teachers, interviews by the researchers, Oldfather and Thomas, and focus groups of research-team meetings. All of the data were analyzed by the student researchers and the researchers, alike, working on par with each other, minimizing any inhibitions that may have surfaced related to fear of reprisal on the part of the student researchers. They felt their worth as fellow researchers and successfully rendered findings uncovering similarities and differences among all of the cases. They were encouraged when they learned that their findings matched the findings presented by the researchers.

The cases that Oldfather, Thomas, and the student researchers studied were centered around six teachers who reviewed their own cases for accuracy and completeness and gave their feedback to the researchers during the research-team meetings. The teachers were not involved in collecting or analyzing any of the collected data. Through the case studies, the teachers' views were examined on the nature of the knowledge presented, purposes of schooling, their approaches to teaching, their perspectives on their own motivations, and how they situate themselves and see their roles within the culture of their school. The results that emerged ranged from one teacher feeling that the school culture hurt her motivation to another more deeply committed teacher feeling that she truly understood the students and believed that students' negative behavior was not directed at her. As such, she did not feel personally hurt or insulted by them; instead, she felt compelled to support the students non-judgmentally. Each of the six cases varied widely. The teachers found that sharing their feelings with their co-workers once the research was complete was very beneficial in that there was a feeling of connectedness (Oldfather & Thomas, 1998) that did not exist prior to the research that was spearheaded by the students.

Students and teachers are the stakeholders most directly affected by issues related to literacy learning. Together, they experience the daily process of schooling. When students and teachers engage in research collaboratively over an extended period of time, new avenues may be opened, relationships may be realigned, and possibilities for personal and institutional change may be widened (Oldfather & Thomas, 1998).

Studies: Looking at Cultural Identity and School Success

In a year-long study, mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, by Jimenez (2000), a total of 85 students and 4 of their teachers were involved in research that sought to better understand how literacy and identity interacted in the development of Latina/o students in four bilingual classrooms. During the study, data were obtained through classroom observations, dialogue between the teachers and the researcher, student interviews that included think-aloud procedures, cognitive-strategy instruction, and various means of recording student responses to the instruction.

The study was conducted in a mid-western city in a school district that served approximately 30,000 students, of which about 7,000 were Latina/o. Students ranged in ages from 9 to 12 years old. Thirty of the students had been born in the United States; the remainder had been born in Mexico or Puerto Rico. All but one of the students indicated that Spanish was their first language. Of the teachers, two were Anglo, one was from Mexico but had been raised in Chicago, and the other was from Puerto Rico. One teacher had two years of teaching experience; two had six years of teaching experience, and one had 28 years of teaching experience (Jimenez, 2000).

During the classroom visits by the researchers, students were observed in each of the four teachers' classrooms during their literacy or language arts instruction periods. Student participants were involved in think-aloud activities during class. The researcher would ask each student to read selected passages and answer questions about their knowledge of Spanish and English literacy. The think-aloud activities involved asking students to stop at designated points in the text at which time they would be asked to describe their thinking. The sessions were analyzed for evidence of strategic reading processes. The results indicated that students' understanding of identity and their bilingual language coupled with literacy knowledge had noticeable influences on each other. This helped the researchers to understand how students constructed their bi-literate identities (Jimenez, 2000).

The teachers in the study were interviewed on several informal occasions. The teachers were asked to share their understandings of the students participating in the study, their concerns related to literacy instruction and student progress, and their

input concerning influences on student literacy development in the two languages (Jimenez, 2000).

The results of the study indicated that the roles that English and Spanish literacy played in the lives of the students and teachers and the importance of language and literacy to maintaining and fostering interpersonal relationships were the prevailing and identifiable trends that surfaced in the data (Jimenez, 2001). Students' cultural background knowledge enhanced the process that these students faced in undertaking the acquisition and use of knowledge to be forged in the new language content area courses. The data indicated that this was the key component in fostering successful learning and the transition of knowledge for these students.

In a study conducted by Carger (1996), he followed a Mexican-American student, Alejandro, throughout his elementary school years. Alejandro was a very shy, young student who was very reluctant to express himself, at all. Because Carger did not want Alejandro to become another statistic, lost in the system, she became his mentor and an ally to his family. She helped him and his family face the adversities met during his tenure at a local parochial elementary school.

Alejandro had been diagnosed with some mild learning disabilities, and his parents were concerned that he would not be able to learn to read adequately enough to help himself and his family. Academic achievement was difficult for him. The teachers at his school seemed insensitive to his educational needs. There had been reports of one teacher, in particular, who seemed to make it very difficult for Alejandro to achieve even a small measure of success during his tenure at the school. The teacher tended to point out his
faults, along with those of other minority students at the school, and to belittle him to the point that he felt as if the teacher was "picking on him."

Carger, being vested in this young student's academic achievement, made every effort to change his educational setting. With his parents' permission, she began to look into transferring him to another school in another district so that he could begin to have positive experiences as an English Language Learner. In the end, this proved to be unsuccessful. However, in Carger, Alejandro had someone with whom he could share his experiences while he was enrolled in the English Language Learners'

program at Sorrowful Mother. Because Alejandro was able to voice his opinions and perceptions to someone who was willing to hear his concerns, someone in whom he could place his trust with this information, his experience at Sorrowful Mother was a positive one. Carger worked with Alejandro's academic skills during school and after school and was able to help him through his academic struggles, guiding him through his homework assignments which lessened the frustrations he felt due to his learning disabilities. Carger's mere presence, on days she visited his classrooms, seemed to encourage Alejandro 's classroom participation.

Even so, one of the shortcomings that Alejandro experienced at the parochial school was that the teachers with whom he worked seemed unable or unwilling to respect his cultural identity and background as they laid out the framework for learning. As a result, Alejandro often felt alienated from his teachers, as well as from other students in the various classroom settings. Research supports the necessity of assisting multicultural learners to build on their cultural backgrounds as they embark on the journey of knowledge acquisition (Bello, Fajet, Shaver, Toombs, & Schumm, 2003; Moll & Greenberg, 1990). In a learning environment experienced by learners as threatening, their likelihood of academic success is diminished (Carger, 1996).

Summary

Achieving success in the classroom is predicated on building a cooperative curriculum owned jointly by the teacher and the students, taking the students from where they are, as related to literacy learning, and building on it to achieve success in the classroom (Heath, 1983). As educators, we must listen carefully to students and use their concerns and intentions to create classroom tasks in which students become totally involved as they focus discussions on issues that are of interest to them. Students' suggestions related to instruction and strategies can be combined with those of the teacher to jointly accomplish their classroom goals (Comber 2002). Researchers continue to assert the need to listen to the voices of those "on the inside" to determine what needs to be done to better the educational surroundings and environment in educational settings (Poplin & Weeres, 1992).

Generally, students are eager to share their feelings about areas of their lives that are important to them. They clearly express a strong desire to maintain their native

languages and cultures. They feel equally as strong about the need to pass this legacy on to their children. Bilingual students express appreciation for opportunities to hear their home language in school, and they express a desire for the opportunity to learn in that language (Olsen, 1988). Researchers have found that there is a positive correlation between academic success and the variables associated with cultural appreciation such as students' traditional values, ethnic pride, and close social and cultural ties with members of the same group. These values must be brought from the students' cultural backgrounds into the classroom if students are to have meaningful literacy experiences in our schools (Nieto, 2002).

For the most part, students feel that they should be allowed to share in making decisions about their learning because they are the recipients and could help guide the manner in which the lessons would be implemented. Allowing this to take place could be done at any grade level. Once the ideas are shared with the teachers and administrators at the school, they should begin to work closely with the co-researchers to effect a change in the way the schools should be run in the future (Comber, 2002; Vasquez, 2003).

Research supports the necessity of assisting multicultural learners in building on their cultural backgrounds as they embark on the journey of knowledge acquisition (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Students' cultural identities are important and should be used as a bridge to encourage learning. Their cultural background knowledge enhances the process that these students face in undertaking the acquisition and use of knowledge to be forged in the new language content area courses in the public schools. Research indicates that this is the key component in fostering successful learning and the transition of knowledge for these students.

CHAPTER 3
METHOD

In this chapter, I discuss the procedure used to conduct my research. To achieve the purpose of the study, I held conversations with four students with multicultural backgrounds. I collected data through conversations, field notes, journal entries, and email correspondences as is appropriate for ethnographic, qualitative research. Further, I explain how I analyzed the data and the procedure used to report my research findings. I give a description of the site where the study took place, and I identify the research participants and discuss the criteria used to select them. Also, in this chapter, I provide a sample of the interview questions that I used in this study.

Research Design: Using Portraiture

Field work is the hallmark of cultural anthropology (Spradley, 1979). This means, asking questions, taking field notes, doing observations, interviewing participants (participants), and a myriad of other activities. However, the most fundamental task involved in anthropological field work is doing ethnography, a task that is often obscured by the vast range of activities (some of which were listed immediately above) associated with field work (Spradley, 1979). Ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The essential core of ethnography is to understand another way of life from the point of view of the people being studied (Spradley, 1979). Rather than studying people from the researcher's perspective, ethnography means learning from people about their own perspectives and world views. Therefore, I have chosen to use the qualitative, ethnographic approach called portraiture, a research method advanced by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). I chose this ethnographic approach to frame the study for this research since my interest lay in listening to the voices of the students. This approach allowed me to gain personal insight into what I learned from the participants about their literacy experiences. Also, using this research approach allowed me to portray the participants and their experiences as bounded entities, allowing those experiences to form the focal points of the collected data. Using the art of portraiture allowed for a comprehensive, detailed analysis of the data that I collected. I will discuss this ethnographic method of research in detail later in this chapter.

Creswell (2003) states that ethnographic research is that which occurs in natural settings where human behavior and events occur. In addition, ethnographers may focus on identifying and explaining small chunks or aspects of a society or culture (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), as I did in this study. I listened to ESOL students talk about their experiences as newcomers to the United States, as students in the ESOL classrooms, and as adolescents interacting with their families and communities, in an effort to learn about their experiences they have had in each setting. My goal was to learn about ESOL students as they learn the English language while pursuing their education in a public school setting, as well as interacting with the world around them. Merriam (1998) posits that as qualitative researchers conduct their studies, they are interested in understanding the meanings people have construed about life. In other words, qualitative researchers' interests lie in how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in their world. I endeavored to ascribe to Merriam’s position as I talked with the research participants.

Setting/Participants

Site Selection

I selected research participants from students who were currently enrolled in or who had recently exited (within the past year) the ESOL program at Excel Middle School. Excel Middle is a school located in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area in one of the eastern, middle Atlantic states.

One bit of advice given by Preissle and Grant (2004) to ethnographers is that when it comes to selecting a site for the proposed study, the researcher needs to be able to remain in the field for at least one complete cycle in order to satisfy the range and variation needed to adequately involve all participants with the activities that will take place at the site. Adhering to this advice, I scheduled this study to take place during a period spanning one full semester,. a period totaling 18 weeks. The school year is divided into four quarters–each quarter consists of a nine-week grading period. I conducted my research during the second semester of the school year. This allowed for one full grading cycle in which the study took place. Students with whom I worked were scheduled to leave the middle school at the end of the second semester to become

students at the neighboring high school for the coming school year, so it was vital that the study be done in that prescribed amount of time.

Site demographics. Excel Middle School is located in a sprawling community. The school is composed of grades six through eight. There is a vast number of multicultural students enrolled in the school. At the time of the study, with a total population of 750 students, hosting over 50 nationalities, the composition of the student body at Excel Middle School was 27.5% Hispanic, 26.7% White, 21.2% African American, 19.8 % Asian, and 4.8% other. Of the total student population, 23.1% were labeled as ESOL students (FCPS Website, 2008).

Researcher: My Personal Commitment

I began working as a seventh grade English teacher at Excel Middle School in 1994. At that time, the school had three English as Second Language (ESL) teachers. Later, a new term, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), was used to designate those students.

When I joined the staff at Excel Middle School, adolescents representing 57 nationalities were enrolled at the school. Many of those students were enrolled in the ESOL program. What baffled me was that, to my knowledge, none of the teachers who were instructing those students knew how to communicate in the students' heritage languages. The question that stayed with me was, "How can these students possibly learn to speak the English language in a reasonable amount of time, in a meaningful manner given this teaching arrangement?" I found it hard to believe that those ESOL students were receiving adequate instruction due to what I believed was the inability of their teachers to communicate with them effectively. When I talked with the ESOL teachers at the school about my concern, they assured me that it was not necessary for the teachers to be able to speak any language other than English to be effective in their job assignment. Even so, I continued to register disbelief in the effectiveness of this practice.

As a seventh grade English teacher, I began receiving some of the ESOL students who had exited (successfully "tested out" of) the ESOL program into my "regular" English classes. I was amazed at how well some of those students were actually able to communicate using the English language and how well they were able

to keep up with their various studies. On the other hand, some students who were placed in my English classes, having exited the ESOL program, neither spoke the English language well nor were able to keep up with their studies, including their "regular" English class. These students were far more numerous than the first group mentioned. The two extremes perked my interest in the plight of the ESOL learners at Excel Middle School.

My keen interest in finding out what was happening with the ESOL learners at the school fueled my desire to learn more about these students and how they learn. I decided to explore the possibility of doing an ethnographic study using portraiture, the inquiry method that allows the researcher to record and present the perspectives and experiences of research subjects or participants. I believed that the use of portraiture would allow me to interact with the students on a more personal level. I wanted to know just how the students enrolled in the ESOL program coped with learning the English language and exactly what their various experiences were while they were enrolled in the program. Further, I believed that each of those students had a story to tell, and through the use of portraiture, I would get to know their stories. In essence, my interest in the students' educational welfare was the driving force that led me to this research study.

Research Participants

Recruitment of participants. All qualitative researchers are bound by codes of ethics, according to Devault and Gross (2007). Further, they assert that those conducting interviews are required to secure informed consent from participants. In an effort to abide by the code of ethics referenced by Devault and Gross, prior to beginning this research study, I received approval from the local school board and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university to conduct my research study. I submitted assent (See Appendix A) and consent (See Appendix B) forms for approval. Having been granted approval from both administrative bodies, I talked with potential research participants individually to determine their willingness to participate in the study. I explained to the students that I would be asking them questions about their life experiences as ESOL students, and I personally invited those students to participate in my research study.

I read the assent form to the participants to make sure that they were aware of all aspects of the study as advised by Seidman (2006). Seidman recommends that all aspects of the research project, as outlined in the assent and consent forms, be orally explained to the participants so that they would not be surprised by anything related to the study. I gave potential participants an opportunity to ask questions and raise any issues of concern during my introduction of the research study. I asked consenting participants to sign the assent form indicating their acceptance to participate in this research study. I sought permission from their parents for them to participate by having the parents sign the consent form. I sent a letter (See Appendix C) home to the parents explaining the nature of the research encouraging the parents to contact me if they had any questions. I made sure that each research participant's signature and that of a parent had been properly entered on the appropriate documents (assent and consent forms) prior to each participant being allowed to participate.

Selection of participants. I began by contacting eight possible participants which included male and female students. I wanted to include students who were able to communicate in English well enough to understand the nature of the questions they would be asked and be able to respond with clarity. I felt that given the time allotted for the research (a full semester), six to eight students would be a manageable number of participants to include in the research study. I did not feel that I could adequately conduct the study with more than eight participants and justly hold the number of initial and follow up sessions that would be required over the course of the study. I wanted to make sure that I would have ample time to adequately talk with each participant over the duration of the study. This process entailed going back to each participant a number of times, as needed, for follow up conversations related to the responses given in earlier sessions.

Of the eight possible participants, six students showed a keen interest in participating. However, as I began the actual research, only four of the six students, all females, remained as committed research participants. The other two chose not to continue with their scheduled sessions, citing a conflict of time with their studies and a general lack of interest in participating in the research project. With the number of potential research participants reduced to four, I was concerned that the number of

participants might not be adequate, possibly jeopardizing the feasibility of continuing with the research. After much reasoning and discussion with my advisor, I determined that I would proceed with the project as planned. My goal was to work with those participants whose responses would maximize the variability of my findings (Seidman, 2006), and I felt that given the years of experience in the ESOL program, the four students would do admirably well as we worked together on the research project. Table 3.1 shows a breakout of the characteristics of the four research participants.

Table 3.1

Characteristics of Multicultural Research Participants

Research Participant's Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Heritage Country	Number of Yrs. in the U.S.
Shayley	F	14	Bangladesh	7
Lily	F	13	Ethiopia	6
Soledad	F	13	Bolivia	13
Shanna	F	13	Korea	4.5

Criteria Used for Selection of Research Participants

For the most part, I selected students who had trans-national experiences--students whose family had immigrated to the United States and whose heritage language was one other than English. Seidman (2006) believes that including a sample of participants who all have experienced similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of the research participants. I believed that the trans-national experiences would be a thread that would link the participants' experiences together. Only one of the research participants was actually born here in the United States. However, she was raised by parents who had come to the United States just prior to her birth. Prior to this participant's entry into public school, she had only been exposed to her parents' heritage language in the home. Overall, the students' cultural

identities varied along many lines, including social experiences, family background, ethnicity, and country of origin. Unfortunately, I was unable to determine the participants' socio-economic status because the school was unable to provide that information due to issues related to confidentiality.

Students selected to participate in the research study were those with whom I believed I had established a degree of rapport and trust (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997; Spradley, 1979). That is, I had either taught them at an earlier time or interacted with them on a regular basis prior to the school year in which the research was conducted. They were students who had self-initiated interaction with me outside of the classroom setting prior to and during that school year. I concur with Spradley (1979) and Lightfoot-Lawrence and Davis (1997) that the participants and the researcher should share a sense of rapport that will allow such a feeling of comfort and ease as they work together that they will be encouraged to express themselves at will without inhibitions throughout the study. As such, I felt that the four participants and were very compatible.

Further, adhering to advice advanced by Seidman (2006) in which he discourages choosing one’s own students to interview, I did not choose students who were at that time enrolled in any of my classes. Students who are not being taught by the researcher are likely to feel less inhibited and reserved since grades are not at stake (Seidman, 2006). Thus, choosing students who were not being taught by me at that time increased the likelihood of a more candid, sincere interview session throughout the research process.

Along with sharing a feeling of comfort as we interacted with each other, I wanted the participants to be able to converse in English without difficulty. Therefore, I chose eighth graders who had already had at least two and one-half years of ESOL classroom experience, increasing the likelihood of the desired level of communication that I sought. Their comfort level of being able to communicate in English was crucial to this research study. I wanted to receive well-elaborated responses during the interview sessions (Spradley, 1979). Therefore, determining each student's level of oral English proficiency became a priority. I talked with some of the ESOL teachers about assessments to determine these potential research participants' levels of English

proficiency. The teachers suggested that I look at documents used to measure these students' English proficiency levels to get a more accurate reading of their oral communication skills.

Documents Used To Identify Levels of English Proficiency

To assist with my selection of the participants, I used the results of three county approved assessments used by the school to determine the level of English language proficiency attained by students enrolled in the ESOL Program: the Oral Proficiency Assessment OPA), the Writing Proficiency Assessment (WPA), and the Directed Reading Proficiency Assessment (DRP). Peregoy and Boyle (2005) define the language proficiency level as the ability to use a language effectively and appropriately throughout the range of social, personal, and school situations required for daily living. There are four levels of English proficiency. Those students attaining level four are eventually tested and exited out of the ESOL program. For the purpose of this research, students who had attained Level 4 on all assessments and who had exited out of the program were those selected to participate in this research study.

Selecting Research Participants

As the researcher, I held sessions with the participants after school in a designated classroom, meeting two of the participants in separate sessions, once a week for one hour through the end of the final grading period for the semester. Each student was able to meet with me a total of four to five times during the final nine weeks of the last quarter. I asked participants to meet with me on Mondays or Wednesdays. The exact day was predetermined per the participant's availability. Mondays and Wednesdays were days that the school designated as late bus days to arrange transportation for students engaged in after school activities. Having access to prearranged transportation was important during the research period because some of the research participants' parents were unable to pick-up them up after regular school hours using private transportation. In addition, holding research sessions after school eliminated the possibility of any interruption of the academic programs that were in session during the regular school day.

Ethical Issues

Actual names of the students and the particular school and school system in which the study was done are not identified in this research report. I asked participating students to choose pseudonyms that they would like me to use in place of using their actual names in an attempt to achieve anonymity for all persons involved. I stressed to the student participants that it would be nearly impossible to guarantee complete anonymity, given that each participant would know the other (Merriam, 1998), but that I would attempt to protect their identities in every way possible. I also stressed that those who were not involved in the research who would read the research findings would not be able to readily identify, if at all, any of the participants. I further resolved that I would not disclose any information that would put anyone in danger or cause embarrassment (Creswell, 1998). I explained to participants that the data would be used to write my dissertation and there was a possibility it may be published in a scholarly journal or a professional book and would be available for others to read.

Types of Data Collection

I used several types of data collection for this qualitative research study: interviews/conversations with audio recordings, field notes, journal writings, and email correspondences. The methods of data collection used in this study were appropriate for this type qualitative research study in that they were interactive, allowing the research participants to share their lived experiences with the researcher over time (Merriam, 1998). Interviews or conversations with the research participants should allow the researcher to conduct one-on-one interactive sessions with each participant (DeVault & Gross, 2007). The conversations, field notes, journal entries, and email correspondences allowed for reflection and feedback on a number of issues and personal concerns that surfaced throughout the research procedure.

Interviews (conversations)/audio recordings. Interview research is research conducted by talking with people, and it involves gathering participants' reports and stories, learning about their perspectives, and giving them a chance to voice their academic, public, and private discourses (DeVault & Gross, 2007). Talking with others is a fundamental human activity, and research simply systematizes that activity, according to DeVault and Gross (2007).

In this study, I engaged research participants in conversations using a series of open-ended questions (See Appendix D). Open-ended questions are those that do not make preconceived judgments or assumptions. The use of open-ended questions gave the students the opportunity to offer unlimited responses to the questions and impart salient accounts of their experiences. This procedure is highly recommended by Denzin and Lincoln (2003), as well as Banks and Banks (2004). However, Devault and Gross (2007) caution the researcher to be cognizant of concerns the participants may have that could possibly hinder the research efforts. A participant may feel inclined, for whatever reason, to hold back information that pertains to a question, giving a guarded response instead. Therefore, there should be an established degree of trust between the researcher and the participant (Devault & Gross, 2007).

Further, Banks and Banks (2004) recommend that researchers frame their questions in such a way as not to place unnecessary constraints on the students (such as asking a question that requires a definitive answer as opposed to one that seeks a free response) as they attempt to engage in conversation. Thus, questions used for my conversations with the research participants were open-ended questions that were designed to get students to open up and talk freely about their experiences. Answers to these questions, frequently lent themselves to further questions being asked in an effort to further clarify a response.

Initial questions that I asked the participants as we began our conversations stemmed from the research questions that were used to guide this research: to Iearn about students' perceptions of their experiences as newcomers to the United States, as participants in the ESOL program, as adolescent literacy learners, as members of a family and community members, as individuals with hopes, dreams, and fears concerning the future.

I used audio recording, with the permission of the participants, to capture responses to questions during our initial conversations, as the participants and I shared our knowledge during our talking sessions. Audio recording is one way to provide a rich, descriptive data base for the study of talk and interaction which is what interviews encompass (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I held formal taped sessions with each of the participants. Seidman (2006) recommends multiple sessions to allow for

follow up and enhancing accuracy of reporting. I made a concerted effort to transcribe each audio-taped session immediately following each recording session, or soon thereafter, so as to maintain accuracy of transcribing and analysis of the recordings (Banks & Banks, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Spradley, 1979).

Another procedural consideration in transcribing the audio-recorded interview, according to Patton (2002), is that researchers must be careful as transcriptions are being made of audio recordings to present the intended meanings rather than the literal ones. Therefore, in this study, I have made every effort to maintain the tone of the original words used by the participants during our conversations by writing verbatim transcriptions and noting various tones and pitches to enhance or amplify the intended meaning. Patton (2002) and Spradley (1979) maintain that verbatim transcriptions are the raw material essential for qualitative analysis. They allow the reader to see the personality of a person due to the manner in which the person speaks or uses language. I used the transcriptions and notes to portray each of the research participants as real people doing and saying real things. Doing so is highly advised by Wolcott (2001). I wanted to help the reader to see and understand the personality of each of the research participants.

After the initial conversation, subsequent sessions were scheduled as needed to receive clarification of issues that surfaced and address concerns related to questions asked. In so doing, I followed Seidman's (2006) and Nespor's (1998) advice about conducting multiple follow up sessions with a single research participant to increase the likelihood of reporting findings that are as detailed as possible. I continued to have subsequent conversations with the participants until the end of the time allotted for the research study. These sessions were not taped; however, I took notes to document each of the sessions. Follow up sessions were conducted to allow me to address questions that surfaced as I listened to the transcripts and sought to clarifiy some of the responses given to earlier questions asked.

During one of my initial conversations with one of the research participants, we discussed her relationship with her estranged father, early on in her life. As I listened to the transcript, I began to wonder whether the strain on the relationship was still prevalent and if so, what the cause was. If the strain had eased, I wanted to know what had happened to lessen the strain in the relationship. Other follow up sessions with the other participants were of a similar nature. For instance, another of the participants had stated during our initial conversation that when she first came to the United States, her aunts and uncles who had come to the United States were very accommodating to her family, allowing her family to move into their homes with them until they found a place of their own. During our follow up session, I asked how long her family actually lived with the aunts and uncles before they found a place of their own. Additionally, I inquired as to whether the aunts or uncles were relatives of the mother or father. I found out that the aunts and uncles were not blood relatives, at all. In fact, they were actually close family friends who just wanted to help, but they were referred to by the research participant as her aunts and uncles, apparently an act of endearment. That bit of unexpected information led to other queries related to that particular situation. So, follow up sessions were crucial to my getting enough information to effectively complete each of the portraits that were being developed.

When sessions could not be arranged due to personal scheduling conflicts on the part of a participant, journals and email correspondences were used to follow up on initial questions. The format for the follow up journal entries and email correspondences were similar, in nature, to face to face follow up sessions. Participants were given questions related to responses given at an earlier session or related to a previous journal entry about which I needed more information or clarification. They would write the questions down in their journals and provide responses which they would bring to the next scheduled session for discussion. Email entries were done with a much quicker turn-around time, but the format was the same, including the discussions during a face-to face-meeting.

During those meetings, the conversations paralleled with the areas enumerated in the purpose of this research study (See Chapter 1, p. 18). Discussions were related to the participants' literacy learning experiences as they grew up in their heritage

countries, as newcomers to the United States, as adolescents interacting with family and community members, and as learners framing their hopes, dreams, fears, and plans for the future. Prior to each meeting, participants were informed of the topic of discussion for each session to allow them time to prepare as needed.

The frequency of subsequent conversations with the participants was determined on an as-needed basis, taking into consideration the time needed for clarification of responses from previously held sessions. I sought to receive enough information from the participants so that I would have a more comprehensive understanding of their perceptions of their shared experiences. Doing so allowed me to impart rich, detailed accounts in the reporting of my data as strongly encouraged by Patton (2002) who asserts that thick, rich description of research participants and their experiences provide the foundation for qualitative studies. Doing so also assisted me in placing the reader into the actual setting (Patton, 2002).

Researcher's field notes and journal entries. As part of the data collection procedure used in this research, field notes were kept. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), field notes should describe the research environment and provide an honest picture of the events occurring during the study; all relevant features should be recorded by the researcher. With that advice in mind, I took field notes of my observations and reflections related to my conversations with the research participants, transcriptions of interviews/conversations, and interactions with the research participants throughout the study. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) identify field notes as "thick descriptions" (p.17) or detailed descriptions of behaviors, conversations, and explanations.

Spradely (1979) states that it is advisable to make a condensed account (jottings, phrases, sketchings) during every interview. He further recommends that even while tape recording, it is advisable to write down phrases and words used by the participants. These condensed notations should be expanded as soon as possible, preferably as soon as the interview/recording session has ended (Spradley, 1979). During the interview process, I wrote my field notes in a sketchy manner so as not to be too distracting during my conversations with the participants, as recommended. However, if I discerned that writing notes was distracting during the interview, I

discontinued note taking during the procedure and jotted down notes immediately following the interview session, instead.

I remember, vividly, that during an initial taped session with one of the participants, she seemed to be a little nervous as she spoke her responses into the tape recorder as she watched me taking notes in my notebook. I immediately asked her if she was uncomfortable during the taping and suggested that she turn off the tape recorder if she felt nervous. I didn't know whether my writing was a distraction, but I stopped taking notes, just to be safe. Afterwards, I noticed that she seemed less tense. As soon as the session was over, I listened to the tape and jotted down notes of her behavior during the early part of the session and other notes of interest that were related to the manner of her responses. I would use these notes to frame my next and succeeding sessions with her.

In addition to jotting down field notes, I also maintained a journal. This is highly recommended by Spradley (1979). The journal contained a record of my personal experiences during the study, along with ideas, fears, mistakes, etc. associated with the study. My journal entries were logged into my computer and catalogued along with other coded tools used during the analysis. I compared what I had written and observed (from my field notes and journal entries) with what the participants actually shared with me, noting the similarities and differences, and making notes of ideas related to our discussions. In this way, I became part of the research process, as well (Ely, 1991; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). I pursued discussions with the participants about their notes compared to my notes. I found that this process engendered a deeper sense of trust between the participants and me as the research unfolded (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Participants' journal reflections/email correspondences. I invited each participant to keep a journal. I supplied small, decorative spiral composition books with designs of some aspect of nature--plants, animals, flowers--in an assortment of colors--inviting the research participants to choose the one that was the most appealing. Along with the notebook, I gave each participant an ink pen with decorative markings that matched the notebook they had chosen. They were encouraged to make journal entries of any thoughts, questions, or ideas that they had related to any of the

conversations we had, as well as random thoughts that may have come to mind related to experiences they had. Those who wanted to also use the computer to log in their journal entries were encouraged to do so and to email their entries to me. I used the email correspondences in the same way the journal entries were used. I encouraged participants to jot down reflections at any time something came to mind related to the study. I also encouraged them to jot down questions that they had or items of interest that they wanted to share. Further, I encouraged them to share thoughts about their hopes and plans for the future with me in their journals/email correspondences and impressed upon each of the participants the importance of continuing their journal entries/email correspondences throughout the duration of the research study. I received a total of five or more pages of journal entries from each participant and several email correspondences dating from May through October of the year the research was conducted. Some participants responded more frequently than others via email, but for the most part, the correspondence was continual and reciprocal on my part, well after the close of school for the year. Though the participants had moved on to high school, we continued to correspond by email, addressing issues that surfaced as I continued to finalize my research findings.

As I conducted this research study, the research participants and I did share a very personal, collaborative bond. As they shared their experience with me, I shared my experiences with them intersubjectively (Gluck & Patai,1991). That is, I was able to share some facets of my life experiences, as my experiences related to the life experiences the research participants shared with me. Doing so facilitated an ease of communication between us and a candid delivery as I talked with them about their lived experiences (Featherstone, 1989; Merriam, 1998). Their experiences ranged from time spent in their heritage countries and here in the United States.

I recall that during one of my sessions with one of the participants, I wanted to learn more about her experience in speaking the English language as a new comer to the United States. I wanted her to share a moment when she may have felt vulnerable and easily embarrassed because she did not know how to speak the language. She seemed hesitant to share, initially. So, I shared with her my most embarrassing moment which occurred when I traveled to Germany and attempted to order flowers

from one of the local florists there. Once I shared my experience with her, she seemed to share more openly, more candidly. I found that intersubjective sharing with the research participants encouraged them to share more willingly as our discussions continued. However, throughout the research project, I was careful not to overuse the technique, ensuring its effectiveness.

Collecting Data for Use with Portraiture

Managing the collected data. Qualitative, ethnographic research methods such as portraiture depend on massive amounts of data (Patton 2002; Wolcott, 1994). These data must be organized in a manner that will allow for effective analysis and presentation of the collected data.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, ethnography is the work of describing a culture (Spradley, 1979). In fact, Spradley points out that analysis consists of a search for the parts of a culture, the relationship among those parts, and the relationship of the parts to the whole. Patton (2002) asserts that ideas for making sense of the data that emerge while in the field or conducting research constitute the beginning of the data analysis process. Wolcott (1994) refers to the process of analyzing data as "data transformation." Data transformation occurs when the researcher “does something” (Spradley, 1979. p. 4) with the previously collected data. What the researcher chooses to focus on and record or explain, as well as what the researcher does not report, represents the art of transforming data (Wolcott, 1994). The goal of the data transformation process is to make sense of the data that have been collected and to attempt to answer the research questions.

I began the process of analyzing or transforming the data as soon as I began listening to and transcribing conversations with the participants and making field note notations. Spradely (1979) advocates that one of the most important strategies to use in analyzing data is writing. The major reason for getting the writing underway early is that, according to Spradley, in addition to being an act of communication, writing actually involves a process of thinking and analyzing. Writing helps one to gain insights, see relationships, and generate questions for further research (Spradley, 1979). I realized that in order to develop well framed narratives (shared stories) for my

portraits, I must be diligent in my analysis of the collected data. Therefore, I began writing early and often.

I wrote down ideas that were formed on a weekly basis, and I noted themes that began to emerge throughout the study. As I learned of each of the participant's literacy experiences, dating back to life in their heritage countries, I began to record strands of themes that surfaced as they related to the experiences these participants shared: support from family and community, attempts to overcome language barriers, and adversities faced. In addition to noting the themes, I became aware of specific personal and cultural characteristics of each of the participants. I recorded each of these insights regularly as they surfaced.

In addition, I catalogued or coded (used easily identifiable markings) the data to develop a system of organization of the collected data which allowed for ready access. All data related to an individual participant were gathered and coded/catalogued together into one area as related to that individual participant. All interview responses for that individual, all field notes related to that individual, and all journal entries made by that individual were catalogued together. The procedure I used to catalogue or code the collected data was in accordance with what Banks and Banks (2004) advocate. They encourage researchers to have clearly identifiable markings for the data in order to facilitate the analysis process.

Adhering to the advice advanced by Banks and Banks (2004), I used identifiable markings or codes as I catalogued the collected data (See Appendix E). For instance, in relation to recording research participants' experiences as literacy learners, categories included experiences as newcomers to the United States, experiences as ESOL students, experiences with family members, experiences as adolescents in middle school, experiences with community members, experiences related to their hopes, dreams, fears, and plans for the future. Coding was key in assisting me in making sense of all of the data that I had collected.

In an effort to effectively catalogue or code the collected data, I reviewed notes and recordings soon after they were made. Placing the collected data in categories assisted me in my effort to begin to make meaning of the data (Spradley, 1979). I based my decisions about categorizing and cataloguing on those critical elements

given in my general research questions used to guide this study. (Refer to guided research questions, Chapter 1).

As I analyzed the data, I noted any similarities that existed among the research participants' experiences that may have shaped their literacy learning while in the program. Strands or trends that surfaced during the analysis are reported; however, looking for trends was not the primary focus of my research. My focus was to get the perceptions of students' experiences to see how those experiences related to their literacy learning**.**

Using Portraiture to Analyze, Synthesize, and Present Data

Understanding the nature of portraiture. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) define portraiture as an inquiry method of qualitative research that allows the researcher to seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people being studied–documenting their voices, their visions, their wisdom, and their knowledge. Further, they contend that the use of portraiture allows the writer to document human behavior and experience in context. In fact, they assert that the most effective way to interpret people's actions, perspectives, and talk is to see them and present them in context. Featherstone (1989) believes that to use portraiture effectively, it must involve a storyteller, the narrator, and an audience. Portraiture, Featherstone maintains, allows the voices of the storyteller, the narrator, and the audience to be connected in such a way that voice is given to the people's experiences (1989).

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), in creating portraits, the portraitist--the researcher--enters people's lives, builds relationships, engages in discourse, makes an imprint, and leaves. However, the imprint that the portraitist or researcher makes is long lasting. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis posit that the interaction between the portraitist or researcher and the subject or participant may be compared to that of an actual portrait artist painting a picture of his subject.

In fact, Lawrence-Lightfoot shares her own personal experience as the subject of an artist and likens it to the experience that the subject of one of Picasso's paintings, titled *Girl Before a Mirror*, had as she looked at her reflection in the mirror. The girl looks in the mirror and instead of seeing her likeness, she comes face to face with a

more penetrating image–one that is revealing, yet at the same time, disturbing. She does not see the expected smiling prettiness; rather, she perceives a deeper, more authentic reflection "of who she really is" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xvii). In reality, she sees and reaches out to the essence of her being. Likewise, when the portraitist writes a narrative detailing the lived experiences of her research participant, the result should be one that depicts or captures the mystery and artistry that turns image into essence, the true self of the research participant. Further, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) contend that the portraitist believes that human experience has meaning in a particular social, cultural, and historical context. Such a context will allow relationships to be real, increasing the likelihood of the research participant to more fully express and
reveal the knowledge, insight, and wisdom derived through reflection and interpretation.

In essence, according to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), using the art of portraiture provides "a reflective glass to the stories that shape lives, pedagogy, and institutions" (p. 36). In doing so, portraiture illuminates and acknowledges the importance of the phenomenon--that which is being studied. Therefore, the subject of the portrait is considered a phenomenon that is to be studied. Though Miles and Huberman (1994) reference the idea of viewing the subject as a phenomenon in presenting case studies, Featherstone (1989), Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Davis (1997), and other noted portraitists contend that this must also be done when the researcher uses the art of portraiture to present data.

To further explain the concept of phenomenology, Patton (p. 105, 2002) and Merriam (1998), proffer that a phenomenon is "a lived experience" which allows an individual to describe occurrences and experience them through one's own senses. Patton's most basic assumption is that "we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness" (pp.105-106). Our conscious awareness is the phenomenon. Portraiture allows for such a study; for it is an empirical qualitative research method that is centered on an intensive description of conscious awareness and an analysis of a single instance or a single phenomenon (Featherstone, 1989).

Miles and Huberman (1994) advocate that researchers treat the subject as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p. 25). To be bounded is to be a distinct entity or part set aside from the whole. Merriam (1998) sees this as a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries about which she says "I can fence in what I am going to study" (p, 27). Miles and Huberman (1994) depict the imagery of this concept as a circle with a heart in the center. The heart is the focus of the study or the bounded entity (p. 25). The experience or conscious awareness of each research participant in

this study, relevant to the research questions, represents the heart of the study.

To further explain the nature of the bounded entities of my research study, perhaps it would be beneficial to explain it this way. Though I selected each participant from the ESOL program at the middle school, neither the actual program nor the school was the focus of the study. Only the perceived experiences or conscious awareness of each participant selected for the study was the focal point (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of the actual research.

Presenting findings through portraiture As I presented each portrait, I recounted the experiences and perceptions each adolescent informant shared with me. Alluding to the imagery of the heart and circle shared by Miles and Huberman (1994) related to focusing on the research subjects, each of the participants' experiences became the heart of the circle, as I presented their stories. In that sense, I presented each research participant as the intrinsically bounded phenomenon of each individual portrait, focusing on their perceptions of their lived experiences. I used the art of portraiture to give a detailed account of the various literacy experiences of each research participant.

Additionally, I used various data sources (field notes, journal entries, conversations, etc.) to construct each portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1998; Patton, 2002) presented in this research study. I decided to present the data through the use of portraiture to give the reader an opportunity to get to know each of the participants as well as I had gotten to know them, to know what their lives were like, what was going on for them, and how the participants viewed their "experienced" world, also called their lived experience (Merriam, 1998). Yet, I concur with Tilley-

Lubbs (2003) that it is virtually impossible to ever accurately and completely represent the lived experience of any one research participant. Even so, through the use of portraiture, I have shared my understandings of their experiences in as richly a detailed account. as possible.

On a final note, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) believe that the researcher helps the reader to construct knowledge. According to them, both the researcher and the reader bring their conceptual structures to a study--reconstructing the knowledge in ways that leave it differently connected and more likely to be personally useful (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In other words, because the reader brings a different view point to the research, he/she is able to take away bits of knowledge that may best serve his/her interest and/or needs. Here it is important to note that each interest and each need may differ, notably, with each reader.

Similarly, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggest that through portraiture, the researcher or portraitist negotiates expressions of vision and understanding, similar to putting the pieces of a puzzle together, which entitle the reader to new ways of seeing and thinking, new ways of representing acquired knowledge to others. The puzzle building analogy is synonymous to taking the parts of the portrait and creating a credible or believable story. When one thinks about creating a story, one must think about the whole story, not just the pieces that were used to create it.

When the portraitist or the researcher begins to put all parts of the data together, he/she is able to begin to explain, conclude, and/or interpret that which has been collected/compiled for the presentation of the data (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). When the researcher does this, the procedure is known as synthesizing the data. In other words, the researcher allows the reader to begin to see the data that has been presented from a different perspective.

My hope is that this research study will help the readers to construct knowledge and generate insight that may be transformed to a useful purpose as they seek to broaden their knowledge base of literacy learning among adolescents.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the nature of the research study. I gave a description of the setting that was used for this research as well as the participants who were chosen to be a part of the study and the method used in selecting them. I described the procedure used for collecting, analyzing, and reporting the data. This ethnographic research study was designed to give adolescents an opportunity to voice their “lived experiences”--experiences that have shaped their literacy learning through the years. It is my hope that in some small measure, this study will play a role in informing future literacy learning practices intended to assist language learners aspiring to acquire a language secondary to their heritage language.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS: PRESENTING DATA THROUGH PORTRAITURE

In this chapter, I construct portraits of four adolescent ESOL students in an effort to gain some insight into their experiences as literacy learners. During conversations with me, these adolescents shared a wide range of literacy experiences that have directly impacted their lives, from their early childhood through their adolescent years–experiences which occurred in their various heritage countries and here in the United States.

I attempt to present a detailed account of the "lived experiences" (Featherstone, 1989; Merriam, 1998) as perceived by each of these adolescents, captured through their own perceptual lenses. In order for the reader to fully grasp the essence of the participants' perceptions of their literacy experiences, I believe it is necessary to keep in mind the view of literacy advanced by Heath (1989). As mentioned earlier in this study. Heath views literacy learning as "the ways of living, eating, sleeping, worshiping, using space, and filling time with which the language learner is surrounded each day ..." (p. 3). I make a concerted effort to preserve this view as I present each participant throughout this chapter through the art of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), an empirical, qualitative research method discussed at length in Chapter 3 and referenced later in this chapter.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) maintain that the researcher should invite the reader to become actively involved in discovering and understanding the perspective of the research participant. The research participant who is bounded, the one upon whom the focus is placed (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in a research study. Therefore, in a concerted effort to follow the advice proffered by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, I invite you, the reader, to allow each portrait of the research participants to channel your discovery and understanding of their experiences as literacy learners.

Determining the Direction for the Research

When I first began preparations for this study, I considered limiting my conversations with the students by focusing exclusively on their experiences within the middle school setting. However, as my work progressed, I became aware that there was so much more to learn about their experiences as literacy learners. So, I decided to delve more deeply into the participants' lived experiences over time (Merriam, 1998), as they transitioned from their cultural heritage to a new culture, as second language learners here in the United States. I wanted to know more about their family background, their cultural heritage, their on-going experiences with immediate and extended family, and their experiences with community members (Merriam, 1998). With each of the portraits that follow, I have attempted to capture those lived experiences and frame the images to inform your understanding of literacy learning among adolescents.

Presenting the Portraits of the Participants

In an effort to present the most vivid portrait possible for each individual research participant, I frequently used their own words from oral transcripts, journal writings, and email correspondences. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I want the reader to get to know the participants as well as I came to know them, to know what their lives were like, what was going on for them, and how they viewed their "experienced" world (Featherstone, 1989; Merriam, 1998).

In addition to using pseudonyms chosen by the research participants for this study, I also omit or rename specific places and localities referenced by them. In selecting research participants, to strengthen the multicultural aspect of this research, I include participants of varying cultural backgrounds as is reflected in their countries of origin: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru, and Korea.

Framing the Portraits

For each portrait presented, I use five categories based on data from this study: personal traits, life in the heritage country, life as newcomers to the United States, adolescent experiences, and hopes, dreams, fears, and plans for the future. These categories reflect the research questions stated in Chapter 1.

While the categories listed highlight the particular findings of this study, the overarching purpose of the study is to contribute to the knowledge base of adolescent literacy learning. Keeping in mind the purpose of the study, I talked with each research participant about their perceptions of their various literacy learning experiences.

As I present each portrait, I try to impart the precise tone of the language used, including language variations, pronunciations, and spellings to capture the uniqueness of each personality. To distinguish quoted responses given from paraphrased wording, I use block-style indentation of forty or more words, and I enclose short quotes of less than forty words within quotation marks in accordance with established APA guidelines.

The portraits presented in this chapter are meant to broaden the reader's knowledge base of the various individual literacy learning experiences advanced by each of the four adolescent research participants.

Shayley of Bangali Heritage

Personal Traits

Shayley's demeanor truly impressed me. The poise with which she carried herself, her vibrant spirit, and her out-going personality won me over almost immediately. I first met Shayley the year before I began working on this research project when she was a student in my seventh grade English class.

Shayley, whom I fondly remembered for her warm, beaming smile, came quietly to my classroom door at the end of the school day on the first day of our scheduled meeting. She rapped softly on the door while poking her head in to ask if it was okay for her to enter. I was setting up the room for our meeting and making sure that the tape recorder was functioning properly. As I invited her to come in, I remembered that she had, indeed, been a very delightful student, and I smiled as memories of our experiences in the classroom the previous year began to seep into my thoughts.

Shayley was now in the eighth grade, but I noticed that as an eighth grader, she had not changed that much in appearance. She still walked tall, seeming to exude self-confidence. Her large brown eyes seemed to dance about the room as she walked over to where I stood. We reminisced casually about her experiences as a seventh grade English student in my class, with her pointing out the desk where she had sat during her tenure that year. Then, as we sat down and began our conversation for the research project, Shayley seemed to seize every opportunity to respond to each question I posed with very candid, detailed answers.

Because Shayley is of the Muslim faith, custom dictates that her head, arms, legs, and body be covered when in public or in the presence of males who are not family members (Muslim dress code, Article retrieved 2009). Even so, I noticed that she had a tendency to wear her head covering somewhat loosely-fitted around the temples of her forehead. At any given moment during our conversation, the head covering might just slip ever so slowly down the back of her head, revealing long, dark, silky tresses. When this happened, she would delicately adjust it, in a somewhat nonchalant way, continuing her conversation as if nothing ever happened. This happened several times during the course of our conversations. I suspect that she allowed her head covering to fall away in such an unassuming manner because, after all, I am another female, and no males were ever present during those times.

Shayley's manner of speaking was very engaging to me. Often, I found myself thinking that she seemed so much more advanced, age-wise, than her 14 years. She spoke very clearly, making sure that she punctuated (with high or low pitches) those phrases that she wanted to highlight. Her delivery seemed very candid as she talked with a slightly pronounced smile, her eyes twinkling as she spoke. Her voice was the kind that if I were to talk with her by telephone, I would be able to "hear her smile." Her voice was very soothing to me, even though it was somewhat marginally elevated. She was, indeed, a very engaging speaker.

Life in the Heritage Country

As we began our conversation, Shayley informed me that prior to her family coming to the United States they had lived in Dhaka, which is the capital of Bangladesh. She indicated that besides her mother and father, her family also included her siblings: an older sister and two older brothers. Both brothers experienced serious medical conditions. One of them had suffered brain damage from two childhood bouts with pneumonia, leaving him with a severe learning disability. The other was physically handicapped, a condition resulting from a birth defect. Shayley seemed to step back in time as she shared this information about her brothers. The eyes that generally sparkled seemed to cloud over with sadness.

During several of our conversations, Shayley shared some of the more memorable experiences she had as a young child growing up in Bangladesh. One such memory was of the home that her family owned:

> We owned our own home, and on one part of our land, there was another house that my family owned that we rented out to another family. I really had fun playing with the children of that family and we became very close friends. We had this huge front yard and we spent lots of days just playing and having so much fun together. (Transcript, March 26, 2008)

According to Shayley, one of the most poignant memories of their home in Bangladesh was that in the front yard, there was a large opening in the ground that was made of cement, closely resembling a deep well, in which water collected for the family's household use. She referred to this structure as "a water thing"--emphasizing that it was not a well. In fact, she highlighted that distinction in one of her journal entries:

> In our front yard we had a water thing with a water supply pipe in it. It was not a well, but a water thing made of cement and it was long and wide. It was very deep, meaning part of it was underground, and very long and very wide. We would have to use a bucket tied with a rope to get the water out and use it. Once in a while when all the water was used up we would have to go down in the thing and scrub the inside walls because they grew algae on them and rinse them off to make it clean. Sometimes when at night the electricity went out me and the

> renters would go and sit on the water thing and tell ghost stories which was a lot of fun. (Journal entry, April 7, 2008)

Shayley's account reminded me of Au's (1977) study that involved storytelling, a practice engaged in by Hawaiian families and adopted by teachers in their efforts to support Hawaiian children in becoming more proficient at school-based reading. So, as a follow up question in an email correspondence, I asked Shayley if she could remember any of the stories that were told during the time the electricity was out as they sat on the "water thing" and if the stories were symbolic of anything in their lives. She responded to my query:

> I really don't remember any particular story. The stories that we ended up telling were told just for fun. They did not have any significance, at all. They were just scary stories that were told because the lights were out, and everyone had fun just listening to them. We usually told stories when we just wanted something to do, or we were bored. (Email Entry, July 20, 2008)

In addition to the story telling adventures, her memories of other "fun times" were those spent playing with other children of families in the close-knit community in her heritage country. "Most of the time," she explained, "the neighborhood children would all gather at my house to play games because we had a very large front yard" (Journal Entry, March 10, 2008). In the same journal entry, she described one of the childhood games they frequently played:

> I would play blind fly with my friends. It is a game where you blind fold someone and they try to catch the other players. Whoever the blindfoled (sic) person touches first they have to be it. Then they get blindfoled (sic) and try to catch another player. (Journal Entry, March 10, 2008)

As Shayley reminisced about her childhood experiences in her Bangladesh neighborhood, memories of my childhood days and similar games that my neighbors and I played flashed through my mind. So, I shared some of my childhood experiences that I remembered. Sharing my experiences with her, intersubjectively, as recommended by Gluck and Patai (1991) seemed to encourage her to want to share more of her own experiences and she shared openly and candidly. However, as mentioned earlier in this document, I was careful to use this technique very sparingly because overuse could render it ineffective, drawing more attention to me than to what

the research participants had to share with me (Gluck & Patai, 1991).

One account that Shayley shared was somewhat dramatic. While Shayley's family lived in Bangladesh, her father, a soldier in the army, was away from the family on a military assignment. During that time, Shayley had to be taken to the doctor for emergency treatment. She recalled this incident vividly because her father usually took care of family emergencies, but this time she had to rely on her mother:

> But there was one time when, uh, my father was not at home because he was uh, away, uh, in the military, and, uh, since my father was not at home, my mother was in charge, and I had to go out, when I had to go to the doctor to get three stitches because my sister came from the college and it was in the afternoon, so we didn't eat lunch. So she was laying down on the floor, and I was telling her to go to take a shower so we could go eat lunch, and she still wasn't getting up, so I pulled her. And there was a chair next to my face with a broken edge, so I, when I pulled her, my chin dashed into the broken edge and a piece of my skin went somewhere, I don't know, and, uh, uh, that was in the afternoon. But then I went to the doctor, like around seven, so that when I went there, I had to get three stitches. And my sister was holding, was covering my eyes so I wouldn't see all the gadgets and everything, so that was really scary. So when I came home, everyone said that I had a beard with all the bandages and everything [emitting a slight chuckle]. That was kinda funny. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

As Shayley looked back on other childhood experiences, she recalled her first two elementary school years in Bangladesh:

> We lived really close to the school, so I just walked there. In first grade we only went to school for two hours. So, we just came, so we went at, like, at 8 in the morning and came home at 10 in the morning. So, it was kinda fun. And then we had a little snack between. So it wasn't that long. But, ah, when I got to second grade, the school days were longer. They, they were up to, like, 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Then, in second grade, we had to start writing in pens, which I was really excited about 'cause we always had to write in pencil in first grade. So, I was getting tired of it [tired of writing in pencil]. (Transcript, March 26, 2008)

As Shayley talked of her experiences, she fondly recounted one of her family's traditional religious celebrations. One of the holidays that the family observed annually was Eid ul-Fitr, a three-day celebration that is held at the end of Ramadan, a Muslim observance lasting for 30 days (Eid ul-Fitr, January 2009, ¶ 1). This observance was a time for families to celebrate with each other and with the grandparents, usually in the countryside. Shayley elaborated:

> Oh, there are different holidays, like Eid, and they are a lot of fun. Ah, a lot of people go to their countrysides, like, where they are originally from to celebrate Eid with their grandparents, but we never really spent it in my countryside. We just did it, uhm, at the regular house in Dhaka. That's the capital city of Bangladesh.
>
> Eid is part of the Muslim celebration called Ramadan. In Bangladesh, and here in the United States, too, it's the time for me and my family to become more aware of ourselves, but not just ourselves, other people as well, and our surroundings and how we treat others, including the people who, ah, may not be participating in our, in the celebration. Ramadan lasts for 30 days and, ah, during that time there is, ah, fasting each day until sundown. Then, in the morning, well, the night before Eid, actually, uhm, my mom and my sister cooked lots of food. And we just had a lot of fun. We put henna on our hands and then in the morning we ah, got up, took showers and changed into our new clothes and ate. Then we went out to enjoy the day. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

I asked Shayley to explain what henna was and how it was used in the observance of Ramadan. She rendered her response in detail:

> Henna, It's kinda like a green paste, but, uhm, it's from the henna tree. The henna tree in our yard in Bangladesh actually belonged to my sister since she was born before me. You have to get, it's like little leaves, so you have to pick it from the tree. It was really big, so, uhm, we picked the leaves from there and we smashed it into paste, and then we just put it on our hands in different designs. It's really cool! It's just for fun, basically. But our prophet Mohammed, he'd just put it on his hair and his beard, so, I mean, it's good if you do that. But it's a choice, really. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

She continued her description of the use of henna for the Ramadan celebration in a journal entry:

> We used to grind the henna leaves with water. Then we would put the mix of henna on our hands and nails in creative designs. We would do this just for fun. When the henna dried we just picked it off, put some oil on our hands to make the color shinier. The color was usually from a dark orange to a really dark brown. We did different kinds of patterns. We sometimes wrote our names on our hands with the henna. But we mostly did creative designs. Some brides put henna on their hands for their wedding ceremonies because it looks pretty. (Journal Entry, March 21, 2008)

As Shayley shared her experience of painting the body with henna, I was reminded of Ball's and Smith's (1992) summation that such physical decoration is a visual medium which allows one to communicate symbolic information. Shayley's

family used the henna designs on their hands to express the joy and happiness they were experiencing in their lives and to express their creativity which is expressed in religious symbolism (Gee, 1998).

Shayley offered a very interesting assessment of her personal, spiritual experience during the observance of Ramadan:

> After fasting for 30 days, I feel kinda renewed, really, as if I have accomplished something, you know, great, a feeling that is difficult for me to put into words or explain, but I feel, ah, stronger and better able to handle things. I believe it helps me to be, more, uh, calm, and more disciplined. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

Hearing Shayley express her personal experience of growth and strength during the 30-day Ramadan observance caused me to begin to understand why she appeared to me to be so poised and full of self confidence. This traditional, spiritual practice, on her part, seemed to be a powerful profession of will and determination with which I could readily identify. As such, I chose to share with Shayley, intersubjectively (Gluck & Patai, 1991), an experience that I have each year during the season of Lent.

During that time period, I make a personal commitment to fast for a 50-day period leading up to Easter Sunday in which I abstain from eating solid foods from midnight until 5:00 pm each day. This period of sacrifice has strengthened me in my willingness to be more patient and tolerant of others and more mindful of what I say and do as I interact with others, as well. I also shared with her that my personal experience of sacrifice allows me to re-affirm my various beliefs, strengthen my resolve, and become more focused as I make decisions that will impact my daily and future undertakings.

Though it seemed that Shayley and her family enjoyed their lives in their heritage country, they would soon begin preparations to come to the United States due to medical concerns for both her brothers.

Life as a Newcomer to the United States

According to Shayley, her mother and father desperately sought medical help for both of her brothers, and they felt that they would have a better opportunity finding

that medical help in the United States. They had heard that the United States was the "best place in the world" to receive medical help, and they wanted to get the best medical help possible for the two boys.

Fortunately, while her father was assigned to the Bangali embassy in France, Shayley recounted, he received military orders for an assignment with the Bangali embassy in the United States. After learning of the new assignment, he began making preparations for his family to join him once he had moved to the United States. He applied for the family to come to America, and they were able to immigrate to the United States within six months after their application for a Diversity Visa had been approved.

Sadly, about a year after Shayley's family relocated to the United States, her physically handicapped brother died. As Shayley spoke of his death, I could see that she remained emotionally affected by it. Her eyes watered, though not to tears, and her voice was a bit hushed as she talked. She confided during one of our early conversations, "The closeness that we shared makes his death really, really hard for me. But my mother and father are helping me to cope" (Transcript, March 19, 2008).

In addition to the death of her brother, Shayley experienced other difficulties during her first year in the United States. In one of her journal entries, she reported that she endured several educational setbacks during that time:

> I was in second grade in my country, but when I came to the U. S. I had to repeat second grade again because I didn't know any English. Also, I went to two different schools while I was in second grade after we came to the U. S. We had moved to Maryland. I guess it was because the first school didn't have an ESOL program. (Journal Entry, March 21, 2008)

I wanted to know more about her early elementary educational experience as a newcomer to the United States, so in a follow-up session, I asked Shayley to expand on what she had shared in her journal. She responded in detail:

> Well, they [school officials] switched me to a new school when they realized that I did not speak any English. They switched me to a school that had an ESOL program. So they switched me to Newcomers Elementary School, another school in Maryland not far from our house. And at the end of the year, the teacher was telling my sister and my dad that I was a really good student, I was really quiet. Uh, obviously, I didn't know any English, so it was really hard because I didn't, like, everything was in English, writing, everything. So I

> didn't really have an idea of what I was doing when I had to work on something.
>
> I always felt left out because everyone had, like, little, their little groups of friends and I had no one. And, like, where I lived in Maryland, there were barely any Bengalis, so I couldn't relate to anyone. I did not know of anyone at the school who spoke Bangla. So, I cried at school, I was really relieved when, when I came home from school because I lived with my parents, and because I, and I actually understood what they said because they were, of course, speaking Bangla to me. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

Once Shayley shared this experience, I was curious to know how the situation, which seemed to be a very painful experience for her, was handled by the school officials. So, I asked her to share that aspect with me:

> Well, my sister used to go to school with me. So, she used to stay after school with me and whenever I cried a lot, the teacher used to call my sister. But then, like, it was hard on her too because, ah, she would have to stay after school with me, and, like, she didn't sit in the classroom the whole time. So I can't, I felt really scared because there's just only me. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

As Shayley shared her experience, I could sense her feeling of frustration with the educational system in which she was enrolled and the isolation of being a new student in an unfamiliar cultural setting. However, after a couple of months had passed, Shayley admitted that she began to gradually adjust to being a newcomer in the second grade. She began to break through the isolation, making the connections needed to adjust to a new cultural and educational climate. She eagerly shared her experience:

> Well, I began to notice that there were other children from different ethnic groups in the ESOL class who, I guess, were in the same situation as me, but they spoke English. I guess they were here longer than me, so, but it was kind of fun because they were experiencing some of the same things I was experiencing, so, ah, I could relate to them, and it made me determined to try harder to learn to speak English. I wanted to catch up with everybody. (Transcript, March 26, 2008)

Adolescent Experiences

As an ESOL student. According to Shayley, once she began to understand the English language better, she quickly began to adjust as an English Language Learner

and became very committed to learning how to communicate fluently in English. In one of her journal entries, she asserted her commitment:

> Learning the new language can be very difficult when you can't pick up on things as fast as others. It can be embarrassing when you are unable to pronounce the words of the new language correctly. When you are in the ESOL program you can make friends from many different ethnic groups. When you start learning the new language and start understanding it, you can gain a lot of confidence. You start to feel better about yourself because you know your hard work is starting to pay off. In the beginning you may feel like you're not good at anything, but in the end you can find out alot about yourself. (Journal Entry, April 24, 2008)

I asked Shayley to elaborate on what she had found out about herself through her experience as a novice English learner. In response, she detailed what she had discovered about herself:

> What I mean about finding out alot (sic) about yourself is when I started reading and learning how to pronounce different words, I picked up on it quickly. As I read more a more I started to get a lot better at reading and I started to realize that reading was one of my strong areas. (Journal Entry, April 26, 2008)

She explained further that she made sure that she listened very carefully to others as they spoke, and she practiced continually until she began to feel at ease while speaking the language.

Shayley's memories of her early years as a student in the ESOL classroom were that, initially, much of the work consisted of using workbooks with pictures, and she would look at the pictures and match the pictures with the English words that the pictures represented. She said that this later progressed into written phrases, then sentences, then whole paragraphs. She proudly asserted, "When I started to learn English, boy was that fun, because I, I kept talking and I didn't stop talking" (Transcript, March 19, 2008). According to Shayley, within a two-year period, she was speaking English without much difficulty.

Shayley also reminisced that while she was in the sixth grade at Excel Middle School, her English skills greatly improved. She recalled being asked by her teachers at the school to help other ESOL students with their assignments because her English

skills seemed so much more advanced. She believed that by helping others to master their English speaking skills, her own speaking skills began to improve.

Looking back on her educational experience during her early years in the ESOL program, Shayley remembered how patient her ESOL teachers had been in the primary grades. She witnessed the same patience and encouragement from the ESOL teachers when she enrolled at Excel Middle. She affirmed in a rather modulated voice:

> The teacher always tries to encourage you by, like, telling you that you're getting better when they listen to you read. They always tell you that if you, like, keep trying you'll, start, like, understanding the new language and how it works, better. Also, the teachers are very patient. Even when you want to give up, they won't. They won't give up. They will keep trying to help you get better at learning the language by reading more and writing more. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

Shayley continued to excel in learning English and different aspects of the American Culture. She even boasts of maintaining A's and B's in her core classes (English, math, history, and science), making the honor roll each quarter since she exited the ESOL program more than a year ago.

With family and community. In addition to the help Shayley received from her teachers, as she learned to speak English while enrolled at Marginal Middle School, she received help from family members while at home. Her sister was there for her emotionally as she struggled to come to grips with being the only Bangla speaking student in her class during her pre-middle school years. Her mother and father gave her spiritual and moral guidance by instilling within her the lessons of the Muslim faith which she embraces faithfully.

Shayley's aunts, uncles and cousins have also given her moral and academic support. She stated that she would go to them for help when she had problems with English pronunciations or word meanings since they had been in the United States much longer than she, and they knew more English. She ventured to explain her assertion:

> Well, I, well, my cousins were my friends, really [She calls them her friends because in actuality her "cousins" were the children of parents who were not blood relatives; yet, these parents were referred to by Shayley as uncle, aunt, etc.]. When we first came we lived with my aunt and uncle, and their kids.

> They were here since they were born, so they spook, spoke English, and I learned from them. And then, at the school, all I heard was English, so I was trying to catch up and they helped me. They didn't speak good Bangla though, so it was kind of hard, at first. Their parents kind of helped me, too. So, like, my family and relatives were really very supportive. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

The fact that Shayley referred to family friends as uncle, aunt, and cousins was an interesting literacy learning concept. To me, this was an enormous revelation with very positive overtones. Family friends who reached out to enclose the newly arrived family with caring and nurturing was a testament of the close knit community in which Shayley's immediate family resided.

Shayley continued to work on her English speaking skills, and she was also able to strengthen those skills as she worked with her mentally-challenged brother who was enrolled at a local high school. She shared that she would translate in English for him at home since his ability to speak English was minimal. She elaborated on her sessions with him:

> Well, when he goes to school, he does much better because he can communicate, I guess, a little better with other people. But, he, he can speak English, sort of, a little English and, and a little Bangla. Like if we tell him to do something, he will do it, but I mean, he won't always understand it. So, we have to keep repeating it. So, what I do is, sometimes I say it in English and Bangla so he, like, so he doesn't, like, lose his communication skills. Yeah, so I try to do both with him. And that helps me with my English, too. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

Listening to Shayley explain the need to help her brother as well as allow herself to gain English speaking skills was a very humbling experience for me. There seemed to be such a sense of caring in her willingness to share her language skills with her brother.

In addition to receiving help from family members, Shayley remembered practicing her English on kids in the neighborhood where she currently lives in Virginia. She admitted that she found it to be extremely beneficial in that she was not only helping the neighborhood kids learn English, but she was helping to strengthen her own English skills in the process. In that Shayley provided help as an active community member in assisting the neighborhood children with their English skills

and as a viable family member in assisting her brother with his English skills, while at the same time increasing her own English skills, she seemed to inhabit dual roles as an assistant in the affective domain and as a learner in the cognitive domain while dispensing and acquiring knowledge.

When Shayley's family moved to the community in which her family now lives, they moved to an apartment complex-type community that had other families who spoke Bangla. She beamed as she recalled how receptive the children in the neighborhood were to her, how they seemed to look up to her because she knew enough English to teach them. Many of them were newcomers to the community, and they welcomed her help. Shayley was willing to help them because she remembered her early experiences as an ESOL learner, and readily identified with these newcomers. During one of our conversations, she explained:

> Well, in my community, we live in an apartment complex, so, uhm, there's a lot of people from our embassy where my dad works; they're all Bangalis, so, totally different experience than when I lived in Maryland because you could barely find a Bangali person. It's really kind of cool because I can communicate with them because sometimes when they can't understand something in English, they will ask me, which I feel really good about because I feel like I'm a teacher. My dad called me, like, the translator of the family. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

Though Shayley seemed proud of the accomplishments she had made in learning the English language, she asserted, during one of our conversations, that there are drawbacks or disadvantages associated with learning a new language. Hearing this assertion really interested me. When I asked her to explain what she meant, she shared:

> I'm starting to forget my own language. I'm not really proud about that because I'm starting to forget my, really, my own language. So, well, I'm trying to learn more Bangla [The terms Bangla and Bangali were used interchangeably by Shayley to refer to her heritage language], like, more vocab words. That's kind of hard when you're in school for, like, seven or eight hours of the day, yeah, all day speaking English, so even when I talk to myself, I speak in English rather than in Bangali. English is very comfortable for me, now. When I try to say something in my language, I won't be able to express it as easily as I would in English. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

Shayley went on to explain by sharing a recent experience she had which related to the difficulty she was having retaining her heritage language:

> We [she and her mother] were watching something on TV yesterday, and my mom wanted to know something that they were saying. And I kept trying to explain it to her in Bangla. But then, I just told her that it would be easier if I could just say it in English. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

Then, Shayley revealed, somewhat boldly, that even though Bangla is her first language, she has been speaking English for so long that she has become very comfortable with using it, and now English seems like her first language. She reasoned what seemed to be a newly found revelation:

> Since I spoke Bangla the first seven years of my life in my country and now that I am 14 years old, and been living in the United States since I turned eight, ah, which is all of the second half of my life, really. Well, maybe that’s why it’s hard for me to speak in my language. It makes sense, really. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

I must admit that after hearing Shayley explain why she felt she was having difficulties holding on to her heritage language, her reasoning made logical sense to me.

Shayley and I talked extensively about her schooling experiences. However, I was also curious about the social aspects of her life, so I asked her to talk about her after-school and weekend activities. She elaborated on the subject through an email correspondence:

> I spent after school nights and weekends just hanging out with friends and family. One of the activities that I became involved in was becoming a member of the student Muslim organization that meets after school. At our first meeting I really felt good about this because I enjoyed this time because it gave me an opportunity to meet with other students who have the same religious beliefs as me. I believed that meeting with other students who have the same beliefs as me would help me to understand people better. The first time we met we talked about what we'd be doing in there and we played a game. The second time kind of annoyed me because they called a meeting just so we could write down our e-mail addresses so they could send us information which only took like five minutes and then they told us the meeting was over and I couldn't go home because the bus was gone. I haven't been able to go to some of the other meetings because either I had too much homework or I had to stay after with a teacher. (E-mail Entry, November 16, 2008)

Shayley was an honor student and valued her time. Having worked with her the year before in my English class, I believed that she prided herself in spending her time wisely. So, when she professed that the second Muslim student meeting annoyed her when they met for only five minutes, I suspected a sense of frustration. Therefore, I followed up by asking her to elaborate on her feelings about being a member of the Muslim club. She did so by revealing that she had lost interest in remaining a member because she did not feel that the meeting times would be well spent.

As far as Shayley's religious activities are concerned, she seemed eager to talk about them and offered the following in an email correspondence:

> Our religion is Islam. We participate in an activity called Talim. During the Talim the ladies talk about Islamic things like how to dress, how to treat others, how to read the Koran and other important things. We meet on weekends with the women of my community at different homes. They make me really feel a part of the group because I can talk to the older women and they share their knowledge with me and I feel really connected to them. It makes me feel good that they care about me and what I do and he way I live my life. They are like a second mother to me. And I think that's really pretty cool. (E-Mail Entry, August 20, 2008)

Shayley also shared that each meeting culminated with dinner being served and a time for the members of the group to socialize before returning to their homes.

It seems that the Talim ladies group was a literacy experience which served as a support system for Shayley. This support group helped to strengthen her religious beliefs and practices as a young Muslim. The group could also be viewed as a close-knit community of practice with members who served as peripheral participators (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in that they were there to teach and assist Shayley in her religious experience apart from ,but in conjunction with ,the teachings she regularly received from her immediate family members.

The idea of peripheral participation, a supportive, interpersonal interaction between the literacy learner and a capable adult leader, was referred to by Vygotsky (p, 86, 1978) as the "zone of proximal development" in which the learner collaborates or interacts with the adult to the extent that the literacy learning process can proceed on its own. This social interaction approach seemed to strengthen Shayley in her religious practice as she attended the Talim meetings with the ladies of her community.

In addition to allotting time for group activities, her after school and weekend times were also spent with her family. Evenings were spent watching television together, having family meals which were served around the same time each day. “Family meals are generally thought of as a time for the family to relax together and enjoy the company of one another” (Email Entry, November 16, 2008).

I wanted to know more about the times Shayley spent with her family, especially at meal times. My prompting elicited a very interesting response:

> We really don't have a certain time for eating meals. No one is really home on weekdays other than my mom and nephew to eat breakfast. Everyone leaves the house to go to work at different times and I'm usually the first one to leave and I don't really eat breakfast unless I want to. Basically, we don't eat breakfast together unless it’s a weekend. No one is home to eat lunch on weekdays. On weekends we usually eat lunch at one or two o’clock. I wake up late on weekends so sometimes I don't eat breakfast and just eat lunch. We usually eat dinner at nine or ten in the evening because that is when everyone is at home and settled in. The fact that many American families eat their meals so early in the evening, like dinner at five, six, and seven in the evening, kind of surprises us. (Email Entry, November 16, 2008)

I must admit that I was surprised to learn that Shayley’s family gathered for dinner around nine or ten o’clock in the evenings. Her family considered the time that most Americans have dinner–around five, six, or seven o’clock in the evening–too early for a family to come together to eat. Shayley shared that though she did not have a favorite food, there was one dish.that she liked to share with her family when they gathered for dinner. She elaborated:

> I don't really have a favorite meal, but I really like biryani. It is a rice dish, and you can choose the meat of your choice mixed with a lot of different spices because it's really delicious and it’s a cultural dish from my country. The rice should not be overcooked and the spices that you choose should be the kind that you would use on the meat that you will serve with the rice. It is a very delicious dish. Me and my family love it. (E-Mail Entry, November 16, 2008)

Even though Shayley believed that she was in danger of forgetting her heritage language, as she shared with me earlier, she seemed to have steadfastly maintained those cultural customs and practices that remain a major part of her life here in the

United States: maintaining traditional Muslim activities, practices, and religious customs and eating cultural dishes of which she had grown accustomed to in her heritage country.

Aside from sharing family meals together, spending time with her family on vacation became an event that Shayley looked forward to every year during the summer months. At those times, the whole family participated in a planned activity that allowed them to do something together, such as walking through the park or having a picnic in the park, going on various tours of cities and towns, and other such related activities. Family time seemed to be very important.

Another activity Shayley enjoyed included taking walks with her friends in the neighborhood. She stated that the walks with her friends were restricted to the neighborhood because her parents did not allow her to leave the neighborhood for activities without parental supervision. She detailed the activity in another email correspondence:

> We [she and her friends] usually just walk around the neighborhood. There are usually three of us. It's me, my best friend and her sister. We're all really good friends. We spend time talking about things like school and what’s going on with our families and just being together without parents being around. (E-Mail Entry, November 16, 2008)

Hopes, Dreams, Fears, and Plans for the Future

During one of our conversations, I asked Shayley to share her thoughts about her hopes, dreams, fears, and plans for the future as they related to her life experiences, so far. She thought for a while and asked if she could write her thoughts in her journal, instead. Of course, I granted her permission to do that. So, she penned her thoughts in her journal and shared them with me at our next meeting. As she revealed her outlook on life, I realized that it was wrapped up in a very noble, humanitarian gesture. She willingly unveiled these thoughts in her journal:

> In my country, Bangladesh, there are many children who are turned away from medical treatment because their parents can’t pay. I don’t think any child deserves to be turned away like that. They didn’t choose to get sick. This is really personal to me because it happens in my country a lot. (Journal Entry, April 26, 2008)

When I asked Shayley to explain why this was such an important issue for her, she explained that medical care for the young was important because she often thought of the medical assistance her brothers needed early on in their lives. Further, she stated that she would not like to think of what would have happened to them if her parents had not been able to get the medical care they needed due to an inability to pay for the treatment and care they required.

Shayley went on to make an unexpected allegation against the government of her heritage country relative to funds being appropriated for the needy:

> The government in my home country Bangladesh does not have a health system like we have here in the United States where health care is made available for low income families. In Bangladesh, the government is greedy for money and they only care for themselves, really. So, because of that, many low income children are not taken care of and do not get the medical help they need because the government is pocketing the money for themselves. (Journal April 26, 2008)

I felt that Shayley's willingness to critique the governmental practices of her heritage country was a very perceptive and insightful assessment which showed a depth of understanding and compassion on her part.

I asked Shayley what she thought should be done about what was happening in Bangladesh with the poor and needy and how she might be able to lend her support in helping to eradicate the problem in the future, if she had an opportunity to do so. Her reply indicated that she had already given this issue careful thought:

> As for my future plans, I plan on going to Scholars Medical University. I want to study to be a pediatrician so that I can be in a position to get kids the medical help they need. I want to help kids get better when they are sick.
>
> I also want to be part of a charity that helps poor and sick children. I plan to return to Bangladesh one day and begin to work with others to fix this problem. I don't want sick children to be turned away from treatment just because their parents don't have enough money to pay medical bills. No child deserves to be turned away like that. They didn't ask to be sick. I want to be remembered as someone who worked hard to help others in need. I want to make a difference in the lives of others who need financial help. (Journal Entry, April 26, 2008)

As Shayley shared her thoughts with me, I could sense her deep compassion, and I believed that she would one day champion the cause of getting medical

assistance to the poor and needy families in Bangladesh and that her dream would one day become her reality**.**

Lily of Ethiopian Heritage

Personal Traits

Lily wore her hair in long, stiff braids–multiple, single braids–that hung at irregular intervals from the top, back, and sides of her head onto her shoulders and down her back. Her hair style brought to mind my own early elementary school years. I remember one of my childhood pictures which shows me wearing similar braids. However, since Lily was a middle school student, the braids were somewhat unexpected, and initially, I was somewhat taken aback, given the usual meticulous, coiffed hair styles worn by most of the other young ladies enrolled at the middle school level. However, I must admit that I quickly adjusted to those stiff, braided locks she wore with that signature, seemingly, haphazard parting, which separated each braid in sporadic patterns all over her head. In fact, her hairstyle became her personal trademark, complementing her spirited personality, it seemed.

I first met Lily when she was a seventh grade student the year before. Though she was not on my seventh grade team, she had friends and acquaintances who were. Therefore, I saw her occasionally throughout that year at various times when she visited with friends whose lockers were located on the same hall as my classroom. I was drawn in immediately by her welcoming, yet shy, smile. I also liked listening to her speak because of the way she pronounced some of her English words which were infused or

peppered with an occasional, slight Amharic (official Ethiopian language) accent. What an appealing accent, I remembered thinking, when I first heard her speak.

She was a rather tall, slender girl, boasting a very poised posture as she walked with head held high. She tended to stand out from those who were with her. When she talked, there was a noticeable twinkle in her eyes, as if she were about to laugh at something that she was about to say. I found her demeanor to be quite impressive.

As I observed Lily, I was also impressed with her apparent sense of self. She seemed to embody the traits of one who is self-assured, knows what she is about, and is determined to stay the course which she has chosen, no matter what. I would often hear her casual conversations with her friends as they traveled the halls together, and she definitely seemed to be the one who carried the conversations while others seemed to listen attentively.

Lily had an especially outgoing personality with a jovial air about her that went beyond her interactions with her peers and extended to her teachers and other adults at school, as well. She seemed to make sure that she recognized each of them, often calling out to them by name in acknowledgement. Though I was not one of her teachers, she would often recognize me in the same manner.

Even so, as comfortable as she seemed to be with herself and others when I saw her in the halls, during the first few minutes of our first conversation for this research project, I sensed that Lily felt somewhat uncomfortable, less like the self-confident young lady of whom I had come to know the year before. As we talked, I felt that her responses were a bit crisp, as if she wanted to answer the questions quickly so that she could move on to whatever the next area of discussion would be. Her demeanor was somewhat bordering on what I would term nervousness and unsound footing. I found myself listening to the way she was answering the questions rather than what she was saying. Since the tape recorder was being used as we talked, I suspected that the manner in which she was responding was probably due to her being uncomfortable with speaking while being recorded.

Just as I was about to suggest that we turn off the tape recorder and proceed without it, I noticed that she was becoming a bit more relaxed. At that point, I ventured to remind her that she could turn off the tape recorder at any time that she felt

uncomfortable. However, she assured me that she was fine, that the tape recorder did not bother her. So, our conversation continued, and she began to relax. I must admit that I was quite relieved to see this change.

Life in the Heritage Country

I wanted to learn about Lily's early childhood as she grew up in Ethiopia, so I asked her to share some of her memorable experiences. She remembered one of her favorite childhood games that she liked to play called *Keleblebosh* [a game with rocks that she talked about in an email correspondence]. It's a game that reminds me of the American game of jacks, which I was very familiar with as I grew up. Lily explained the game this way:

> This game is played with two or more people. To play the game five small size roundish stones are needed. The way to play the game is the first player gets all five of the stones. Then the player puts four of the stones on a floor and he throws the fifth one. The goal is to pick one of the stones from the floor before the one that is thrown comes down. Then do the same thing till all four of them are picked off the floor. Next do the same thing again but instade [interesting to note that she spells this word just as she pronounces it] of picking one stone this time throw one up and try to pick two at the same time and so on in the same way. Then throw the stones and try to make them land on the outside of your hand. The more you hold the better because the amount you hold count against the second player who will do the same as the first player did and so on. (Email Entry, August 4, 2008)

Lily also elaborated on another childhood memory that was centered around an annual activity that she and her school mates enjoyed each year. It was celebrated at the beginning of each new calendar year in Ethiopia. In an email entry, she explained this annual activity:

> One cultural activity that I participated in while I was in Ethiopia is singing during New Years. On New Years girls from our neighborhood get together and pick a team leader. Then we go around knocking on people's doors singing a song called *Abebayewshe* [a song of well wishes]. Then if the person in the house wanted to give us money she opened the door and lets us come in. Once we finished singing the song the person gives us money (mostly small amounts) to the team leader. Then all of us girls bless the person who gave money and sprinkle flowers in the house and leave. Once we finish going around to people's houses the team leader divides the money equally with all the girls. Then once we get the money we go and buy whatever we want to buy

> with it. Mostly, most girls buy candies, gum, chocolate and other small things like that. (Email Entry, August 4, 2008)

The cultural activity or practice that Lily elaborated on above reminded me of what used to be a popular practice in many neighborhoods here in the United States during the Christmas holiday season when carolers would go from house to house in the various neighborhoods singing songs of joy and celebration. I was somewhat surprised to hear of a similar activity used to usher in the new year in Ethiopia.

During one of our conversations, I shared with Lily how impressed I was with how well she was able to communicate in English, though she had only been in the United States for two years. Granted, her sentence structure and pronunciation of many of the English words were not always correct, in fact far from it in some cases, but she knew English well enough to hold a conversation with her peers and her teachers. However, When she entered Excel Middle, she was tested for ESOL placement, and the test results indicated that she be placed in ESOL due to her low performance scores in reading comprehension and writing applications. In view of her placement in ESOL, I asked Lily how she had learned to communicate so well in English. She explained that the reason she could speak English so well was that she had become accustomed to hearing it spoken while she lived in Ethiopia. I asked her to explain further:

> In Ethiopia, I went to a school called The School of the Future and in my school all of my classes were taught in English, social studies, math, and science were all taught in English at my school. In Ethiopia, it was required that every subject was taught in English. Then, there was one class that was taught in Amharic (Lily pronounced this word with a very hard "k" at the end). Amharic is the language we speak in Ethiopia. In the Amharic class, we learned grammar, sentence structure, and the vocab [pronounced as if she were saying vo.cob'- with emphasis on the "cob"] of the Amharic language. So, when I came to the United States, I already knew how to speak English. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

According to Lily, though all of her classes but one was taught in English while she lived in Ethiopia, as a general practice, English was not spoken in their home. Family members spoke to each other in Amharic. Lily explained that this practice, of not speaking dual languages in the home, was common among families throughout Ethiopia, even though students were exposed to the English language on a

daily basis during classes at school. However, when Lily's family came to the United States, she was tested for English proficiency. Her test results indicated that she be placed in the ESOL program.

Lily shared another memorable childhood experience which happened shortly after the family's Diversity Visa application to the United States was approved. Lily and her sister learned to swim, and she fondly rendered an account of this unforgettable experience:

> In Ethiopia we don't have four seasons. The time school is closed for us is when there is lots of rain. So we were never able to do it [learn to swim] when school is closed though the pools were open. So when we stopped school to come to America, me and my sister kept asking our parents to teach us swimming. Since there was not as much rain during that period, we were able to learn. For about two month we started swimming lessons. We used to go to a public pool every day at 6 am and learn how to swim. The one thing that I will never forget is how I learned to swim in the big pool. When I went the first day my teacher told me to go into the little pool. There the water was warm and nice to swim in. Especially because I love warm water. But the second day it was diffrent (sic), he had me and a lot of other people line up in a single file. We all did not know what he was expecting of us. Finally after waiting for a couple of minutes he told us that we were going to jump in the big pool. Knowing that the pool was Olympic size we were all scared that we might drawn and die. My teacher jumped with us and had us swim the whole 25 meters. The water in the big pool is not the kind of water that you want to jump into at 6:00 am. It was really cold. But as we got use to it, it was not that bad. My sister and I learned how to swim for about two and half month over all. But then we had to stop because we had to go to diffrent (sic) parts of the country to visit. (Email Entry, April 5, 2008)

In addition to learning to swim during the last few months while they lived in Ethiopia, Lily and her sister spent time touring the country side. Their father and mother felt that they needed to be exposed to the parts of the country that they had never seen and to visit relatives that they had never met. Lily elaborated on this experience:

> My parents wanted my sister and I to stop school and visit historical places because they wanted us to have a better idea of what our country looked like, so when we moved to the United States, we would not forget our home country. Since we leaved (sic) [Interestingly, spelled as she pronounced it] in the city we really did not have any idea of how some people lived in the country sides of our home country. As we traveled through the country, we

found out that the countryside is a lot different because in some places they don't have the technology that we have in the cities. So my parents wanted me and my sister to understand that all the people in Ethiopia don't live the same way we did. The other reason is that they wanted us to visit historical places because most of the things were located where my dad grow up. And he wanted us to see where he grow up.

> My dad also wanted us to meet his side of the family because most of them were in the country side. Me and my sister have never seen some of his family members 'till that day we went and visited them. After we stopped swimming, the first place we went to is Gonder. We went to Gonder because one, that is where my dad grew up and second there are a lot of things to visit. There we visited Fasil Genb which is one of the ancient buildings. That was fun, but I had most of the fun traveling by boat on Lake Tana with my family. We stopped for every island that we saw. We went into the churches and visited the inside of it. That was awesome. We also visited some relatives. That was fun. Then after we staying there for about 4 days we went to Bahardar. There we did not really do anything but we got to visit some relatives. That was the fun part. Then we went to Addis Ababa. That was where our real house was. It was the house where most of my father's family was raised. (Email Entry, April 5, 2008)

Life as a Newcomer to the United States

After immigrating to the United States, Lily had an opportunity to interact with several of her relatives who had come to the United States quite some time earlier. In an email correspondence, she wrote:

> Living in my uncles house was fun. There I lived with my uncle, cousin, aunt, grandma and, and my family. Well, at that time all of them work, so for the most part it was me, my sister and my grandma in the house. My parents go to visit some places so they can learn the area fast. But we always walked with my grandma that was a lot of fun because the place they use to live in was beautiful. Sometimes when my parents are home they take us to some places that they know. But the person that contributed the most for us to have fun is my cousin Julius. Whenever he is not working he takes us out side to eat, he rent a video for us, he bought us almost everything that we wanted. I had the most fun with him. My aunt and uncle contributed too. They are the once (sic) that took us shopping most of the time. They also use to take us to an Ethiopian restrant (sic) to eat.
>
> At night my sister, my father, my mom and I slept in the same room. My aunt and uncle gave us the master bedroom. My mom and dad slept in my uncle's bed and me and my sister slept on a matres (sic). My aunt and my Grandma slept together and my uncle took my cousin's room, and my cousin

> slept on the sofa. Some time my cousins and other relatives came to visit us. We had a lot of fun in my uncles (sic) house. (Email Entry, April 5, 2008)

Lily remembered that her grandmother and aunts would often take her and her sister to the National Park Zoo and other such places as outdoor parks where they could just relax and talk about a variety of subjects because family time together was very important to them. All of these activities were done to help Lily and her sister adjust to the American way of life, according to Lily.

As Lily narrated her early experience as a newly arrived immigrant to the United States, I was reminded of an assertion made by Lincoln (2005) in which she states, “The recognition that humans are storytelling creatures, that we narrate the existence of ourselves and others, has created a climate of acceptance for the nearness of emotion, feeling, caring, connection, community engendered by narration” (p. 2). The mere fact that Lily’s relatives welcomed the newly arrived family into their home and, as narrated by Lily, rearranged their living arrangements to accommodate the members of Lily’s family, seemingly without constraints, is a testament of unselfish sharing, caring, and feeling. Such action could be interpreted as text that imparts a community spirit of caring and undeniable community connection (Lincoln, 2005).

Upon arriving in the United States, Lily and her family lived with one of her uncles for three months in one of the more north eastern shore states. At the end of the three months, the family moved to their current location where Lily was enrolled in Excel Middle School. Though the move was a welcome change, Lily stated, “At first I did not talk to the people in my neighborhood because I didn’t know the people that well, so I just wouldn’t talk to them” (Transcript, March 19, 2008). Even though Lily spoke English relatively well, when she first came to the United States, she admitted that she was somewhat shy around people with whom she was not familiar or had not become acquainted. Since she did not talk to people readily, they thought that she did not know how to speak English. However, she wittingly made an assertion during one of our conversations:

> Why, when I, when I first came, people used to think that I don’t speak any English. I understand what they say and stuff, but I can’t, I think I was shy, I don’t talk to people and they used to think I don’t speak English, but I understand everything they said. I pretended I did not understand what they said, so I could learn what they had to say. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

Lily laughed softly–somewhat to herself–as she shared the conversation above, as if what she had shared was a well kept secret and she had, just at that moment, discovered the humor of it all. I found her candor to be very refreshing as she talked about her experiences as an English Language Learner and a newcomer to the United States.

Lily eventually began to interact with members of her community, speaking with them using a mixture of English and Amharic. She shared:

> And sometimes I speak English with my cousins, some, and sometimes, and I, like, combine English and Amharic. And with my neighbors, sometimes, when I play, like, with little kids or baby sit them, I speak English with them, and sometimes I teach them how to, ahm, how to speak, ah, Amharic, like little words, like sit down, stand up, and that's it. Like that. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

As Lily interacted with the children of her community, she seemed to take on the role of communitarian (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), helping them to broaden their communicative skills as they learned to speak English. According to Lily, she enjoyed teaching others and stated that her father sometimes referred to her as "the teacher" when he witnessed her helping the younger children in the community. Her father summed it up quite nicely, I believe. Lily just wanted to help others, and helping the children in the neighborhood was one way to do that. She took pleasure in contributing to others. As Lily helped others with their English speaking skills, she began to realize that she was strengthening her own skills as an ESOL learner, as well.

Adolescent Experiences

As an ESOL student. By Lily's account, when she first came to the United States, she was enrolled in a school in a city in Pennsylvania and experienced extreme disappointment with the school personnel and the students. She expressed how surprised she was to learn how little the students at the school knew about Africa. She elaborated on her experience in a journal entry:

> In that school, there were all white people. I think I was the only girl who was black in the classroom. I also think that the students are not familiar to the African culture because when I tell them that I am from Africa they would ask a lot of questions. For example, some of the questions I remember are, Do you guys live in a house or do you live in a tent? and Did you guys have shoes in Africa or do you walk bare foot? I was kind of surprised to find out that they

> know so very little about Africa. I don't think I will ever forget their questions. (Journal entry, May 12, 2008)

Lily admitted that the questions somewhat annoyed her as well as surprised her. Even so, she said she answered each of their questions, despite the fact that they were somewhat annoying and insulting to her.

In addition to the annoyance she experienced with the students, Lily's interaction with the teachers caused more disappointment for her. She explained that there were not many ESOL students at the school. Because of this, she was pulled out of her English class to go to the ESOL teacher's class. She registered great disappointment when she found out that she was the only ESOL student for that class period. She found this to be unacceptable and quite unsettling. She was also concerned with the way the ESOL class was taught, declaring, "I felt that the way that ESOL class was taught to me in that school was just totally not good, not helpful" (Transcript, March 19, 2008). She explained further:

> The first ESOL class I took [which was located in a different state than where she currently lived] it didn't help me a lot because I already know English, so It was like, she [the teacher] put some little words on the wall then she goes like, find this thing, like, in the room, and I find it and I say what it is in English so it didn't help a lot, but like, in this Excel Middle School, they actually teach those higher vocab and, yeah, all that stuff. so I learn a lot (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

As Lily recalled the experience she had with the ESOL program at the first school in which she was enrolled, I could discern that she was still noticeably upset about it from the tone of her voice and the look of displeasure on her face. It was clear to me that re-living the experiences she had at that school was a very distasteful memory. However, Lily did not remain at that school very long because her family soon moved to a different state where, she was enrolled in Excel Middle School and reported a very different experience compared to the one that she had in Pennsylvania. She penned her experience:

> When I came to Excel Middle School, I liked the ESOL program a lot because I was not the only student in a classroom and it taught me how to write paragraphs, sentence structure and some good things. Excel Middle School was a lot different from the other school I went to. In Excel Middle there are people from a different country. That is the main difference. I liked the diversity a lot

> because you don't feel left out and you get to learn about other countries culture and you get to teach them yours. That is the thing I like about Excel Middle School (Journal Entry, May 12, 2008)

In addition to teaching other students about her culture, Lily was also very helpful to her ESOL teachers and other ESOL students who needed help with English translations, especially new comers from her heritage country. She shared during our conversation:

> Well, sometimes, my ESOL teacher, she asked me to help some, a new student who just got here, just came to America to help them with their locker, to help them open their locker, their combination, or help them find their classes. And that was good because then the student would not feel left alone. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

Lily also stated that she liked the activities and lessons that she received at Excel Middle even though sometimes they were challenging. She elaborated:

> The ESOL class, like it teach you more, more things [more than was taught at the other school. We have very more papers.Say, like you can know about what you can really do, your strong parts and your average parts. We have this little independent reading thing. There we read and like, on the computers, we do vocabs, we do, like read, there's rules, they tell us some things in spellings, and on her Smart Board, we do some reading and like finding the main idea, those kinds of things. But, learning to write in sentences and paragraphs. For me writing was the, writing was the most hard, well, hardest because you have to know subject/verb agreement and punctuations and all those little stuff. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

It seems that Lily was able to work through the challenges she faced as an ESOL student because she now demonstrates the ability to write and speak rather fluently in English and is on the A-B honor roll each quarter.

With family and community. Lily stated that after moving to a different state, she became somewhat more comfortable as she began to settle into her new surroundings, especially when school was not in session. Lily asserted: "When school is not in session, I love to just hang out with friends, having fun just hanging out, relaxing, and talking about whatever comes to mind" (Transcript, March 19, 2008). When she and her friends "hang out," according to Lily, they go out to eat, occasionally. She talked briefly about going out to eat with her friends:

> They like to eat Ethiopian food and American food. I also like to eat Ethiopian food and American food, but I also like Chinese food and Latin American food. Sometimes we go out to eat, but most of the time we eat at home and sometimes we eat over somebody's house. (Email Entry, November 23, 2008)

In addition to occasionally eating out with her friends, Lily divulged:

> We do different things depending on the season. If it is in the spring we spend most of our time outside doing different things like volleyball, sometimes soccer, riding bikes. If it is in the summer we spend most of our time in the pool. But we also do other things like walking. I take walks with my friends in the near-by park and sometimes in the neighborhood, sometimes get ice cream and other cold drinks and just relax, talk and have fun. During fall and winter we go over each others house and just spend the time by talking, sometimes we go to the movies and sometimes go ice skating. But I also like some indoor games, too, like pool and some board and card games. (Email Entry, November 23, 2008)

Lily went on to explain her fondness for playing pool:

> I play pool for fun. I play it mostly on Fridays because there is a pool table in the church. I don't play an actual game of pool because I don't know the rules that well, but I play before the Friday night church service begins. I admit I am not really good at it. I just play it for fun. So I don't have any secrets to how to score a good game. For me, it's just for fun. (Email Entry, November 23, 2008)

When school is in session, many of Lily's after school evenings are spent studying or reading with her sister and a very close friend. She explained:

> We take turns studying at each other's house or we go to the library to check out books and just "hangout" in the library for a while, just enjoying the books because I like to read. My father usually drives us to the library when we want to go. (Email Entry, November, 23, 2008)

In addition to being involved with her family members and school, Lily's religious beliefs and those activities related to them are very important to her. She seems to have very strong religious convictions. According to Lily:

> Everyone in my family is a born again Christian. We believe that Jesus is the son of God and that God raised him from the dead. And we believe that anyone who believes that has eternal life. Knowing this and believing this has helped to keep me and my family strong and binds us together in love for one another, including people who are not family members, people who live around us, that we deal with every day. (Email Entry, August 14, 2008)

As far as her religious activities are concerned, Lily has worked in the church as a Sunday school teacher for the past couple of years. She also shared another thought about her church activity:

> I sing in the youth choir at church. I basically like to sing Christian music and I like to sing any Christian songs, because I don't listen to anything other than Christian music. In the choir we don't have a part that we sing, everyone sings with their natural voice. Even though I like to sing, I have not taken singing lessons, so I am not the best at singing. But I really do enjoy singing in the choir at church. (Email Entry, November 23, 2008)

Hopes, Dreams, Fears, and Plans for the Future

Lily seemed always so pensive when we discussed issues related to the research project. When I asked her about her hopes, dreams, and plans for the future, she shared these thoughts after much reflection

> I am planning on helping people in Africa (but I will also help people that are outside of Africa if they are in need). The reason is because Africa is still a third world country, and there are lots of people there that are homeless, hungry, sick but yet they don't have the money to have a home, food to eat, and a hospital to be treated at when they are sick. What I am planning to do is for the people that don't have houses, especially with the children, I want to help them by providing a house. I don't know how I am going to do it yet but I will probably have an orphanage, and children live in it and I provide them with their needs and if I have the money maybe even with their wants. (Journal Entry, March 31, 2008)

When I inquired of Lily exactly what career path she had chosen in relation to her hopes and dreams, she thoughtfully explained:

> At this time, I don't know what I want to be when I grow up. But I want to be successful in my school things so I could make a lot of money when I grow up. But I am thinking of being a fashion designer or any type of business lady. The reason I want to make lots of money is because I want to help people with it. (Journal Entry, May 5, 2008)

Lily's religious beliefs seemed to be deeply rooted in her family's Christian beliefs and practices. She shared:

> I hope that when I grow up that I will live for Christ. I want to do good things to people. I want to help them with everything that I have. I believe that we are created to serve God and to serve other people. I am scared that time will run out before the return of Christ. And I am scared that enough people won't be saved. But hopefully that will not happen. (Journal Entry, May 12, 2008)

After writing the passage above, she included a special note to me in her journal. It seemed to be somewhat of an after-thought, yet at the same time, firmly asserting her convictions. She stated, “You might not agree with all the things I wrote, Mrs. Lucas, but those are the things I believe in" Journal Entry, (May 12, 2008). She and I had never discussed my religious convictions or affiliations, so I think she assumed that I was not a Christian, and that belief is what prompted her statement.

As Lily elaborated in her journal about her hopes, dreams, and plans for the future, she seemed to be thoroughly caught up in the very essence of affirming her views. Her email and journal entries depicted an earnestness that I had not expected to find.

Soledad of Peruvian Heritage

Personal Traits

Soledad would sometimes come to my classroom door, linger for a little, and wish me a good day before leaving to board the bus to go home. During the year that we worked together on this project, the after school visits became more frequent. She had been a student in my seventh grade English class the year before, and during that time, she and I had developed a very unique relationship, one of mentor/mentee. She seemed to feel at ease as we talked, often sharing thoughts about a wide-range of topics, including matters that were of a very personal nature.

When Soledad was a student in my seventh grade English class, she wore her hair in a short, page-boy type hair style with bangs that hung somewhat evenly, just above her eyebrows. This year, however, she had let her hair grow out and often wore it parted in the center with heavy, jet-black flowing rivulets of hair falling loosely to the sides of her round-shaped face, then spreading over both shoulders, and cascading down her back. Her dark hair was in stark contrast to her soft, olive-brown complexion, lending her, what I thought to be, a very attractive, stunning appearance.

At very brief intervals, her eyes were fixed and very piercing. Then, seemingly, without warning, they would be replaced by eyes that danced, and sparkled, and twinkled–eyes that darted about occasionally, as if in anticipation of unveiling a yet unsolved mystery. The changes in her eye movements match her personality perfectly.

She seemed to be so carefree, in fact, totally free-spirited most of the time. Her spirited behavior reminded me of the flight of an ever-exploring butterfly, fluttering from one place of interest to another. I thought of her as a "multi-personalitied phenomenon" (a phrase I have taken the liberty to use), one that is not contrived at all, but easily filtering from one dimension to the next. At times, her temperament exuded excitement and expectation; at other times she presented a more morose persona. During those latter times, she talked with me, easily it seemed, about what was on her mind, and she and I would address those concerns very candidly. As a result, I came to think of her as a very intriguing young lady.

Life in the Heritage Country

Most of what Soledad knew about life in Peru is what she learned from her mother's accounts. She was just two months old when she left Peru and would not visit the country again until she was 10 years old. However, Soledad shared one very poignant memory of her childhood in Peru when she returned with her parents for a visit:

> My most memorable memory of Peru was when me and my family went to the beach. It was so beautiful, even though I couldn't get in the water because it was winter over there. But it was just so beautiful to just see the waves and the birds flying. I will never forget that! (Email Entry, August 14, 2008)

Though Soledad could not share many personal memories of her life in Peru, she seemed to enjoy reliving, vicariously, the memories of the experiences her mother shared with her. According to Soledad, when her mother was growing up in Peru, she was adopted by a Peruvian family at a very young age. Reportedly, the adoptive parents neglected her mother, treating her poorly. During one of our sessions, she elaborated on her mother's plight as a youngster growing up in Peru:

> My mother, she was made to work in the home of her adoptive parents when she was in second grade to help the family with stuff around the house. Then, when she was older, they made her work for other families in the neighborhood as their housekeeper and sometimes as their babysitter just so they could get the money she made to help them out. This meant that she did not have a chance to go to school like other kids her age. So, not wanting me, her own daughter, to have the same kind of experience she had, my mother told me that she was determined to make my life a much better life from the one she had. (Transcript, March 12, 2008)

As for Soledad's father, she explained that he was enrolled in college at the age of 16 while he lived in Peru. She interjected, rather hurriedly, "You can be in college at that age in Peru, you know" (Transcript, March 12, 2008). He eventually dropped out, promising himself that he would go back to school once he was settled in the United States. However, according to Soledad, "He never went back. I doubt he's ever going to go back because he has a decent job now and he likes what he is doing. He is working at McDonald's (Email Entry, March 15, 2009).

During another of our conversations, Soledad shared her parents' interest in learning to cook with the hope of one day having their own dining service, perhaps, once they immigrated to the United States:

> When my mom and dad met each other, instead of going out on a date, they would have study sessions to learn English together. They would go to the library and check out cooking books with like, one side was Spanish and the other side was, like, English. My mom was the one who was really into cooking more than my dad. (Transcript, April 16, 2008)

Soledad's parents did not fulfill their dream of opening their own food service as they had hoped when they came to the United States.

Soledad's memories of her visits to Peru are centered around her grandmother whom she would visit during the summer. According to Soledad, her grandmother would invite the neighborhood children over, and they would have a party, just for fun. Each time her grandmother gave a party, there would be a piñata that all of the children eagerly attacked with sticks. Remembering those times brought a broad smile to her face. Soledad eagerly reminisced:

> All of us would try as hard as we can to break the piñata. When it broke we all ran around like crazy, just running, screaming, to the top of our lungs, pushing, and shouting, trying to pick up the most candy and laughing so hard. It was sooo much fun. (Transcript, April 16, 2008)

Hearing Soledad share those memories she had of Peru caused me to I wonder if Soledad's parents brought any of the traditions and practices with them from Peru to share with Soledad as she grew up here in the United States. When I asked Soledad about this, she said that the only thing she could remember was that her mother still prepared some Peruvian dishes

occasionally. She fondly remembers one particular dish that she really liked but could not recall its name:

> Well, I don't know the name they are called, but I call them green spaghettis, but they're called something else, but I don't know, really. It's like spinach with, like, milk and cheese, and it's like all blended up in, like, this, pasta thing. It's sooo good! (Transcript, March 12, 2008)

Though Soledad was describing a Peruvian dish, I noticed that she used language that is indigenous to America to describe the way the food looked. One might say that as a language learner, she related her experiences through anglicized lenses, a trait not uncommon for English Language Learners who are becoming more comfortable with the use of the American language.

Even though Soledad seems to have begun to anglicize her communication by using American phrases that support her continued use of Spanish, she readily volunteered that she feels that it is very important for her to hold on to all that her mother shares with her verbally about her cultural heritage. She emphatically declared during one of our conversations:

> I, I want to hold on to anything that my mom can teach me 'cause she knows, she know, like, different, like, other places, like Columbian, how they speak, because they speak in different styles, and/or Mexicans, or Argentineans, I want to learn how to, like, as much as she knows from those different countries and stuff. (Transcript, March 12, 2008)

Life as a Newcomer to the United States

When Soledad's parents arrived in the United States, they lived with her mother's sister who had come to the east coast earlier and settled. She shared that once her parents came to the United States and settled in, they began to accept the fact that realizing their dream of having their own food service would not be an easy task. She elaborated:

> My mom and my dad believed that they would get better jobs and a better education if they came to the United States. That's why they decided to come to the United States. But my dad did not go to college. My mom and my dad worked at a restaurant after they came to the United States. They never did open their own restaurant. (Transcript, March 12, 2008)

Eventually, there would be a dramatic change in the make-up of the nuclear family when her father decided to leave her and her mother. His leaving caused Soledad to be raised by a single mother. Her mother took on the responsibility of raising her child without continual help from the father of her child in a country that was foreign to her, whose language she had not mastered. Soledad explained the situation in an email correspondence:

> At my house I only remember just being with my mom. My dad left when I was 2. I don't really have any memories of him. My mom only knew how to speak Spanish, since I was going to school I had to help her with the grammar [as Soledad began to learn English]. I had my older cousins to help me with homework since my mom didn't really understand it. Growing up in my house was pretty confusing. My dad stopped by every month or so. He talked both English and Spanish. We never really talked when he visited. He would just take me to the playground and not really talk to me about anything. It was just silence between me and him. (Email Entry, May 28, 2008)

According to Soledad, though both her parents had tried to learn English from cook books prior to coming to the United States, her father spoke very little English and her mother spoke no English at all when they arrived in the United States. Once her father left their home, Soledad did not hear English spoken in the home. Speaking only Spanish in the home seemed to work well for Soledad, but it could not be used as a resource for communication when she enrolled in the public school and began to learn to speak the English language. Having heard only Spanish spoken in the home proved to be very difficult and frustrating for her as she struggled to learn to speak the English language while in school. She reported in an email:

> Starting school was pretty hard. I mean my mom only talking to me in Spanish, and in school having to know English. I thought it would be amazing to know this new language but then when I started it was like a bore like there wasn't really a point. But then I started the ESOL program and that helped me. I only remember that I would be in class and someone would take me out to go to the ESOL. Each passing grade was getting easier since the ESOL program. It had helped me to understand more of the concept of the school and rules. (Email Entry, April 18, 2008)

In addition to the help Soledad received in the ESOL program, she received support from extended family members, as well. In the same email correspondence, Soledad stated:

My cousin that I consider my sister, she had always helped me with homework when I didn't understand any of it. She helped me with most of my stuff. She only knew English and some Spanish. She influenced me to speak more English, but still keep my Spanish. I had always looked up to her. Since she was always there for me, I'm just really influenced by her, I don't know what it really is, but it's just this connection that I have with her. She made me feel like anything was possible, that giving up is just another weakness against self. I just really look up to her. She's one of my big influence. (Email Entry, April 18, 2008)

In another email correspondence, she talked about another relative who was instrumental in helping her as she learned the English language during her middle school years:

> My older cousin was always here for me so, he basically always helped me. So I didn't have too much trouble. But when he wasn't there it was somewhat hard, but besides that, everything was ok, I lived in a Spanish community so it wasn't a big challenge. (Email Entry, May 28, 2008)

Adolescent Experiences

As an ESOL student. When Soledad enrolled in Excel Middle School as a sixth grade ESOL student, she had actually been in ESOL classes for a number of years. According to her, learning English continued to be difficult for her in middle school. Even though Soledad was learning English in school, she continued to speak Spanish at home with her mom. Eventually her cousins began to provide her with out-of-school opportunities to speak English. She explained:

> Well, my family knew I was in ESOL and my older cousins, you know, they were already in the eighth and ninth grades, so they talked to me in English instead of Spanish. My mom would try to talk to me in English the little as she can, but, yeah. And when I came to 6th grade, I was still in ESOL for the whole year. (Transcript, March 12, 2008)

While in middle school, Soledad experienced the struggle of trying to maintain fluency in both the English and Spanish. The struggle seemed more intense each time she traveled from the United States to Peru for summer visits and back to the United States at the end of the summer. She explained during one of our conversations:

> That summer [at the end of 6th grade] I stayed in Peru for the whole summer to get caught up on my Spanish again because I had forgotten it after a while).

> And I came back to I came to 7th grade, my English was a little off because I went to Peru and there was no one, there was no one over there to talk in English, so, yeah. (Transcript, March 12, 2008)

As a result of the difficulty Soledad experienced in not being able to retain fluency in both languages, her mother began to teach her Spanish. Learning English and re-learning Spanish at the same time compounded the awkwardness of the learning process for her. So, according to Soledad, "I would, like, mix my Spanish and English together, in the same sentence" (Transcript, March 12, 2008) as she communicated with her teachers and peers, and this, reportedly, was very frustrating for her. The fact that Soledad combined the two languages as she spoke was a natural form of register (Carger, 1996). This form of register is sometimes, more often than not, deemed a deficit for English Language Learners, when, in fact, it is not a deficit at all. Combining the two languages shows a level of maturity as the learner becomes more comfortable as the acquisition of the languages begins to emerge (Carger, 1996).

As time passed, however, communicating in English became much less stressful and much more comfortable for Soledad. In fact, though her English was not perfect, she had progressed so well that her teachers would often ask her to help newly enrolled ESOL students with their English. As she translated for the ESOL students, she realized that she was helping the teachers reach these students as well, and that was a great source of pride and exhilaration for her. She recalled:

> I was helping one of my old teachers from last year, Uhm, there was a new student, she talked Spanish, and she really didn't know how to communicate in English. So, I got to translate and help her out. I was able to translate for the teacher and for the student. It felt nice being able to, like, help her. (Transcript, March 12, 2008)

Soledad's bilingual ability was becoming a resource that proved useful in helping others. She later acknowledged that being able to help her former ESOL teacher and the new ESOL student communicate with each other caused her to begin thinking of ways that she might be of service to the school on a more regular basis and went on to assert, "I have thought of, you know, teaching English to other people that don't know it, or, like just being, like, a translator, around school" (Transcript, March 12, 2008).

Soledad continued to improve in all of her academic courses, achieving B's in English and A's and B's in her math classes frequently. She declared that math was her strongest subject and her favorite class throughout middle school.

With family and community. Soledad seems to have adjusted, somewhat, to not having both parents in the home. She readily elaborated:

> My family life is not what I want it to be with my father being gone and all, but I have learned to adjust to just being with my mom. Sometimes me and my mom might take in a movie and afterwards sit and just talk about it, analyzing why characters did what they did in the movie. We also go to the mall to shop for clothes, sometimes. I like to choose my own clothes because sometimes what my mom likes for me is not what I like. Me and my mom also like to go out to eat at different restaurants, but she so likes to go to restaurants that serve Spanish or Italian food. (Email Entry, May20, 2008)

In another email correspondence, she continued to explain:

> Even though my father was not in the picture for me when I was growing up, I forgive him. My dad wasn't around when I was younger. He came back when I was like 7 years old. His dad died like, when he was really young and his mom died when he was like, in his 20's. So he probably didn't know how to be a father to me, I guess. I'm sure he probably didn't know how to be a father with his other kids either that he had with the other woman. So he didn't really have any hand up experience, but my mom was my main influence for most of my goals and stuff. I'm nothing what my dad wanted me to be because I don't get good grades. I want to become something that I want. Not what he wants. He wants me to become a lawyer. Which is far from my mind. I really don't want to because of the pressure he'll put on me. He wants me to be the best, but he pressures so much that it get to the point that I give up on everything. Trying to become what my dad wants is like trying to be a different ethnicity than you really are. Which we all know is impossible!!! So I just rather become someone I want to be for the rest of my life. (Email Entry, May 30, 2008)

In the above assertion, it seems that Soledad is becoming an adolescent with her own goals. These goals seem to cause confrontations with her father because she wants to be more independent in making choices in her life.

When Soledad's father left the family, her mom wanted to make sure that she was able to support her family. She found work at a local restaurant. Soledad recalled that sometimes her mother would take her to work with her. She elaborated on one of those occasions which occurred when she was about nine or ten years old:

> I remember once, uhmmm, believe I was in fifth grade and I went to work with my mom. It was parent take your child to work day and my mom was, well,

> she worked at a fast food restaurant, and she was in the front and some guy, he comes up to her, he was Caucasian, I guess and he comes up to her and my mom's English was so little, rough back then, uhmm, she was trying to take his order, and he kept make, making fun of her because it wasn't as well. So, I walked up, and I had to help my mom. Then, the guy looked at me and, as if, like, what is she doing? You know, she is so little, how does she know all of this stuff? Err, then, after his order was taken, I went to sit back down, he comes up, he comes up to me, says, where'd you learn all that? How do you help your mom? Do you always help mommy? No, just now 'cause I guess you didn't understand her as much. He just smiled and went to his seat. (Transcript, April 28, 2008)

Soledad said of that moment, "I felt so grown up, like an adult, like I could accomplish anything! Like, I could help my mom with anything!" (Transcript, April 28, 2008). As she shared this moment, she seemed to bubble over with pride and joy flashing a huge, victorious smile.

Later, during the same year that Soledad helped her mother with English while she was at work, she also remembered helping a young boy in her neighborhood, who was about her own age, with English. She shared:

> It was the same year, but it was in the spring. That happened in the fall [translating for her mother at the restaurant]. But it was in the spring this time. And the ice cream truck was there. And there was this boy, he didn't know [English] he just moved here and I had to translate to him, so I helped him order from the ice cream truck. He got it was like those ice cream sandwiches with the vanilla ones in the middle and the outside was like chocolate, yeah, that one, I remember. (Transcript, April 28, 2008)

The experience that Soledad had of translating for her mother and again for the young boy seemed to characterize her as a helper. Being in a position to help someone seemed to give Soledad a euphoric feeling, a feeling of power. In fact, she asserted during our conversation:

> It makes me, like, think of other people more, and how they can struggle and stuff. And that just by doing something little helps them, like, a lot. It's, well, like, a really good feeling to be able to help someone even if just a little, you know? (Transcript, March 12, 2008)

Soledad could not meet with me toward the end of the school year to continue our oral sessions for our research because of her prescheduled meetings with the counselor's peer group, so, we continued our correspondence through email. During

one of our email correspondences, Soledad discussed how she and her friends spend their time. She readily admitted that she did not have a great number of friends, but that the friends that she did have were very close. She explained:

> Me and my friends, I only have a couple of really good friends. Well, me and my friends just love to hang out. Usually at someone's house and watch t.v., talk, take pictures of us just hanging out and having fun together and we put all the photos in an album for us to have to look back and remember for later on, and sometimes we just want to be around each other. We don't really care on what we do, as long as we're together it's fine. (Email Entry, May 30, 2008)

Hopes, Dreams, Fears, and Plans for the Future

Soledad seemed a bit hesitant to begin speaking as we settled in during one of our final oral conversations. She had been dealing with a very personal issue the year before, and she and I had talked extensively about it. Now, apparently, she was faced with the same issue again. She had been working through a very troubling, frustrating situation in which she was dealing with feeling unwanted at home and not being able to fit in with her peers at school. She had been working with the school counselor and psychologist, at the request of her mother, to try to head off any activity that could potentially turn into a harmful situation for her.

When we sat down to talk, I noticed that Soledad seemed somewhat subdued. I asked her if she felt up to our conversation that day and assured her that if she wanted to reschedule that we could. However, she seemed determined to go ahead with our session, as planned. I began by asking her to share her thoughts about her hopes, dreams, or fears in her life. At that point, she hesitated briefly; then she rolled back her sleeves and revealed several freshly healed flesh wounds that were the result of apparent self-mutilations, known among adolescents, including Soledad, as “cutting.” Seeing the wounds did not surprise me because I had seen similar wounds on her before; however, seeing them at that point was a surprise because I had been assured by Soledad at the beginning of the school year that she was no longer doing this. Even so, Soledad explained that she wanted to share her most recent experience with me because she felt that she needed to talk about it, to “get it out there in the open,” as she candidly put it.

She began the conversation by stating that her mother's work schedule often caused her to be away from home when Soledad returned from school, and since her father was not living in the home any more, she experienced periods of depression, periods of feeling as if she had no one around who cared about her. These feelings, according to Soledad, are what led to the "cutting." The following is a segment of our conversation during that session which sheds some light on her behavior as she began to resort to "cutting" herself:

Researcher: What caused you to feel neglected, alone?

Soledad: 'Cause she [Soledad's mother] started working more as my aunt started living with me and my mom, and she thought that my aunt would always be there, but she wasn't really. *Researcher*: So, your aunt got a job and moved out?

Soledad: Yeah. And then there was like the stress of kids around me telling me how happy their both parents were and my dad wasn't there, so, it would like anger me and I'd go home, I'd just go home [makes gesture, pointing to scar on her arm]

Researcher: What do you feel when you do that to yourself, though? What does it do?

Soledad: Well, it's like a relief!

Researcher: Really?

Soledad: Yeah, it's like, this, my pain in my heart comes out through the blood that is coming out of my wrists and my arms.

Researcher: Gosh!

Soledad: Yeah [*very softly spoken*].

Researcher: So, you, you're not doing that now, are you?

Soledad: Ah, Ahmm, I've tried, to, I've tried, I've stopped [*said as if to reassure or convince the researcher of the truth of the statement*].

Researcher: And, is it something like, it's kind of addictive?

Soledad: Yeah

Researcher: You stop for a while and you start again?

Soledad: Yeah, uh, humm, really

Researcher: What could trigger it, starting it again?

Soledad: Ssss, ssss. Something, If I lose someone, or, If someone comes up to me, like, talks to me about my past or something that I really don't like

Researcher: Uhm humm. Do you think, maybe, if you could, at those times if you could go home and talk to Mom at that time when it happened

Soledad: So, then I wouldn't cut myself.

Researcher: Yeah! So, But, Mom's not there.

Soledad: Sometimes, Yeah

Researcher: Sometimes, Is there a way you could call her?

Soledad: Yeah, but sometimes she's busy and she doesn't pick up quick. The last time she found out, I had told her that I stopped three times and the third time was during this year.

Researcher: Uhmmmm

Soledad: Yeah.
Researcher: 'Cause I know when I saw you the early part of this school year, you, did tell me that you weren't doing that anymore.
Soledad: Yeah.
Researcher: And at the time I guess you weren't.
Soledad: Yeah, I wasn't and then, just, I had a friend and he just, you know, I had told him one of my deepest secrets and, cause I trusted him so much, and we've known each other since elementary, and, he just happened to tell everyone, and he
Researcher: Awwhhh.
Soledad: he got angry at me for some unknown reason and he would, like, hit me, and I thought for the first time it was playful, because, you know, he would, like, do that for the sake of this alone. Then...
Researcher: Was he here at school? Someone you know here at school?
Soledad: Yeah. And then I would, like, brush off when he did and I'd go, whatever. And then it kept happening, and every hit was harder and harder and…
Researcher: Are you still with him?
Soledad: No.
Researcher: Okay.
Soledad: And, well, and I just got angry and thought it was my fault, and I guess it was and I just cut myself and then when I kept cutting myself, I kept remembering all the times my dad wasn't there for me or my mom.
Researcher: So when you do it, do, is it continual, do you, or is one?
Soledad: It's continual.
Researcher: One cut, I mean, in the course of an hour, is it more than one cut?
Soledad: Yeah, it's more than one; it usually is.
(Transcript, April 30, 2008)

At that point in our conversation, I advised Soledad to seek professional counseling to help her deal with what I perceived to be some relatively grave issues: self mutilation and bullying/physical abuse. I advised her to talk with the school's guidance counselor, or if she felt more comfortable with me doing so on her behalf, I would do so. She assured me that she would talk with the counselor, with whom she had a close relationship, about both problems. Eventually, I would learn from the counselor that Soledad had, in fact, talked with her the following day about her problems.

Since Soledad's revelations had been so forthcoming and seemingly unrestrained, I felt that she had entrusted me with some very personal information. Thus, I felt a degree of responsibility toward steering her in the direction of professional help realizing that I did not possess the expertise needed to deal with those issues with which she was struggling.

Not only did Soledad receive help from the school through the counseling program, the counselor also referred her to the county's medical assistance program through a local hospital. At the school, she was enrolled in the after-school peer mediation program. This program, under the direction of the school's grade-level guidance counselor, allowed her to meet with other students who were dealing with similar problems or issues. The program assisted the students in approaching their problems in a safe, structured environment. The local hospital's medical assistance program provided one-on-one counseling as well as small group sessions that helped to strengthen her ability to deal with emotional issues related to the "cutting" and physical abuse she was experiencing.

In addition to encouraging Soledad to seek professional help, I strongly encouraged her to talk with her mother about her feelings and about what was going on in her life. She agreed, somewhat hesitantly, to do so. Our oral research sessions were suspended to allow Soledad to participate in the after-school mediation sessions and the hospital's scheduled counseling sessions which conflicted with our scheduled sessions. However, Soledad and I agreed to continue to correspond via email. I assured her that at any time she felt the need to discontinue our email correspondence, I would honor her decision to do so. Fortunately, she did not feel a need to discontinue our email correspondences. Thus, I was able to keep up with her mediation and therapy sessions and check on her well-being, periodically. I feel that I may have been able to help Soledad in a small way by being available to her as a sounding board. Though my availability was limited due to our inability to meet, our email correspondences were frequent, and I was able to remain a presence in her life, complementing the help she received from the school counselor and therapist as she sought to work through her problems.

I surmised that because of the various experiences Soledad had related to the issues with which she was faced, she began to become somewhat introspective. In one of our email correspondences, Soledad offered that she felt very strongly about becoming a psychologist. She seemed to hold fast the need to help those who were suffering, mentally, especially those who may be experiencing behavior similar to her own. She unveiled some interesting insights:

> I thought being a psychologist would make it easier for me to relate to younger kids with the same problem as me. But not only for kids but for adults, too. I just want to help people. It's just that I've done it [helped other people] for a long time. So why not grow up and help people with their problems. Just knowing that I can help someone makes me feel like a better person. (Email Entry, May 30, 2008)

In another email entry, Soledad elaborated further about her desire to become a psychologist:

> Although one of my biggest dreams is to being a psychologist, I'm kind of scared that I wouldn't be able to succeed in it. Since I don't know most of my grammar, and I have a little accent. Which I'm sure it would make hard for people to understand me. But I'm sure my cousin and my mom will influence me that having an accent shouldn't stop me. And that whatever happens, happens. I 'm just scared, but then I'm excited to be someone who can help others. I want to start in high school with it, take some classes to get ready for it. (Email Entry, May 30, 2008)

Soledad's willingness to help others who may be experiencing similar behavior problems as she has faced seemed to be the driving force behind her career choice. Given her willingness to help others and her ability to speak fluently in two languages, English and Spanish, Soledad could combine those two powerful assets. They would allow her to reach a vast audience in her quest to help or assist others.

Shanna of Korean Heritage

Personal Traits

Upon first meeting Shanna, I was very impressed by her poised, quiet, yet self-confident demeanor. She smiled easily, which lent itself to her pleasing personality. At the time she was a seventh grade student on my team, and her locker was on the same hall as my classroom; in fact, it was located very near to my classroom door. She would often smile and speak, acknowledging me by name, as she passed by on her way to class while I was on hall duty.

Though I did not know who she was, I felt drawn to her because she seemed so friendly and outgoing. Then one day she stopped to talk. This surprised me. We talked very briefly that day, and she mentioned that she wished that she could be in my English class that year, but she explained that she was still taking all ESOL classes,

except for her science class and math. According to Shanna, she had come to the United States a couple of years earlier and was not ready to move into all general education classes, yet. The county's school policy dictated that ESOL students must demonstrate specific levels of achievement in language acquisition to be enrolled in a general English education course (Levels of achievement are discussed in Chapter 3).

With reference to Shanna's readiness for the general education English class, I mentioned to her that I was impressed that she was eager to begin taking general education English and that I looked forward to having her in my English class when that time came. Unfortunately, that did not happen during her seventh grade year. It would not be until she reached eighth grade that she would exit the ESOL program and begin taking all general education classes.

I thought of Shanna as a strikingly attractive young lady, with high cheek bones and flawless skin. She often wore her dark, brown hair pulled away from her face, tied in a long, flowing pony tail that was balanced in the center of the back of her head. Wisps of hair managed to elude the tightly pulled pony tail; they fell at irregular intervals along the sides of her face. Her thinly-parted bangs were cut just short of the tip of her eyebrows, giving her a very youthful, yet elegant appearance. Her skin had a bronze hue to it which complimented her dark brown eyes, eyes that were ever-smiling.

As she sat across from me during our first conversation for this research project, I reflected on the numerous times she and I had talked the year before when she was in the seventh grade. Those were fond memories. Now, as I contemplated Shanna's portrait, I recalled one unforgettable moment that occurred towards the end of her eighth grade school year. Shanna presented me with a very special gift–a delectable assortment of miniature Korean sweet cakes and cookies. She stood before me with one of the broadest smiles I had yet to witness from her and declared, "Mrs. Lucas, my mom baked these little mini cakes and cookies *especially* for you. She wanted you to have something uh.special, something Korean to say thanks to you for helping me" (Transcript, April 7, 2008). I was truly touched by this warm gesture. I felt that having her mom do that for me was a gesture of true appreciation and acceptance. Shanna mentioned that she had talked to her mom and expressed a desire

to do something nice for me, and her mother decided that the miniature cakes and cookies would be the perfect gift. At that moment, I felt very special.

Life in the Heritage Country

Shanna shared with me that four and one-half years earlier, she and her parents came to the United States from Korea. Her parents were looking for better job opportunities and a school system that offered a well-balanced education for their daughter, an only child. At the time, Shanna was only 10 years old, and her life revolved around her pet dog and her cousins. She stated:

> Okay, I am only child, and I'm kind of used to playing by myself. I have one pet dog name Mila, my parents. So in my family there are only 4 members including my dog. Also, I have cousins. We played and had fun together, not many friends in the neighborhood where I grow up. When my parents told me my family is coming to the United States, I was so, happy (Journal Entry, April 23, 2008).

While she lived in Korea, Shanna enjoyed the times she had with her cousins, visiting them on a regular basis and keeping close contact with them by telephone or email. Shanna remembered that her aunts and uncles were very protective of her as were her parents of her cousins. There seemed to be a very strong communal bond between the families. Shanna reminisced about the family ties during one of our conversations:

> My mom and dad would invite my aunts and uncles and their children, my cousins, over for dinner and as we ate our dinner, we all ate from a large, same bowl. Yeah [bobbing her head up and down, smiling slightly with eyes open wide] sometime it might be rice or it might be kim-chi. And we would, each person, dip into big bowl at different turns, one person would dip, then another person would dip, until we would finish. (Transcript, April 7, 2008)

According to Shanna, her aunts and uncles, being the elders in the family were shown great respect–so much so that when Shanna learned to speak English in the United States, she would not speak in English to them out of respect for their heritage language.

Looking back on her life in Korea, Shanna said that what she remembers most was celebrating the Lunar New Year, held in February. She elaborated:

> I always enjoy the Lunar New Year celebration because my parents or my aunts or uncles would give me and my cousins money, and we could buy

> whatever we want. And I could dress up in colorful clothes. I like dressing up in Korean dress because all the pretty colors and beautiful designs. I like the long flow of the dress on me. They make me want to walk tall and hold my head high. I felt sooo pretty, kinda like a fairy tale princess. I wear my hair up like this on my head [piling her hair on top of her head and smiling broadly]. I felt so grown up. (Transcript, April 7, 2008)

The clothing worn during these celebrations depicted symbols and designs that many times were taken from original Chinese symbols that stood for luck, fortune, longevity, and fertility (Rhodes, 2008). Shanna stated that she always looked forward to wearing the special attire during the celebration period. The Lunar New Year was a celebration that lasted for three days and was a time for visiting relatives and commemorating their ancestors, so there was always a lot of food and celebrations during that time (Rhodes, 2008).

While she was in school in Korea, Shanna recalled that by the time Korean children reached grade three, they were enrolled in an English class at the school or enrolled in a class that was taught by a tutor because all Korean children were expected to know how to speak English by the time they completed grammar school. She explained:

> In Korea you learn English at school when you go to third grade. Some kids take English tutor class. But I wasn't really interested in English back than even though I had a good grade. Well, I went to my cousin's English tutor class but I was not very paying attention to it. At least I learned to sing ABC song. (Journal Entry, April 23, 2008)

Shanna would later regret not having paid more attention to learning to speak the English language during the time she spent with her cousin in the tutored English classes while in Korea.

Life* as a *Newcomer to the United States

After Shanna and her parents came to the United States, she confided that she felt overwhelmed once she entered public school because of her limited English. As Shanna looked back to those times in Korea when she had the opportunity to learn English, she stated that she wished she had been more attentive. She found that learning to speak English, once she arrived here in the United States, was so much

more difficult for her than she could ever have imagined. However, Shanna's mother and father were very supportive of her as she began to learn the English language. She elaborated:

> When I came to United States, my father taught me the English letters for my name and the sounds of them. My mom helped me, too. She wrote my name and pronounced over and over to me, using English pronounce-ci-a-tion [written this way to emphasize her pronunciation of the word] that my father used. And they continued until I learned how to do it by myself. (Transcript, March 19, 2008)

During one of our oral sessions, Shanna dramatically recounted what happened when she first began to practice speaking English at home:

> I would stand before a mirror and say words, phrases aloud – watching my words, watching my mouth as I said the words. When my mom first heard me practice out loud that way, she goes, Shanna, who are you talking to? and I go, imaginary person, Mom. She thought I was talking to real person. So, I go, I'm talking to the mirror, Mom. I'm practicing my English in the mirror. (Transcript, March 31, 2008)

Though her mother did not speak English, once she understood what Shanna was doing, she would often offer her assistance. However, Shanna felt that this was something that she had to do on her own and would decline any help. She felt more secure if she practiced alone, she declared. There was one incident that Shanna shared with me during one of our conversations that was so very poignant. She had been practicing–trying to say the word "woods." She was having such a difficult time trying to master it that she was tempted to give up; yet, at the same time, she was determined to get it right. She went into elaborate details about what happened:

> But, only that word I couldn't really pronounce it, and I always pronounce it in Korean, like, like Korean accent. So, when I say it, people like my ESOL teacher or other teachers, they do understand. But I wanted to make that sound like, really perfect, so, on like, when everybody was sleeping, I went to my bed and then I was, like, just keep on pronouncing that word, but then I couldn't make it perfect. And I had the dictionary on the computer, so I got out of bed and I went on line and I went to dictionary.com. I would, I was like listening to the pronunciation entire night but I couldn't, like still pronounce it perfectly. I was so mad at myself. I was actually crying for that, and then my mom came and she's like, Honey, why are you crying? I was like, I just can't pronounce this word. And then she was like, Why? And then I was like, Well, I know how

> to pronounce it, but it's Korean accent, and I don't like it. And, then she's like, well, then, practice. And I was like, I, It just it just make me don't say it out loud. I was like really crazy and my mom's like, It's okay if you have a little mistake, It doesn't really hurt you. But that's the way it was, I just wanted to make a perfect sound. (Transcript, April 7, 2008)

My heart went out to Shanna, immediately. I couldn't imagine what it must have felt like to want to say something so badly and not be able to do it to the point where it would bring one to tears. Yet, as Shanna shared that moment with me, I felt, partly, that I was reliving that experience, that very moment, with her.

Adolescent Experiences

As an ESOL student. Shanna admitted that though she had been exposed to some English during her third grade year in elementary school while in Korea, she did not know how to speak the language comfortably. In fact, she state in one of her journal entries:

> I could not speak English very well. I had to use body language to communicate with my teachers and friends. I don't know why, but I couldn't even say "Hi" in English. I had learned how to sing ABC song and that is the only English I could say. (Journal Entry, March 2008)

As mentioned earlier, by the time Shanna came to Excel Middle School, she had already been in the United States for nearly four and one-half years. Yet, she still had not mastered the English language to her satisfaction. She elaborated:

> The most difficult part was talking to ESOL teacher, like asking questions and, like answering what the teacher is asking me because I had to answer with English. But, usually my teacher, she use, like, easy words, and, ah, words that I can understand, and she would explain to me. We used, like, pictures. That helped a lot, really, like when we learn new words like dogs, cats or something, well, I already know what that means, so, she would, like make us draw on the board and then, like, I got to learn the simple sentence like, I like something, and then she would make us, like put a vocab words in there and then, like, tell the meaning, like, I like pizza and then she'd draw a pizza and then she would put a heart next to it, maybe that'll make me understand. So, yeah, it was like, almost like a (sic) art class. (Transcript, March 19, 2009)

However, about the middle of her seventh grade year, she stated that she had begun to pick up the language and to speak it more comfortably. She remembered that

her ESOL teacher and her homeroom teacher would help her with her reading and speaking in the English language. They saw that she was trying extremely hard. Eventually, her speaking improved, and she began to concentrate on writing the English language, using complete sentences. She even progressed to making the A/B honor roll frequently. For Shanna, that was quite a feat.

With family and community. Shanna found that by emailing her cousins back in Korea using English instead of the Korean language helped her learn how to speak and write English more fluently. In her journal she wrote:

> Some of my cousins know English. So when I talk to them I only speak English. And it's so fun. Now, for over 10 years I've been speaking Korean with them and now I talk in English. When I email to them, my cousins answer my emails in English. Their English is not so perfect, but they try and it helps me practice my English. It help (sic) me to practice English language with my cousins and other Korean people. (Journal Entry, April 23, 2008)

She further stated in the same journal entry:

> I always talk to my mom's friends in Korean, but to my cousins, I always speak to them in English and not in Korean language. I believe my cousins use English when they write to me in emails because they probably feel comfortable speaking to me in English or maybe they just want to practice their English with me because they really don't know how to speak Korean language, to translating the Korean word for the English word in Korean language. You know what I mean? Even though they might know Korean words better, but they write their emails to me in English. And, anyway, and that helps me. (Journal Entry, April 23, 2008)

Shanna also shared that her mother has a Korean friend who lived in the same area in which they lived, who owned a learning center that she established to help newly-arrived Koreans adjust to the language and cultural customs here in the United States. Her mother's friend had encouraged Shanna to speak in English as much as possible, but to use her Korean language, as well. She had also encouraged Shanna to work at the learning center on weekends to gain more experience using both the English and Korean languages.

Hopes, Dreams, Fears, and Plans for the Future

Shanna, though not having made a firm commitment towards her future as far as her hopes, dreams, and plans were concerned, did share that she liked being able to

help people by translating for them. When her cousins would email her from Korea using the Korean language, she would sometimes translate the Korean they had written into the English that she was beginning to learn. She would also act as a translator for her mother when her mother's English-speaking friends came to their home to visit. At other times, she would also translate into English some of the Korean phrases that her mother's Asian American friends used when they came to visit. She stated that she wanted to expose her mother to as much English as possible. She once exclaimed:

> I think it is so cool to be able to give translation for English words for the Korean words when my parents' friends don't know, especially the ones who just came here. It helps me so much. I really, really want to have perfect words, perfect English. I want to help people who are new to United States or just need help translating. I think I will ask my mom's friend at the learning center if I can work in summer months, every summer, to get more training in speaking perfect English. (Transcript, April 23, 2008)

According to Shanna, many of the patrons at the learning center do not speak English fluently and some not at all. She felt that by working there, she could begin to work towards fulfilling her aspirations of being a translator for Korean speaking Americans one day.

I also noticed that Shanna seemed to be very fashion-conscious and looked the part of a fashion model with her gracious appearance and slim, streamline features. She wore one of her favorite dress-up outfits to school at the end of her eighth grade year. The occasion was the end of the school year awards assembly, and students who had excelled in a variety of areas were being recognized for their achievements. Shanna was being recognized for having made the honor roll all four quarters during the school year, and as she beamed, she demurely explained, "I want to look really nice for the awards assembly." She wore an off-white, two-piece, jersey outfit–a short jacket with a matching, knee-length skirt. She had accented the outfit with silver accessories–a petite, extended-strap shoulder bag and high-heel, sling-back shoes. She looked very lovely in that outfit, and she was widely complimented throughout the day. Shortly after that, she demurely confessed that she liked the way she felt with the attention she had gotten that day and then stated, jokingly, that she " just might give being a model or a fashion designer, even, some thought. Who knows?" She smiled broadly and laughed slightly as she said this. Unfortunately, I was not able to follow

up on that conversation. Shortly after Shanna completed eighth grade, she returned to Korea to visit with relatives, and our communication was reduced to email, which continued briefly. Eventually, our correspondence became nonexistent, despite my numerous attempts to reestablish our communication.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The primary force that drove this research study was my intense desire to understand the very nature of the process involved when students who are new to the United States begin the challenge of learning a new language. I deem this an intricate process because while the learners are learning a new language, they are also learning to adapt to a new culture. I wanted to impart what I learned from the research in such a way that not only would I better understand this intricate process but the reader would also understand and appreciate all that the adolescent research participants brought to the study.

As mentioned earlier in this document the purpose of this study was to learn about how multicultural adolescents grappled with the problems of learning a new language and culture. With the purpose in mind, during the research process, I endeavored to address the intermediate goal which involved learning about the literacy experiences of the adolescent learners and correlating how various aspects of their life experiences related to their transitions from their various heritage countries. Therefore, during my conversations with these adolescents, I made a concerted effort to record precise dictations of their accounts of their various lived experiences in order to present as accurate a representation of each participant as possible.

Overview

Through the use of portraiture I examined, analyzed, and synthesized my data, presenting each adolescent as a framed portrait with each frame encompassing one of six areas of concentrated interest: personal traits, life in the heritage country, life as a newcomer to the United States, experiences as an adolescent ESOL student, adolescent experiences with family and community, and their hopes, dreams, fears, and plans for the future. Within each frame, I showed how these areas related to the various literacies experienced by each participant.

I chose portraiture as a research method to present my findings because portraiture is not only a method of presentation, it is also a research method that allows me to construct a rich and complex understanding of each of the four adolescents and to present that rich understanding in a vivid manner.

As I began to synthesize my findings, I identified several themes which permeated my conversations with the adolescent participants. Each theme was prevalent during my conversations with at least three of the four adolescents (See *Table 5.1*). I identified the following as emerged themes.

- Receiving strong support from family and community
- Helping others overcome language barriers
- Persevering in spite of adversity
- Envisioning a future of helping others in need
- Losing one's heritage language

In the following section, I will discuss each of the themes as they relate to individual adolescent participants with emphasis on the various experiences that impacted their literacy learning.

Table 5.1

Themes That Emerged from Conversations with the Adolescent Research Participants

	Adolescent Participants			
Emergent Themes[1]	*Shayley*	*Lily*	*Soledad*	*Shanna*
Receiving strong support from family and community	X	X	X	X
Helping others overcome language barriers	X	X	X	X
Persevering in spite of adversity	X	X	X	X
Envisioning a future of helping others in need	X	X	X	
Losing one's heritage language	X		X	X

[1]The "X" denotes that the stated theme was prevalent in my conversations with the adolescents as indicated. Note that each theme was prevalent with at least three of the adolescent participants.

Synthesis: Emergent Themes

Receiving Strong Support from Family and Community

Faced with various challenges as they learned a new language and adapted to a new culture, the adolescents received unwavering support from family and community. This support helped to sustain them as they began to adjust to the changes and experiences of being in a new country. Family and community members seemed to have a vested interest in making sure that these adolescents succeeded in their various quests.

The theme of strong family and community support was evident in my conversations with Shayley of Bangladesh. At an early age, when she first came to the United States, she found it especially challenging to try to learn a new language in a new elementary school and spent the majority of each day in tears. In an effort to ease the pain and frustration of allowing Shayley to remain at school without familiar people around her, her older sister, with the encouragement from Shayley's teachers,

agreed to come to school and spend the day with her. This arrangement continued for several days until Shayley felt comfortable enough to be on her own while at school. In addition to her sister's unselfish support, Shayley received assistance from her aunts, uncles, and cousins as they coached her in her studies after school. Members of Shayley's community were also supportive, especially when she moved to the community where she now lives. The community was home to many Bangali families, and these community members encouraged Shayley's success in various endeavors.

For example, she received encouragement from the ladies in the Islamic religious group who took her into their care and instructed her in learning how to read the Koran, how to dress properly, and how to treat others. Shayley felt that these ladies took on the same role as her mother with regards to her spiritual and social growth.

In Lily's case, from the beginning of her family's preparation for relocation from Ethiopia to the United States, her parents were at the forefront, making sure that she and her sister were prepared for the journey abroad, exposing them to elements of their heritage culture to ensure that they would have these as an anchor once they had left their heritage country.

This support continued after they arrived in the United States. The aunts, grandmother, and cousins showered Lily and her sister with affection and attention, ensuring adequate family protection and close-knit attention during their transition to a new culture. The relatives took turns introducing the girls to American foods and other cultural aspects of the United States. When Lily and her family moved to a different community where there were numerous other Ethiopian families, the community rallied around them to give even more support. Families in the community provided help for Lily as she learned to speak the English language, and they welcomed her into their homes to practice her English with their own family members.

Though Soledad's (Peruvian) nuclear family no longer existed with the absence of her father, she received help from a number of relatives and friends. Though her mother did not speak English well and was not able to help Soledad as she learned the English language, her mother was a willing student, allowing Soledad to teach her the English that she was learning in school. Her aunts, uncles, cousins, and neighborhood friends offered to study with her on a daily basis. Having the various relatives and

friends to lend their support was an element crucial to Soledad's academic survival. As she worked with her family, neighborhood members, and friends, she worked diligently to improve her English language skills.

Similar support from family and community was evident in Shanna's (Korean) struggle to learn the English language. Her mother, father, and close relatives surrounded her as she struggled to learn the new language. What Shanna experienced was a collaborative effort on the part of her nuclear family, extended family, and the community to ensure that she achieved her goals as an English Language Learner. Her father helped her with transitioning to the English language by modeling how to say her name in English and encouraging her to practice newly learned words with him. Her mother listened attentively as she expressed her numerous frustrations during the language transition process, advising her to be patient, assuring her that she could do it, and cautioning her that it would take time. This support system stretched all the way back to Korea in the form of email correspondences as her cousins responded to her emails by using English, though their English was not especially fluent.

The type of shepherding and support from one's family and community that was evident in the relationships shared by the adolescents is a valued resource in the eyes of these adolescents. Each of them expressed appreciation and gratitude for the support they had received.

Helping Others Overcome Language Barriers

Each of the research participants seemed committed to helping fellow English Language Learners overcome the barriers they encountered as they sought to become fluent English speakers. They each eagerly explained the roles they played and the gratification they received as a result of being able to assist other learners, especially those who were newcomers to the United States. Shayley was eager to help others once she felt comfortable herself speaking the English language. She demonstrated this by readily volunteering to help other students at school and children in her neighborhood as she endeavored to bring others on board with speaking the new language that she was determined to master. She volunteered to translate for her teachers at Excel Middle School when students from her heritage country enrolled. By reaching out to help others, she contributed to the language development of her peers,

while at the same time practicing what she had learned and strengthening her own English speaking skills.

As for Lily, once she settled into her new school and became acquainted with community of people who were there to support her, she began helping other ESOL learners who needed assistance with English translations, often inviting them to her home so that they could study together. She extended her help to the elementary school age kids in the community for whom she baby sat, using the baby sitting activities as teachable moments. She also volunteered to help her teachers with translations for new students from her heritage country who enrolled in Excel Middle.

In like manner, Soledad seemed to thrive on being able to help others with their English speaking skills. She not only helped her ESOL teachers and fellow students at school, but she also seemed to thrive on helping others in varied community settings, as well. Especially poignant to me was an incident Soledad shared which occurred at her mother's work place when she was eight or nine years old. Her mother worked at a local restaurant, and one of her customers was attempting to place an order. Soledad's mother was having some difficulty understanding him because he was speaking in English, and her mother did not understand English that well. Soledad stepped forward to assist her mother by translating what he was saying into Spanish. Soledad declared that being able to help her mother with that customer gave her a great feeling of satisfaction.

Another experience that Soledad shared was when she decided to help a young Latino boy, newly arrived to her community, a kid about her age. She was about 9 or 10 years old at the time. The young boy wanted to buy ice cream from the ice cream truck that periodically made rounds through the neighborhood, but he did not speak English well enough to ask for what he wanted. When Soledad saw that the other neighborhood children were forcing him out of the way, pushing him aside so that they could place their orders, she stepped up to help him by ordering for him. Again, this gave Soledad much satisfaction knowing that she could help.

Shanna seemed to thrive on helping her fellow students, also. She was an advocate for the newly arrived ESOL students at Excel Middle. She helped her ESOL

teachers in instructing these students by translating for them and assisting them in getting to their classes. She recognized that being able to assist them served to boost her energy level and helped her to maintain a balance between feeling over confident and being efficient as she learned the English language herself.

Persevering in spite of Adversity

Each of the research participants have experienced adversities; yet, each was able to overcome the challenges they faced as they lived through those difficult times in their young lives. Remarkably, not only did they meet the challenges head on, they did so as newcomers tasked both with adjusting to a totally different cultural environment and learning a new language.

Shayley exemplified the willingness and steadfastness to endure against the odds. For, in the face of the critical health issues both her brothers experienced, she forged ahead with the challenge of adjusting to a new cultural environment and learning a new language; she seemed undaunted. After the death of one of her brothers, shortly after the family arrived in the United States, Shayley came through very strongly, exuding self confidence and determination. She would shortly, thereafter, take on the responsibility of being solely responsible for tutoring her surviving brother in English, though she faced difficult challenges in view of his severe learning disability. She endured, in spite of those adversities, and seemed to have the full support of her parents and extended family members--the aunts, uncles, cousins--as well as her community members who rallied to assist her along the way.

As for Lily, she showed a strong will and determination in being able to overcome the negative encounters she experienced during her brief stay in the small town where she initially enrolled in the public schools here in the United States. There, the inadequately equipped ESOL department was a major disappointment for Lily. The school authorities assumed that Lily needed to be taught English on the beginner's language level of their ESOL program. Doing so did not help her academically; rather, it led to her frustration at being held back from learning English on a more elevated level since she had demonstrated a command of the English language, having been schooled in English in Ethiopia prior to coming to the United States. She felt that she did not receive adequate assistance from the teachers at the school. That experience

was further compounded by the insensitive treatment she experienced at the hands of the students at the school. She had moved into an American community whose inhabitants seemed oblivious to what was happening in other parts of the world. She had to endure when other students asked her questions that seemed very insensitive to her. Questions such as, “Do you live in tents or houses?” “Do you walk with bare feet all the time?” were very uncomfortable for Lily. Yet, she endured the frustration and adjusted to life, such as it was, at the new school. Lily did not let these challenges deter her progress in becoming more knowledgeable and skillful in her use of English, and she was able to expand on her ever-increasing knowledge of the English language once she moved and enrolled in Excel Middle School.

Similarly, Soledad was able to rise above those impediments that seemed to block her way. Conversations that I had with her were very intense and extremely personal in nature, uncovering behavior that bordered on self-destruction. These behaviors included episodes in her life when she felt it necessary to inflict bodily harm to herself through self-mutilation or “cutting,” a practice that is not uncommon among roughly 2 to 3 million Americans today, ranging from ages 13 to 30 years (eSSORTMENT.com, July 2009). Yet, in spite of all that she endured- including the absence of her father from the home early on in her life, the difficulties in making wise choices in life, and having abusive friendships, Soledad regained her composure with the support of her mother, aunt, uncle, cousins, and the school guidance counselor.

The negatives in her life did not derail her for extended periods of time. She seemed determined to get back on track, encouraged by the love and support of those nurturing family members who showed an interest in her well being and who gave her unwavering support when she needed it most. Having this safety net of caring persons around her, she has been able to get through the hardships and begin adjusting her life accordingly.

Shanna also seemed to face very trying times when she began to learn the English language. She struggled daily with acquiring a non-Korean accent as she learned to speak English. Early on in her quest to speak the English language fluently, Shanna lamented her many unsuccessful attempts at perfecting the pronunciation of certain initial sounds of some of the English words, one of her many trials as she

struggled to learn the language. Even so, she refused to give up. She persisted until she had mastered the pronunciation, often coming to tears at her attempts to do so. She wanted so desperately to succeed that she would practice well into the night, long after others in her household had retired. She exemplified endurance and perseverance during those times.

Envisioning a Future of Helping Others in Need

The theme of wanting to help others who are in need is one that resonated through my conversations with these young research participants. I found that they did not look toward furthering self-gain; instead, they wished to use their future knowledge and resources to help others who were in need. I think of this unselfish call to future service as a very worthy and a very noble gesture of human kindness. With the exception of one of the research participants, Shanna of Korea, the recurring theme of doing something that would benefit others on a broad scale was prevalent during my conversations with the research participants.

Shayley of Bangali envisioned being in a position to help poor children who may need medical help, but whose parents could not afford to pay for their care. Her future career goal was to become a pediatrician and possibly work for a charity organization that would be set up to help children who live in poverty, not only in the United States but in Bangali, as well.

Again, the same theme resonated in my conversation with Lily of Ethiopia who seemed determined to one day make “lots of money” that she would use to help others. She hoped that she would one day be in a position to help the homeless and the medically distraught. At the time of our conversation, Lily had not decided what her career choice would be, but she did not waver when she began to discuss her desire to help others. She professed that she wants "to do good things for people." Further, she stated that she believes that we are created by God to serve others, and she wants to willingly offer her services to those who are in need.

In similar fashion, Soledad of Peru declared that she wanted to be a psychologist. She wanted to be in a position to help people who may be dealing with critical life altering issues similar to those with which she dealt as she struggled to live with the feeling of rejection (her father leaving the home) and the feeling of loneliness

(the mother not being at home for her when she came home from school because of her late work hours) which, according to Soledad, eventually led to the episodes of "cutting." She believed that by becoming a psychologist she would be able to help others who presented a need for psychiatric counseling.

Losing One's Heritage Language

One of the issues that surfaced during my conversations with the adolescents was that of losing the ability to retain the use of their heritage language, while increasing their fluency of communicating in the English language.

As Shayley shared her enthusiasm of learning to communicate using the English language with ease and confidence, she mentioned that she felt that she was becoming so comfortable speaking the English language that she found herself thinking in English and would often respond in English when she was upset or angry about something. She did not express a regret towards this occurrence, rather she seemed to be somewhat boastful that this occurrence was taking place and accepted the occurrence as if the outcome were both expected and preferred. Her somewhat boastful attitude was especially evident when she shared the incident of needing to explain something to her mother about what was happening in a television show and actually giving up trying to explain to her mother in her heritage language which her mother would have understood perfectly. She explained to her mother that trying to verbally express what was happening on television was too difficult for her to do in Bangla and that it would be much easier for her if she could explain it in English which her mother would not have understood.

Soledad, who is of Peruvian heritage, was faced with the challenge of maintaining a fluid use of her heritage language as she learned to speak English more fluently. On more than one occasion, when she traveled from the United States to Peru, she reported having the experience of being faced with the need to relearn her heritage language, which was Spanish. She stated that she did not want to lose the ability to speak her heritage language, but she found that being able to retain it with fluency as she learned English seemed an almost impossible task. Likewise, once she returned to the United States, she found that after having spent a couple of months in her heritage country, she had virtually lost the fluency with which she had learned to

speak English, making it necessary for her relearn English words and phrases she thought she had already mastered. Being faced with having to relearn English words and phrases each time she returned to the United States after an brief stay in Peru and having to relearn Spanish each time she returned to Peru after having lived in the United States for a while proved to be frustrating for her.

Shanna also came face to face with this dilemma. Holding on to her Korean language proved to be a challenge for her. As she eagerly helped Korean students new to Excel Middle with their English translations, she realized that though this tended to help her sharpen her Korean speaking skills, like most of the other research participants, she had begun to slip into the comfort zone of speaking English so often that she was allowing herself to forget the Korean she once knew so well.

Shanna felt that losing her heritage language was not a viable option, and she began thinking of ways to keep that from happening. She decided that perhaps she should get involved with an activity that would allow her to speak Korean on a regular basis. She thought that perhaps her mother's friend, who operated a learning center for Koreans, could use a helper at the center to translate for the clients. Shanna reasoned that acting as an assistant translator for the Koreans would allow her to sharpen her Korean and English language skills at the same time. She also viewed acting as a translator for her mother’s American and Asian-American friends who made casual visits to their home as a way to enhance her own use of the Korean language. Shanna seemed determined to hold on to her heritage language, but found the effort both challenging and frustrating at times, recognizing that her use of the English language had not reached the fluency for which she so fervently strove.

I was impressed that Shanna was able to come up with strategies to address her problem. However, I was not able to follow up with her to discuss the effectiveness of the strategies she advanced to deal with her language loss problem because the email correspondence we had established to continue our conversations ended somewhat abruptly when the school year ended. I have tried repeatedly, but I have been unsuccessful in my attempts to locate Shanna for further feedback related to our research.

Of the four research participants, Lily, from Ethiopia, was the only one who was not faced with the challenge of holding on to her heritage language as she became immersed in the culture and language of the United States. Losing her heritage language, it seemed, was never a threat to her. When Lily lived in Ethiopia, she was introduced to the English language through the Ethiopian public education system which required that all classes be taught in English as early as elementary school. The curriculum was so structured that her classes were taught basically in English, but she was also allowed to use her heritage language in the classroom, as deemed appropriate. Therefore, when she came to the United States, she already had some knowledge of how to speak using English. Also, she stated that even though all of her core classes were taught in English while she attended school in Ethiopia, the dominant language spoken in her home was Amharic, her heritage language. Therefore, Lily was exposed to the oral use of the English language throughout all of her early elementary school years. Due to this early exposure, Lily was, perhaps, more aptly prepared to use the English language for communication purposes than were the other adolescent participants upon their arrival in the United States. Lily's family's practice of speaking the heritage language in the home, even though she was being exposed to English in the classroom on a daily basis while in Ethiopia, may have helped to strengthen Lily's hold on her heritage language after she arrived here in the United States. Amharic remains the dominant language spoken in Lily's home today.

Emergent Themes: Making Meaning of It All

Reflection on Receiving Strong Support from Family and Community

Often in communities in which many of our English Language Learners live, evidence of interdependence between families and individuals are so routine and constant that community members hardly take notice of the practice. Gonzalez, *et. al* (2005) reference these exchanges known as Funds of Knowledge (Moll & Greenberg, 1990) which are based in the various homes within the community. Through the use of funds of knowledge, skills passed down from generation to generation helped to sustain families in the rural communities that Moll and Greenburg studied. These funds are the currency of exchange that are not only between generations but between households, as well. The entire family benefits from the collective skills that exist

within and among households. Therefore, such skills as electrical and automotive repair, technical expertise, and the like, are shared among all family members of a single household. The same sharing is evident in and between communities, as well. When families share the funds of knowledge, many people benefit.

As for the research participants, each one depended on family members to work with them as they completed their academic studies. When mothers or fathers were unable to help them, they received help from their siblings or from extended family members--aunts, uncles, cousins. Knowledge was exchanged when the adolescent participants taught other members of their family what they had previously learned about the English language. Knowledge was further shared when members of the family shared the tasks associated with homework. The sharing and exchange of knowledge was not limited to academic studies but included religious activities and practices, as well. Norms related to appropriate religious dress, cultural foods associated with religious rituals, and proper behavior associated with religious activities as they interacted with each other were shared during the exchange of knowledge. These adolescent learners overwhelmingly depended on family members for support.

Vygotsky (1978) viewed this type of support and interaction as a tool for mediation, which involves social networking that allows for the interdependence of the various cultural practices, beliefs, and ways of using language. The continued support these adolescents received from their family, friends, and community members fostered a mutual atmosphere of trust and comfort which encouraged them to become more relaxed and willing to take risks as they interacted with each other during the language learning process (Gonzalez, *et. al.*, 2005). These adolescents were members of close-knit, interconnected families and communities which welcomed them and reached out to them in a non-judgmental way, contributing to a sense of security, which translated into self-confidence even in the face of challenges (Gonzalez, *et. al.*, 2005).

Reflection on Helping Others Overcome Language Barriers

In the past, I have always viewed the act of one language learner helping another language learner adjust to speaking the English language as simply an act of

assistance, with one individual willingly volunteering to help another. However, as I reflected on the theme related to these adolescent learners helping others overcome language barriers, I have come to think of their act of compassion and caring, as they helped their fellow learners with language translations and acclimation to the school's cultural, social, and academic climate, as a form of mutually, beneficial literacy discourse.

To explain my view, I draw on Gee's (1990) and other social theorists' explanations of the term "discourse." Gee offers that discourse includes various ways of acting and being in the world and consists of "words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities...gestures, etc." (p. 142). Also, Larson and Marsh (2005) assert that literacy discourse involves having practices and ways of knowing and being in common with one another. Additionally, Heath (1983) explains that the traditional oral-literate definition of discourse does not capture the ways cultural patterns in each community affect the uses of language. From this perspective of discourse, I feel that the adolescents who participated in this research project were engaged in a form of literacy discourse each time they volunteered to help another English Language Learner. These students readily identified with the needs of the newly arrived English Language Learners to the United States. In their interactions with these newcomers, they were teaching not only the English language but modeling a compassionate and caring approach to human interaction.

A unique aspect of this type sharing and interaction was the total commitment they seemed to internalize as they willingly helped the newly arrived language learners overcome the barriers they faced. Often they exclaimed that they really liked the euphoric feeling they received as a result of being able to help others, of being able to make a difference in others' lives. I have come to view these adolescents' willingness to assist other ESOL learners as unselfish acts of sharing and caring.

Caring is an integral part of the learning process (Nodding, 1991). When the learner perceives that the teacher (in this case the adolescent participant) really cares for or about the learner, as well as the learning that is taking place, there is an atmosphere of ease and comfort--two ingredients that make for an ideal atmosphere for learning.

Teachers are those important passersby on the road of education who maintain the responsibility of enhancing the lives of learners by showing them that they care (Alvermann, et al., 1998). Caring allows teachers to be supportive when language learners experience difficulties in their various places of learning (Greene, 1988). When teachers show that they care, they place themselves in positions that will allow them to help the learner to become apt narrators. As narrators, they are able to tell the stories of their lived experiences, and they are better able to handle the challenges they will face (Alvermann, et al., 1998; Noddings, 1991). Overcoming language barriers is one such challenge. The adolescents in this research project acted not only as research participants but as "teachers" as well who expressed caring as they assisted other language learners in overcoming linguistic and cultural challenges in their lives.

Reflection on Persevering in spite of Adversity

Many adolescent learners who relocate to the United States from other countries have varying stories to share about the reasons that prompted their families' relocation. Varied accounts are given related to fleeing from war-torn countries, seeking medical help for a member of the family, hoping to find better job opportunities that would enable them to more adequately care for the family, and a host of other reasons. In like manner, the adolescents who participated in this research study had a variety of reasons, as well, from seeking medical assistance for family members, to looking for better job opportunities, to hoping for better educational opportunities for the children in the family. However, once these adolescents and their families arrived in the United States, they were also faced with a new set of challenges: having to adjust to a new language and a new culture. Having to adjust to a new language was perhaps the most crucial issue these adolescents faced, but each one took on the challenge, and in their own way, they prevailed.

As I reflected on the way these adolescents faced those difficult situations in their lives, I marveled at how well they were able to cope through it all and how they were able to forge ahead, in spite of the adversities they encountered. Often, we tend to hear of second language learners who, in spite of difficulties in their lives, have come through as successful members of society. People such as Nieto (2002), whose family eventually rose above the low class status into which she was born, and

Santiago (1993), who also struggled against the difficult times her family faced due to poverty, readily come to mind. There are many others who have also overcome adversities in their lives, people who have achieved success despite the odds that seemed to work against them.

When I think of successful people such as Nieto and others who overcame their adversities, I tend to beam with pride as I reflect on the strength and determination I witnessed from the adolescent rparticipants who worked with me on this project. I am reminded of Shayley's stoic determination to assist both her ailing brothers as her family struggled to maintain some normalcy in their lives as they sought relief from their medical worries, traveling to the United States in search of more adequate medical assistance than what was available in her heritage country. Similarly, I am reminded of Lily as she and her sister prepared to come to the United States with her family in search of better working conditions for both her parents and a chance for a better education for her and her sister. The plight of Soledad readily comes to mind as I reflect on her bout with self mutilation as she struggled to find her place in society among her family members (especially her estranged father) and her peers. I am also reminded of Shanna's steadfastness in overcoming the challenge she met head on as she struggled to perfect her pronunciation of the sounds that were so foreign to her as she learned the English language. Each of the research participants shared vivid narratives of their lived experiences as language learners seeking to create a space for themselves as newcomers in a country, being introduced to a new language and culture, while they grappled with the personal struggles in their lives. Yet, in spite of it all, they have endured; they have stood fast, and they have achieved success as promising, adolescent literacy learners.

Reflection on Envisioning a Future of Helping Others in Need

As I talked with the adolescent research participants about their passions--their hopes, dreams, fears, and plans for the future--I found a common theme that emanated from thoughts related to their future plans. I was not able to talk with all four of the adolescent participants about this topic, but each of the three with whom I had an opportunity to engage in conversation stated very strongly that they wanted to do something that would make a difference in others' lives.

Often choices are made in our lives that are determined by the experiences we have had and how those experiences affected or impacted our lives. The literacy experiences shared by each of the adolescent participants seemed to play a definite role in their decision making about their future plans. Their humanitarian gestures seemed rooted in personal experiences such as medical emergencies and devastating illnesses. These experiences served, it seemed, to nurture rather than diminish their humanitarian impulse. Each of the adolescents envisioned a future that would allow her to be able to serve humanity in a very noble manner.

I was impressed by the very nature of the enormity of each expressed desire. All of our students deserve to dream, and teachers and schools are well positioned to create the opportunity for them to do so. This means, according to Nieto (2002) and Sleeter (1994), that we should develop conditions in our schools that let students know that they have a right to envision other possibilities for their lives beyond those traditionally constrained by race, gender, and social class.

Reflection on Losing One's Heritage Language

As I reflected on the experiences these adolescents shared with me and their perspectives on their experiences, I came face to face with the realization that these learners were faced with the possibility of losing their heritage language as they struggled to learn a new language, a possibility that seemed all too real to them. For me, knowing that such a possibility existed for the adolescent participants, the issue was a crucial one.

When one of the research participants (from Bangali) mentioned that she was beginning to lose the ease with which she was once accustomed to speaking her heritage language, I was not prepared to accept the reality of such an occurrence, even after hearing her verbal assertion. I had not expected to hear such a claim from any of the research participants. Afterwards, I would hear this refrain again from two other participants (from Peru and Korea). Each time I heard this revelation, I could not fathom what such a loss must truly mean. I recall thinking that losing one's heritage language must surely be tantamount to losing a part of one's own self. Yet, these adolescents insisted that the more fluent they became as English speakers, the less likely they were to use their heritage language for primary communication purposes. I

feel that such a loss would be devastating, a major concern paramount to losing a part of one’s cultural identity.

In fact, Nieto (2002) and others address the growing concern of English Language Learners losing the ability to communicate fluently in their heritage language. Nieto states that for years, educational institutions in the United States have heralded the equation that *education = assimilation*, a conclusion that is beginning to be challenged by those concerned with the importance of cultural maintenance. For linguistic assimilation, in the past, has meant not only learning the national language but also forgetting one's native or heritage language. Thus, cultural assimilation has meant not only learning the new language, but also learning to eat, dress, talk, think, and behave like those in a dominant group, often resulting in losing one's cultural identity. As such, the assimilation process poses a wrenching dilemma for culturally dominated adolescents (Nieto, 2002). Along with experiencing the loss of the linguistic component of one's language comes the stark realization that the unique knowledge and insights carried within that component will also be lost. Such a loss will surely be detrimental to society.

I feel that as educators, we must address the assimilation issue with urgency. When our English Language Learners come face to face with the dilemma of choosing between holding on to their heritage language and letting an educational opportunity pass by or letting go of their heritage language and accepting the educational opportunity before them, it is the job of educators to begin to assist these learners in affirming their cultural identities and encourage them to build on their unique cultural backgrounds as a means to achieve success. We must let them know that they don't need to make a choice; there doesn't need to be an "either - or" decision (Nieto, 2002). In many cases, such encouragement seems to be lacking in our schools where prevailing, educational philosophy along with policies and practices discourage the maintenance of one's cultural identity. All too often, English Language Learners are left with no alternative but to give in to assimilation, their cultural identities hanging precariously in the balance (Nieto, 2002).

Additionally, Corson (1993), goes a step further in discussing the negative impact of assimilation in the public schools in the United States and asserts that

"working with minority children is often more than a skill; it is an act of cultural fairness" (p. 179). He elaborates more decisively concerning this crucial issue:

> We are dealing, it would seem, not so much with culturally deprived children as with culturally depriving schools. And the task to be accomplished is not to revise, amend, and repair deficient children, but to alter and transform the atmosphere and operations of the school to which we commit these children. (p.61)

To assist in accomplishing the goal of helping the English Language Learners retain their heritage language as they begin to learn the English language, we might move toward a more supportive, multicultural educational practice in our schools, one that supports an additive dual language program for all children. Such a program would include a second language for English speakers, as well. Instituting an additive dual language program has the potential for allowing the English language to be an additional language of communication, not merely the dominant language.

Nieto (2002) suggests that ideally, students could work in bilingual settings where two languages are used for instruction. Students would be encouraged to use these languages in classrooms, in the hallways, and on the school grounds during recess or other outdoor activity, as well. An additive dual language program would allow the language learners to hold on to their heritage languages, remain connected to their cultural background, and feel a sense of actual acceptance into the mainstream of the educational setting while learning a second language.

Implications: Informing Educators and Policy Makers

As I reflect on the conversations that I had with each of the research participants and contemplate the enormity of this research experience, I feel a sense of awe. I was allowed the opportunity to give these adolescents a chance to voice their opinions, make known their concerns, and share their perceptions of their unique literacy learning experiences.

Given the various lived experiences of these adolescent literacy learners and the manner in which each met the challenges they faced as English Language Learners, I would venture to affirm that, indeed, these adolescents proved to be fairly successful in their quest for enculturation, acceptance, and inclusion in an educational system that seemed to be overpowering and daunting at times.

In view of the role our educational system plays in the lives of our language learners, this study suggests that in order to successfully meet the educational needs of such learners, a multifaceted approach should be used. This type approach would include family and school working together to achieve the aims and goals set forth. In the remainder of this section, I discuss five aspects of this approach as suggested by the findings of this study.

Aspect #1*: Tapping into the adolescents' life experiences and cultural heritages as newcomers to the United States as they learn the English language and adjust to the American culture has the potential of being an approbation for their self-esteem and a major factor in fostering their learning capabilities now and in the future.*

ESOL programs that are established in our schools must make provisions for English Language Learners to bring their languages and their cultures into the school setting to be used as assets rather than thought of as deficits.

I believe that including an additive dual language program in our schools would allow us to move in the right direction (Nieto & Bode, 2008). By instituting such a program in our schools, we would allow our language learners to add another language for communication purposes to augment their heritage language as opposed to attempting to eradicate the heritage language as they learn a new language. An additive dual language program would give these language learners the affirmation that holding on to their individual cultural identity--of which their heritage language is certainly key--as they begin the acculturation process of learning a new language and a new culture is an acceptable practice.

Currently, our society dictates otherwise, the dictation being either lose your private language (heritage language) to become a public person with all the benefits of our society or retain your private language and forfeit a public identity (Nieto, 2003; Rodriguez, 1982). Many English Language Learners struggle with this dilemma as they begin to learn the English language. Usually, losing the heritage language is the outcome for many of our language learners.

Nieto and Bode (2008) assert that students' heritage language is an asset that can enhance their academic achievement and that students using both their heritage

language and the second language of acquisition with fluency are better prepared for success in a given academic setting.

Studies done by Zentella (1997), as well as Portes and Rumbaut (2001), support the assertion made by Nieto and Bode (2008). In Zentella's study, research was conducted on the academic success of 19 families living in a low-income Puerto Rican community in New York. The study found that the most academically successful students were those enrolled in bilingual programs. Portes and Rumbaut's review of a number of research studies that dealt with cultural adaptation and academic achievement of immigrants of various backgrounds led to the conclusion that students with limited bilingualism are far more likely to leave school than those fluent in both their heritage language and the second language of acquisition. Thus, Nieto and Bode (2008) surmise that additive bilingualism supports the notion that two is better than one. Also they posit that English plus another language can make an individual stronger and increase the strength of society, as well.

In view of the outcome of the afore mentioned studies, I believe that as educators, we have a responsibility to encourage our English Language Learners to feel such pride for and connection with their heritage language and cultural background that they will discern the need to continue to be fluent in their heritage language as they learn the English language, and as a result, they will hold firm their cultural affiliation because it is a crucial link to their personal and cultural identities (Corson, 1993). Equally as important, parents should be encouraged to continue to speak their heritage language in the home. Such a practice should be encouraged despite contrary messages from some school officials in some educational jurisdictions to do otherwise. Incorporating such an approach to language learning will help to prepare students for a more successful educational venture throughout their educational careers and beyond (Nieto & Bode, 2008).

In addition to allowing the language learners to bring their heritage language into the classroom, they should also be allowed to bring aspects of their cultural heritages, as well. Holding on to one's cultural heritage and customs would allow our language learners to feel a degree of comfort and safety as they explore a new culture (Corson, 1993; Nieto, 2003). When students feel comfortable in their learning

environment, they become more proactive, taking charge of their learning as they move from one level of achievement to another. When schools allow these students to bring what they are familiar with–cultural practices, cultural norms–into the classroom with them, they are able to operate using funds of knowledge (Moll & Greenberg, 1990), building on that which they are already familiar. When our ESOL students come into our classrooms, they don't leave their families and practices behind. Family and cultural norms and practices are integral parts of their lives. They must be allowed to use them as they begin to adapt to our cultural norms if they are to be successful learners in our society. When students are comfortable as they learn and when they feel safe in the learning environment, they are encouraged to excel as life-long learners.

Aspect #2*: Creating learning opportunities for participants in the ESOL program that would allow them to use their life experiences to enrich their learning and provide assistance to other language learners could be instrumental in helping to instill a sense of self worth, cultural identity, and acceptance.*

One of the emergent themes highlighted the risk of losing one's heritage language and cultural identity while learning to speak a new language and adjust to a new culture. There is a possibility that this issue, a very crucial one, could be addressed by enlisting the assistance from veteran ESOL students to participate in a dual language-sharing program that would allow for concentrated student-to-student interaction.

Schools should be encouraged to design a curriculum that includes an ESOL program tailored to meet the needs of English Language Learners by having students who have been in this country for a while and who have gained a level of fluency in speaking the English language to act as their mentors. The student mentors would be instrumental in assisting the newly arrived language learners to adjust more readily as they begin the task of learning a new language and adjusting to a new culture. However, measures should be taken and guidelines established that would guard against the suppression of the use of one's heritage language and cultural practices while learning is taking place in the classroom.

One's cultural identity is closely tied to one's heritage language and cultural practices (Nieto, 2002). When one's heritage language is abandoned, a sense of loss of identity ensues. English Language Learners need to feel that they are accepted among us, not if they learn this new language, but in spite of it. They should be encouraged to continue to use their heritage language as they learn the new language, and they should also be encouraged to continue to hold on to their cultural practices as they begin to adjust to the new culture.

The feeling of belonging and the feeling of acceptance are crucial factors in becoming successful adolescent learners. Students who experience success are more likely to want to reach out to assist others to experience success, as well.

Aspect #3*: Fostering a caring atmosphere in the learning environment at school would encourage language learners to develop meaningful, caring relationships with their peers and trust-relationships with adults and others as they shape their views about the world in which they live.*

As I conducted my research, the one aspect of my relationship with each of the adolescent participants was the level of trust they developed with me as we worked together on this project. The more we talked about issues in their lives that were important to them, the more open they became, and they began to share very personal aspects of their literacy learning experiences, doing so very candidly. Students need to feel that adults who work with them in their various learning environments can be trusted. This level of interaction allows the student to view the learning environment from a place of comfort in which they can perform the duties of learning and social interaction.

These adolescents shared their “lived experiences” (Patton, 2002) with me. We were actually engaged in what Patton refers to as a phenomenological view or approach to learning. Patton asserts that phenomenology does not ask, “How do these children learn this particular material?” rather it asks, “What is the nature or essence of the experience of learning?” (p. 106) or, in other words, "What is the learning experience like?" As educators, we should be concerned with asking the latter question so that we can better understand what a particular learning experience is like for these

students. Learning what the experience is like is the core or the essence of the literacy learning experience for these adolescents.

When we inquire about "what the learning experience is like," we are asking our students for their opinions. Moreover, we are asking them to share their feelings, their perceptions with us. Such inquiries signal to students that we want to know more about them as a person. When students know that we have their best interest at heart, they become more open to receiving guidance and instruction from us.

I feel that the adolescents who worked with me on this project were able to share their lived experiences or perceived experiences with me so openly throughout our research project because there was the element of trust, a sense or feeling that I really wanted to better understand what their literacy experiences were like for them. I believe that having developed a teacher-student relationship with each of the research participants prior to the research project was perhaps key to the ease with which we were able to interact during the research process. I surmise that not having established such a relationship with the two students who opted to drop out of the research study shortly after we had begun may have attributed to their lack of interest to participate in the study.

As educators, we should be invested in the educational and social welfare of our students. Listening to what they have to say and responding to what they have said in an appropriate manner is an important step in helping these adolescent learners as they prepare to become viable members of society.

Aspect #4: *Establishing outreach programs in our schools would allow school personnel the opportunity to participate in the language learners' experiences as school personnel interact with the language learner, the learner's family, and community members, thereby enhancing both the literacy learning experiences of both the school personnel and ESOL students.*

Our ESOL programs must be geared toward welcoming our English Language Learners and charting them on a learning course that will set the stage for them to be successful adolescents. Schools working together with language learners' families and communities is an important step toward helping these learners feel acceptance as

opposed to feeling ostracized in their academic setting. Working with the students separate from their families tend to limit the scope of learning possibilities.

Many parents want to be a part of their children's learning experiences. However, due to limited language speaking abilities, some of the parents often feel left out. Feeling left out leads to frustration. Outreach programs such as evening family festival events featuring heritage foods, dance, games, etc. from the various countries represented at the school or classes designed to help parents and other family members with limited English skills would do much to begin to bring school and community closer.

Families, communities, and the school provide the support needed to build a strong, curriculum foundation these language learners need to be successful literacy learners. When schools work jointly with language learners, their parents, and the communities in which these students live, a more positive outcome will be realized as these language learners begin undertaking the learning process.

Aspect #5: *Availing opportunities for language learners to verbalize their ideas about their future plans (including hopes, dreams, fears) would allow the school to better educate them for the futures they desire and allow them to become more empowered to achieve their goals.*

As educators, we must be willing listeners. Students want their voices to be heard. However, they need to know that we are willing to give them the opportunity to share what is on their minds. A part of our language learners program should be geared toward encouraging our students to verbalize their hopes, dreams, fears, and plans for the future.

When one is able to verbalize a plan, doing so tends to make the possibility of attaining one's goal a reality. When language learners are given the opportunity to verbalize their dreams, their plans for the future, they feel empowered. Often, one's future plans are directly connected to one's life experiences. I was impressed with the way research participants they were able to connect their lived experiences with what they wanted to do with their future lives. What impressed me most was that these adolescents' future plans were such that should they be able to bring their plans to

fruition, our society would receive enormous benefits on a national level and on a global level, as well.

Observations, Insights, and Queries Related to Research: Possible Focus for Future Studies

As I reflect on the perceptions of the life experiences of the adolescent participants who worked with me on this project, I find myself wondering about the plight of our language learners in general. Those of us who have not had to make an adjustment in our lives due to cultural changes or language barriers tend to overlook the challenges faced by those who have. Our language learners are faced with enormous tasks as they struggle with adapting to a new culture and learning a new language. However, as educators, we tend not to be as vigilant as is needed in assisting them in overcoming those challenges.

The research participants who worked with me depended heavily on the support of family and community members to get them through the difficult, transitional changes they faced. While receiving that support is certainly ideal, I believe that there should be more effort on the part of the school system to address the various issues these language learners face. Not all language learners are fortunate enough to have the support of family and community to help them through the challenges they face as newcomers. In order to insure that these language learners experience success, should schools be accountable for support that is given to these learners? If so, what could school systems do to incorporate and/or enhance the support the language learners receive?

Issues such as social acceptance and religious tolerance are crucial in the social, moral, and academic development of these learners. The adolescents presented in this research project were all fairly successful in their quest for social acceptance and academic achievement. Would this be true if they did not have the continual support of family and community? What could be done to ensure the success of the language learners who do not have the support from family and community when they enroll in our schools? Should educators be expected to take a more active role to ensure their success? If so, what would the educator's role entail? To what degree should we be accountable? What would the accountability look like?

In addition, I feel that we, as educators, must be more open to our language learners' realities, their lived experiences (Heath, 1983; Merriam, 1998). We must be willing to openly engage these learners in conversations about their lived experiences. As they share their experiences, it is incumbent upon us to listen with rapt attention to what they have to say. I am readily reminded of my own experience with the adolescent participants in this study. There were times when they shared their personal experiences with me which caught me by surprise: i.e., discussions we had about their perceptions related to overcoming the language barrier. The surprise registered by me was more akin to the reality of personally hearing a truth stated by someone who actually lived through the experience. Hearing the participants verbally express the fear of possibly losing their heritage language was a reality check for me. I had read about the possibility of such a loss (Nieto, 2002; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Rodriguez, 1982), but I had never talked with anyone to whom it had actually happened. My inability to connect to the problem as a real, vital occurrence was inhibited by my lack of viewing their experiences through their lenses. I feel that by viewing the language learners' experiences through their lenses, we allow ourselves to be more in touch with their problem. Doing so will also allow us, as educators, to be more effective in addressing the needs of these learners. Listening attentively and empathetically to these learners will be key in helping them. Two questions come to mind that warrant addressing: Should programs be instituted by our schools that will raise the awareness of this issue? How can educators effectively work with these language learners to insure that we are critically listening to them?

In essence, as a novice qualitative researcher, I have learned to begin to listen attentively to our language learners. Having the opportunity to become actively engaged with the adolescent learners during this research project has been a very rewarding experience for me. I have come to realize that the accumulated knowledge one gets from reading about a cultural experience is certainly no trade-off for witnessing or hearing someone verbally assert that knowledge from personal experience. As educators, we must make an effort to become more aware of this concern.

Finally, on a more personal note, this research project has certainly caused me to be much more cognizant and appreciative of the various cultural practices, beliefs, and mores of the many cultural societies in our nation. As an educator, I have resolved to be more open and accepting of the different societal cultures that we, in the United States, are privy to have among us.

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APPENDIX A

Assent Form for Participants

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Assent Form for Participants (Children) Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: Literacy from a Different Perspective: Listening to the Voices of Adolescents from a Multicultural Context

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this research is to give minority students who are enrolled in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program a chance to voice their opinions/perceptions about their academic experiences as they moved from one language proficiency level to another. The student will be asked to give candid views/perceptions of both the positive and negative educational experiences related to strategies and practices used to assist the learning process while he/she was enrolled in the ESOL program. Also, those students who have exited the ESOL program will be asked to share experiences that occurred once they exited the program. Middle school students ranging from grade eight, representing the various language proficiency levels of the ESOL program, will be selected by teacher recommendation to participate in the research project**.**

II. Procedures

As a participant in this research project, you, the student, will be asked to be available once a week after regular school hours, on Mondays from 3:00 to 4:00 pm, to talk about your experiences in the ESOL program. You will be expected to give feedback concerning what you feel may be effective or non-effective strategies, methods, and practices used in the program. Further, you will be asked to give what you feel would be recommendations for improvement to the program based on the strategies, methods, and practices used in the program.

The after school sessions will continue for a total of 12 weeks, during the months of January, February, and March. You will meet with me in my classroom which will be designated for use by no other students than those who are participating in the research. Sessions will be tape recorded. However, I will ask your permission to tape record your comments which will be transcribed by me after each meeting. You will have the option to decline being tape recorded before and/or during any of the sessions. Your wishes will be honored without question. I will have a set of identical questions to ask each participant or student during each after-school session. However,

you will be allowed to give information or views that go beyond the question asked, as long as it relates to the question.

III. Risks

Any risks to the participants, if any, will be minimal. Data will be collected through voice recordings and field notes. All recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet. All field notes will be kept in a separate locked file cabinet. During research and data collection, coding will be used to identify participants. Recordings, oral and written, will be destroyed once the research is completed. The names of the students and the school will not be given in the actual research reporting/publication of data. Pseudonyms will be used, instead. Additionally, characteristics that might allow identification of individuals and/or the school or school system will be modified in order to protect the anonymity the participants, the school, and the school system.

IV. Benefits

No direct or indirect benefits can be guaranteed in such research. Therefore, no promises or guarantees of benefits will be given to the participants. However, those involved in the study will have the opportunity to let their voices be heard by others, in particular by those who are in a position to make a positive change if the need exists, depending on the outcome of the research. Any changes that may be made to the ESOL program with respect to procedure and implementation of guidelines as a result of this research will be beneficial to the student, the school and the community.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Data will be collected through voice recordings and field notes. All recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet. All field notes will be kept in a separate locked file cabinet by me. I will be the only person who will have direct access to the recordings (for transcribing purposes) or field notes during the data collection process. During research and data collection, coding will be used to identify participants. Recordings, oral and written, will be destroyed once the research is completed. The names of the students and the school will not be given in the actual research reporting/publication of data. Pseudonyms (false names) will be used, instead. Additionally, characteristics that might allow identification of individuals and/or the school or school system will be modified in order to protect anonymity of the participants, the school, and the school system.

During each session, students will be asked permission to tape record their comments which will be transcribed by me, after each meeting. Students will have the option to decline being tape recorded before and/or during the sessions. Their wishes will be honored without question. I will have a set of identical questions to ask each participant during each session.

At no time will the results of the research study be released to anyone other than persons working on the project without the student's written consent. It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

You will receive no compensation of any kind for participating in this research project.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

As a participant, you will be allowed to withdraw from this research project at any time without penalty of any kind. If at any time you wish not to answer a question that has been asked, you have a right not to do so. No pressure will be made to get a comment or answer. Your request will be honored without question**.**

VII. Subject's/(Participant's) Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

As a participant in this research project, I will be expected to:

- Meet for one hour on Mondays each week during the recording/sharing sessions.
- Meet once each week during the months of January, February, and March, at which time the data collection will end.
- Meet after school with you (the investigator) along with the other participants in the project, at the end of the data collection process, to review and finalize the interview sessions.

X. Subject's Permission

I have read the Assent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

____Date________________
Subject Signature
____Date________________
Witness (Optional)

Should I have any other questions about this research or its conduct and my rights, as the subject, or the person to contact in the event of a research-related injury to me, I may contact:

Tina M. Lucas ______________ 703-912-5889 / tina.lucas@fcps.edu
Investigator(s) Telephone/e-mail

Rosary Lalik ______________ 703-538-8493 / rlalik@vt.edu
Faculty Advisor Telephone/e-mail

____
Departmental Reviewer/Department Head Telephone/email

If I should have any questions about the protection of human research participants regarding this study, I may contact.

David M. Moore ______________ 540-231-4991 / moored@vt.edu
Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects Telephone/email
Office of Research Compliance
1880 Pratt Drive, Suite 2006 (0497)
Blacksburg, VA 24061

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent For Parents of Participants

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for Parents of Participants In Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: Literacy from a Different Perspective: Listening to the Voices of Adolescents from a Multicultural Context

Investigator(s): Ernestine McKoy-Lucas, Dr. Rosary Lalik (Advisor)

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this research is to give minority students who are enrolled in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program a chance to voice their opinions about their academic experiences as they move from one language proficiency level to another. Students will be asked to give their views/opinions of both the positive and negative educational experiences related to strategies and practices designed to help them in the learning process, as well as educational experiences that occur once they exit the program (if applicable). Middle school students from grade eight, representing the various language proficiency levels of the ESOL program, will be selected by teacher recommendation to participate in this research project**.**

II. Procedures

As a participant in this research project, your child will be asked to be available once a week after regular school hours, on Mondays from 3:00 to 4:00 pm, to talk about his/her experiences in the ESOL program. He/she will be expected to give feedback concerning what he/she feels may be effective or non-effective strategies, methods, and practices used in the program. Further, he/she will be asked to give what they feel would be recommendations for improvement to the program based on the strategies, methods, and practices used in the program.

The after school sessions will continue for a period of 12 weeks, for a span of three months, from January through March. Students will meet with me in my classroom which will be designated for use by no other students than those who are participating in the research. Sessions will be tape recorded. However, I will ask the students' permission to tape record their comments which will be transcribed by me after each meeting. Students will have the option to decline being tape recorded before and/or during any of the sessions. Their wishes will be honored without question. I will have a set of identical questions to ask each participant or student during each after-school

session. However, each student will be allowed to give information or views that go beyond the questions asked, as long as the information given relates to the question asked.

III. Risks

Any risks to the students, if any, will be minimal. Data will be collected through voice recordings (tape recordings) and field notes (notes written down during the sessions by me). All recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet. I will be the only person who will have access to the recordings. All field notes will be kept in a separate locked file cabinet. I will be the only person who will have access to the field notes. I will destroy recordings, oral and written, once the research is completed. The names of the students and the school will not be used in the actual research reporting. Pseudonyms (false names) will be used, instead. Additionally, characteristics that might allow identification of individuals and/or the school or school system will be modified in order to protect the anonymity of the participants, the school, and the school system.

IV. Benefits

No direct or indirect benefits can be guaranteed in such research. Therefore, no promises or guarantees of benefits can be given to the participants. However, those involved in the study will have the opportunity to let their voices be heard by others, in particular by those who are in a position to make necessary changes, depending on the outcome of the research. Any changes that may be made to the ESOL program with respect to procedure and implementation of guidelines as a result of this research will be beneficial to the student, the school and the community.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Data will be collected through voice recordings and field notes. All recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet and all field notes will be kept in a separate locked file cabinet by me, the primary investigator. I will be the only person who will have direct access to the recordings (for transcribing purposes) or field notes during the data collection process. Recordings, oral and written, will be destroyed once the research is completed. The names of the students and the school will not be used in the actual research reporting. Pseudonyms (false names) will be used, instead. Additionally, characteristics that might allow identification of students and/or the school or school system will be modified in order to protect anonymity of the participants, the school, and the school system.

During each session, students will be asked permission to tape record their comments which will be transcribed by me, the primary investigator, after each meeting. Students will have the option of declining being tape recorded before and/or during the sessions. Their wishes will be honored without question.

At no time will the results of the study be released to anyone other than persons working on the project without the student's written consent.
It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Tech University may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

The student participants will receive no compensation of any kind for participating in this research project.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

The student will be allowed to withdraw from this research project at any time without penalty of any kind. If at any time a student wishes not to answer a question that has been asked, he/she has a right not to do so. No pressure will be made to get a comment or answer. The student's request will be honored without question**.**

VII. Parent's Agreement and Understanding of Student's Responsibilities

As a parent, I agree to allow my child to participate in this study. I understand that my child has the following responsibilities:

As a participant in this research project, my child will be expected to:

- Meet for one hour on Mondays each week during the recording/sharing sessions.
- Meet once each week during the months of January, February, and March, at which time the data collection will end.
- Meet after school with you (the co-investigator) along with the other participants in the project, at the end of the data collection process, to review and finalize the interview sessions.

X. Parent's Permission

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have talked with the investigator, and I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

____Date______________
Parent Signature

____Date_______________
Witness (Optional)

Should I have any other questions about this research or its conduct and my rights, as the subject, or the person to contact in the event of a research-related injury to me, I may contact:

Tina M. Lucas_________________703-912-5889 / tina.lucas@fcps.edu
Investigator(s) Telephone/e-mail

Rosary Lalik___________________________703-538-8493 / rlalik@vt.edu
Faculty Advisor Telephone/e-mail

If I should have any questions about the protection of human research participants regarding this study, I may contact:

David M. Moore________________________540-231-4991/moored@vt.edu
Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Telephone/email
Board for Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research Compliance
1880 Pratt Drive, Suite 2006 (0497)
Blacksburg, VA 24061

APPENDIX C

Letter to Parents of Participants

January 2007

Dear Student Participant and Parents,

I am interested in listening to the voices of students as they share their perceptions of their experiences as multicultural learners as while enrolled in the English for Speakers of Other Languages program in the Fairfax County Public Schools. I will use the information that I gather to write parts of a dissertation I am doing for the doctoral program I am enrolled in at Virginia Tech University.

I will be talking to four to six students who have been recommended by the teachers in the ESOL program. Students who volunteer to be interviewed will need to have their parent's written permission.

I will respect the wishes of the students at all times during the interview sessions; this includes getting permission from the students to participate in oral recordings. The students' opinions are valuable to me, and I will honor their participation at all times.

I am looking forward to meeting with and talking with the students as they share their experiences during the after school sessions which are scheduled to be held for a period of 12 or more weeks spanning the months of February through June of the current school year. I think that this will be a rewarding experience and an exciting opportunity for everyone involved in this research project.

Please feel free to contact me if there are questions or concerns related to his proposed research study.

Sincerely,

Ernestine McKoy-Lucas
Teacher/Researcher, FCPS
Tina.Lucas@fcps.edu
703-658-5717

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol questions

Interview Protocol Questions for Initial Conversations with Research Participants

What I Want to Learn from Research Participants

Purpose: To get perspectives of students' experiences in the ESOL program and to inform the practices/procedures used in the program**.**

Questions Related to Background and Experiences

- Tell me about your experiences before coming to the United States.
- Talk about the experiences you and your family had upon entering the United States?
- Talk about your experiences with people in your community immediately after entering the United States.
- What kind of experiences did you have in interacting with your fellow students once you enrolled in the ESOL program?
- What kind of experiences did you have in interacting with your teachers? Other authority figures?
- How did you feel about being in a new learning environment around people you did not know?
- What kind of experiences did you have as you began to learn a new language?
- What were some difficulties (if any) did you face as a new student in a new school setting?
- What are some things that you did to deal with the difficulties you faced?
- What are some strategies you used to ensure your success at school?
- How resourceful were your family members in helping you to deal with this new learning setting? (What did they do to help you?)
- How resourceful were fellow students in helping you deal with the new setting? Teachers? Friends? Community members? (What did they do to help you?)
- How did each of the above resources help you as far as classroom participation is concerned? (family, teachers, friends, community).

Questions Seeking Advice/Suggestions from Research Participants

- If you had the opportunity to give advice to your teachers, what would it be?
- In your opinion, which strategies used in the classroom were most beneficial? Why?
- In your opinion, which strategies used in the classroom were not beneficial at all? Why not?
- What are some things teachers and students did that were really very helpful to you while you were enrolled in the ESOL program?
- What advice would you give to newly arrived English Language Learners to the United States who are enrolled in the ESOL program?
- Will the experiences you had in the ESOL program help to prepare you for your life experiences in the future? Talk about how this is so.

APPENDIX E

Code Marks Used to Catalog Collected Data

Multiple Data Collected Related to Literacy Learning Experiences	Code Used
Experiences in ESOL	Exp. ESOL
Experiences with Family	Exp. Fam
Experiences in the Community	Exp. Com
Experiences as an Adolescent in Middle School	Exp. Adol-MS
Experiences as Newcomers to the United States	Exp. New to U. S.
Experiences with Learning a New Language	Exp. Lang.
Experiences with Learning a New Culture	Exp. Cult.
Experiences Related to Hopes, Dreams, Fears, Plans for the Future	H.D.F.P