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# Identity, Subjectivity, and Agency in L1-L2 Literacy Processes Among Young Spanish-English Learners in a K-12 Bilingual School in Bogotá, Colombia

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IDENTITY, SUBJECTIVITY, AND AGENCY IN L1-L2 LITERACY PROCESSES AMONG  
YOUNG SPANISH-ENGLISH LEARNERS IN A K-12 BILINGUAL SCHOOL IN BOGOTA,  
COLOMBIA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Identity, Subjectivity, and Agency in L1-L2 Literacy Processes  
Among Young Spanish-English Learners in a K-12 Bilingual  
School in Bogotá, Colombia

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Literacy is one of the most fundamental processes in the life of people. It is complex enough when people develop these processes in their first language, and the nature of the task becomes even more challenging when it is developed with students in a second language within the context of a bilingual setting.

Bilingual education has been based on theories and research stemming from fields such as linguistics, psychology, first and second language acquisition. The views of second language acquisition have dominated the scope of research in terms of both linguistic and cognitive aspects. However, the study of second language acquisition in current times requires a change of paradigm that involves the social and cultural views of language and literacy learning. These views include the conception of second language learners whose literacy processes are based on the ideas of identity, subjectivity, and agency.

These research concepts play an important role when educators attempt to conceptualize L1 and L2 literacy processes for various reasons. First, students build their identity through participating in discursive practices in their school lives. Second, they express their opinions and take positions in their writing. The above elements become more or less relevant in students' lives depending on how much agency, that is-leeway and choice they

can develop in their literacy practices. In sum, the contexts where these practices are enacted play a major role in the students' sense as bilingual literate people.

One of the most likely scenarios to research literacy is case study methodology since it is intended to capture the lives and the histories of the people who are involved in a particular phenomenon, in this case their literacy education. This study used classroom observations, field notes, open interviews, and documents as a backdrop to conceptualize the literacy processes of young Spanish/English learners in a K-12 bilingual school in Bogotá, Colombia.

The data obtained with the students indicate that they have a sense of their identity as bilingual learners; they are aware of their subjective positions in their literacy practices, and they do recognize instances of agency in their school lives. However, these three concepts depend greatly on the school L1/L2 official agenda for literacy education which many times do not consider how students understand their condition of being bilingual and biliterate.

The study becomes a starting point to bring together the school and the students' literacy perspectives so that this mutual shaping provides important reflections on the directions of the students learning and the school further understanding of bilingual education.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### RATIONALE

I have been involved in English learning and teaching for almost twenty years in my home country, Colombia. From very early on in my teaching career, I taught English in a school that offered an intensive English program as part of its curriculum. In 1994 the school owners and administrators decided to set up an agreement of understanding with an American university to help them design a bilingual program tailored to the school's needs in the Colombian context. The agreement included the training of English teachers from the school's English Institute. As a result, I was part of a group of nine teachers who completed their Master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). We started using English as a medium of instruction in subjects such as science, mathematics, and language arts. Some teachers remained in the elementary school section, but I and others also went on to do content teaching in the high school section, where we also taught world history and literature.

The program began with a good deal of success in terms of having many new students coming to the school. The school also started gaining some recognition as a new bilingual program in Bogotá. The program had a three-tier structure: early immersion in preschool, bilingual elementary school, and bilingual high school.

The school owners decided to set up a new branch of the school in Medellín, the second largest city in the country, where there was a lack of bilingual schools in 1997, the time of the new school foundation. My wife, a TESOL graduate, and I were given the responsibility to help set up this new school that would work in a similar fashion to the one in

Bogotá. That is, early immersion in preschool, with bilingual elementary and high school bilingual sections.

The school began with the preschool section, and every year we added new groups. Several years later, we had both an elementary and a high school section. The school priority was always to start with little children so that they could benefit from the immersion years; we only accepted students for either elementary or high school if they had had some prior experience in bilingual schools, or if they had come from English speaking countries.

A key part of our vision, and the reason for our insistence on students entering the school early, was for children to begin their literacy in their L2 (English). Their L1 literacy (Spanish) would start three years later when our students would be in their first grade. We felt that our students would develop literacy in English first as a result of the amount of language exposure that they had had in the previous preschool years. During the preschool years, the work we did to improve children's fine motor skills, perceptual and oral skills as well as shared reading was all geared toward promoting literacy. We also thought that the cognitive processes and language skills that they had developed in English would be transferred into Spanish once they started their L1 literacy in elementary school.

### **The problem**

This bilingual literacy "development" process happened for most of our students without major problems; however, we had certain students who experienced difficulties developing their L1 and L2 literacies. This situation led to tensions between teachers and some of the parents, especially when we had to persuade them to put their children into monolingual programs because of the difficulties they were experiencing with both English and Spanish (literacy). The difficulties these children evidenced ranged from limited phonemic awareness in both languages to a lack of strategies to deal with printed letters.

Furthermore, some of them did display some confusion with the phonetic patterns of both languages as they either read or wrote in their classes.

As the head of the elementary school section and years later as the associate director of the school, I was given the responsibility to conduct such meetings with parents. Prior to those meetings, I had met with the school counselors and the student's teachers in the areas of English and Spanish in order to have some sort of a case to present to the parents and convince them of giving their children a new chance in their education in a monolingual school where they would have a clearer focus in their native language and literacy.

These meetings were not at all easy. After presenting parents all the evidence about their children's progress, I needed to tell them that their children could not continue in the school because of their gaps in literacy which would be aggravated by learning English in content areas such as mathematics and science in the elementary school years. Parents accepted the school decision most of the time; however, they did not leave the school without expressing their disappointment for our teaching strategies particularly in the teaching of literacy. Sometimes they pointed out the problems our teachers encountered in conceptualizing bilingual processes. Finally, they always felt we did not do enough to help their children overcome their difficulties with their literacy processes.

I always ran a separate meeting with the teachers to tell them about the results of these meetings. Often times we concluded that the teaching of L2 literacy prior to consolidating our students' literacy in their L1 Spanish was problematic. We also critically reviewed the classroom methodologies and strategies to help students with the bilingual literacy processes. As the head of the Language Department, I always felt that in the education of these children, we had a great responsibility to their parents. There was no point trying to save face. I always tried to consider the parents' criticisms, and there was no shortage of those!

Most of these meetings lingered in my mind both at the personal and the intellectual level. In regards to the personal, I have always wondered about what the children themselves felt about their schooling and what they had to say about their literacy. I have also wondered how they progressed in their education after leaving our school. Intellectually, I decided I was going to promote several changes in our program. The first was to help restructure the preschool section to cover prekinder, kinder, transition and to include the first and second grade so that teachers could see that they needed to rethink the way students were developing both their L1 and L2 literacy. Besides that, we would give our children more time to overcome the difficulties that could lead them to leaving the program. We also made several changes to the process of evaluating our students.

Perhaps the most significant changes had to do with our approach to literacy. We thought students needed to have contact with language content much earlier in their preschool years especially exposure to books and class readings in addition to the exposure they already had through the work in thematic units based on vocabulary topics such as the family members, the parts of the city, or community helpers, to name a few. Moreover, we decided to adopt a genre-based pedagogy which would provide learners with a much more scaffolded way to develop their literacy beyond methodologies such as phonics, controlled composition, or the whole language approach. In certain cases, we approved strategies such as having individual tutoring for some students or devising curricular adaptations for their particular needs.

Finally, on a personal level, I felt I needed to study literacy in depth, so I decided to go back to school and join the Composition and TESOL program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

My time in Indiana and the scholarly work of my professors in the Composition and TESOL program allowed me to explore my ideas about bilingual literacy from a wider perspective beyond controlled composition, the process approach to writing, and even genre-based pedagogy which I revisited in my doctoral courses, such as Second Language Writing, Second Language Literacy, Second Language Acquisition, and Rhetorical Traditions.

These experiences as a bilingual learner myself and as a teacher/administrator in a bilingual program allowed me to hypothesize that bilingual literacy programs need to take into consideration students' identity, subjectivity, and agency as part of their theoretical foundations and pedagogical practices. The reason these concepts are important in conceptualizing literacy is their significance for the processes of both meaning negotiation and creation that are pursued in literacy practices. Identity, subjectivity and agency also become more pertinent in second language environments where the processes of meaning negotiation and creation are further complicated by the introduction of a second language.

Before I make an argument for the need to research bilingual literacy programs from the above perspective, I think it is important to provide some background regarding bilingual education in Colombia; the guidelines for literacy education according to the Ministry of Education; the relationship between L1 and L2 literacies; and the shifting paradigm in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) from cognitive perspectives to social views of language. The above elements will give me the bases to determine the significance of this study for TESOL and Composition.

### **Bilingual Education in Colombia**

Bilingual Education in Colombia is enjoying something of a heyday as the efforts of both governmental and private institutions are oriented towards the promotion of bilingual education and intensive language programs, particularly in English school curricula. The



recent trend for bilingual education has seen a number of programs being offered by mostly private institutions at elementary, secondary, and even tertiary level.

Anne-Marie de Mejía (2004) in an article about the scope of bilingual education in Colombia, states that:

More recently, with the General Education Law (1994) foreign languages were introduced for the first time at primary school level, generally from Third Grade onwards. It was stated that at this level attention should be focused on ‘The acquisition of elements of conversation and reading in at least one foreign language’ (Article 21, m). According to Rey de Castro and García (1997: 5), ‘the new law gives clear signs of official recognition of the importance of English to support: (i) the development of the Colombian economy; (ii) the education systems to enhance Colombian opportunities in the era of globalization’. Due to these developments, in recent years, the profile of language teaching, especially English Language teaching, has become more prominent in the country and there have been several initiatives at the level of the Ministry of Education aimed at raising standards in this area. (p.387)

The above situation has brought about the alignment of most English programs to standards such as the ones stipulated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages-CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) that have been interpreted in different contexts as fragmented views of the language in which grammar has a fundamental role that surpasses other aspects of the so-called communicative language teaching and the inclusion of the language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary.

The concept of bilingual education in Colombia has its roots in programs offered by K-12 private schools populated by students of the middle and upper-middle strata of society. Some parents regard bilingual education as an important investment as they want their

children to pursue professional careers that eventually lead them to postgraduate education outside the country. Parents feel their children will be more competitive in today's globalized world if they have the chance to work professionally overseas. Besides that, the current trends in the labor market show that both the public and private sectors are demanding either bilingual or highly proficient people in languages other than Spanish.

In spite of the fact that most people in Colombia consider bilingual education as an asset in today's globalized world, there is no universally recognized definition of the term or what constitutes bilingual education in a school's curriculum and how it is manifest in school curricula. Mejia maintains that:

There is no consensus as to what is precisely meant by the term 'bilingualism', most people take it to mean 'proficiency in the use of the (foreign) language' (Rey de Castro & García, 1997: 5). A similar lack of precision can be seen in the designation of what is meant by the term 'bilingual schools'. While most of the long-established bilingual schools use both Spanish and a foreign language as media of instruction in their programmes, there are many more recent bilingual educational institutions which, in fact, provide an intensive foreign language programme (usually ranging from between 8–20 hours per week), rather than offering bilingual content-based teaching and learning. (p.388)

Another factor that plays a major role in the conceptualization of bilingual programs in Colombia is the fact that schools have developed their models based largely on second language teaching tenets, cognitive theories of second language acquisition, and experiences of bilingual programs from countries such as Canada and the United States. Schools also have a tendency to believe that they require the presence of foreigners' expertise, even if it is just their sheer presence to market their programs and cater to their staffing needs. The over-

reliance on the “native” English speaker is common place in the teaching of English. In other words, the teaching of the language has overshadowed the culture, or the glimpses of culture are based on quintessential stereotypes of English culture that are chiefly dominated by either the British or the American perspectives.

### **The Educational Context for Literacy in Colombia**

Education in Colombia has embraced the ideas of standardization, evaluation, and improvement plans. These three concepts aim to establish the common criteria that schools nationwide need to adhere to and against which their students’ competencies in both declarative and procedural knowledge can be measured. The Colombian Ministry of Education has also determined the mechanisms to evaluate students’ achievement and the criteria schools need to follow so that they are able to generate improvement plans to assure the quality of their programs and their students’ results. For these reasons, the Ministry of Education published the standards for most of the school subjects based on a series of guidelines intended to reflect both the theoretical and pedagogical foundations of each one of these subjects.

With regards to literacy, the official document from the Ministry of Education for Castilian Language in Colombia (2006) asserts that both reading and writing have to be considered beyond the mechanical processes of decoding and encoding; as a matter of fact, these processes need to reflect the aspects that are both internal and external to the individual. The former involves personal knowledge and skills; the latter takes into consideration the sociocultural context where these literacy events occur.

The above situation gives rise to a discussion of the sociocultural context, as education must meet the needs, values, beliefs, and goals of society. The individuals who are immersed

in the educational system will be shaped personally and academically according to what society and particular groups in society determine as their needs, beliefs, values, and goals.

Education has become a commodity symbol and wealth as parents view their children's education as an investment. Thus, they are becoming more vocal on the type of education they want for their children. They also turn to education because it is one of the most dominant institutions in society that governs the circles in which people move and participate. These interactions are based largely on particular practices and symbols carrying meanings that promote the status quo and call for people's accommodation as one of its main goals. One can go even further and assert that the educational system has institutions whose goals go beyond people's accommodations to promote differential values. For instance, having access to bilingual education in Colombia creates one of such differences that create a surplus for the people who can afford to pay it. In other words, bilingual education makes students more competitive to meet the demands of today's education. Thus, families are motivated to pay for such differential values.

One of the scenarios in education of individuals in today's world where the concept of cultural capital operates is in literacy processes. Instruction in literacy is one of the earliest and most enduring processes of human beings, scholars, and society members in different countries and cultures. Throughout history definitions of literacy have changed as societies have evolved. It was first understood as the ability of an individual to read and write; this definition emphasized the individual aspects of the process as a routine practice that was learned primarily in school settings. However, as this practice has proved to be fundamental in the formation of individuals in society, the notion of literacy has taken a turn towards its social dimensions.

Marilyn Cooper (1986) puts forward the idea of *ecology* in the sense of the interaction of writers with other writers and their writing systems which makes the task of finding parameters for writing difficult to achieve; it actually reifies the original definition of *kairos* as the moment or the contingency of circumstances (Kinneavy, 1986). In a much similar vein, Leo Van Lier (2002) in his discussion of ecology and educational linguistics argues that:

Educational linguists –including the language teacher and the language learner- must not be linguistic vivisectionists or paleontologists, but rather linguistic ethologists; so that, instead of dissecting the language and operating on the cadaver, examining the bits and pieces in the manner of Rembrandt's Anatomical Lesson, the educational linguist must observe the living entity and learn to understand critically what it does to whom, by whom, and for whom in the multiplexity of semiotic ecosystems in which it (language) operates, or rather co-operates with other meaning making processes.

(p.145)

Van Lier is also emphatic in his assertion that, as part of his ecological vision of language education, language is to be considered a living organism, which interacts naturally with its environment. Thus, context is central to any attempt to understand what language does, or how it behaves if we want to extend the ecological metaphor.

Literacy as a construct has had such an impact on human lives that it has also been loaded with very important political tenets that have impacted literacy instruction in education. For example, it has been conceptualized as a practice to help individuals function in society. However, since there are many perspectives on education, this idea has been challenged. On one hand, it is intended to help individuals progress in society (and increase social mobility). On the other hand, it has also been understood as an important element in the education of politically engaged citizens in times of social paroxysm.

These evolving views of literacy have taken the concept from the basic idea of a skill towards one of the markers for a participatory threshold in society. The emphasis on writing as a social practice is documented by Ivanic (2004) who gathers the thoughts of scholars such as Barton (1994), Bayham (1995), and Hannon (2000) at the school of New Literacy Studies. Moreover, she reviews her own work together with the perspectives of Fairclough (1989, 1992a) and Jones (1990) who conceptualize language, particularly writing as a multi-layered phenomenon that has this social component as one of its layers (p.221). In the same way, the sociocultural perspective theorizes literacy as a series of multifaceted tasks that involve what Johns (1997) describes as the relationships between *texts, roles, and contexts* (xiii). This triadic conception of literacy encapsulates a more comprehensive understanding of literacy as the medium by which individuals continuously attempt to make sense of the world that surrounds them.

Individuals experience the world as active participants; they use the systems of symbols at their disposal. These symbols, as parts of systems of meanings, are ruled by a series of conventions as to how to spell words, put them together as sentences, and string these sentences into texts. These texts are also influenced by the social environment and the culture in which they are produced; consequently, the meanings created in these texts are loaded with networks of ideas and values to be interpreted by either interlocutors, in the case of oral texts in speech, or readers.

An important aspect of literacy is the individual, who is at the juncture of both society and his own capacity to develop a sense of self-representation through acts of reading and writing. This individual's identity will be disclosed in many aspects as he/she engages in literacy practices. Nonetheless, the concept of identity brings forth a series of tensions since it delves into a variety of aspects that are to be researched in settings that develop literacy

instruction. Along with the concept of identity, literacy practices prompt the ideas of subjectivity and agency. Subjectivity has to do with the ownership of positions towards the world, and agency means the way individuals are able to integrate the physical and mental aspects of literacy as resources to relate to the world as agents acting on this very same “literacy means” autonomously (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

The above discussion was meant to illustrate various perspectives on literacy definition and practice; however, it did not specify whether these views applied to a person’s L1 or L2. This language distinction is fundamental in understanding how individuals develop referential frameworks that help them interact with the world that surrounds them. Sometimes such referential frameworks are artificial elaborations of language samples geared to the classroom setting, so this artificiality does not let learners get the essence of the “real” second language world.

### **L1 and L2 Literacy**

Literacy helps children develop abilities to make meanings using the language systems of symbols in a process that Hassan and Perret called *semiosis* that is, making and exchanging meaning through symbolic mediation (p.180). When this process happens in L1, children naturally engage in acts of communication whose meanings contribute to their repertoire of knowledge and feed their theories about the language systematicity. These interactions are made redundant by the constant exchanges and feedback from peers and adults within specific circumstances; this situation makes literacy a socially constructed and culturally situated activity characterized by being highly dynamic and ever changing.

If literacy is to be achieved in an L2, there are a series of elements beyond the linguistic aspects that must be integrated in this second language. That is, individuals need to be exposed to the ways literacy works in the community they are part of, and how these

practices are generated so that these individuals are fully incorporated into the means of communication of the target community; these means of communication may take the form of social gatherings, workplace activities, academic school work, and even the most common social activities like church attendance. Hence, literacy programs and instruction need to consider aspects such as identity performance, subjective positioning and agency demonstrations.

For second language learners to be able to immerse themselves in the above social transactions, it is fundamental that they be constantly contextualized in the negotiation of meanings involved in such transactions. In other words, students are required to have relevant cultural schemata so that they develop successful communicative processes in either oral or written form. For this reason, it is necessary that the literacy of the classroom has a close relationship with the diversity of literacy within the given community. Berta Pérez (2004) argues:

Studies on the role of background knowledge and reading in bilingual contexts have found that second-language students require careful prereading preparation to activate and expand background knowledge for comprehension. Children need to be made aware of the rhetorical organization of texts, and need to read extensively to become productive readers. (p.42)

My claims in the present study are related to the development of literacy programs and literacy communities that take into consideration the diversity of students regardless of the fact that they may be homogenous in the sense of having the same native language or probably belonging to the same socioeconomic strata. Diversity among students needs to be acknowledged as it plays an important role in shaping their concepts of the world and has a major bearing on their literacy. This is perhaps more relevant for developing writing skills,



where the concepts of identity, subjectivity and agency are fundamental. Bilingual teachers are part of a system that puts pressure on them to have students who are successful in standardized testing, yet they are required to have these same students produce “authentic” pieces of English writing with elements of target culture appropriateness. Pérez and Nolander make very similar claims when they assert that:

Children are challenged by a curriculum that teaches skills in isolation yet expects children to apply those skills separate from the different expectations and learning contexts for themselves. A skill-based approach disconnects the set of skills from the learning context. Some children can comply with the need for different strategies required by different contexts, but for other children this creates a level of incongruence that is overwhelming. (p.290)

I think schools require literacy frameworks that go beyond what Auerbach (1989) described as “transmission school practices” in which parents become a link in a chain of school-related literacy activities that sometimes they are not ready to develop with their children for different reasons. She states that parents probably need to be asked how their experiences around literacy may inform instruction instead of asking them how to transfer school practices in home contexts. She goes on to say that:

The goal then is to increase the social significance of literacy in family life by incorporating community cultural forms and social issues into the content of literacy activities. Instead, the curriculum development process is participatory and is based on collaborative investigation of critical issues in family or community life. As these issues emerge, they are explored and transformed into content-based literacy work, so that literacy can in turn become a tool for shaping the social context. (p.177)

Auerbach shows one of the challenges of education and literacy since these processes need to be open to include the diversity of views from their stakeholders namely teachers, parents, and students. Here I see that there is usually a conflict between the lockstep curricula of standardized education, and the symbolic capital that literacy practices may represent for families in a particular school community. On the one hand, there may be families that regard literacy as an important asset in life, making it part of family routines such as reading the newspaper, having a bookshelf and making books accessible to children. On the other hand, there are families where literacy is only a school-related activity that does not have any other connections with how the family functions on a day-to-day basis.

If students are to commit to literacy acquisition and development as a lifelong process, they must understand from the outset its importance for them. Literacy becomes meaningful in the sense that it reflects what students experience in life beyond the school. Auerbach sees the teacher's role in literacy instruction as that of someone who works at the juncture of what happens both inside and outside the classroom (p.166).

The present discussion on bilingual literacy requires the views of second language acquisition especially when the construction of a referential world through the use of a second language comes into consideration.

### **Second Language Acquisition**

Language is perhaps one of the most fascinating media of symbolic mediation used by human kind; it is an essential component in all aspects of society. Moreover, it contributes to one's sense of identity and helps to determine one's role in society. In other words, language, according to Hassan and Perret (1994), is fundamental in establishing an individual's points of reference for understanding the (real) world. The first language allows people to construe a series of material, mental, and social processes to enable them to understand their

communities and to participate in them actively and meaningfully. When a person decides to assume a second language, there is a similar process of creating oneself as an individual to be part of the second language community. This process is largely built on the first language in linguistic, cognitive, and social aspects. Hassan and Perret consider this secondary socialization an interesting scenario where the acts of learning and teaching this second language are governed by factors ranging from the personal to the social and the institutional. This last aspect is worth mentioning since the educational agendas of most nations and institutions have English as a mandatory language. The above situation shows that the access to English has been institutionalized by means of educational policies in terms of accreditations and standardized testing. Consequently, the learners' socialization processes in their L2 owe much to these views of either foreign or second language learning. In the case of bilingual education, the efforts of most educational institutions are oriented towards second language learning where English is the medium of instruction in areas of academic work.

When learners are faced with the daunting yet satisfying task of learning a second language, they need to be immersed in a world that their teachers must create in order for them to become part of the target language community. Such creation does not have to be exclusively based on the teacher's worldviews; it requires a sense of what Wallace and Ewald (2000) coined *mutuality* in rhetoric and composition. These scholars envision writing classrooms as the appropriate locus for recovering the transactional and dialogic nature of teacher-student interaction in their attempts to work around the idea of knowledge creation in which the value of students' interpretive agency in classroom discourse was fundamental for such mutuality to happen (p.5).

Negotiation in many instances of second language interaction is around what individuals can attain with the language in the society. This idea is precisely the main concern

for bilingual institutions as they need to have clear ideas of the scope of second language acquisition. On the one hand, they may think about the mastery of the linguistic system in L2; on the other hand, they need to ask themselves about the social processes in which these learners will participate in society legitimately. The inclusion of the social in second language learning broadens the scope of work with second language learners, yet it adds a layer of complexity to the way scholars and teachers conceive their work, their learners, and more importantly their learning. Watson-Gegeo (2004) argues for a paradigm shift in second language acquisition research that has been motivated by a series of developments in areas such as cognitive science, first language acquisition and socialization, child and human development to name a few. In fact, the paradigm shift has to do with the growing participation of second language learners' communities that gravitated in the periphery of dominant societies in the global world. She asserts that the traditional views of SLA, based on experimental modes of inquiry, over reliance on linguistic structuralism, and the inadequacy to generate a pedagogy that fully understands societies of the developing world, do not provide an accurate picture of the complex processes involved in SLA. Moreover, these processes are highly permeated by both cultural and sociopolitical circumstances (p.332).

The inclusion of cultural and social ideas in language acquisition requires perspectives beyond the cognitive and linguistic views of SLA. Watson-Gegeo advances the idea of a paradigm that both acknowledges and takes as its foundations language socialization.

This language socialization (LS) view involves a series of premises that need to be taken into consideration to research SLA (p.339):

- Individuals are active participants in the processes of language and culture that are mutually constructed.

- Individuals' activities within a community are politically constrained.
- Context needs to be regarded as a factor that is influenced by aspects such as social identities and discourse patterns.
- The learning of culture by individuals is influenced by linguistic events that frame the ways individuals understand the world and know about it.
- Individuals build their mental representations of the world based on the ways they participate in learning events in their communities.

The above premises integrate a series of elements that add levels of complexity to the notions of SLA. The inclusion of social and cultural aspects to the nature and the results of second language negotiation are fundamental in the configuration of both classroom settings and teacher/student communicative exchanges.

### **Significance of the study**

This study contributes to the field of Composition and TESOL in a number of ways. First of all, it addresses the particularities of a bilingual program in a K-12 school in a context different from that of the U.S or an English speaking environment where English is not the majority language, yet is considered fundamental to the educational processes of their individuals. Second, it focuses on issues that are of importance to the study of both Composition and TESOL so that there are instances of dialogue. Valdés has very similar claims when she asserts that:

Unfortunately, existing boundaries between professional fields have not allowed related dialogues to become part of ongoing conversations within particular communities. As a result, there has been little opportunity for refutation or affirmation

of highly relevant utterances that take place in parallel but unconnected conversations (p.81).

This study, on the one hand, informs the TESOL community about the development of bilingual literacy in a K-12 school from a social perspective. On the other hand, it provides compositionists with elements of analysis for the L1 and L2 writing instruction. It does not address the issue of the second language writers' deficit, yet it attempts to study the L1/L2 discrepancies through the comprehensive perspective of sociocultural theory.

Guerra (1997), as cited by Valdés (2004), argues for an *intercultural literacy* “the ability to consciously and effectively move back and forth among as well as in and out of the discourse communities they belong to or will belong to” (p.258). Lastly, the study attempts to problematize the construct of literacy, and in particular, second language literacy so that students have the central role in expressing their views of the world within literacy frameworks and practices that promote ideas such identity, subjectivity, and agency.

### **Research questions**

The research questions of the study are oriented towards the dynamics of both the L1 and L2 reading and writing processes. These questions are formulated as follows:

1. How do young bilingual language learners voice aspects of identity in their L1 and L2 to initiate and/or maintain reading and writing processes in the classroom?

This question aims at establishing how learners express aspects of their personal worldviews through discursive practices as they engage in reading and writing practices either in the process of idea generation or the development of activities.

2. How do bilingual Spanish –English students account for aspects of subjectivity in their writing assignments?

This second question is oriented towards exploring how individuals integrate and articulate subjective (personal) positions or perspectives in their assignments. Of particular interest is the way(s) they verbalize these opinions in terms of their L1 and L2.

3. How much agency do bilingual Spanish-English students show in their reading and writing practice?

This third question explores students' agency examining the way they assume their literacy practices beyond the accomplishment of specific class activities. Another interesting aspect to look at in students' agency is to research how much leeway and choice they are able to exert as they engage in various literacy activities in L1 and/or L2. Another focus of the study will look at how literacy, as one of the most essential instruments of scholarly work, occupies a particular place in the students' academic life and beyond.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In chapter one, I argued for the formulation of bilingual literacy programs that include the ideas of identity, subjectivity, and agency in both their theoretical orientations and pedagogical practices. I argued for this not only because of the complex nature of literacy itself but also because of the aspirations of bilingual schools to foster literacy in L1 and L2 with Colombian students. The main contention is based on the idea that any literacy project in the education of any individual regardless of their language (s) has to seek to incorporate what the individual brings to the teaching-learning scenario. Thus, literacy programs need to take into consideration the construction of identity, the development of subjective positions, and the inclusion of students' agency in their actual literacy practices.

This chapter includes some theoretical assumptions that support the inclusion of identity, subjectivity, and agency in school practices particularly literacy. It also surveys relevant empirical research on these same issues; it is worth pointing out that much of this work was done following case study methodology and narrative research that are also important for the purpose of this study. The chapter ends with a definition of the research concepts to be used in the empirical world.

#### **Theoretical assumptions**

The study has a postmodern view of literacy practices in which the theorizing from second language writing instruction and research, sociocultural theory in particular social interactionism, and Bakhtinian dialogism shed important lights on the concepts under examination. These conceptions are also part of the theories that support a growing number of empirical studies on literacy. These studies were done through the lens of the qualitative research paradigm and more explicitly, the case study research methodology.



## **Postmodernism**

Lester Faigley (1992) in his discussion of postmodernity in composition makes a distinction between the terms postmodernism, postmodern theory, and postmodernity. The first concept is located in the areas of arts and literature to emphasize the nonlinearity of postmodern literature and artistic forms and the assimilation of popular culture as a multiplicity of representations of society.

The second idea of postmodern theory is related to a critique of philosophical thinking associated with the conception of subject and subjectivity as objective concepts detached from the world. Faigley also states that postmodern theory doubts:

Artistic judgment such as 'universal value' and 'intrinsic merit', science views such as 'truth' and 'objectivity', and ethics and law as being 'rights' and 'freedoms' which suddenly have no meaning outside of particular discourses and are deeply involved in the qualities they are alleged to be describing objectively. (p.8)

Lastly, postmodernity refers to the change of the conception of the subject as an individual who has a myriad of interactions with society, which call for a view of subjects, not as unified entities, but fragmented limbs. One of the most common manifestations associated with the idea of postmodernity in terms of writing is the pastiche, a piece of literary work intended to recreate some previous work with a particular intention that does not necessarily mean to plagiarize the original. The idea is to provide a new configuration of views and meanings along the lines of the original work to obtain some sort of effect which may be that of being sarcastic or humorous.

Allan and Turner (2000) provide a cogent view of postmodernity when they argue for a reconfiguration of the boundaries of time and space in society that are very attuned to the idea of pastiche:

For many postmodernists, the technologies and infrastructures that allow for the rapid dissemination of cultural images change the nature of culture so that it can no longer readily symbolize relationships and structures located in time and place. Local place and time become subordinated to the rapid circulation of cultural images, creating a period of “liminality” in which the significance of place and time decreases. This void in cultural space becomes ever more important for individuals’ sense of identity and their organization of meaning. During this process, the symbols of culture circumvent traditional cultural markers and boundaries, increasingly destroying life worlds, and traditional cultural meanings. Symbols are lifted out of groups, marketed, and consumed as commodities on a global scale, thereby breaking the hold of older cultural systems on individuals’ perceptions of self and their interpretations of the world. In this way, local cultures diffuse very rapidly and are commodified in high-volume, high-velocity, and expansive markets fueled by advertising and capitalists’ need to develop new commodities in order to sustain profits. These processes, in turn, are possible because of the general prosperity in advanced capitalist systems, which give individuals more discretionary money to spend on commodified symbols. Thus groups can no longer protect their symbols in time and place, and they become “free-floating signifiers”. (p.370)

Concepts such as literacy and composition are part of this liminality and end up being prey of corporations that may be academic in nature, yet they are determined to establish their hegemonic views to succeed in capitalist money making systems. I could mention some of

these businesses such as publishing houses, testing agencies, and even academic journals. Foreign language testing in Europe, for instance, is regulated by a Common Framework for the Languages. The framework has a thorough description of language levels, competencies, and domains that language learners achieve according to levels of proficiency from basic to expert.

Institutions that build the educational system namely schools, technological institutes, and universities are the givers of knowledge credentials to their members to vouch for their successful accommodation in society. However, postmodern views of the world bring to the surface a series of contradictions that are found at the heart of education itself. On the one hand, most institutions claim education is one of the most important endeavors for human kind in their struggle for a series of values such as respect, solidarity, equality, and freedom. On the other hand, these same institutions compete for giving individuals degrees that insert them in the workforce where job opportunities and success usually clash with respect, solidarity, equality, and freedom. Bourdieu (1977) would argue that the symbolic capital granted by education should not aggravate the inequalities present in society; educators would be the ones in charge of displaying in their pedagogical rationality the means to educate individuals with these values and aspirations regardless of their place in society as either privileged or underprivileged.

I argue that society is constantly claiming for an individual who is singled out from the collectivity as subject. This subject is no longer a unified subject that the education machine sends from the assembly line of standardization in the Fordist education; it is a decentered subject- that is, a subject that may deploy multiple identities as Allan & Turner (2000) argue:

Subjectivity and individual identity are major concerns of postmodern social theory. As social activity becomes deinstitutionalized and thus not attached to a particular place,

as grand narratives lose their ability to embrace large groups with a sense of a collective identity, as markets focus on individual tastes and expressions, as differentiation escalates to the point where each person is the locus of many groups, and as communication and transportation technologies systematically break down the symbolic barriers between groups, individuals and their identities increase in importance. (p.375)

Faigley makes a similar claim when he argues for the changes in the theoretical orientation of composition in America as he analyses the visions of composition from the expressivist, cognitivist, and social-epistemic perspectives. He claims that the discrepancies that arise among scholars in the teaching of composition are related to “the subjectivities that composition teachers want their students to occupy” (p.17). One example of where students frequently display identity (ies) is in the literacy activities that they perform in school; their participation has to do with how they exert their subjectivities and sense of agency. However, many of these practices are anchored in both what the institution and what teachers consider writing, especially what “good” English writing is about or the canonical ways of writing.

The fact that near-native or native English proficiency is the target that most bilingual communities aim at hitting creates the idea that writing is a product of impeccable paragraph structure, flawless grammar, and accurate spelling. I think that this is motivated by the teachers’ reliance on the language as a structure with sets of rules for its functioning. These views seem to take precedence over purpose, content, audience, and logic organization of ideas that are fluctuating when writing is thought of as a rhetorical act. Writing is both process and product, yet writing instructors need to have in mind that there is indeed a conflict of roles between the author and the secretary. That was the assertion that Stephen Isaacson’s

(1989), who wrote about the respective roles and the importance of understanding the writer's burden.

The scholar states that writing instructors need to solve this author/secretary dichotomy by removing the burden of either one at a given time. He also proposes addressing this source of conflict by assuming four instructional approaches to help the beginning writer: (1) rule and skill instruction, (2) substantive facilitation, (3) procedural facilitation, (4) self-instructional strategy training. The first approach aims at working with writing skills such as punctuation and spelling in isolation. The second has to do with both the teacher and student collaborating in the phases of writing. The third intends to provide help in writing subprocesses as the writer is engaged in the assignment. The fourth works with strategies to make the writer understand the roles of author and secretary and monitor their interaction (p.210).

### **Second Language Writing History**

Second language writing has become a field of its own, yet its roots and development can be traced back to the contributions of other disciplines towards which L2 writing gravitated before gaining momentum as an independent field of work. Matsuda (2003) provides an overview of the field from its beginnings, development, and future ideas.

Writing did not receive much attention in the field of second language studies until recently. Matsuda asserts that most efforts in second language learning and teaching were oriented towards the development of oral abilities, and these efforts were reflected in the ideas of both linguists and language teachers in the first part of the twentieth century. It was in the late 1950s that issues of L2 writing instruction began to come to the attention of language specialists who witnessed the growing presence of nonnative English speakers in American universities. This influx of foreigners brought the recognition of some instructional problems that required the attention of English departments. The first discussions took place in the

Conference on College Composition and Communication, but concerns shifted from composition studies to second language studies as this field began to grow due to the establishment of professional programs for second language teachers (p.18). Nevertheless, these new professionals were not really ready to work in second language writing to prepare nonnative students for the demands of first-year composition courses. Different approaches were taken in order to come to terms with the complexities of second language writing; they ranged from controlled to guided composition at either the sentential or text level.

The field was also permeated by the tendencies in composition studies such as the writing as a process movement in the 1980s. The constant exchange of insights from composition studies and second language studies allowed for the birth of second language writing as a legitimate field. Matsuda points out the production of research articles in journals such as *College ESL*, *English for Specific Purposes*, *Language Learning* and *TESOL Quarterly*. He also mentions the publication of second language writing topics in journals in Composition studies such as *College Composition and Communication*. Moreover, there was an increasing number of articles and dissertations on this field in the last twenty years of the previous century (p.26). But the clearest sign of the maturity of the field was the creation of the *Journal of Second Language Writing* in 1992 together with a number of similar publications. Matsuda adds to this idea of maturity of the field, the existence of a metadisciplinary discourse or self-conscious inquiries into its nature and history in issues such as methodology, interdisciplinary relations, ideological and political issues, as well as personal reflections on professional growth (p.27).

The future of second language writing according to Matsuda ties in well with the purpose of the present study since he discusses the need to research contexts other than U.S. higher education or second languages other than English. He claims that theories of second

language writing generated from one context or from one language are limited. Moreover, the field must welcome studies that discuss issues that are not only concerned with methodologies but also with theoretical and ideological positions in different institutional contexts (p.29).

Besides the need to look at the history of second language writing and its emergence, it is equally important to delve into the research that has been conducted in the field. One of the reasons for such enterprise has to do with the changes in educational agendas and the populations of students. Another reason is the need to resolve the theory versus practice divide which Kroll (2003) considers artificial since “research insights drive practice and concerns for practices that do not seem to be working to drive additional research” (p.4). Perhaps the most important purpose of this chapter is to look at the research paradigms and methodologies that have been employed to develop the bulk of knowledge in second language writing.

## **Second Language Writing Research**

Charlene Polio (2003) provides an interesting account of some of the most prominent research studies conducted in the field of second language writing depending on their focus of research namely: the texts, the writers’ processes, the participants, and the context both outside and inside the classroom. The lists of studies specify aspects such as the foci, techniques, and methodological approaches as well as some analysis of the issues under discussion.

Polio clustered the first group of studies under the focus of the writers’ texts; the topics under investigation range from overall quality to discourse features with some emphasis on linguistic aspects such as lexicon, syntactic complexity, accuracy and mechanics (p.41). Only one of the studies devoted its attention to content in terms of quality, higher level propositions, and topics. These elements of writing were approached through experimental studies that attempted to manipulate variables and comparison of different groups.

The research on the writing process foci included the general process, revision, fluency, prewriting, written feedback, peer review, conferencing/tutoring, and dictionary use (p.46). Most of the research in this aspect was qualitative due to non-concrete nature of the issues under investigation, and the inherent difficulty of capturing evidence based on such internal processes. Consequently, researchers need to make use of instruments such as interviews and think aloud protocols. Nevertheless, Polio recognizes that this type of research on writing processes may be difficult to conduct because it is time-consuming due to the instruments of data collection and analysis; moreover, the samples tend to be small, so the researcher ends up describing data without the possibility of some sort of statistical analysis (p.49).

The research on the participants showed that they were separated into teachers, students, exam raters, and content teachers. These studies included aspects such as attitudes, backgrounds, previous instruction, experience in a content course, immigrant experience in an ESL class, coping strategies, effects of experience, the native/nonnative speaker dualism, error tolerance and the judgments of native English speakers and ESL teachers (p.52). The aspects related to students had to do with their experiences in content classes as well as the way they coped with writing demands in their classes. Both the rater's and the teacher's focus of study was around the way they evaluated students' tasks and assumed errors. These studies were qualitative in nature; the focus was to describe phenomena without attempting to manipulate them. The instruments of data collection were surveys, document analyses, and some ethnographic views of people and events involved in the research.

The research interested in the social context took into consideration the students' goals outside the classroom and some examination of what happens inside the classroom. The specific focus outside the classroom investigated the structure of texts in the target language,



the content of class assignments, tasks, and texts. In regards to what happens inside the classroom, the research looked at what happens as instruction takes place, the relative proportions of both native and non-native speakers and their instructors, and the program stated rationale for teaching writing in L1 and L2 programs.

Polio offers a wide-angle view of research in second language writing that contains the research foci, the participants, and their contexts of work. These studies tend to reflect what has been the history of writing instruction from the texts, the writers, and the contribution of both in educating individuals with a socioliterate perspective. Nevertheless, she claims that there is a lack of research on writing in a foreign language context or in a language that is not North American English. She concludes by pointing out that regardless of the research paradigm being used in second language writing, it is important to consider the careful reporting of methodology (p.60).

This study looks at the writing processes of L2 elementary school learners in a K-12 bilingual school. The research process attempts to conceptualize what happens to writers beyond the studies that Polio reviewed in terms of the participants' attitudes toward peer response (Mc Groarty &Zhu,1997), background/previous instruction (Liebman,1992), experience in a content course (Spack,1997), EAP and context experience (Leki and Carson,1997), perspective on plagiarism (Deckert,1993), immigrants experience in ESL class (Harklau,1999), and coping strategies (Leki,1995) (p. 52).

### **Sociocultural Theory: social interactionism**

Investigating identity, subjectivity, and agency in L1-L2 writing processes requires a contextualization of these concepts from the perspective of learning and more specifically from education and second language pedagogy. Social interactionism and constructivism are schools of thought whose tenets are reflected in education. Social interactionism is based on

the idea that people are social by nature, and it is through socialization that individuals gradually make sense of the world. The main thinkers of this school, according to Williams and Burden (1997), are Vygotsky and Feuerstein who agree that both *mediation* and significant people (parents, teachers, peers) as *mediators* were central elements of learning. For Vygotsky mediation has to do with what he called a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a space where learners meet and interact. Learning happens in this interaction as peers with differing levels of skill or knowledge help each other cope with the demands of a particular task. The idea of individuals involved in the act of mediation is that the more able learners help the less able so that they progress in their learning.

Feuerstein, on the other hand, believed in the learner's abilities to cope with the demands of the context, as he advanced the conception of the *structural cognitive modifiability* (p.41) that learners exhibited in their learning process. In the view of Feuerstein, the role of the mediators is important since they are the ones who select and shape elements from the environment that will lead to their learners' development. Nonetheless, Williams and Burden provide words of caution about the possible shortcomings of Feuerstein's ideas since they may promote the excessive control of the adult mediator that may undermine the role of the learner. Thus, the authors talk about an interactive process where the relationship between the teacher and the learner is bidirectional instead of unidirectional (p.67).

Constructivism relies on the idea that individuals actively construct personal meanings through their experiences and the learning they develop from those situations. One of the most common scenarios for this learning to happen is the learners' active involvement in problem-solving activities that require a dialogue between teachers and learners. The teachers' expertise becomes salient since they have to find ways to best orient students so that students develop skills and knowledge on how to conduct their own searches.

Regarding this very same idea of learning from the perspective of second language pedagogy, Guadalupe Valdés (2004) in an article entitled “The Teaching of Academic Language to Minority Second Language Learners” claims that there has been little research conducted on literacy from the social and cultural point of view within the mainstream English profession. In fact, she states that:

The view that there are multiple literacies rather than a single literacy, and that these literacies depend on the context of the situation, the activity itself, the interactions between participants, and the knowledge and experiences that these various participants bring to these interactions, is distant from the view held by most L2 educators who still embrace the technocratic notion of literacy and emphasize the development of decontextualized skills. (p.79)

Valdés reports on different efforts of scholarly communities such as TESOL to research language for social purposes such as the academic domain, yet there has not been an influential movement towards discussing the politics of bilingualism or bicultural pedagogy which determine topics of paramount importance such as the definition of academic English and the agendas to be followed by bilingual institutions. She points out that work in these areas has not impacted the mainstream English community that still seems to be dominated by the conceptualizations based on the cognitive and linguistic aspects of bilingual education such as the quintessential distinction between BICS and CALP.

### **Bakhtin’s Dialogism**

In the study I will circumscribe the definition of literacy and the research concepts of identity, subjectivity, and agency within the realms of social interactionism, and constructivism. Both social interactionism and constructivism allow for teachers and students to be fully-fledged participants in the teaching/learning process. Moreover, these two

perspectives argue for the recognition of the diversity of individuals who participate in educational activities in which literacy or multiple literacies are fundamental for their integration in society. Nevertheless, there is a need to make a mechanism to regulate such interactions clearly visible. For that reason, I take into consideration the idea of *dialogism* as defined by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. Dialogism for Bakhtin goes beyond the common concept of conversation. Bakhtinian scholars such as Hirkshop (1999) as cited by Dressman (2004) claims that “dialogue is a contextualized process of exchanges between an author and his text, between readers and a text, and between the text, and the society in which experience takes place” (p.45).

Bakhtin also had the idea that individuals needed the interaction with others to help themselves in the process of developing their own selves. In other words, individuals need to interact with the outside world of others in order to identify themselves based on what others perceive about them. In this process of developing an author-self, there is a constant struggle between the individual internal construction of personal ideas and the external views and intentions of others which are filled with the tensions between both the authoritative and the internally persuasive discourse. In this tension lies one of the contradictions of institutions in society that tend to close off the possibilities of dialogism to promote what Greenlaf and Katz (2004) described as “singularity of viewpoints, transmission and recitation rather than meaning- making, and didactic and authoritarian discourses that have ceased to be internally persuasive to the thinking being” (p.174). These scholars see some similarities between these monologic views and the schooling of children and the teachers’ supposed “ongoing” development. Literacy is also conducted in such transmission fashion, and the focus of teaching writing is to control students’ possible sources of errors at the level of introductions, body paragraphs, and conclusions in the case of expository texts. Guadalupe Valdés argues

that what is missing in these teacher-student interactions is the idea of dialogue since “the notion of writing is about ideas, that presentations are about ideas and that, when one engages in writing and speaking, one also engages in dialogue with others” (p.87).

These dialogues in which readers, writers, and texts are heard and responded to while attempt to hear and respond allow for the manifestation of elements that are germane to the notion of expressing oneself; precisely identity, subjectivity, and agency. This triad is essential if writing processes and the education of writers is oriented to come to terms with the diversity of the world. I do not mean just giving value to the aesthetic experience of reading and writing; what I mean is the education of individuals who might develop their own idea systems through constant interactions in a wide spectrum of possibilities, where they can exert dialogues that are not free from the struggles between the self-conscious internal voices and the external authoritative discourses. In other words, the educational perspectives in literacy instruction need to open up spaces where students have a voice of their own and are able to have a dialogue with their peers, teachers, and their communities as students and/or writers. These dialogues are about central issues that attract their attention and are fundamental to their interests and performance in school and society. Only then will it be possible to see the concepts of identity, subjectivity, and agency at the heart of bilingual literacy programs and practices. A similar view is presented by Guadalupe Valdés when she maintains that:

Students should not be encouraged to merely pretend to talk to distant audiences so that their teacher can correct their vocabulary and syntax. They should be made aware of other voices, of how they speak, how they write, of the ways they say what they mean, of the resources they use to gain attention, to persuade, and to explain, and then, they should be encouraged to respond. (p.88)

## **Empirical Studies on Identity, Subjectivity, and Agency**

The next section of this chapter consists of a survey of the literature on empirical studies in which bilingual literacy has been viewed through the lenses of identity, subjectivity, and agency. On many occasions, the treatment of these concepts is dealt with separately because of their research orientation; however, many of these studies tend to point to the existence of convergence in attempting to widen understandings about literacy development, particularly writing. Once these literacy perspectives are analyzed in terms of how these concepts play themselves out in different research studies, I attempt to redefine them for the purposes of my own study on identity, subjectivity, and agency with bilingual elementary students in a K-12 school in Bogotá, Colombia. The main two reasons for researching bilingual literacy through these three concepts are (1) to problematize the reductionist technocratic idea of literacy in the current lockstep curriculum of standardized education in Colombia and (2) to advocate a conception of literacy that includes the social and cultural dimensions of their main participants namely the students. Such a view of literacy is maintained within the grounds of sociocultural theories and the social-epistemic views of writing.

This review begins with the description of recent and relevant studies on literacy whose foci were identity, subjectivity, and agency. It is followed by an analysis of the way researchers conceptualize their views on each of these concepts, and how they manage them for the purposes of their own research projects. Then I discuss the significance of these constructs for the purposes of my own study with elementary school learners in a bilingual setting.

## **Identity**

A very relevant study on identity with elementary readers and writers was conducted by Sarah McCarthy (2001) who worked with a teacher and a class of students from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds in a school in Texas. The purpose of her study was to understand the role of literacy perceptions and practices in shaping identity (4). Her research questions were: (1) How do students and their teachers, parents and peers perceive students from diverse backgrounds? (2) What role did students' involvement (success with an interest) in literacy activities play in identity construction? (3) What features of the literacy curriculum played a role in identity construction? (p.6). Student narratives and writing samples; interviews with teachers; parents and the students; and case studies were used to collect data. The data analysis rendered some findings that indicated agreement amongst some parents, teachers, and students about their positive perceptions of students who were successful and interested readers and writers. Regarding the students' involvement in literacy activities, the results showed that their identity as successful readers and writers was related to their engagement in literacy practices. Moreover, they shared reading and writing with parents, and the home-school connections with regards to their literacy development were strong. Nonetheless, the ideas of identity for struggling readers were not as important as their other school roles such as their relationships with their classmates.

As far as the role of the curriculum in literacy practices, the data allowed the researcher to examine the way students followed class activities such as summary writing or journal completion; however, they did not demonstrate aspects of identity in terms of either gender or race. The researchers did trace some elements of identity in the extensive reading program in which some students could find personal connections to the stories they were reading. The researchers studied four specific cases in the classroom whose participants represented the

class configuration regarding the perceptions from others, their involvement in literacy activities, and the role that stories played in their identity or subidentity constructions.

Elena was Latina avid reader who was very consistent with the views her teachers, parents, and peers had about her in class. She was also very aware of these views since she integrated them in the way she talked and performed reading and writing. Natalie, on the other hand, was a struggling reader especially when her work had to become public; moreover, Natalie's shyness did not help her much before her classmates in this aspect. Natalie's first language was German, but she came from Latino-German parents. She seemed to do better in private literacy activities since her mom was concerned about her progress in spelling and grammar. Even though Natalie was viewed as a struggling reader and writer, this situation did not affect the way she felt about her schooling since she still wanted to learn English and have friends.

Daniel was a student who was seen as a cheerful and energetic boy by his peers, yet some of his writing revealed a more circumspect outlook on life. Daniel had had some unhappy previous experiences in his home and school life. In fact, the only people who knew about these situations were his parents and his teacher. It seems that he displayed a different attitude towards life depending on the people he was with.

Carmen was an African American girl who had recently moved to Texas. There was conflicting information about her family configuration. As far as her literacy is concerned, she was more comfortable writing than reading. In fact, she considered herself a "slow reader." In her interviews, she reported she behaved differently at home and at school, and she suspected that the school and family accounts of who she was were different too.

McCarthy's discussion on identity begins with the postmodernist and social constructivist idea of identity as construction. This idea challenges the traditional view of



identity as self- identification. The researcher considers the views on identity exposed by Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) as being “partial, local, and contingent upon the situation” (125). This viewpoint is refined by the positions of both Mishler (1999) and Sarup (1996). The former formulated identity as the interplay of subidentities instances of arrangement and conflict, and the latter saw it as a space with multiple dimensions where these elements combine and collide in processes such as writing. McCarthey also brings up the ideas on identity as a construction in relation to others’ perceptions. As a result, in her research design and intervention, she pays close attention to the different narratives people use to describe students and their literacy performance.

Once the researcher establishes the possible enactments of identity, she discusses the idea of literacy as one of the most common scenarios for such identity construction as she goes on to quote her own research with a group of “third and fourth graders who reconstructed their subjectivities based on the demands of the social setting. Students’ classroom participation was not only influenced by race, class, and gender but also by the classroom (literacy) tasks presented to them” (p.126).

Literacy practices are in fact vehicles for unfolding one’s identity. Moreover, literacy may be a predictor of people’s sense of self. McCarthey quotes the work on classroom subjective positions of Cherland (1994), Blake (1997), Dillon & Moje (1998), and Egan & Robertson (1998). She points out that the common threads of these studies demonstrate the complexity of identity construction in students as they struggle to either accept or resist cultural norms. The researchers in these studies assert that there is investigation to be done on the influence of the classroom contexts in students’ evolving identities. Beyond this influence, they argue that there is a need for further investigation on how the classroom can provide students with opportunities to explore their identity.

Robert Jiménez (2000) developed a study that attempted to understand contextual factors that influenced the literacy development of Latina students and to improve the instructional approach for promoting students engagement in literacy practices in their classrooms. The study was conducted in a mid-western city school in the United States with a population of Latina students. Bilingual class sections were used for the project with some low-performing students whose ages ranged from 9 to 12 years. Four bilingual English-Spanish teachers were also recruited for the project. The data collection procedures included teacher interviews, classroom observations, think aloud procedures, student interviews, a formative experiment, and bilingual strategic reading instruction.

The results indicated that students considered that their Latino identity was not commonly included in their literacy education, yet they recognized they had more academic demands on the grounds of their being biliterate. They also admitted that literacy was much more appealing when it took into consideration aspects of their Latina identity to develop their Spanish literacy as well. The instructional component did help students in their display of bilingual and biliterate knowledge and experiences. The researcher attributed this increase in students' involvement to both the cultural relevance and the linguistic sensitivity of the instruction (p.995-96).

Jimenez's view of identity in his theoretical framework includes the positions of two scholars: Ferdman (1990) who conceived identity embedded in an individual's membership in a community with some effects on his becoming literate. These consequences have to do with either the strengthening or weakening of the individual identity. Brodkey's (1992) perspective, on the other hand, sees the educational setting as the promoter of mainstream discourse that may either alienate or silence the views of minority students. Consequently, teachers and

researchers need to be alert to act against discourse that neglects the views of minority students.

Jiménez claims that there are no very clear examples of instructional practices that somehow operationalize identity; however, he does find that the inclusion of perspectives from the students' heritage language is a factor in mobilizing their literacy practices. Here we are confronted with the quintessential clash between theoreticians and practitioners which is customary of researchers and teachers in education.

I think that teachers cannot realistically expect that theoretical reasoning be translated into actual teaching actions all the time. What they need to think and reflect on is how their dispositions towards teaching and learning need to be permeated by the idea that the classroom must try, by all possible means, to be inclusive. This inclusivity may be along the lines of ethnicity, gender, cognitive capacity, or language ability. Furthermore, there has to be a serious consideration on how the class setting is constantly triggering acts of identity that incorporate the above elements that are essential for the students' well-being in the classroom.

In a study entitled "Speaking personalities in Primary School Children's L2 Writing," Maguire and Graves (2001) used L2 students' journal writing to study the relationship between L2 writing and identity constructions. The researchers wanted to investigate this relationship with constructs such as knowledge, agency, and identity construction that were tied to the following research questions: (1) Is there evidence that bilingual children understand the literacy systems, their values, and their demands of the contexts in which the children find themselves? (2) What does the children's journal writing reveal about the personal and social significance of their choices and interpretations with regard to a task representation? (3) In a classroom-based task like journal writing, how do discourse choices mark the social construction of bilingual children's identities and subject positions? (p.565)

The participants were three Muslim immigrant girls attending a dual-track (L1 English-L2 French) elementary school in a high-immigrant area in Montreal, Canada. Heddie and Sadda were both Iranian girls; Emma was from Indonesia. All families had literacy practices that integrated Persian, Arabic, English, and Javanese in the case of Emma. Some French teachers also took part in the study, and their views on writing were along the lines of the expressivist writing pedagogy. The instruments of data collection consisted of classroom observations, children's interactions outside the classroom, and samples of their journal writing which were the most important elements for analysis. The researchers also interviewed children, parents, teachers, and principals at the school. There was also a very close observation of "children's patterns of language development over a three-year period, their individualistic styles of using languages and their evaluative observations of their biliteracy" (p.570).

The data analysis of the journal writing showed that students developed different ways to represent themselves in writing style as well as individual considerations on social negotiations in their lives. Perhaps one of the most interesting reflections the researchers came up with was the sense of agency the students demonstrated when they assert that:

as classroom-based studies have shown that discursive teaching practices can define what is or is not possible, but our results demonstrate that the three children constructed their own activity as they defined who they were, what they could do, and ultimately what their textual representations conveyed to themselves and their interlocutors. They themselves chose mediational means and decided what words and discourses to appropriate and reaccent to their own intentions in particular contexts. (p.588)

One aspect that was very important for the researchers was the concept of voice which they drew from Bakhtin's dialogism where individuals produce utterances that express who they are in both social and cultural terms. The researchers used the expression *speaking personalities* following the Bakhtinian idea of individuals' speaking consciousness that is essential in identity construction. Maguire and Graves' conclusions are also oriented towards the reformulation of L2 research and practice in which it is fundamental to study the sociocultural contexts of language learning and the development of discursive practices of bilingual students in their classrooms and their communities (p.587). The perspective on identity the researchers developed for this particular project is related to the concept of speaking personalities within a four dimensional model that includes appropriation, social actions, participation, and presentation of self (p.568).

*Appropriation* has to do with children's subjectivity, and how they assume mediational means such as language which shape their thinking activities. *Social actions* have to do with the children's participation in communities of practice. This dimension sees the children as actors in their social milieu. *Participation* is evinced through the children's access to the use of mediational tools that grant them access to social practices and their evaluative view of how much room they have to maneuver within those practices.

*Presentation of self* is the domain where children position themselves through language interactions with interlocutors. Children's choices of language and expressions are a vehicle for them to establish themselves as members of the communities which they will be part of.

The above framework has a series of significant elements to understand the complex relationship between literacy and identity for several reasons. First, literacy has to be considered as a multilayered experience that surpasses cognitive activity. Second, literacy events will always involve a transaction where interlocutors' identities need to be considered

beyond the immediate circumstances of readers and writers. Last, literacy will always be present in educational settings; consequently, teachers and educational authorities at large need to understand the evolutionary nature of their students' identities and notions of the self over the course of their students' school lives.

Another study that sheds lights on the relationship between identity construction and literacy was conducted by Xuemei Li (2007) whose research was concerned with the connection between culture, identity, and beliefs of second language learners and writing. The researcher examined both, what she referred as, to the macro-process of learning to write and the micro process, the (physical) process of writing itself. She formulated her research questions as follows: (1) What is the interplay of culture, writer identity, and learner beliefs in the product, micro-process, and macro-process of ESL writing? (2) How do writer identity and learner beliefs influence the way ESL writers compose and learn to compose academic texts? (3) How do learner beliefs evolve, and how can this evolution be facilitated? (p.47)

The participants were a first-year undergraduate student from China and some students from East-Asian countries participating in an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) class in a Canadian university. The class teacher also took part in the project as a legitimate stakeholder in the process of working with students' L2 literacy development.

Xuemei Li used a qualitative case study approach in which the student from China was Case A, and the group of students from the EAP class was Case B. The instruments employed in the process of the data collection for Case A were field notes, interviews, and class assignments. For Case B, the instruments were class observations and interviews. The results were obtained by closely analyzing the development and reconstruction of writer identity in both the macro and micro processes for Case A. With regards to Case B, the interpretation was

based on “how the students' cultural beliefs about learning and writing evolved and played a role in shaping their identity in the processes of composing and learning to compose” (p.50).

Information from the data collection and analysis Xuemei Li conducted as part of her study also helps to answer her initial research question. Regarding the first question on the relationship between cultural influence on writer identity and learner beliefs, the study showed the effect of L1 culture in the development of writers' identities and their beliefs as learners. The relationship between macro and micro processes in question 2 presented itself with elements that interacted in different ways as learners assumed their assignments. In the evolution of learners' beliefs, there was a process of change in which students had to alter their previous ideas about writing. Nonetheless, there were still moments in which students wonder in the junctures of their first and second culture requiring their teachers' motivation to work in the reconfiguration of their writing (p.58).

The researcher's conclusions point to the need to do more research on the relationship between culture, identity, and learners' beliefs as they are closely interwoven to shape learners' ideas about writing and learning. The particular perspective of the researcher regarding identity is based on the construct of identity as a multiple notion in which the cultural, the personal, and the ethnic are present. The researcher also examines identity as a writing precursor that integrates “the writer's life history and sense of roots, self-representation, and sense of authority in the text, and limitations on possibilities for selfhood” (p.47).

I consider Li's research to be of real significance for my own work on bilingual literacy. Writing encapsulates several elements of a student's evolution not only in academic aspects but also in personal ones. A written product of any sort is the embodiment of a person's sense of self, the measurement of authorial voice, and the reification of a person's

sense of agency. Unfortunately, when the written product is just a product, it will be evaluated and categorized as very competent, competent, or incompetent. This grading and labeling of the written work will get through people's skins and become part of their identities not only as scholars but as human beings. The above situation again brings up the conceptions of school work and literacy that rely heavily on cognitive views of learning. These conceptions are put to the test in the following study by Rymes and Pash (2000) who tried to elucidate the tension between cognition and identity in a language classroom. The researchers describe the relationship between cognition and identity as tense. They conducted a study with a second language learner in a mainstream second-grade classroom in a school in a rural area of Georgia. The student's class participation was some sort of performance or language games that the researchers termed as "passing as knowing" so that he could sustain his identity before his classmates. Their research question looked at the teacher-student interaction based on the question-answer exchanges.

Rymes and Pash wanted to set apart the cognitive and identity aspects of the responses elicited from students as a result of the teacher's questioning routines. The study is about Rene, a second language learner in a mainstream second-grade classroom. Rene's teacher was a white, monolingual English speaker with a successful teaching career with children. Nonetheless, she was having doubts about her teaching with Rene due to his difficulties in reading and the rising concerns over his learning abilities (p.287).

The researchers collected data from videotaped observations of Rene's performance in reading groups as well as some of his interactions in other contexts where they noticed Rene's tendency to monitor his peers for patterns to give answers. The researcher also conducted interviews with Rene's teacher, mother, and the child himself. The data gathered from the interviews with Rene and the videotaped reading sessions helped researchers to have an idea



of Rene's class performance. Some preliminary analysis showed the researchers the following information:

Rene's attempt to blend in is crucial to his language development because it affects his participation in classroom literacy events. Indeed, his "I've done that!" refrain was his way of "doing 'being student,' " of figuring out how to be ordinary. It was his way of "passing," and he became quite successful at it. But in the process, he was missing out on other learning. (p.287)

The authors' conclusion was that Rene was so excessively concerned with echoing his peers' responses that he would not pay attention to his actual understanding of the lesson. Some possible explanations for this behavior have to do with Rene's reluctance to appear different in his class. One example of this is Rene's reluctance to talk about his background in Costa Rica. He always needed to somehow replicate his classmates' experiences even if he did not have the conditions to do so. Another aspect has to do with the lack of familiarity with the questioning and reasoning that come from experiences that require not only routine answers but also personal input.

The study anticipates some implications for the ramifications of literacy practices that compromise students' social identity. The researchers stress the idea that teachers need to develop awareness of the implications of students' responses beyond the content of their answers in order to see what the repercussions of this are for their discursive practices. The last ideas of the study are devoted to emphasizing the importance of social identity in academic learning and the primacy of this very same learning in shaping students identities.

Rymes and Pash's explanation of identity is taken from Sacks (1975) concept "doing being ordinary" which visitors to the United States enact as they gradually integrate themselves into society (p.279). In other words, people are always working on the

construction of their identity so that they can pass as ordinary people by exercising behavioral and linguistic formulas. They extrapolate the idea of doing “being ordinary” with doing “being student” with the contradictions that these ideas may produce in the sense of the advantages or disadvantages of performing classroom social routines.

The present review on the relationship between identity and literacy benefit from the above study since it questions the dangers of classroom literacy routines that may ignore or eschew students’ sources of input in many aspects such as their own personalities as children, and bilingual students. It does not matter if students are engaged in “objective” academic writing in science, mathematics, or social studies; there are issues of identity being displayed as students try to make sense of literacy events in these content areas. These issues are also contributors to how learners see themselves as budding scientists, mathematicians, or social scientists with the corresponding repercussions in their school performance.

The development of the present chapter has showed different views on identity and its connections with literacy development. It is common to see that identity is not a static idea related to people’s identification. In fact, literacy is essential in giving dynamism to the construct of identity that goes beyond the roles of individuals as students or writers. Both concepts, identity and literacy, are mutually shaping people’s worldviews that are not exclusively anchored around the commonly held belief of cognitive processes in today’s high achieving schools.

### **Metaphors of Literacy and Identity**

The many views on identity and literacy are best gathered by Birr Moje et al. (2009) in a fascinating article that reviews the metaphors of literacy and identity in history and contemporary research. The authors start by questioning how identity influences the way scholars think about literacy, and how literacy perspectives influence the way people think

about identity. The authors explore the historical development of identity constructions in history and research and their relationship with equally evolving views on literacy. They analyze the concept of identity as difference, sense of self/subjectivity, mind or consciousness, narrative, and position (p.416). After conceptualizing each one of these perspectives, the authors discuss their relationship with literacy studies from the five aforementioned perspectives.

**Identity as Difference.** Identity as difference is perhaps one of the most common ways to understand identity; the concept of identity as difference is what sets people apart from a group of individuals with a lot of commonalities. Social psychological studies consider identity as representations of the self in the world. Such representations are the result of different experiences in a group so that the individual develops a sense of membership. There is also a tendency for individuals to express a stable idea of identity in different contexts which in turn tend to become stable as well. Sociocultural views on identity as difference advance on the notion of identity as being negotiated and constantly changing depending on an individual's location and discursive practices.

Literacy studies framed within the metaphor of identity as difference evinced the explicit idea of working with individuals' literacy practices to match the expectations of specific group norms. It is clear again the struggle between culture and identity in which the former privileges particular practices and the latter advocates the differentiation of those practices. Nonetheless, the literacy studies under the view of difference do recognize the role of the recognition of others but leave the space for people to identify or not with those canonical practices (p.421).

**The Identity as a Self-Metaphor.** The identity as self-metaphor emphasizes how people develop their own sense of self. The idea of self has been part of cognitive psychology as it has tried to understand constructs such as self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-regulation (p.422). However, the work of Erikson (1994) and Mead (1934) deserves some attention since they both researched the construct of self in relation to identity. On the one hand, Erikson's idea of self was a concept people achieved in their lives in a somehow linear manner that ended in a state of some sort of maturity. As a matter of fact, most of his work was with adolescents as individuals developing their identities. Erikson acknowledged that this construction took place in the contexts of individuals' interactions with others. On the other hand, Mead's idea of self was that individuals interacted with others, but the result of these interactions was not predictable; she viewed the self in action as individuals adjusted to social circumstances based on their awareness of these situations.

More recent views of self are not related to psychological views; these ideas are more attuned to sociological ideas such as Bourdieu's concept of habitus in which individuals display a series of interactions in different social practices. The idea of self appears as an effect of individuals' participation in those practices.

The literacy studies conducted through the conduit of identity as self-metaphor presuppose some of the perspectives outlined above, yet Birr Moje et al. consider that this view may be assumed if we consider individuals free from the constraints of their social settings in which there are unquestionably issues of power relations. Both scholars found that regardless the theoretical perspectives from Erikson, Mead, and Bourdieu, the idea of self was "consciously built by individuals" (p.425).

**Identity as Consciousness.** Identity as mind or consciousness is related to the ideas of Karl Marx in social materialistic terms where individuals shape realities through their activities, and in doing so, also shape their consciousness. Vygotsky and activity theorists took these ideas and viewed them through the sociocultural spectrum. The Vygotskian version of consciousness had to do with the individuals' mastering of tools such as language and symbol systems to develop their thinking progressively as they gain control over tools and systems that allow them to expand their thinking to higher levels (p.425). Even though there is not a clear connection between identity and consciousness in Vygotsky's terms, his work seems to hint that individuals come into being as they progress in their levels of consciousness that happens as a process of continuous interactions between mental abilities and cultural patterns of organization.

The literacy studies from the perspective of mind or consciousness metaphor explore the ideas of consciousness (higher levels of thinking) development that individuals experience as they master mediational tools such as reading and writing. Birr Moje et al. review this idea against the background of the present "new literacy" in which media, print, visuals, and technology have been redefined. Thus, they demand new activities, new tools, and new minds to be able to redefine literacy itself. This teaching/learning scenario will call for a conception of a new subject whose agency will help him construct his own reality based on his own sense of subjectivity and identity (p.426).

**Identity as Narrative.** The basic premise of identity as narrative is that identities are constructed through stories told or written by people about their experiences in different walks of life. The authors of the present review cite the work of Mishler (1999; 2004) who claims that identities are stories people tell about themselves which may change in time. They also cite Wortham's (2005) similar views of identities as stories, yet he argues for a shaping of

narrative depending on the circumstances and the actors involved in the act of narrative elicitation. Sfard & Prusak (2005) make a much bolder claim equating identities to stories. The reason they give is that identities are reifications of activity and experience. They come to these conclusions analyzing stories of people's school accomplishments. In a similar vein, Bamberg (2005) and Georgakopoulou (2006) agree that identities are stories, but they go on to argue that scholars should abandon the canonical narratives or "grand narratives" to explore small narratives of people in their everyday lives. In sum, they assert, stories that are constantly moving and positioning individuals in relation to circumstances and to others. Similarly, in the field of rhetoric, Ellen Cushman (2008) argues for a rhetoric of self-representation that allows people from various ethnic backgrounds to develop narratives of the self to show "their audiences the cultural logics and the rhetoric exigencies informing these constructions." (p.327). I consider Cushman's ideas about a rhetoric of self-representation relevant in bilingual and /or bicultural settings since there are constant encounters of languages and cultures which have the possibility of being felicitous or infelicitous depending on the understandings of such encounters.

Birr Moje et al. argue that the literacy studies from the metaphor of identity as narrative are helpful in two particular ways. While it is true that these studies allow identity to be seen as an evolving idea throughout time; it is also true that, "they offer the possibilities to see how people recognize others or respond to others' recognition via telling their stories" (p.429). Georgakopoulou sees in these doing and representing identities an important element to view the influence of identity on literate practices of individuals as they engage in these practices with different people and communities usually changing the positions of their telling.

**Identity as Position.** The work on the conception of identity as position can be summarized as the individuals' actions in different scenarios and circumstances of time and place where they are asked to interact. Their responses and attitudes will account for their particular positions whose possible outcomes may be of either acceptance or resistance. The idea of laminations taken from the work of Holland and Leander (2004) is important for understanding the concept of identity as being a multilayered concept that takes forms depending on the individuals' positioning in the world. In sum, what Birr Moje et al. define identity as "layers of positions (i.e., as laminations) carries with it the histories (hence, the overlap with the concept of histories in person, or even possibly, of *habitus*) of past experiences" (p.430).

In literacy studies in which identity is viewed as positioning, the review of studies points to the idea that literacy may be considered as instrumental to how people make meanings; however, the nature of literacy can experience a shifting of positions where the ideas of agency and interpellation may take the forms of accommodation and/or resistance. To sum up, the literacy as positioning metaphor will be always present itself as individuals enact acts of identity and subjectivity that are constantly changing as positions.

The concluding remarks made by Birr Moje et al. support the idea that identity is a concept that is shifting, multiple, and social. They argue that these ideas on identity have a distinct influence on how literacy is taught and learned:

Literacy-and-identity studies can also offer insights into practice, particularly for educators working within a sociopolitical milieu that casts literacy learning (and all learning) as a matter of accrual of skills and information. Developing academic literacies—or any kind of learning, for that matter—of necessity involves shifting identities, whether as a requirement for the learning to occur or as a result of the

learning (Lave & Wenger,1991; Wenger, 1998). In contrast to a decontextualized, autonomous skills approach, an academic literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998) is “concerned with meaning making, identity, power and authority and foreground[s] the institutional nature of what ‘counts’ acknowledge in any particular academic context” (Street, 2009, p. 3) ( p.433).

The above review of identity studies much scope for educational stakeholders to promote initiatives that give serious consideration to the promotion of individuals’ exploration of their identities. Thus, the value of such an endeavor is worth assuming for students in school, especially in the configuration of students as literate beings with a very good sense of their social and personal circumstances.

The following studies are focused on the idea of subjectivity. These studies view this concept in terms of discursive practices performed in literacy activities in the classroom. It is important to point out that the discursive practices of individuals occur in an environment that is permeated with issues of power, authority, and personal relationships. As a matter of fact, these studies seem to confirm Faigley’s (1992) reflections on the nuances among composition pedagogies. He viewed the expressivist, the cognitivist, and social-epistemic positions as “the subjectivities the teachers wanted their students to occupy” (p.17).

### **Subjectivity**

Sara McCarthey (1998) developed a study in which she explores various subjectivity constructions of students in a classroom setting. Her research questions were the following: (1) How are students socially constructed within classroom settings? (2) How do social class, race, ethnicity, culture and gender influence student interaction? (3) In what ways might the task and classroom context influence student interaction? (p.126)



The participants in the study were three students from Hispanic and American backgrounds, from a group of third-fourth graders in a southwestern city school. Both the teachers and students' parents took part in the study since the sources of data collection included interviews, observations, and students' journals and classroom assignments such as worksheets. The literacy practices and contexts of Rosa, Matthew, and Andy provided some of the data to help figure out the concept of subjectivity in a classroom setting. The events in which the students' literate performances and interactions took place were a small group talk, the *Jeopardy!* game, and a small group read aloud.

Rosa was a Hispanic fourth-grader whose response to the above scenarios varied from being shy in the first setting, to becoming more vocal and involved in the other two activities. Matthew was also from a Hispanic background, and his behavior in the tasks also varied from being more participatory in large group settings, where he was assisted by the teacher, to remaining quiet in the game activity where he was required to offer his individual answers without support. Andy was a European American student who participated actively in both large class activities and the game format exhibiting his cultural capital. Yet he did not have a domineering role in the group since his views were either accepted or rejected alternatively in the development of class tasks (p.155).

The discussion of the results by McCarthey indicated that students' participation varied depending on a number of factors such as the immediate social context, the group composition, the nature of the task, and their positions regarding gender, social class, and ethnicity (p.155). The theoretical lenses the author used to make sense of her research approach did not offer a clear answer to what motivated the changes in positions (subjectivities) as students took part in class dynamics. A plausible explanation for these changes in subjectivities was based on the demands of social settings. Rosa, for instance, was

more participatory in the consensus activity due to her Hispanic background which in turn did not play a major role in playing the *Jeopardy!* game. Matthew's difficulties in reading and writing were more salient in the game than in the consensus task. Andy's responses as a boy were much more prominent in the game than in the small group read aloud.

The conclusions of the study suggest that both teachers and researchers should consider individuals as social beings in constant evolution. They also propose looking at individuals in social circumstances where personality traits or labels such as outgoing, extroverted, or timid may be limiting or misleading in the understanding of those complex individuals.

The position on subjectivity assumed by the researcher in this study stems from the poststructuralist views by Fiske (1987) who asserted that "subjectivity is the result of social relationships" (p.49). McCarthey also cites the views by Giroux & Aranowitz (1991) that emphasize the effect of circumstances on how people present themselves discursively. But perhaps the view of Walkerdine (1990) provides a much more encompassing view of subjectivity for the purposes of this research. Walkerdine argues that subjectivity should be considered not in the singular but in the plural form and prefers to refer to "subjectivities", so the concept is not confused with the idea of role(s). He affirms that "subjectivities vary across and within social interactions and are constructed within particular discursive practices" (p.129).

The construction of discursive practices brings up the idea of literacy or literacies, and how they are essential in helping students construct and reconstruct their subjectivities within specific classroom contexts. This reflection may be helpful to elucidate students' particular preferences for their studies.

Another study related to the idea of subjectivity was developed by Beth Howell (2008). Her research project aimed to investigate how boys and girls in secondary school in England

developed aspects of their writing such as “thematic content, plot and structure, complexity of character relationships, focus on place, style, narrative voice, and implicit or explicit relationship with the reader” (p.515). The background of this exploration is closely tied to the theoretical concepts of gender divide, subjectivity, and authorship. The study also sought to reexamine the socially constructed gender assumptions of boys and girls and their influence on their school performance, in this particular case literacy performance.

The research took place in a secondary school in England with a sample population of 11 boys and 10 girls whose ages ranged from 12 to 13 years old and who had varying levels of literacy development. The data collection procedures included students’ participation in literary lessons and their development of a composition assignment followed by individual conversations about student writing that were intended to reduce the burden of social peer pressure from the classroom setting.

The research findings indicated that there was a common sense of audience and narrative framework in both boys and girls. There was also a similar choice for topics such as loss, grief, death, and adventure to name a few. Yet boys preferred male characters and girls female ones. Nevertheless, Howell argues that although some of the students writing may suggest gender preferences, there were boys’ stories that included aspects such as reflection, feelings, and relationships among characters (p.520).

Howell concludes that her study challenged gender based assumptions to view boys and girls writing. She points out that the presence of elements of reflection, feelings, and relationships in both boys’ and girls’ stories are an indication that students’ subjectivities do not necessarily correspond to what people general think of boys or girls. Finally, the author asserts that both reading and writing affect how people think of themselves; consequently, there have to be educational efforts oriented towards reviewing the mechanistic view of

literacy which reduces the potential for an educational environment to promote a positive sense of identity, equality, and democracy among students.

Howell's theoretical perspective on identity, subjectivity, and the writer is built upon Butler's (1990) identity as performance, Burke's (1995) notion that the writer has an interest in the reader and engages in an exercise of authorship that is both situated and contextualized, and Benhabib's (1992) concept of contextual situatedness where the growing "child develops a narrative of the world in which he is both the author and the actor" (p.515).

In a third study on subjectivity entitled "Performativity in the Bilingual Classroom: The Plight of English Learners in the Current Reform Context", the researcher Mariana Pacheco (2010) studies the reading practices of one bilingual third grade classroom in a state-designated "high achieving" elementary school in southern California. She examines three classroom events through Butler's (1999) concept of performativity which encompassed the role of ideologies embodied by an institutionalized bilingual teacher's authority, on the one hand, and by the students' embodiment of defeat and failure at this early stage of their school lives (p.75). The researcher carried out a yearlong ethnographic study of some classroom events in which she wanted to get data to establish the influence of "the ways language policy, school accountability, and reading policy at the state and federal levels affected the teaching and learning of reading in bilingual third grade classrooms" (p.77). Pacheco used participant-observation methods such as video recordings to document reading practices in both English and Spanish classes. She also used in-depth interviews with key institutional personnel in order to gather their views on the federal policies regarding language, reading, and accountability in the school system.

The research analyses considered three events that took place in Mr. Saunders' reading class. The classroom teacher was a Euro-American bilingual teacher who had been recently

transferred to the school which had gained some recognition for its bilingual program. Nonetheless, the school was immersed in the hard pressing State mandated policies of high-stakes testing and educational rankings. All these issues were part of the staff–room small talk which influenced the way they viewed their classes. Within these circumstances, Mr. Saunders exhibited ideas and classroom behaviors in accordance with the ideology of the cognitive deficiency of English language learners based on assumptions about the learners’ backgrounds and family circumstances.

Mr. Saunders’ thinking revealed he held these views through some discursive practices of his teaching. On one occasion he made some remarks that pointed out that his students’ family literacy practices were somehow deficient or problematic because many of them acknowledge they did not have a dictionary at home. On another occasion, he framed the proximity of a report card day in a classroom event as his opportunity to “get back” at a student for his missing homework. The researcher asserts that “Mr. Saunders in essence alerted his ELs to potential retribution through the report card. Accordingly, this routine event revealed the socially (and politically) complex nature of report cards and schools for particularly for vulnerable students like Jacobo, as well as Mr. Saunders’s institutionally legitimated authority to exercise a relative degree of power over students’ constructed academic identities” (p.85).

Another incident happened at the expense of the same student, Jacobo, who did not bring his homework signed by his parents. This time Mr. Saunders involved the class by asking them the extent of Jacobo’s punishment for his lack of compliance with the signed card.

Pacheco finds these events compelling since they show how Mr. Saunders involved students' bodies and generated a degree of excitement among some students at the expense of marginalized others. In this case:

Mr. Saunders facilitated performative acts during Jacobo's punishment such that the distribution of bodies across classroom spaces sustained and reified asymmetrical power relations and institutional practices (Butler, 1999). Jacobo in turn evidenced the cumulative effects of this marginalization in his embodiment of discomfort—and I would posit shame—in his downward gaze, the bobbing of his head, and the slow swaying movements he made walking to the desk located farthest away from everyone. (p.87)

The researcher's conclusions illustrate how social practices permeate literacy events in which there are constant enactments of power relations that have an effect on the students, especially those who may appear academically vulnerable as tends to happen in bilingual classrooms with diverse learners. Pacheco's conclusions also reflect the existence of classrooms with vulnerable teachers who encounter equally vulnerable students to face the complexity of bilingual teaching and learning especially with the current demands for accountability at all levels in the educational spectrum.

The researcher's view of subjectivity as performativity –that is, the discursive construction of subjectivities, exposes an unbalanced relation in which there is a clash of subjectivities of disadvantaged students on one side, and the high-achieving, successful teacher on the other.

This study is very relevant for the purposes of my own research because the setting is not so unlike that of the conditions of many high-achieving bilingual schools in Colombia that are also faced with the pressure of rankings and high-stakes tests. According to the Ministry

of Education of Colombia, students from different levels of education beginning in elementary school are required to take tests on different subject areas. Schools receive feedback from the Ministry of Education and the results are used for internal and external purposes. At the high school level, the tests results are published yearly in a ranking that determine the top schools in the country.

A source of concern is also the subjectivity positions that schools and teachers may assume with students who have linguistic, cognitive, or emotional difficulties. It is not very unusual to find families and students who have left bilingual education because of the deficit ideologies of high-achieving schools that cannot deal with diverse learners not in terms of ethnic or linguistic background but in terms of learning styles and learners' aspirations or even trajectories.

A feature that merits attention in this review of the literature on subjectivity is the idea of voice because both its theoretical and research treatment liken this concept with a lot of the elements that are present in discussions of subjectivity as discursive positions that will help people configure their identity (ies). Thus, it is worth considering the notion of voice as the establishment of authorial voice as one of the factors in writers' identities.

A related study on the issue of voice was developed by Hirvela & Belcher (2001) who explored the voices and identities of L2 writers at graduate level in a university in the United States. They studied voice as a problematic concept that L2 adult writers had to struggle with in a demanding L2 context. In sum, the researchers,

tried to identify where, in students' experiences and attitudes, voice-related dilemmas have been most dominant and what strategies the students have employed to cope with the changing demands of the rhetorical situations they have faced in moving from being professional writers in their L1 to novice writers in academic English. (p.91)

The participants were three doctoral students enrolled in an American university. All of them were from South American countries: Venezuela, Peru, and Brazil. The research orientation was case study methodology and the instruments of data collection were interviews with both the subjects and their advisors, and some samples of their academic writing.

Fernando was a 40 year-old Venezuelan doctoral student in mechanical engineering. He had an extensive career in his home country that included working as a professor at a university and a lot of academic writing in journals in his L1. Even though he handled the technical vocabulary related to his field of knowledge, he was placed in an ESL writing class at the university. He did voice concerns about his identity as a scholar based on the restructuring of his writing in English. Nonetheless, he was aware of his process of adding a new perspective to his identity by working in his L2.

Jacinta was a Peruvian doctoral student in agricultural economics. She had also done some publishing in Spanish, but had not tried to do so in English. She voiced similar views about her academic status from being a recognized professor in Peru versus being an international student in the States. She also mentioned the idea of reclaiming her status when she returned to her home country. However, more than that, she had difficulty establishing her voice in English compared to her already recognized voice in her native Spanish.

Carmen was a Brazilian student who was developing her masters and then doctoral studies in agricultural education in English. The case of Carmen was very interesting for the purposes of the study since she had worked for about twenty years as a print journalist and had extensive experience in writing and editing in Portuguese. She came to graduate school with an already established and recognized voice in her native language. In fact, she characterized her issues of voice and self-representation as a struggle or a composite of many mini-struggles (p.99).



The findings that Hirvela & Belcher offered in their study had to do with the complexity of issues raised by the participants in the project. Variables such as the students' background as well as their prior experiences in academia and their writing needed to be taken into consideration if voice was to be regarded as more than some sort of teaching particularity to an interpretive device in itself (p.103).

The researchers' theoretical orientation on voice is drawn from different scholars, yet they recognize Bowden's (1999) perspective of voice through the metaphor of creating a persona with feelings and senses behind her words (p.85). They maintained this idea throughout the development of their research process and as part of their conclusions they found "that we need greater emphasis on trying to locate the writerly person, the identities and self-representations, "behind the written words" of our students if we are to assist them meaningfully in their voicing" (p.105).

I find this study of particular relevance for my project because it brings into consideration the prevalent notion of academic literacy as disconnected from what writers may experience individually in an attempt to give some sense of "scientific" objectivity to writing in academia, yet it raises important reflections that will allow writers to actually develop their sense of identity and authorial voice in their fields of work, in this particular study in engineering and agricultural science.

The remaining section of this chapter is devoted to summarizing studies about literacy and agency with second language learners together with the analysis of the researchers' viewpoints on agency for their research purposes. The review of these studies suggests that agency is also constrained by the students' social circumstances. They also discuss the strong connections between the classroom or the school literacy with the world outside school in

which students will actually exert autonomous control of their literacy knowledge to be part of society.

### **Agency**

The studies that follow address the issue of agency as a research concept; they emphasize how learners are able to use language resources, particularly literacy, within the possibilities and limits of their social settings. One of these studies entitled “Exploring Biliteracy: Two Student Case Examples of Writing as a Social Practice” by Luis C. Moll et al. (2001) illustrates how bilingual children develop their biliteracy within the particular circumstances of their school settings. The researchers worked with two bilingual students: one in kindergarten and the other in third grade. For the first learner, they studied how the student capitalized on her incipient knowledge of literacy to interact with others symbolically as a “cultural agent” (p.437). The case study with the third grade learner focused on “how she is able to read in one language and write about what she reads in the other; how she uses her lived experiences in one language to produce text in the other language; how she collaborates with another student in (deliberately) creating a new and bilingual text” (p.438).

This study followed a case study methodology and used field notes and students’ writing samples as data collection instruments. The first participant, Krystal, was a kindergarten student. The researchers pointed out that the kindergarten writing was oriented towards students creating meanings even if they could not do “conventional” writing. Most of the time, students were encouraged to explore their writing freely. Krystal was a Mexican-American girl who was asked about a text she had written. When she attempted to read it, she switched from sound to letter correspondence to syllabic reading in order to make the link between what she was “reading” and the number of letters she had jotted down. The researcher also asked a boy named Aaron to write a song for her which he did by paying

attention to the order of the letters in both English and Spanish. Both children showed that they attempted to give meanings to their writing. They were also aware of the possibilities to translate spoken language into written symbols. Finally, they were very aware that these negotiations of meanings through written texts happened due to their interactions with others in the immediate context.

The third grade student was Lupita who was biliterate in English and Spanish. Her writing included elements of conventional writing, but the researchers focused on the way Lupita used her literacy resources depending on special circumstances. The teacher offered specific guidelines, yet she allowed space for students to take risks. Lupita was engaged in the class activities by deliberately alternating her use of English and Spanish to develop the task the teacher had assigned or supervised; she even used both languages to complete a pair work written assignment. The observations on Lupita's work and classroom performance showed the deliberate use of language resources interchangeably. It also evinced the inclusion of both academic and social content in the students' assignments.

The researchers conclude that educators need to consider the flexible flux in becoming bilingual and biliterate. Moreover, they need to pay close attention to the relationship between literacy and aspects such as culture, society, and the institutions that define its character (p.447).

Even though Moll et al. do not talk explicitly about agency, there are a lot of elements of agency being displayed by the bilingual children in their case study. For example, they quote the work of Wells (1989) and Wolf (1990) whose ideas about literacy are in terms of "literate thinking," as those uses of language in which its symbolic potential is utilized as a tool for thinking, and "reflective literacy" where students consciously know literacy, and what it does for their lives in terms of how they can work and think (p.436). What is common to

these two points of view is the idea that literacy processes have to help children to find their potential as meditational resources and achieve both their purposes in school in terms of communication and academic accomplishment. In sum, these are two elements of agency that I strongly believe literacy should be all about in people's lives regardless of whether they are scholars or not.

Another study which focused on student agency was carried out by Heron (2003) with a group of struggling readers in a summer program in a suburban high school in the southeastern United States. The researcher sought to investigate what students valued about their schooling, and what "made them feel important as both classroom participants and contributors" (p.568). Heron's interviews with four ninth graders led her to understand requisite classroom conditions for student participation. Heron's study cites multiple opinions from these students suggesting that a great deal of their engagement in class activities had to do with their relationship with teachers. Nonetheless, this relationship needed to give them a sense of what the lessons were about.

The researcher was interested in studying agency since she believed that by working with struggling readers in class activities that require their active involvement and participation, these learners would eventually develop a sense of agency and satisfaction while working on their literacy skills.

Heron's study sought "to understand how low-achieving students and their teachers perceived choice and decision-making roles while participating in and preparing for inquiry based language arts activities." (p.569). As a matter of fact, the students were enrolled in an inquiry-based program oriented towards including students' perspectives on how they could relate their education with issues such as racism, violence, and other challenging situations in their environments.

Heron draws on the work of scholars such as Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain (1998) who defined agency as “a person’s capacity to act upon the world” (p.568). She also quotes the work of Paris, Wasik, & Turner (1996) and Johnston & Winograd (1985) who suggested that the difference between high and low achieving students has to do with their command of academic activities and their attitudes of either accomplishment or failure towards their activities.

The researcher used her daily observations, consulted the field notes taken after long conversations with the language arts teacher, and conducted some interviews with students who attended the program regularly. The analyses obtained from the different sources of data collection allow the researcher to determine some findings: First, students expect to have class time and opportunities to develop their ideas without being either judged or lectured by the teachers. Second, the allocation of both time and chances to contribute will in turn strengthen students’ sense of efficacy towards the subject. Third, these students also acknowledge the fact that they expect teachers to give learners practical strategies to become better learners.

Heron also discusses the sociocultural ideas of agency following Bakhtin’s ideas of dialogism that he defined as the mutual shaping between the individual values and desires with the social and cultural dynamics the person is immersed in. The researcher goes on to stress that:

Students, while able to change the direction of a lesson through their individual contributions, are nonetheless acting within particular expectations for classroom learning; these expectations might include taking turns during discussions, responding by essay to literature, or providing well-researched evidence for their claims. Their own thoughts and behaviors come into contact with long-standing expectations and

routines, which then shape the ways they interact with the classroom environment.

(p.569)

I think that Heron's study reflects what seems to be common practice in today's educational systems, especially when curricula are standardized so the conditions for teaching and learning are for the most part mandated. The above situation limits the possibilities for teachers and students to feel like real agents of change within their sociocultural settings. As a result, students' agency will depend largely on how much leeway teachers are also allowed to give them with the competing hard-pressing demands of school rankings and high-stakes testing.

These conflicts between the individual and the social rendered similar conclusions in a study developed by Norton and Toohey (2001) who investigated the construct of good language learning in which they documented the display of both cognitive and linguistic aspects by learners echoing SLA research. This time, however, they included sociocultural, poststructuralist, and feminist perspectives in order to view this phenomenon from a different angle. The researchers did not intend to disregard the fact that the social was present in earlier studies of SLA; nevertheless, it was subsumed in the idea of context which usually referred to what the external did to the individual. Norton and Toohey wanted to explore the differential approach to learning among good and bad learners, and what elements of these learners affected them to display either good or poor learning (p.308). The researchers' arguments were not around the learners' characteristics, their learning strategies, or their linguistic outputs. They wanted to research "the receptions of their actions in particular sociocultural communities" (p.308).

The researchers developed two qualitative studies that used journals, interviews, participant observation, and videotaping. Norton worked with adult immigrant women in

Canada. One of them was Eva who was the most successful student according to a variety of measurements. However, what was particularly interesting about Eva's good language learning had to do with the environment where she lived. She always spoke English in her neighborhood and had a job. Norton concludes that her success was due to her desire to negotiate entry in social networks in her workplace (p.313).

Toohey worked with a five-year old girl named Julie. She was an immigrant from Poland and had participated in a study where she had been observed for three years. The observations went from her kindergarten years to the end of second grade, and they were aimed at discovering how the children became participants in school activities (p.313).

The results of both studies demonstrated that the good language learning of these two individuals was related to the way they were received in their communities, either the workplace or the school. There were also differences since Eva had to do all her negotiation with her colleagues or boss who did not feel responsible for her inclusion or participation in the community. Unlike Eva, Julie had much more support in school since it was one of the responsibilities of her teachers to help her become a participant in the classroom.

The particular strategies that showed Eva's and Julie's agency in their communities had to do with the way they assume their identities and shape them according to their circumstances as the researchers assert "Eva, initially constructed as an ESL immigrant, sought to reposition herself as a multilingual resource with a desirable partner; Julie, initially constructed as an ESL learner, came to be seen as a nice little girl with allies" (p.318).

The researchers' discussion of agency is based on how learners gained access to their communities and used their intellectual social resources to broaden their inclusion by participating in different job -or school- related activities. Eva, for instance, participated in some conversations with coworkers based on her knowledge of European countries. Julie

used her knowledge of Polish to teach peers some words or her knowledge of school routines to help people in the classroom.

The conclusions of the above studies suggest that the classroom as a community and the teacher as the “manager” need to pay attention to what students’ bring as legitimate contributions to the learning scenarios. When students are given the chance to be contributors to the teaching-learning experience, there will be plenty of opportunities for them to exert their agency or at least to mobilize the resources for doing so.

The present discussion on agency in children’s literacy practices is also researched by Anne Haas Dyson (2001) in an insightful article entitled “Where are the childhoods in childhood literacy? An exploration in outer (school) space”. Her research intended to determine the qualities of childhood these days due to the changing cultural practices in which children are immersed and where they have to continuously recontextualize their practices especially in literacy. The researcher focuses on “key events from two children’s case histories to illustrate how recontextualization processes (i.e. processes of transporting cultural material across social boundaries) undergirded developmental pathways into school literacy” (p.9).

The researcher spent a year doing observations, document collection, and audiotaping sessions in an urban primary school in the San Francisco Bay area. She documented the literacy development of Denise and Noah paying particular attention to how these children recontextualized their practices to connect with the social world of their childhood. This particular social world they brought to the classroom had to do with elements from their popular culture such as sports, media, music, and films.

The researcher gives examples of how these children used the cultural resources available to them and integrated them not only in their composing practices but also in their class performance. She describes school events in which Denise and Vanessa played “radio



stars” and changed the lyrics of songs they learned with their own ideas or even altered the rhythm to fit their musical preferences, which in the case of these girls was rap music. In a similar vein, Noah takes an official classroom text and uses the narrative to frame a new story in which he includes the popular video game character *Donkey Kong*.

Haas Dyson analyses two dimensions that co-exist in the classroom. One, the classroom institutional agenda to engage students in school practices to conform to the school ethos, curricula, beliefs, and goals. Another, the presence in the classroom of the personal resources that students bring with them and purposefully use in their school lives. As a result, students manifest a great deal of their identities and exert their agency.

The author concludes her research by questioning the hegemonic views of literacy as a linear process in which there is a lot of apprenticeship guided by expert teachers. She argues that literacy has to be considered as a space where children are asked to communicate their ideas on how they interpret the world and their social actions. Finally, she adds that:

The emphasis in this article on literacy learning as a process of text appropriation and recontextualization, rather than one of pure invention or diligent apprenticeship, recasts the usual developmental story. Rather than a kind of ancient Greek adventure, unfolding in a space removed from the local (Bakhtin, 1981), it becomes a (post)modern novel, actualized through children’s play with, and organization of, their everyday textual stuff. (p.36)

The idea of finding the childhoods in childhood literacies is a very thought-provoking endeavor to pursue especially if we are to discuss how much agency is left to children in our schools these days. I also anticipate that the notion of agency will be the most problematic for literacy instruction of standardized education. Nonetheless, this situation is not totally unheard of in other settings. As a matter of fact, a friend of mine (J. Schreyer, personal communication,

October, 2010) recently posted a very worrying facebook message in which she talked about a composition tutor who had read a student essay and suggested an additional paragraph to extend an idea. This suggestion was followed by the immediate student rebuttal arguing that she had to write a five-paragraph essay!

This chapter has reviewed empirical research conducted mainly in bilingual settings with English language learners where the issues of identity, subjectivity, and agency have become visible in educational practices more specifically literacy ones. In fact, the researchers I have cited tried to problematize the role of literacy as a powerful educational element to enact both social and cultural practices. Each one of the studies has touched upon the social, the cultural, and more importantly the individuals who exist amidst these three aspects. However, research has shown that many times the views of these individuals are misrepresented or eschewed in these processes that are fundamental for their lives not only as scholars but as children, sons, community members, churchgoers, and citizens of the world.

The Fordist educational model that seems to dominate today's world does not take into consideration the individual potential to make a difference. It requires people to get some literacy, numeracy, and technologic skills from their schooling from preschool to tertiary education and eventually join the workforce to punch the clock at eight and five every day; an educational model very much attuned to Frank Tashlin (1946) *The Bear that Wasn't* which I happened to read with my eight-year old son for a school assignment recently. One message that both my son and I gathered from this book was this idea of conformity with other people's ideas and actions without any possibility of scrutiny to say the least as it happened to the life and identity of the main character in the book. This standardized education is at odds with differentiated teaching and education for diversity where the individual has to be raised to face the challenges of the world. I am not talking about the individual in romantic terms even if

my language here implies such an approach. The individual that I am trying to describe here is a person who is central to the fabric of society. This individual's idea will bring about changes, points of view that many times need to question, to abolish, to create and/or recreate the very essence of the institutions in which this person participates as a student, scholar, or citizen.

Colombia is a country that is being eroded by a plague of corruption among top leaders, politicians, entrepreneurs, members of the justice system, and even the armed forces. Unfortunately, Colombian scholars from different fields and denominations have not taken a clear position to demand that both the government and the judicial system punish these criminals. Thus, impunity marches triumphantly in different walks of society regardless of whether the people belong to either private or public institutions.

My strong belief is that the educational milieu namely schools, colleges, institutes of technology, and universities must be havens for the so-called educated people to evince the problems or at least the contradictions in society in order to resolve them. For this to happen, it is necessary to use educational resources such as literacy to give students the criteria to progressively evolve as critical readers and writers within their environment and their circumstances. Literacy processes need to take into account the social aspects of individuals in order to become a truly educational project oriented and to have people whose identity enriches the diversity of the social spectrum, whose subjectivity imprints particular characteristics that contribute to the idea of consciousness, and whose agency allows these individuals to become active reformers of the world.

I also believe that literacy processes that incorporate the social setting with the good, the bad, and the ugly of today's world will help individuals to become educated in how to expand the good, change the bad, and come to terms with the ugly. Nonetheless, the social

setting that I envision in the education of literate individuals needs to include these people's ideas, points of view, feelings, aspirations, and even frustrations. A literacy perspective with the above elements as overriding criteria will be a literacy where identity, subjectivity, and agency will flourish freely. This very last aspect of freedom is missing in some educational efforts to have bilingually literate people in some schools in my home country, I am afraid.

The concepts of identity, subjectivity, and agency are discussed in more detail in the following chapter where they are essential elements for the rationale of the research methodology of the present study. Nevertheless, my initial concept definition of identity, subjectivity, and agency are related to the above reflection. For the sake of my case study research with elementary school children in a Colombian K-12 bilingual school, I assume *identity* to be constant in the sense of an individual construction through discursive practices. I consider that people enact their identities depending on the circumstances in which they are participating, and this participation is done through discursive practices.

*Subjectivity* takes the form of the discursive practices that individuals deploy in order to develop particular perspectives or take positions. For the effects of literacy, I would say that subjectivity is related to authorship and the levels of consciousness that children have as authors of their writing. Nonetheless, I also feel that subjectivity needs to be seen within the relationships of students and their teachers where issues of power and marginalization are likely to happen.

*Agency* is regarded in this research project in terms of how much choice students feel they have in their literacy work and to what extent their views and proposals are actually included on the official school agenda for literacy.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODS

“What you do about what you don’t know is, in the final analysis, what determines what you will know.” (Eleanor Duckworth, 1987)

In chapter one I made a case to integrate the concepts of identity, subjectivity and agency in both the theoretical orientation and the pedagogical practices of bilingual school literacy programs. This first chapter ended with the following research questions:

1. How do young language bilingual learners voice aspects of identity in their L1 and L2 l to initiate and/or maintain reading and writing processes in their classrooms?

This question aims at establishing how learners express aspects of their personal worlds through discursive practices as they engage in reading and writing practices either in the process of idea generation or the development of activities.

2. How do bilingual Spanish –English students account for aspects of subjectivity in their writing assignments?

This second question is oriented towards exploring how individuals integrate and articulate subjective (personal) positions or perspectives in their assignments. It seems interesting to see how they verbalize these processes in terms of their L1 and L2.

3. How much agency do bilingual Spanish-English students show in their reading and writing practices?

The third question explores students’ agency regarding how they assume their literacy practices beyond the accomplishment of specific class activities. Another interesting aspect to look at in students’ agency is to research how much leeway and choice they are able to exert as they engage in these various literacy activities in L1 and/or L2. Another matter which this

study will be concerned is determining the role literacy, as one of the most essential instruments of scholarly work, occupies a particular place in the students' academic lives.

In chapter two, I established the theoretical assumptions of the study which are intended to provide the rationale for theoretical foundations and pedagogical practices in second language literacy programs. The chapter also surveyed some empirical studies with ESL learners where the concepts of identity, subjectivity and agency emerged as essential in defining and developing literacy practices in different school settings. The discussion and conclusions of these empirical studies allowed me to define these constructs for the purposes of this study in the following terms:

#### *Identity*

I consider that people enact their identities depending on the circumstances in which they are participating in society, and this participation is done through discursive practices.

#### *Subjectivity*

Subjectivity takes the form of the discursive practices that individuals deploy in order to develop particular perspectives or take positions. For the effects of literacy, I would say that subjectivity is related to authorship and the levels of consciousness that children have as authors of their writing. Nonetheless, I also feel that subjectivity needs to be seen within the relationships of intersubjectivity among students and their teachers where issues of power and marginalization are likely to emerge.

#### *Agency*

Agency is regarded in this research project in terms of how much leeway and choice students feel they have in their literacy work and to what extent their views and proposals are actually included in the school's official agenda for literacy.

In this third chapter, I seek to establish the qualitative nature of my research. First, I position myself as a researcher within the perspective of postmodernism. Second, I discuss the status of knowledge to discern the epistemological direction of my research, particularly in the context of bilingual literacy in a private K-12 school in Colombia. Next, I describe the research site, the participants and the ethical considerations for conducting the study. Then, I state my research goals and briefly reveal my bias to help me both find and balance the boundaries of my role as a researcher and the implications of my study. After that, I explain my research design based on case study methodology. Finally, I describe the case study framework, and what I intend to do with the data that I gather from my individual cases. The chapter ends with a brief discussion on narrative inquiry and its relationship with the data collection techniques and analyses.

### **Positioning myself**

In order to effectively establish his claims, a researcher must first establish his view of reality in the context of his study and establish the assumptions on which this view is based. Here it is worth mentioning the struggles of researchers in the social sciences to achieve their status as scientists against the hegemonic views of research in terms of its scope and methodologies that scientists from fields such as mathematics, physics, and the natural sciences have maintained throughout the history of science. According to positivist scientists, reality is unitary and can be fragmented for its study through the scientific method by means of experimenting with variables and conducting quantitative analysis is customary. Taking an alternative view, there are pockets of researchers in the social sciences that do qualitative work. This research orientation tends to view reality as a multiple concept. Moreover, social

scientists try to present realities from the perspectives of those individuals considered to be a part of them.

Reality is a concept apparently easy to capture; however, it is slippery since the only possibility to have a glimpse of it is through a particular representation as a proof of knowledge construction in naturalistic research. Reality as unity, simplicity, or communicability is no longer available in society. In fact, the project of modernism as organic whole (Lyotard, 1984) has been challenged as part of the project of human thinking. Consequently, the ways to represent such reality and the rules to make such projects can no longer apply to the project of modernism. The view of a composite reality is much more embraced in a project that roots for multiplicity, complexity, and understanding in order to make sense of the world as a fragmented globality. Rubin & Rubin (2006) illustrate this situation as the postmodernist view, and they assert that:

postmodernists argue that neutrality is impossible because everyone has interests and attitudes that influence how topics are selected, what questions are deemed appropriate, how they are asked, and what means of analysis are considered appropriate. (p.27)

This study will be conducted through the interpretive lens of postmodern perspectives which consider that any attempt to do research needs to take into consideration the conditions of individuals immersed in the research process; such conditions have to do with issues such as race, gender, and other group relationships to name a few (Creswell, 8). These conditions are part of who these individuals are, and how they relate to the world. Moreover, this world is permeated with positions and discourses where either open or masked struggles for power and marginalization occur. Nevertheless, any research project that embraces postmodernist views has to be aware of what Gubrium and Holstein (2003) termed as the deprivilege of



hegemonic narratives or theories linked to the particular perspectives and interests of their storytellers (p.5).

In other words, postmodernist researchers work with the ideas of deconstruction and self-reflexivity. The former to challenge a writer's text to disclose hidden ideas behind his writing, and the latter to question the conscious use of language to sustain the legitimacy of his accounts.

I think that it is very relevant to pursue the many connections between social constructivism as a worldview and how these perspectives are echoed in fields such as education. I actually see my research for the most part as a project of education; such a project involves exploring some of the concepts suggested by Vygotsky in his reliance on the terms symbolic mediation and dialogism; these concepts are also at the heart of Bakhtin's work. However, the idea of dialogism in Bakhtin's ideas is much more compelling for me as it plays a fundamental role in what Warschauer and Ball (2004) defined as "ideological becoming," (p.5) a concept they had drawn from Bakhtin himself.

Becoming in terms of ideology is related to how individuals develop a sense of their own discourse by participating in relations and interactions with the discourses of others, interactions that are not free of sources of conflict since they may trigger issues of power and authority. I consider that a very likely follow up to my research will be the operationalization of these ideas in actual classroom approaches to subjects such as language arts, literature, and composition where issues of power and marginalization are present because of the hegemonic views that may be governing teaching and learning in such areas. I can take the case of English composition as an example of changes in trends that are ideologically formulated to support the case for writing pedagogies such as the cognitivist, expressivist, and social-epistemic. Another example is the conceptions around the teaching of language arts through

skill-based approaches such as phonics or more holistic ideas such as the whole language approach, the learning experience approach, or the genre-based pedagogy.

Understanding the world is one of the elements embedded in research, and it usually lends itself to the type of assertions people make about it and the reasons for making those statements. This situation takes the present discussion to what researchers determine as knowledge claims since one of the goals of research is to add knowledge, create it, or search to demonstrate the ‘truth’ depending on the interpretive framework in which researchers develop their work.

### **Status of Knowledge**

The review of studies in the preceding chapter demonstrated that the notion of identity has been viewed from both theoretical and empirical perspectives which seemed to agree that identity is a dynamic concept with the connotation individuals’ construction through discursive practices which largely depend on the context in which individuals are immersed. Subjectivity, on the other hand, was studied primarily as a series of discursive positions or perspectives. Such positions were not static either since they were prompted by the relationships between individuals, their peers and adults where issues of power and authority emerged and exerted their influence in the constitution of these individuals’ subjectivities. Agency was viewed as the way individuals could to exert control over the mediational possibilities of literacy, particularly writing. A common thread that ran through many of these studies suggested that these concepts were highly influenced by the individuals’ context; in many of them, the role of teachers was fundamental to how individuals, many of them English language learners, approach their schooling.

The notion of representation has an important impact on how people build their identities, how they assume subjective positions, and how they develop their agency as they

increasingly evolve in the control of their literacy as a fundamental element for both their scholarship and personal growth. This brings up one of the most common criticisms about education and how people are supposed to develop knowledge, competencies, and skills to assist them in their real lives outside their educational environments regardless of the level of schooling be it elementary, high school, or university. At this point, I recall something a colleague of mine (Julio César Arboleda, personal communication, September 7, 2010) told me about his mother and what she used to say to him and his siblings when they were young: she would praise them for their intelligence in their studies, but at the same time, she admonished them for being so brainless in other aspects of their personal lives. I must say I agree with my colleagues' mother. I think our educational efforts have to be oriented towards having students who are intelligent in both their school and their personal lives. In other words, the quintessential quest for meaningful learning is to be found in teaching-learning acts that include the personal for both the teachers and the students.

### **Study site**

The research site is a K-12 bilingual school in Bogotá, Colombia. In the 90's, the school established an Agreement of Understanding with an American university. Part of the agreement was to design a bilingual program based on the needs of the school population. Some of the factors that were considered were the socio-economic strata of the students and their family backgrounds. The students belong to families where most parents are well-educated and have some understanding of English; some of them may even work for companies that do business with English-speaking countries.

The students begin their exposure to English at the age of four in the preschool section for three years. During this time, they are introduced to literacy in English from an array of methodologies that range from phonics, the Language Experience Approach, and Whole

Language. At the end of three years in preschool, the students are promoted to first grade when they turn seven. In first grade they are introduced to literacy in Spanish for the first time. Spanish teachers tend to follow some of the ideas that the preschool teachers used to work with their students literacy in English. From that moment on, they received instruction in language arts, science, and mathematics in English; the Spanish classes are Spanish, social studies, religion, physical education, music, and arts.

Bilingual school administrators and bilingual teachers in Colombia would agree that their programs are inspired in the research conducted in bilingual settings in English speaking countries such as the United States and Canada. However, there is little evidence on research about bilingual schools and/or programs in Colombia. I argue that this particular school is worthy of investigation for various reasons. First, the school started its bilingual program fourteen years ago. They already have a first generation of students who have graduated in the school program, and there are many others who started their education as early as their preschool years. These students have been exposed to English, and most of this English instruction has been on academic literacy geared towards helping them to cope with the demands of the bilingual program.

The evaluation of the school bilingual program is based largely on students' results on tests at the end of each academic term and a final evaluation at the end of the year. A typical language exam is made up of four sections: listening and/or reading comprehension; vocabulary; grammar and mechanics; and writing instruction. It is of my particular interest to point out that the evaluation of writing is based on an analytic rubric with descriptors that account for the production of texts (see Appendix F). The instructions in the writing section of the exam offer a topic that has previously been studied during the term. The students are then asked to write a text to characterize a particular genre: narration, description. Besides

that, they are often given a series of instructions to meet certain given criteria. For example, they may be told to write a minimum number of sentences. These sentences need to comply with criteria such as the use of adjectives or verbs; sometimes they need to color-code these language tokens. At the intersentential level, students may be asked to include some specific tokens of conjunctions. On top of that they are reminded to consider issues of word choice and audience as considerations for their writing. In high school there is a similar evaluation of the students' language development with an added evaluative view provided by language tests such as the TOEFL and Cambridge IELTS.

Second, the theoretical foundations of the English department are based on the bilingual experiences in Canada and some other programs in the United States. Besides that, the teachers in the English Institute would agree that their practices in bilingualism and literacy instruction stem from the empirical work of Cummins (1979), Hakuta (1987), and Bialystok (1988) whose research shows positive gains of bilingualism among students receiving instruction in two languages. Although there is a conscious effort to connect literacy instruction and development in L1 and L2, there does not seem to be a common theory of literacy and writing instruction that explain the bilingual literacy processes of these students.

A third reason for researching the bilingual literacy programs at this particular school has to do with the professional responsibility for Colombian teachers, who have been working in bilingualism, to study the theoretical themes that may emerge as the result of such an investigation. Moreover, studying the local bilingual environment may provide feedback on the program itself as well as originate information for the various stakeholders in the school community. Nevertheless, it is by no means within the scope of this study to evaluate the school program or its bilingual bases.

### **Ethical protection of the study participants**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Indiana University of Pennsylvania read my protocol and gave written approval of both my research site and the study participants who are children. The fact that I work with minors required a series of steps to make sure the school authorities and the children's legal guardians (their parents) approved of their participation by signing consent forms. Students were also given a form to assent to take part in the study. The IRB official letter of approval was sent to my home country on August 23, 2011.

### **Research goals**

This study has several goals to achieve through both theoretical and empirical exploration. First, it researches L1 and L2 literacy practices in a K-12 bilingual school in Bogotá, Colombia. Second, it attempts to document research participants' views on their bilingual literacy. Third, it evaluates the possibilities and limitations of case study research in literacy studies. Fourth, it creates a starting point for my own research on the nature of literacy and socio cultural practices in pedagogy and education for the Colombian context.

I need to conclude this section of the chapter by addressing my biases. First of all, I would say that I was a former teacher and administrator in the school in which I intend to conduct my research; consequently, I have some knowledge of their orientation towards bilingualism and literacy. Furthermore, one of my children studies at the school, and I have access to his literacy practices. I must say, however, that the data from his class will not be included in this study. Second, I have to admit that I do not agree with the school literacy practices which I consider very far from the sociocultural paradigm and the current social views of SLA. Third, I recognize that in the writing of this study, there have been many moments I have struggled with the controversial nature of many of the issues I have discussed so far. Fourth, I strongly believe that the standardized view of the current Fordist education

leaves little to no space for people to exert their agency in one of the most fundamental human enterprises, education. In fact, the actual prospect of education as a lifetime endeavor is strongly related to the very idea of agency!

### **Case Study Design**

This study is a multiple-case study with elementary school students enrolled in a bilingual program in a school in Bogotá, Colombia. These students were selected after their completion of a purposive survey. The survey was meant to explore the students' school history in terms of years of schooling, beliefs about literacy practices in their L1 (Spanish) and L2 (English), and their perceptions of success as bilingual readers and writers. The literature review on identity, subjectivity, and agency suggested that these concepts were very much related to how students viewed themselves and were perceived by others in their schooling, and the influence of their school progress in how they thought of themselves. The logic for this case study will be what Yin termed as *theoretical replication* (p.54). That is to say, there is a prediction of students' views about themselves based on their school work in literacy practices. However, it is interesting to see how the students' views on their literacies bring forth issues of identity, subjectivity, and agency that are particular to this school context.

The research design consists of three phases: the first one *define and design*; the second *prepare, collect and analyze*; and a third one *analyze and conclude* (p.57). In the first one the steps are the establishment of a theory, the case selection, and the establishment of data sources and instruments. In the next section, the individuals are the "cases". These cases have some units of analysis to explain their literacy processes; these units intend to disclose the students' perception about their school and literacy by means of a purposive survey. The students' class participation in literacy activities in Spanish and English will be based on some class observations and field notes, and their personal views of their L1/L2 literacy will be

gathered through some open-ended interviews. The follow up of the data collection process is the writing of individual case reports based on the data they generated in the units of analyses. Cross-case analyses of the students' actions and narratives of their literacy work will help to determine to what extent these data either confirm or discard particular views of students' identity, subjectivity and agency based on their literacy practices in their school context.

Yin also suggests doing a cross-case report to test the replication logic in terms of either authenticating or contrasting results. The dashed line in the figure represents a loop that may bring findings or discoveries in the case studies that will alter the initial theoretical assumptions to affirm them or change them.

One issue for consideration in case study research is the number of "cases" to study. I have to say that the purpose of the research is not intended to achieve a sampling logic in which I have to establish a sample population representative of a wider set of people, and a level of significance that the population yield for the phenomenon to be researched. Unlike such a sampling logic, the theoretical replication logic is more interested in finding rival explanations that account for the issues that are being researched. I think it is very interesting to see L1 and L2 literacy being studied through the lenses of identity, subjectivity, and agency. The particular context that I intend to investigate produces data to be incorporated in current understandings about the influence of literacy in schooling beyond the linguistic and cognitive aspects.

### **Case study validity and reliability**

The accountability of the findings in a research process is always discussed for the purposes of developing scientific knowledge. Case study research also needs to work in order to vouchsafe its procedures to become accountable as another possibility to know the



empirical world. That is why the notions of validity and reliability deserve some attention in the research design of this study

Validity has been defined as the ability of the research process to produce credible results based on the reasonableness of the inquiry (Freeman, 1998). The scientific community in which a research project is circumscribed needs to know the standards used to arrive at knowledge claims. In case study research, Yin proposes that the validity of these studies will be determined as long as the researcher defines their research concepts and identifies the operational measures that match those concepts (p.42).

Reliability has been thought of as the potential for the research process to be replicated with the same or similar results, given a careful description of the research conditions and factors. Yin establishes that case study research should apply three principles of data collection: the use of multiple sources of evidence, the creation of a case study database, and the maintenance of a chain of evidence (p.114).

The use of multiple sources of evidence allows the researcher to have a broader view of the phenomenon he is investigating. In so doing, the researcher may analyze how the data converge or diverge in a process commonly known in qualitative research as *triangulation*. Freeman talks about different forms of triangulation stemming from the data sources, the methods of data collection and the researchers. This exercise of triangulation directly addresses the threats to validity in a study.

The next consideration concerns with the way researchers organize and file the data they collect. Some of these data are what Yin calls evidentiary, and they are the main source of substantiation for researchers in the process of data analysis and report writing. The research database has to be kept, alongside the researchers' study notes, case study documents, and even narratives, if they are considered important for the study.

## Data collection sources and instruments

I firmly believe that it is important for the sake of clarity to outline the data collection instruments to be employed in this research. Furthermore, I want to consider the alignment among sources, instruments, and the purpose of data expected to be elicited in order to assess both the potential and the plausibility of the research questions. Table 1 shows the arrangement of the research questions with data sources, data collection instruments, and their purpose. This placement also helps to envision the relationship between the instruments and the type of data they produce regarding the issues being investigated.

Table 1

### *Research questions, data sources and data collection instruments*

Research questions	Data source	Data collection instruments	Purpose
1. How do young language bilingual learners voice aspects of identity in their L1 and L2 to initiate and/or maintain reading and writing processes in the classroom?	Student perceptions of their schooling and bilingual literacy ( <b>setting</b> )  Students ( <b>opinions and perceptions</b> )	Purposive survey  Interviews	Access data from the population in the study site.  Gather information from the participants perceptions and reactions about their involvement in the phenomena under study
2. How do bilingual Spanish –English students account for aspects of subjectivity in their writing assignments?	Teachers, students ( <b>class activities</b> )  Teachers, students ( <b>interactions</b> )	Direct observations  Field notes	Describe the classroom dynamics in terms of interactions and dialogues  Make comments about teachers and students interactions
3. How much agency do bilingual Spanish-English students show in their literacy practices?	Student work ( <b>documents</b> )	Writing assignments	Obtain data from the teaching –learning process

**Purposive survey.** The purposive survey is a strategy to select the units of study from general population (see Appendix A). The selection is not based exclusively on “the units representativeness, but for their relevance to the research question, analytical framework, and explanation or account being developed in research” (Schwandt, 2007: p. 269). The relevance of these units may be understood in terms of their direct participation in what goes on in the research site, their particular perspectives on the issue(s) being investigated, and the possibilities for drawing comparisons between them.

The use of a purposive survey allows me to know some aspects about my students’ school histories together with their perceptions in L1 and L2 literacy processes. The first question was about students’ time of enrollment in the school program. Then they were asked if they considered their reading and writing in both English and Spanish to be *good*, *average*, with *some difficulties* or *a lot of difficulties*. They were also asked if they thought their school life was *excellent*, *outstanding*, *acceptable* or *deficient*. The last question asked students if they would like to take part in a project that researched their reading and writing in Spanish and English.

**Interviews.** The interview as an instrument of data collection intends to elicit information from interviewees as they give accounts of their personal experiences. Interviews are normally classified as structured or unstructured. The former are more oriented towards direct or close responses; the latter are more open-ended in nature.

**Observations.** Observations are meant to gather data from the actions of people’s lives in research settings. Even though observations are contested within a postmodern view of research for their inability to account for what reality is about, they help researchers to avoid “the imposition of notions on participants’ perspectives” (Schwandt, p.211). Observations provide data on how people go about their everyday lives in their contexts; they may also yield information on how these individuals interact in terms of actions and communicative exchanges.

**Field notes.** This data collection instrument is meant to provide evidence from the observations made in a research site. However, these notes may be considered personal notes or individual reflections or comments on the issues being investigated.

**Documents.** Documents are artifacts used to obtain authentic pieces of information that are relevant for the purpose of the issues being researched. These documents may vary in nature from public to private records.

### **A brief discussion on narrative inquiry**

The data that I gathered was for the most part presented through narrative form. For this reason, I think it is important to describe briefly what narrative inquiry is about, and how it is displayed in research processes. I will also discuss the role of narrative inquiry in this study.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) established the origins of this research methodology when they developed some sort of dissatisfaction with research methodologies that had a reductionist approach to problems and phenomena. They consider that “researchers’ personal interests submerged for the sake of research precision” (p.xxii). The scholars had been involved in educational research and believed that this research was about life and experiences, so they felt that they wanted to study “experience” as they asserted. They also acknowledged that their interest in studying experience echoed Dewey’s ideas about education in particular how experiences were at the heart of learning. Indeed, they go on to state that:

Dewey held that that one criterion of experience is continuity, namely the notion that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences.

Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum –the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future-each point has a past experiential base and leads to experiential future.

This too is key in our thinking about education because as we think about child’s learning, a

school or a particular policy, there is always a history, it is always changing, and it is always going somewhere (p.2).

Narrative scholars have developed their research work from the seminal work of Clandinin and Connelly. Two of these scholars, Schaafsma & Vinz (2011), define narrative inquiry as:

An account, tale, interview with narrator/s; artifact, object, or action with inherent narrative; co-constructed narratives- all containing a story or stories. In narrative research, then, form and function work reciprocally. Narratives have narrators or re-narrators- those who relate events, describe, question, tell and show. (p.2)

Narrative inquiry as any other research methodology has to account for the way researchers develop interpretive frameworks that allow them to make valid claims in terms of knowledge or understandings. Clandinin and Connelly formulated a three-dimensional inquiry space (p.54) that they described with the concepts inward/outward, backward/forward located in a specific place. They further clarified what these terms means as follows:

By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetics reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality- past, present and future. We wrote that to experience and experience- that is, to do research into an experience- is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way. (p.50)

The researchers add to these dimensions the notion location since these narratives happen in specific places and are also part of the research landscape (p.51). The cross analyses that I conducted in this study tied well with these three-dimensional space. For example, it was common to find students locating their narratives in a temporal frame that was not totally related to their

present; they mentioned their preschool years, and what they achieved in those days compared to what they were learning now. The participants also recognized the progression in their second language learning from the preschool years to third, fourth or fifth grade. Their narratives also disclosed particular moments when they could relate personal feelings and perceptions against the backdrop of their school lives.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CASE STUDIES REPORTS

In this chapter I describe my arrival on site to begin my research after having the IRB approval and the parents' consent to work with their children. Next, I describe my first contact with the students at the first interview. After that, I illustrate the class observations in both Spanish and Language Arts classes where I paid particular attention to the students' class work and interactions with peers and their teachers; some field notes are also part of this section of the chapter. I devote the last section of the chapter to analyzing the second interviews which were mainly about the students' perceptions of their writing.

#### **Entering the research site**

After being given access to the research site, I asked the school to allow me to present my project to the Spanish and Language Arts teachers. I made a presentation to the teachers in which I shared my research questions together with both my theoretical and research orientation. I also clarified what I was going to do in my class observations. I told them I did not expect them to change their classes in any way; I was clear that the project's primary concern was the students and their participation in literacy activities.

A total of 78 students from third to fifth grade responded to the survey. I sent letters of invitation to 25 families. Thirteen parents responded to the invitation positively and signed the consent forms. These students were 9 girls and 4 boys. This chapter takes into consideration the data generated by 7 of these students; 5 of them are girls and 2 are boys. The main reason to pay attention to 7 cases is the amount of information that they generate and the scope of this study. These students were observed in their Spanish and English lessons. Besides that, they were interviewed on three occasions. The first interview was to get to know them, to tell them about the purpose of the project and to learn about their school histories.

The second and third interviews focused on their writing assignments. The following table contains the participants' pseudonyms together with their grades and ages and the amount of time they had been in the program.

Table 2

*Study Cases*

<b>PARTICIPANTS' PSEUDONYMS</b>	<b>GRADE</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>NUMBER OF YEARS IN THE PROGRAM</b>
1. María	3 <sup>rd</sup>	9	6
2. Luisa	3 <sup>rd</sup>	9	6
3. Pedro	4 <sup>th</sup>	10	6
4. Juan	4 <sup>th</sup>	10	5
5. Adriana	4 <sup>th</sup>	10	7
6. Andrea	4 <sup>th</sup>	10	6
7. Diana	5 <sup>th</sup>	11	8

**Initial interview: getting to know the students**

As I said earlier, the initial interview was aimed at getting to know the students and knowing about their school histories. I thought that working with students from the same grade would allow me to see them interacting about a common topic, so there would be moments of real conversation among them. I felt that the fact that they had been together for some years would help each other to reminisce more clearly. First, I interviewed the third graders, next the fourth graders, and finally the fifth graders. Before the interview, I explained to them the research protocol and showed them the consent forms duly signed by their parents. I also reminded them that they were entitled to abandon the project if they wanted to do it. Next, I told students that the activity was more a conversation instead of the question/answer format of a traditional interview. The topic of the interview was their school life. Students were asked to give their names and grade as well as the number of years in the program.



**María.** She was the most outspoken girl of the group from third grade. She always expressed strong ideas about the questions being asked. At one point during the first interview, I asked the students about their favorite school subjects. María said that dance was her favorite class because she was a good dancer; however, the class that she hated was mathematics. She was quick to point out that she did not like the teacher very much. She felt that the teacher was not supportive when the girls experienced difficulties. She expected the teacher to provide some sort of support to help students carry on with the exercises, but she did not feel that this was the situation with the mathematics class.

I told them not to talk about the teachers; they just needed to point out what happened in their Spanish and Language Arts classes. I encouraged María to elaborate on this idea about the mathematics class; however, she carried on talking about the teacher “he is always kind of angry, and he likes to teach in his own way, but it is because we are girls.” [*Él siempre es como bravo y le gusta enseñar a su manera y es que como somos niñas.*] I immediately asked her to elaborate on this idea of being “girls”, so she went on to say:

He is the same. He does not teach like other teachers. Perhaps something happened to him in life that made him the way he is. Who knows? Because one does not know his personal life. Then let us say, he teaches his subject his own way because he does not like being funny. Hey girls! Let us play outside! No, he is more serious with the work, and he does not like games because he is much more serious with the class work. [*Él es el mismo. Y a él no le gusta enseñar como otros profesores. Quizás algo le pasó en la vida que tal vez lo hizo así. ¿Quién sabe? Porque uno no sabe la vida personal de él. Entonces digamos el enseña a su manera su materia a él no le gusta ser tan divertido así hay juguemos niñas yo no sé qué... vayamos al parque afuera. No, él es que como*

*más serio con el trabajo y menos no le gusta el juego porque es mucho más serio con el trabajo.]*

**Luisa.** She was the opposite of María. She did not present herself confidently at school. In fact, she claimed that she was too shy to ask questions and feels ashamed to ask her teachers for fear of rebuttals from classmates who may point out that her question had already been answered or was too silly. She said her favorite subject was physical education, but she did not give any particular reasons.

**Pedro.** In the first interview with Pedro the conversation was mainly about his classes in Spanish and English. Pedro claimed he felt fine studying both languages since he learned English from his kindergarten years. He added his father is an English teacher and had taught him words since he was very little. He said he did not have any problems with the languages; he asserted that Spanish may be more difficult than English since they were learning more things, but he added that he had to carry on.

**Juan.** He was more vocal than Pedro and had strong opinions about the fact that he was being schooled in English and Spanish. He said that “the school has a tendency to celebrate American festivities. They celebrate American holidays, but here in Colombia we have our celebrations. I think it is weird that the school is in Colombia, and they do not celebrate Colombian festivities...” “...I do not like this because we are in Colombia, and the school is in Colombia. I do not understand why they do not celebrate them.” [*El colegio tiene la tendencia a celebrar festividades norteamericanas. Celebran las fiestas de Estados Unidos, pero aquí en Colombia nosotros tenemos nuestras celebraciones. Me parece raro que el colegio está en Colombia y no celebran las fiestas colombianas.*] [*No me gusta porque estamos en Colombia y el colegio está en Colombia. No entiendo porque no las celebran.*]

In regards to his school progress, he considered that he had similar problems in both languages regarding the grammar systems; he was very aware that most of his problems in English stemmed from the fact that he had problems with tense formation. Nonetheless, he was quick to assert that he still needed to continue working on these issues.

**Adriana.** In the first interview Adriana was very quick to say that the interview was going to be done in Spanish; she added that it had to be in her native language, the language of her family. The fourth grade students in Adriana's class started to talk about their studies, particularly the study of languages such as Chinese, English, and Spanish. Adriana felt that she did not like Chinese since she did not understand certain things. However, she said she had the same problems with English when she first started learning it. Then she added that in English she understood everything and was able to find word pairs in both Spanish and English. She said that this happened because she started studying English when she was a little child. Moreover, she believed that this early interest in languages had to do with children's inner curiosity.

When one is little, one is more interested in languages and tries to understand them better...one is more curious as a little child... If one asks little children if they want to learn German, they would say 'yes', 'yes', 'great', it would be amazing something like that... For us it would be kind of the same. [*Uno de chiquito es más interesado en los idiomas y trata de entenderlos...uno es más curioso de niño. Si uno le pregunta a unos chiquitos si quieren aprender alemán, ellos van a decir 'sí,' 'sí,' 'claro,' sería genial algo así... Para nosotras sería como igual.*]

**Andrea.** She began with a narrative of her school life. Her parents decided to bring her and her sister to the school because they felt it was a good school. She talked about her sister's school trajectory which has been successful. Her sister has been an honor student for the most

part of her school life. She said that she was not as successful as her sister was. She also said that whenever her sister got lower grades, she worked really hard to improve them.

Another narrative in Andrea's words was her work in Language Arts which she described in terms of grammar. She said she confused the sequence of tenses and the parts of speech. When she described her writing process, she talked about her grammar problems.

In the last part of this interview, Andrea recalled her experiences in English when she was in preschool. She said she did not like it then because she did not understand it. When she went to first grade and started with Spanish she knew English was going to be her second language. She said that from that moment on, she liked English.

**Diana.** She felt that her school life was easy. She thought that there were many topics that they studied repeatedly although they became more complex as they studied them. She gave the example of her math class. She felt that she knew a lot of the topics because she went to a mathematics academy after her school day.

When she was asked about studying in two languages, she said she felt that writing in English was a lot easier than in Spanish because it did not have the orthography and punctuation marks that Spanish did.

Another moment of the interview was about the language class where students had been given oral presentations on topics of their choice. Diana was going to give a presentation about Egypt. She said she liked Egypt and knew a lot about the topic because she had done a lot of research on this topic.

### **Class observations**

#### **Third Grade [Question Formation]**

The teacher came to class and told students to revise for a quiz they would have in the class session. Most students got their notebooks out and started looking at the examples in

their notebooks. A few minutes later, the students got their quizzes; they needed to provide questions for some answers on the worksheet. Luisa asked the teacher for some sort of clue in determining whether they needed to write a wh-question or a yes/no question. The teacher suggested they looked at the word order to determine whether a wh-question or yes/no question was required.

Once students were finished, they swapped papers in order to correct each other's quizzes. The teacher proceeded to prepare the blackboard with the quiz items to correct it as a class activity. María asked for confirmation of an answer she found in the quiz she was marking. María and Luisa also volunteered answers to the teacher's questions.

A student asked for a possible answer, but the teacher told her that it was wrong; she replied what the mistake was. The students finished with their revisions and gave the papers back to the teacher. The teacher told them to go to the notebooks and correct the quizzes on their notebooks.

### **La Comunicación Escrita: La Carta [Written Communication: The Letter]**

The teacher reviewed the constituent parts of a letter, their contents and the types of letters people usually write. Then he introduced the idea of writing a postcard. He elicited ideas from students to see if they were familiar with postcards and to see if they had either received or sent them. Luisa volunteered to give an answer, but her answer did not really help the teacher. So the teacher decided to use some analogies in order to explain the idea behind a postcard. One of the analogies was the idea of sharing a picture from a place together with the feelings people had in that particular moment.

María listened attentively and offered an index card she had brought from home as part of the class homework for the day. The teacher used her card to show the parts of a postcard. A student made a funny remark about a word the teacher misspelled. She pointed out the

teacher wrote “postar” instead of “postal”, so she said that the class was about to “apostar” meaning “betting” as in a casino. María looked at her and let her know it was a funny comment. In fact, many students thought that was funny and chuckled.

The teacher spent a great deal of the lesson explaining the content of the postcard. Students asked him if they had to describe the picture on the postcard or write a narrative of what was happening at that moment. The teacher drew some sort of monument up on the board and asked the students to describe it. Since the students were going in different directions with either the idea of describing or narrating, the teacher decided to focus on specific questions and answers to write a postcard.

Finally, the teacher determined that students needed to have drawn and described their postcards by the end of the session. He walked around the room offering them some assistance.

Luisa walked behind the teacher to ask him questions about the types of drawings they could use for their postcard; she insisted on receiving the teacher’s attention to solve her problem.

#### *Field note*

*The students had too many questions about what they could or could not do when they wrote a postcard. For example, they asked if they had to write a narrative or a description. They also asked about the drawing that accompanied the text. The teacher encouraged them to be creative with their assignment.*

#### **Fourth Grade [Thomas and the Library Lady]**

The teacher brought a CD player and told students to listen to a story. He added they needed to listen to other sources of English. They listened to the story; the teacher asked some questions. Some of the students provided scattered answers. The teacher finished the activity by establishing the main ideas from the text they had heard.

The teacher told the class that he had another story for the day, but they were not going to follow the book. They needed to listen carefully because they had to answer a particular question from the story. The teacher told them that whoever gave the answer would get a reward. Students seemed to be very engaged with the activity since they had to provide one particular answer for which they would be rewarded. Juan repeatedly volunteered answers. He had failed in the first attempts, but eventually he got it right. He asked the teacher for his reward, but the teacher dismissed his claims. The teacher said he had attempted to answer several times without much success.

The remaining part of the class was devoted to some oral presentations. Two students gave some oral reports about topics related to general knowledge. Then they answered questions from their classmates about their presentations.

### **101 Ways to Bug Your Parents**

The teacher established the class agenda. The first activity was to check students' homework. Students were supposed to write a summary and find new words in a chapter from the book *101 Ways to Bug Your Parents* (Lee Wardlaw, 2005). Some students were selected at random to read their summaries. The teacher paid attention to their reading and reminded them constantly that the summary had to be in the past tense form. The teacher walked around the class and checked students' notebooks to make sure they did their homework.

Adriana walked up to the teacher and explains to her the reasons she did not do the homework. The teacher seemed to be understanding; however, she asked Adriana to give her the lesson planner so that she could write a note to her parents.

#### *Field note*

*A student told the teacher she did the reading with her dad and understood the chapter. The teacher insisted that students had to do both the summary and the vocabulary work as it*

*was assigned in class. I think the student felt it was important to share how she did this particular activity with her father, but the teacher did not pay attention to this particular narrative since she was reminding students about their work outside class.*

The next part of the class was about the words students found in the book chapter. The teacher worked with students' definitions by providing examples or further explanations. There was a moment where the words "glimpse" and "gaze" appeared. A student came up with a hypothesis about their meanings.

*Field note*

*The teacher did not pay attention to the students' idea. She provided the difference herself.*

The class continued with other words, and the teacher encouraged students to provide words meanings by giving definitions, telling sentences or even using mimicry. There was another moment in which students provided the word "slam"; they started a small discussion about its meaning. The teacher did not pay attention to what the students were saying and provided her own examples.

### **Mitos y Leyendas [Myths and Legends]**

The class began with a reminder of the class rules regarding behavior and classwork. The teacher designated a student to go around the class giving out "happy faces" to those students who complied with both criteria. At one point students had to decide on their own if they deserved the sticker. Some of them were very conscious about their classwork and attitude and did not ask for a sticker; some others could actually argue why they deserved one.

Then the teacher started revising the homework. Students had to research similarities and differences between myths and legends. The teacher told students to listen to their



classmates so that they could add more ideas to their own research. The teacher paid attention to some ideas that students put forward and asked the class to give opinions about these ideas.

*Field note*

*At one point the teacher reminded a student to pay attention to the ideas they were sharing because they would be helpful for an evaluation.*

Many students gave their ideas about the similarities and differences between myths and legends. They used personal experiences to justify their opinions. A student said that myths and legends happened in places that were far away like the eastern planes of Colombia. The student made use of a personal narrative that included her grandparents. The teacher used this narrative to illustrate some elements that are present in legends.

Adriana participated actively in the session by giving ideas about the notions of myth and legend. She mentioned the idea of the struggle between the *good* and the *evil* and the presence of special characters with powers. Andrea was also part of this class, but she did not seem to be very interested in the topic. She sat in the back of the class and decided to concentrate on her notebook.

*Field note*

*Students were always encouraged to revise their ideas based on what they heard or discussed with their classmates. At some point, the teacher gave her views, but they did not interrupt the flow of ideas among students.*

**Fifth grade [Kinds of Sentences]**

The class began with an oral presentation that two students did about Spain. During the presentation, they used a word, and the teacher asked for its meaning. The students did not know it. It seemed they copied the information from the internet. They read most of their ideas from papers where they had the information. Students gave feedback to the presenters. They

also suggested that the teacher should not interrupt their presentations with questions about vocabulary words or their pronunciation.

The next part of the class was about different kinds of sentences in English depending on the speakers' attitudes. The teacher pasted some sample sentences on the board and asked students to categorize them as exclamatory, imperative, interrogative or declarative. The teacher gave out a handout with some sort of quick explanation on it so that students had some idea of how to classify the sentences. Some students volunteered to read the explanations. Eventually all of them participated as the teacher directed their work.

Andrea participated in class by giving one particularly good answer in sentence recognition. After they finished with the exercise, the teacher told students to write a letter to her using the four kinds of sentences.

### **Guía para Preparación de Exámenes [Exam Preparation Handout]**

The teacher began the class by telling students that the purpose of the session was to review the study guide for the Spanish evaluation. Some students asked specific questions they had about the reading. Andrea had her notebook ready and asked the teacher to call on her to provide some answers to the students' questions.

The students took turns to ask and answer questions. Some students contributed with the answers; however, the teacher told them to organize their ideas so that they actually answered the questions they were asked. I think the reason the teacher said this was that students gave answers related to the questions but did not answer them. Andrea participated actively in the class activity. In fact, she gave a particular answer, and the teacher took it to be the specific answer to a question.

The teacher invited students to pay attention to the development of the story they were reading beyond the specific comprehension questions. She encouraged them to infer the

development of the story and the characters. At some point, the activity became boring, so some students suggested other ways of checking the comprehension. They changed the exercise format and continued with the reading. Andrea did not seem to be bothered by the class dynamics; she was working individually on her reading and completing the questionnaire.

At the end of the session, the teacher told students to stop and think about the development of the story. She invited them to think about some of the events in the story and analyze them from the perspectives of their own lives.

### **Second interview: writing assignments**

This second interview took place after I observed the students' Spanish and Language Arts classes. I had told the students that they needed to show me their written work for this second interview. All of them brought some samples of their writing which were in their notebooks as they claimed they were part of class activities. Only two students brought a piece that they had written for the interview.

**María.** The second interview with María started with her account of the term activities. She first talked about an activity they did in the Spanish class that she thought was good fun. I asked her to tell me more about this activity in particular

M: We brought a legend. We did some group work and acted out the legend we liked the most.

I: Why was it so fun?

M: It was something new for all of us; something we had never done before in front of the class. We had the opportunity to choose for ourselves. We dressed the way we wanted it. We could choose the lead parts. We felt good because we did not have to fight over I want this or that part.

I: Fight with whom? Your classmates?

M: Often the teachers choose the characters, so the students get into arguments about the characters they want to play. We had the possibility to do what we wanted, and each one found the characters we wanted.

I: So you liked it because you could choose.

M: Yes.

[M: *Era algo nuevo para nosotras; algo que nunca habíamos hecho en frente de la clase. Y uno tenía la posibilidad de elegir por uno mismo, vestirse como quería. Tal vestido no. Protagonizar la que uno quiera. Entonces pues uno se sentía como bien porque no tenía que estar peleando como yo quiero ese personaje yo quiero el otro.*

I: *¿Peleando con quién? ¿Con las compañeras?*

M: *Porque muchas veces, digamos los profesores escogen los personajes. Entonces uno dice hay no entonces yo no quiero ser el hombre. Yo no sé qué. Entonces que yo quiero ser la “patasola” Tres niñas quieren ser la “patasola” Entonces pues uno tenía la capacidad de hacer lo que uno quisiera. Y todas encontramos el personaje que queríamos.*

I: *Y entonces por eso te gustó. Ustedes podían escoger.*

M: *Sí.]*

The rest of the interview was about a piece of writing María entitled “The Cat” (see Appendix B). Her assignment was to write a paragraph based on an animal’s characteristics. The teacher allowed them to choose an animal to describe. She felt she did a good job with the assignment. In fact, she believed she did more than her classmates because she found a lot

more information about cats in the internet. She gave some additional ideas about her participation and said:

I believe I selected the animal. Then a lot of people found a lot of information, but, to be honest, I was the one who found the most because many people say they found something new about the cat, and think “that is enough, done”. But I like it when...Let us say when I do not know a lot of things; I search and search until I find the piece of a puzzle. For example, the cat left home. Why did the cat leave home? Then you have to work out the mysteries of cats, like a puzzle. *[Yo creo que yo lo escogí. Entonces pues mucha gente encontró mucha información pero para mí, sinceramente yo creo que fui la que más encontré porque mucha gente dice hay una cosa nueva y listo y ya para mí fue suficiente. Pero a mí me gusta digamos cuando yo no sé muchas cosas como buscar y buscar hasta que encuentre como el rompecabezas. Digamos, el gato se fue de la casa. ¿Por qué se fue? Entonces buscar como el rompecabezas de las cosas misteriosas de un gato.]*

She described her piece of writing and said that she found a lot of her information from Google™. When she was asked about the process of using the information from internet, she said that she read it and used the ideas for her own writing. She pointed out that she used her own words when she put her ideas on the paper.

I decided to interview María for a third time so she could elaborate on her writing. She started talking again about her composition “The Cat”. I asked what she meant about “the mysterious in writing.” She said that she would go and search in the internet for ideas, but she always wanted to make sure she found new things; things that probably people did not know about. “I like to look for...let us say things in depth. Things that nobody knows. In that way,

the composition becomes cool and better” [*A mi me gusta buscar... digamos cosas como más al fondo. Cosas como que nadie sabe porque así el escrito se hace más chévere y mejorado.*]

She said that when she first wrote about her topic, she did not write “interesting” ideas. She went home and worked on her piece using the internet, so she ended her composition. I also asked her about the use of internet. She was clear to say that whenever she knew information, she could write without internet; however, if she needed to work on something and provide information, she would make sure to find new things.

*Field note*

*María got an A in her writing. The teacher marked some grammar and spelling mistakes. There were no other comments. María did write that she took most of her information from Google™ which granted her a positive check from her teacher. I think the student acknowledge the source of her information.*

In the last part of the interview, María talked about the books she found in the library. She felt that it was hard to find books that were suitable for her age. She said that most books were for little kids. She said she did not find very many books about mysterious things which seemed to be the topic that attracted her for reading and writing.

**Luisa.** She began her interview talking about her descriptive paragraph about “The Rabbits” (see Appendix C). She talked about the problems she experienced and quoted examples from her text where she had difficulties. When she was asked about the choice of animal, she said that she liked giraffes better than other animals, but she decided to write about rabbits because she knew more words about rabbits in terms of their physical characteristics.

I asked her how she compared her writing in Spanish and English. She said that it was easier for her to write in Spanish because she knew many more words than in English. She went on to say that sometimes she could not write about certain topics because her lack of

vocabulary, and the teacher would not help her with words; the teacher would tell her to use the words she knew. I asked her if she knew more words in English. It would be easier to write. She answered positively, yet she considered that in order to know these many words, a person had to be born in the United States. In fact, she talked about the amount of vocabulary people require to talk about topics that are not necessarily related to their everyday lives.

*Field note*

*Luisa's teacher drew some arrows indicating that she misplaced certain words or entire sections of her description. At the end of her paragraph, the teacher wrote "organize your ideas the way it was taught!" She did not say much about this comment since she was more concentrated in explaining how she presented the information, and the teacher pointed out the order of these ideas with some arrows.*

**Pedro.** He talked about the class activities he does in both Spanish and Language Arts. He felt he did well in both languages and asserted that

P: Whenever I write, I feel fine in both languages. I feel as though I were the author of what I am writing. It is like I am writing a book, and I have to give feelings to what I am writing.

I: Can you do that in Spanish and English?

P: Yes.

I: And you do not have any difficulties.

P: No.

I: Why do you think you can do that in both languages without major problems?

P: Because we have had a lot of literacy practices. We have had a lot of demands in writing in both languages, especially English.

I: What does it mean that "we have had demands"?

P: It means that we have had more written exercises in English. In Spanish we write books and all that. But in English we do it more often because we know how to write words in Spanish. English is not our native language. Sometimes we may make mistakes, and the idea in the English class is to correct those mistakes and learn more words, English.

I: So you say that those demands have helped you to work in both languages?

P: Yes.

[P: *Cuando escribo en los dos idiomas me siento bien; me siento concentrado. Me siento como el autor de lo que estoy escribiendo. Como si yo estuviera escribiendo un libro que le tengo que poner sentimiento.*

I: *¿Y tú puedes hacer eso en inglés y en español?*

P: *Sí.*

I: *Y no tienes dificultades.*

P: *No.*

I: *¿Por qué piensas que lo puedes hacer en los dos idiomas sin problemas?*

P: *Porque ya hemos tenido mucha práctica en eso. Ya nos han exigido mucho en la escritura en los dos idiomas, especialmente en inglés.*

I: *Y cuando tú dices que nos han exigido. ¿Qué significa eso?*

P: *Significa que nos han hecho más ejercicios en inglés de escritura. Digamos en español escribimos español y todo eso. Pero en inglés lo hacemos más seguido porque en español ya sabemos cómo escribir las palabras. Pero en inglés como no es nuestra idioma pues natal. A veces nos podemos equivocar en algunas palabras, y la idea de la clase de inglés es como corregir esos errores y aprender más palabras, más inglés.*



I: *Entonces tú dices que esas exigencias han hecho que tu puedas trabajar en los dos idiomas.*

P: *Sí.]*

In the last part of the interview, Pedro said that he felt that his success in writing stemmed from the dedication that he put into his pieces. He could not tell me if his classmates felt the same way about their writing, but he knew that at least one of his classmates could write really well.

I went back to the research site and interviewed Pedro for a third time in order to talk about his subjective positions in writing. He described an assignment he did for the Language Arts class (see Appendix D). He wrote this piece following the instructions for the writing task. I asked him if he remembered a project where he felt he had this authorial voice as he had told me in the previous interview. He said he did remember a piece he wrote when he was in his preschool transition (prior to first grade) year.

P: I remember something I wrote in transition. It was to create a monster. We had to talk about it; what it did; how it dressed; what it looked like. We spent a lot of time writing it. In that one, I put my feelings; my ideas.

I: You remember that one from preschool. You created that text and worked really hard on the topic of the monster. That was in transition...Now you are in fourth grade. How do you see your writing now? Can you do the things you just remembered? Or is it different?

P: Well, since we have advanced in our level of English, I can do it with fewer mistakes. I can do it about other topics...I can do it with different words... things.

I: And in Spanish...Can you do the same?

P: Yep!

[P: *Un escrito que escribí como en transición. Que era de crear como un monstruo. Hablar sobre él. Que hace. Como se viste. Como luce. Que duramos hartoo tiempo haciéndolo. En ese fue como en el que más le puse sentimiento; mis ideas.*

I: *Te acuerdas de ese. Desde preschool. Tú creaste ese texto y tú le trabajaste al tema del monstruo. Bueno y ya ha pasado. Eso fue en transición ahora estás en... cuarto. ¿Cómo ves esos escritos ahora? ¿Puedes hacer lo mismo que te acuerdas que hiciste o es diferente? ¿Cómo es?*

P: *Pues como ya el nivel de inglés, ya hemos avanzado. Ya lo puedo hacer... Ya más con menos errores. Lo puedo hacer ya de otros temas. Lo puedo hacer con diferentes palabras... cosas.*

I: *¿Y en español, puedes hacer lo mismo?*

P: *Sí.*]

**Juan.** He did not want to show me his Spanish or Language notebook. He came to the interview with his social studies notebook where he had some writings in Spanish. He said it was some work he did for the social studies class (see Appendix E). He said he liked it because it was about “aliens”, and he liked to get involved in this topic. I asked him if he had had the chance to select the topic, and he responded that it was their choice; he stated that “I work better with topics of my choice because it is something that you like.” [*Trabajo mejor con tópicos de libre elección porque es algo que te gusta*]

When I asked him about the types of writing in Spanish and English, he said that they did summaries of stories in English. Sometimes they had to work with the vocabulary from the

readings. He said they did not do any free writing except for the quintessential composition about the vacation activities.

I asked him about the story *Thomas and the Library Lady* (Pat Mora, 1997). I told him it was interesting because it was a boy who taught Spanish to a librarian. I added that it was about being bilingual. He said he and other students thought the story was average. This part of the interview ended with his comments about the summary writings in language arts. He added that they did handouts and vocabulary activities.

The last part of the interview was about comparing and contrasting his writing in English and Spanish. He felt he did better in Spanish because he knew many more words; consequently, his writing was much more interesting. He pointed out that his English writing was simple; he said he used words that were very common.

**Adriana.** She was one of the students who had written something for her interview. She wrote about her school life (see Appendix F). In her text “My School Life”, she talked about her learning and the values and virtues that the school has given her. She also talked about her friends and extracurricular interests such as dance. In her writing she said she did well in the school because she put a lot of effort into getting good grades. She felt happy at the school and had some certainty that she would be happy until the end of her studies.

I noticed she wrote her piece using different colors. Her ideas about the school were purple; the section on her friends was in orange; when she talked about the academic life and extracurricular activities, she used red; her understanding of school success was in blue; her conclusions were green.

I asked her about this coloring and she said:

I: Why did you use colors?

A: Well, I do not know. We think it is pretty.

- I: Do you always write like that with colors?
- A: Yes, I do. I always write with colors. It is just that in Language and Spanish, we are not allowed to write in colors.
- I: Why is that?
- A: I do not know. It seems that the teachers do not like it. The Language teacher says that it is because we are trying to figure out the type of handwriting we like, and we may make mistakes. So it is difficult to erase color pens. But in the subjects where we can use color pens, I write with color pens.
- I: In which subjects can you do that?
- A: For example, Science.
- I: What does the teacher say? She says nothing.
- A: [The student nods]
- [I: *¿Por qué esos colores?*
- A: *No sé. Nos parece bonito.*
- I: *¿Y siempre escribes así con colores?*
- A: *Sí. Siempre escribo con colores. Solamente que en lenguaje y español no nos dejan escribir con colores.*
- I: *¿Y por qué crees?*
- A: *No sé. Como que a los profesores no les gusta. Pues la profesora de lenguaje dice que es porque nosotros todavía estamos viendo que letra nos gusta. De pronto nos equivocamos y algo y el esfero no se puede borrar. Pero en las materias que si se puede escribir con colores con esferos de colores, escribo con esferos de colores.*
- I: *¿Y en qué materias puedes escribir con colores?*

A: *Por ejemplo ciencias.*

I: *¿Qué dice la profesora? No dice nada.*

A: *[El estudiante asienta con su cabeza]]*

In the next part of the interview, I asked Adriana how she liked writing. She said she liked to write in both Spanish and English; however, she felt she did much better in Spanish. She said she could express her ideas a lot better with the words in Spanish.

We took a look at some writing samples in the notebook. Adriana and a friend had done a composition in which they had to compare and contrast two singers. The composition was very good. She said that they had worked in Venn Diagrams to organize their ideas, so she felt it had given them good guidance for this particular assignment.

In the last part of the interview, Adriana talked about a writing contest they had in school. She had submitted a poem for this contest. I asked her about her writing of this particular piece.

I: What is your poem about?

A: Next to my house there is a place where they teach children how to take care of animals. And a little goat was born recently. It was very pretty. So I wrote about that.

I: So when you write you do that. You look for things like that?

A: I look for things where I can find some inspiration.

I: Inspiration? What do you mean?

A: For example, if I take a look at that painting. [She points at a painting behind my back] I can say that the person was inspired by some place.

I: So the person got the idea from some place.

A: Yes.

- I: So do you think that this happens in writing?
- A: Yes.
- [I: *¿De qué se trata tu poema?*
- A: *De es que al lado de mi casa hay como una parte donde le enseñan a los niños a cuidar los animales. Y ahí nació una cabrita bebé muy bonita. Y entonces yo lo hice de eso.*
- I: *Y cuando escribes haces eso. Buscas cosas como esa.*
- A: *Cosas por las que me pueda inspirar.*
- I: *¿Inspirar? ¿Qué significa?*
- A: *Por ejemplo... yo veo ese cuadro y... [Señala el cuadro colgado a mi espalda]*  
*Pues digo que la persona se inspiró en algún lugar.*
- I: *Osea de algún lugar sacó la idea.*
- A: Sí.
- I: *Y tú piensas que en escritura es eso. Cuando uno escribe es una idea de algún lado.*
- A: Sí.]

**Andrea.** She had a lot of narratives that stem from her interview. She first talked about a story she wrote for the language class which she titled “Story!” (see Appendix G). She said that the story she was showing me was about a day in her house, but the idea of the activity was to use some words they had been studying. One of the words they were studying was “storyteller”, so I asked her what they did with a word like “storyteller”. Her narrative took the following direction:

I have to learn the definition. We make *pictionaries*. We have to write the word and

if is an adjective..., noun all of those. We also need to give the definition, an example and a drawing. The teacher gives us grades on this. She always does it at the end of the story. She gives us grades because if we do not understand something it is because we have not paid attention. [*Tengo que aprender la definición. Tenemos que hacer “pictionaries”. Son... tenemos que escribir la palabra, si es adjetivo...sustantivos, todos esos. Y la definición, el ejemplo y un dibujo. La profesora nos pone nota de eso. Ella siempre no lo hace al final de que terminamos el tema. Entonces pues ella pone nota porque si nosotros no entendimos esto fue porque no hemos puesto atención.*]

I was interested in asking her about the personal story she wrote in which her main concern was to use some words they had taken from a class reading. She said that the teacher did not force them to use all the words in the writing; the teacher encouraged them to find appropriate places to insert those words. Then she started saying that her concerns were “to do what they were told and also to have a little fun” [*hacer lo que se nos pide y tener un poquito de diversión*] I asked her to tell me how she balanced doing what was required with having fun. She said that in Spanish teachers were more understanding, but in English the teachers were more demanding because English was the language they were learning.

She felt that in Spanish they learned “cool” things, so I asked her what those cool things were, and she said:

We are learning myths and legends. There are many stories, and those stories give you a cool ending. From the beginning of the story one is looking forward to what the end of the story is going to be like. But one must read the entire story to get to the end. [*Estamos aprendiendo mitos y leyendas. Hay muchas historias y esas historias son como...osea te dan como...te dan como un final chévere. Y uno está desde el principio como quiere que llegar allá. Pero te toca leer toda una historia para llegar al final.*]

I asked her if it would be the same if she was taught a myth or a legend in English. She said that it would not be the same because she would be confused with a lot of new words that she would encounter in a text like a myth or a legend. She said that it would be interesting to have those readings in the Language Arts class; they would give some “enthusiasm” to the class so to speak.

Finally, I asked her to tell me when she felt she added the “fun” part to her writing. She said that:

In my writings I always try to give them imagination, fantasy. I write whatever I am thinking. If I am sad. Well, I am sad, and I write that. If I am very happy because something good is going to happen to me, I write that. I like that because not everything is about a topic, and if I do not talk about that topic, I fail the evaluation. *[En mis escritos siempre trato de meterle imaginación, fantasía que lo que yo esté pensando lo escribo. Si estoy triste pues estoy triste y yo escribo eso. Si estoy muy feliz porque me va a pasar algo chévere pues lo escribo. También me gusta hacer eso porque no todo tiene que ser de un tema y pues si no hablo de ese tema pues pierdo la evaluación.]*

**Diana.** She started talking about the goals she had written for the Spanish class. One of her goals was to read independently since she liked reading. She felt that reading allowed her to know more complex words “adult words” according to what she said. She said that her mom taught her words whenever she was reading books on her own, and she could use those words for specific texts in Spanish.

The next part of the interview was about her writing in English. The following excerpt captures this specific part of the conversation

I: What about language? What is it that gives you difficulty? The vocabulary?



- D: I have always done badly with the tenses. Always, always. Present progressive, Well, those things. Never, never, never have I understood them in my life.
- I: But when you say “always”, is it every year? Since the time you were a little girl?
- D: Yes, it has been forever.
- [I: *¿Y en “language” que sería lo difícil? ¿El vocabulario?*
- D: *Es que a mí siempre me ha ido en los “tenses”. Siempre, siempre el “present progressive” bueno esas cosas. Entonces nunca, nunca, nunca en la vida los he entendido.*
- I: *Pero cuando tú dices “siempre” es ¿todos los años desde que estabas pequeña o cuándo?*
- D: *No, si desde siempre.]*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

In this chapter I will do a cross case analysis of my research concepts in terms of identity, subjectivity and agency within the cases' (students) literacy practices in a K-12 bilingual program in Bogotá, Colombia. The main purpose of this chapter is to see to what extent the cases' literacy practices and their opinions can answer my research questions. I will also suggest possible ways forward for conceptualizing bilingual literacy programs which take into account the importance of identity, subjectivity, and agency in its design. The last section of the chapter will be devoted to establishing both the limitations and the conclusions of my study.

#### **Identity**

##### **Glimpses of students' identities through a gaze into the school ethos**

The difference in meaning between the verbs “to gaze” and “to glimpse” has to do with both the nature, intentional or otherwise, of the act and with its duration. Whereas “to gaze” implies a longer deliberate look at something, “to glimpse” suggests a coincidental fleeting vision of it. I think that when conducting my research the focus of my gaze was on the broader picture, the school context and its ethos, but glimpses of the children's identities caught my eye and my gaze was drawn to them. However, it would be really interesting to look at both the school and the students over a longer period of time to have a much more informed idea of the complexity of their identities. A possible scope for such work would be an academic year where I could follow the students' progress from one grade to the next.

The narratives that students produced in the interviews and the evidence from the classroom observations showed that they have built their identities under the umbrella of the school ethos which is oriented towards the students' academic achievement. All of the

students have been in the school since their preschool years and all made specific references to those years in which they had only English as the medium of instruction. They also talked about their current work in both Spanish and English. Their narratives suggested that they view both languages as distinct regarding their school life especially in their literacy processes which they described for the most part in terms of achievement, grades, failure, and evaluations.

Andrea said that there was a time when she did not like English, but that she changed her mind about it when she went into first grade and she was told English was her second language. I think she thought her entire school was going to be just in English. Unlike Andrea, Pedro felt totally comfortable with English since he was very young. He added that his father also taught him some words because he was an English teacher.

Luisa is another student whose narratives are oriented towards school achievement. She said she felt ashamed to ask questions in class since she was kind of afraid of her classmates' reactions. In fact, in a particular Spanish lesson, she did try to participate by answering a teacher's question in class, but her answer was not right. Immediately, she went quiet and withdrew from the class dynamics; she decided to work with her partner to solve specific questions for the activity at hand.

When I interviewed her about her writing, the very first thing she said about her piece was that it had problems. Moreover, she knew what her problems were. When I asked her about the teacher's feedback, she pointed out her problems again. The teacher's feedback was some arrows indicating where she had misplaced the information in her description. The other source of feedback was a written comment that read: "organize your ideas the way it was taught!"

María expressed some sort of discomfort with their schooling. María complained about a teacher's handling of a class that did not seem to take into consideration that the teacher was working with a group of girls. She expected a teacher who worked with young girls should have them to play or take them to the playground. She felt the teacher took his class too seriously. I think María is making a claim about her identity as a student that is related to the identity as a child whose life revolves around the idea of play.

María had had the chance to live and study in an English-speaking country, so she was the only one who had experienced bilingual education from a different perspective. She brought up the idea of finding appropriate topics for her as a young girl when she described the kinds of books she found in the school library. She talked about these books as young children's books with very simple stories with a lot of pictures and a few words in terms of sentences or even paragraphs.

Similarly, Juan was very vocal about the fact that the school does not celebrate Colombian celebrations. He asserted that the school is in Colombia, so they should have the Colombian celebrations in the school calendar alongside the American ones.

Adriana's take on her school life revealed her initial feelings towards English. She did not like it at first because she was young and did not understand it well, but as time went by she got to like it because she understood it. She talked about the idea that learning a language from the time people are at a young age has the advantage of the child's curiosity. For this reason, children are more eager to learn languages. Adriana also expresses an idea that is much attuned to children's identity, and it is the fact that children's attempts to know the world are fueled by their curiosity.

Diana expressed her comfort with her school life; she felt she did well, particularly in mathematics. She felt she had some sort of edge in this subject because she was doing some

extra study in an academy after school. Thus, she found some of the class topics very easy, and therefore had no problems regarding her grades.

The students' narratives and class interactions are very much oriented to school achievement. In fact, they think of their school life in terms of what they do to comply with homework, carry out class projects, or get prepared for evaluations. However, all these ideas of achievement are more oriented towards English. They do not express so many ideas about their school achievement in terms of Spanish.

Another aspect that appears in some of the students' narratives is the fact that they feel they are children, and that there are some ideas associated to the condition of being children; for example, they feel that curiosity, and play have a role in their education.

### **Subjectivity**

#### **Balancing the Yin of doing what you are told to do with the Yang of having some fun**

I tried to find the best means to convey students' views of their subjective perspectives, and it occurred to me that the idea of the yin-yang does capture the essence of their narratives as they accentuate the dualism of their composing processes. However, this dualism does not suggest an either /or scenario; it works with the idea of supplementary perspectives.

Furthermore, the notion of balance ties very well with the idea of subjectivity from the authorial-self perspectives. Nevertheless, this balancing happens within what the school determines as first and second language learning which becomes for the most part both the teacher's work horizon and the agenda for classroom practices.

The students' accounts of their literacy in terms of subjective perspectives or points of view revealed some compelling narratives. Some students had a sense of authorship regarding their writing; they even felt they could convey very personal ideas and feelings through their writing. However, most of them described their writing as complying with requirements as

determined by their teachers. Five out of the seven students brought their notebooks with writing exercises related to class activities to their interviews. One of them brought a writing prompt she had prepared for the study guide for the Language Arts evaluation (see Appendix H). As I said earlier, only two students brought writing samples they had prepared for their interviews.

Andrea said that in her writing she tried to balance doing what the teachers required with having some fun. She clearly described that she tried to put creativity and imagination into her writing, and these two ideas were related to her states of mind. She said that if she was sad she wrote about that, and that if she was happy she also wrote about that.

Another interesting view of subjectivity in literacy was Pedro's account in which he claimed he felt like an author when he was writing. He said he tried to give feeling to what he wrote. He clearly remembered a piece of writing he did when he was in preschool. He felt that that particular piece was an example of his ideas as an author. He added that the project took him a fair amount of time to complete. He also talked about the ideas of dedication and hard work which seem to point out that his view of writing is very attuned to the idea of apprenticeship. He viewed his writing as work in progress that required both revisions and final approval from the master writer (the teacher).

Maria's perspective on subjectivity dealt with how she felt the construction of a writing piece entailed. She said that her writing was like putting together a puzzle. She talked about the idea of looking for new or more information to figure out the mysterious features of an animal she had to write about. María thought that a piece of writing needed to present new or interesting information if it was to accomplish its purpose. I find this view attuned to the idea of giving a perspective about a particular topic.

Luisa talked about her descriptive paragraphs “The Rabbits”. When she was asked if her choice was to write about rabbits, she said that she would have preferred to write about giraffes which she liked better. However, she decided to write about rabbits because she knew more about them or could find more descriptive words for them. In sum, she was more concerned to comply with the writing task which demanded the description of an animal in terms of physical characteristics and a habitat.

Adriana brought up the idea of inspiration as she described her writing; she talked about the source of inspiration for a poem she had submitted to a contest. It was interesting how she extrapolated the idea from what painters do with their paintings when they paint about something taken from reality. She said that a painting was the painters take on an aspect of reality through their lens (canvas).

Diana felt her difficulties in her writing are related to her difficulties in dealing with the sequence of tenses in English. This idea may not seem so relevant here, but what was really interesting was the way she stressed her problems with tenses. She emphasized the fact that she had never understood them. Besides that, she said that she had always had that problem in her writing. When she was asked what she meant with the adverb “always”, she was emphatic to say that it had been “forever”. My interest in the way Diana expressed her views so fervently is that she felt that there was nothing to do about it.

Juan, Andrea, and Luisa said that they could write in Spanish better than in English. They said they could write more because they knew more words according to Luisa. Juan said that in Spanish he could use complex words; he considered his English words to be very simple and common. Andrea said that she would definitely need a lot more vocabulary to understand topics such as myths and legends in English.

## **Agency**

### **It is business as usual**

The English idiom “business as usual” means that despite adverse circumstances people need to carry on with their ordinary activities. I think both teachers and students go about the businesses of class activities according to school routines. However, students’ sense of agency is more welcome in the Spanish lesson where the “usual-ness” of the class business may be interrupted, adapted, or changed. Unlike the Spanish teachers, the Language Arts teachers seem to feel they need to provide for any gaps students may have in their lessons. Thus, their views will not let the class be interrupted, adapted, or changed even if the students are interested in pursuing very analytical or complex language tasks.

My class descriptions, field notes, and the students’ narratives suggest that the students’ agency regarding their L1 and L2 literacy processes are constrained by the official school agenda. I have to say though that the Spanish teachers give a lot more leeway to students to work with their L1. Students have many more opportunities for interaction beyond the customary question/answer format of the lessons. They are also given the opportunity to build concepts based on exchanging ideas. Finally, they do not have to work with handouts for class activities. As I said, usually the class dynamics is about students’ ideas and hypotheses about the language and its uses. Thus, students are more vocal on how they conduct their class assignments. In fact, the Spanish classes are livelier in the sense that students may talk among themselves or with their teacher at any given times; whereas in the Language Arts sessions teacher-fronted activities are pervasive.

### **The Language Arts Classes**

These classes seem to run pretty much in the same manner. The teachers come to class with an agenda which is, for the most part, oriented towards the explicit teaching of grammar.



If there is time for other type of activities such as listening or reading, sooner or later they will return to grammar activities.

Reading consists mainly of activities oriented towards comprehension or vocabulary work. Students must also work on summaries of the class readings which they need to have in their notebooks. In the case of extensive reading such as the book *101 Ways to Bug Your Parents*, students had to prepare summaries and list vocabulary words they did not know in order to find their meanings, learn the parts of speech and draw them.

The students' writing and their reflections are also about the use of grammar to write different types of texts. Usually the writing activities are preceded by a series of detailed instructions for what students need to do in their writing. When students were asked about their writing assignments, many of them started by explaining exactly what they were supposed to do with their texts. Moreover, students judge the quality of their work against how well they can follow these writing prompts, as Luisa made clear when she talked about her description of rabbits.

Andrea made a similar comment when she was asked about a personal narrative of her family which was supposed to include some vocabulary words students were learning. Furthermore, Andrea said that she felt that not all the writing had to be about one specific topic; otherwise, they would fail the evaluation.

I said earlier that the Language teachers come to class with an agenda, and it is their agenda that has to be followed in class. The class observations and my field notes showed some examples of how teachers dismissed students' ideas that could have contributed greatly to the class dynamics which were teacher centered. When students get to talk or do stuff, the teachers are paying attention to what students do or say to correct grammar among other things. I think a student who seems to be institutionalized in this type of scenario is Pedro

who says that the idea of the English class is to correct mistakes. He feels they need to do all this work because the purpose is to learn more English.

### **Las Clases de Español [The Spanish Classes]**

The Spanish teachers also come to class with an agenda; however, they are more inclusive in the sense that they allow children to take part in the construction of class concepts. These teachers do not bring handouts or copies; they ask students to do the work in their notebooks or pieces of paper. One of the teachers always works with the students' ideas to shape the lesson development; she even encourages students to listen to each other so that they can reassess the ideas they bring to class.

Where I feel there is a conflict in the Spanish lesson is in the fact the teachers give assignments that include a lot of instructions, yet they tell students to feel free to be creative and propose ideas. The Spanish classes have variety of activities, and they are not necessarily related to the Spanish grammar. Some of the activities are class discussions where I felt students had legitimate chances to participate. If they had grammar exercises, students were asked to give their own explanations. The teacher usually weighed the value of these ideas, but did not discard them.

The background of both the Spanish and Language Arts classes illustrates different circumstances in which students exert their agency in their literacy practices. The students' views, ideas and hypotheses were included more often in the Spanish classes than in the Language Arts.

The views of agency expressed by the students in the interviews were most salient in the accounts of María who talked about a class project in the Spanish class. The teacher gave them some leeway to come up with their own ideas and follow them. She was very clear to say that it was the first time they did anything like that in the Spanish class.

Juan made similar comments about a project he had for the social studies class where he was given the chance to choose the topic for his own work and research. When I saw his writing, it was a couple of pages long; much longer than the work I had seen from other students in the Spanish or Language Arts notebooks. These pieces did not go beyond two pages.

### **Conceptualizing a bilingual literacy program that includes students' identity (ies) subjectivity and agency**

I have stated in several places of my study that it has an educational purpose in mind which means that one of its objectives is to propose change. Moreover, I have also worked with very talented children who have very fascinating narratives about their school experiences, especially their bilingual literacy. Thus, I think that their voices need to be heard somehow.

I think that a proposal for bilingual literacy programs that includes identity, subjectivity, and agency cannot only be stated in terms of grand theories such as constructivism, social-interactionism or dialogism. Such a proposal has to include the aspects that these children can articulate from their lives through their views of their first and second languages and their literacy practices. In sum, it has to include what these learners bring to the teaching-learning scenario as students, children, family members, and promising citizens.

#### **Identity**

A program that includes students' identity (ies) should consider the fact that these identities are not static or run by the biological clock. Lemke (2002) makes a case for challenging the "linear time" of human biology (p.80) when he asks the following questions:

If you face a 12-year-old in the classroom, do you not also face elements of his behavioral repertory that were formed at age 10, or age six and still remain active or

dormant and waiting to be recalled? Do you not also face a human being who has been learning to interact with a six-year-old sibling and a 10-year-old friend, a 15-year-old nemesis, and a 30-year-old parent? (p.81)

Lemke proposes a view of language development and identity of multiple timescales that do not only apply to human development as in the above quote but in the ways we understand language learning. He views language learning and teaching within timescales in the short and the long term. For the short timescales, he proposes to study language in terms of what it is capable of accomplishing within many different domains particularly the “affective sensibility”. That is, he believes we must acknowledge the power of language to move people through a variety of emotions such as laughter, wit, and humor (p.83).

In the summer of 1996, the Friday sessions of my Master’s program featured a number of guest speakers from various academic fields in TESOL. One speaker at these conferences was Earl Stevick, who talked about languages and cognition. At some point, he talked about second language learning and the teaching of formal grammar. He cautioned the audience about the over-reliance on these practices since he thought teachers would end up creating a “moron” native speaker. I believe both Stevick and Lemke understand language in both social and relational terms. People do not learn languages to recite them as they interact with the speakers of these languages; communication entails acts of language negotiation which often times contradict the language rules.

In a longer time, Lemke proposes a collaborative view of languages or dialects of the same language so that the classroom becomes a multilingual setting where the promotion of dialogues and perspectives constitute teaching/learning scenario. The longest time scale for Lemke will occur when students have had the opportunity to develop a “feel” for the language

so that learners have developed their bilingual or multilingual selves and will consequently develop a voice (p.84).

Lemke's timescales ideas on identity are also related to the classroom. He thinks that the classroom is one of many scenarios where people work on their identity formation as they interact with these cultural artifacts. These places are not that different from their houses, the mass media, or their personal activities like social networks. He feels that people mobilize their identities through these many places and add layers to these configurations. However, he thinks that:

Classroom education and formal curricula which are supposed to create longer term continuity from lesson to lesson and unit to unit (though not, after the earliest years, from hour to hour across the school day or from year to year even in the same subject), are narrowly focused on informational content which is more or less unique to school experience. (p.77)

The students' perspectives that I gathered from their narratives seem to point in the direction of the ideas by Lemke in terms of multiple timescales. Diana, for example, feels she knows "adult words" that she uses for her writing. In fact, she knows these words because her mom taught them to her. Diana also feels she has some sort of edge in her math class because she has taken additional classes at a math academy after school. Similarly, Maria's favorite class is dance, and she thinks she is a good dancer. Pedro recalls the first English words he knew because of his father, an English teacher.

With regards to the Spanish class, a student built the concepts that helped her define legends based on a narrative of a trip she had shared with her grandparents to the eastern states of Colombia. This region is particularly renowned for having these stories intertwined in their

customs and traditions. Similarly, students in the Spanish class had a comedic moment when they joked about a teacher's mistake in spelling a word.

In the language classes there were moments where students tried to make hypotheses about some particular vocabulary words, but their efforts were thwarted by the teacher's need to stick to the class agenda. On another occasion, students complained when a student's presentation was interrupted by the teacher who asked them about the meaning of certain words or their pronunciation.

We can see that what is common to those experiences is how much they mattered to those children. Thus, Lemke asserts that these school experiences that showed they mattered to students are essential in helping students in this "identity work" (p.78). Andrea's account of her authorial position balancing what she is asked to do with having some fun is another example of how these students view their schooling in terms of their identities. Lemke closes these remarks on identity construction by asserting that:

The self I am when I am writing, or teaching, or doing those things that mean something fundamental to me, and that I can do over many years, is basic to my identity. Even the self I am whenever I read a particular book, hear a particular kind of music, play or sing or dance to that music, if I feel strong enough about it, can become basic to my identity. (p.76)

## **Subjectivity**

In regards to subjectivity, a literacy program needs to pay attention to the notions of students/writers and writers/authors. The emergence of the authorial-self is paramount aspect in literacy since individuals are bound to express experiences on both physical and emotional levels which have the power to make visible what Cely (2009) defines as "feel" or "what it is like to be" (p.97). This philosopher makes a case for subjectivity that ties in well with the idea

of subjectivity as position or perspective that I have presented as authorial voice. In her idea of subjectivity, Cely considers that the idea of “I” first person as opposed to “he”, “she” or “it” third person prevails. Moreover, the “I”, first person perspective gives the idea of the authority that individuals have about their experiences.

The authority that individuals evidenced about their experiences is based on a series of networks of ideas that unpack intentional states in terms of beliefs, desires and wishes that will account for the individuals’ actions (p. 123). If we see these aspects in terms of students’ writings, I think there will be a lot of elements to account for students’ literacy progress and learning. The most important aspect of the above reflection is the fact that the student will have elements to position himself/herself to cooperate with or resist the authoritarian/authoritative position of the teacher. Cely also talks about the importance of the dialogic exercise that will take individuals (students and teachers) to the intersubjective condition. However, I feel that both dialog and intersubjectivity need to operate towards equal grounds in different institutional settings.

Andrea’s idea of balancing *doing* assignments and *having* fun in her writing echoes the above reflection on subjectivity. However, it is not only Andrea’s account; it is also Adriana’s inspiration and Pedro’s apprenticeship as an author. In fact, Juan, Diana and Adriana talked about the richness of their native language in opposition to English. Nevertheless, they do not deny the fact their second language could have the potential for similar richness if they knew more words.

## **Agency**

Literacy projects that include the construct of agency need to include students’ perspectives beyond the constraints of what the school considers to be literacy, writing and achievement, especially in today’s world of standardized education and accountability. That

said, a literacy program also needs to take into consideration what students bring with them from outside school and recognize its value.

Lemke uses the saying “it takes a village to raise a child” meaning that we need to build communities, “villages”; however, these villages are like an ecosystem which means that they are not constituted by what participants have in common (p.74). Diversity rules in today’s world in education in spite of futile efforts to “level the field” (Street, 2009: ix).

Literacy practices are mostly framed through activities, and it is the students’ participation in these activities that determines their learning. In fact, Birr Moje and Lewis (2007) conceptualize learning as the enactment of their students’ histories through acts of participation (p.16). Consequently, literacy educators need to regard with interest what students bring to the teaching/learning scenario when they take the floor in the classroom.

María criticizes a teacher for “teaching his own way without acknowledging the fact that they are girls”. Moreover, she also claims that “playing” is part of their identity as girls. She feels the books she finds in the library are not age-appropriate of interests to her. She is also very outspoken when she describes a time students were given choices in a particular class project.

In a similar vein, the fifth grade class offers alternatives for the teacher to change the class dynamics that turned out to be boring. They also suggest that their teacher should not interrupt when they are making their oral presentations since it defeats the whole point of the activity. Finally, Luisa and Andrea talk about the fact that they need to shape their writing to the teachers’ demands which in turn are the demands of the school system.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Even though the study provides important evidence on how students view their school literacy practices in their bilingual setting, there are some limitations that leave a scope for



further issues to research. First of all, the participants represent only a small sample of the elementary school students. Therefore, there are possibilities for conducting more longitudinal work with a larger population. These students considered themselves to be successful language learners in both languages, so the study did not include cases of students struggling in their school progress. The views of struggling ESL learners in terms of school achievement would have also given important information on the research concepts. However, the study does inform of other ways of “struggle”. Second, the study claims to have a sociocultural perspective which demands the input of all the parties involved in the school setting namely teachers, parents, and administrators. Nonetheless, the purpose of the study was to have the students’ perspectives on ideas that are very important for their education. Moreover, these ideas are not taken into consideration beyond the over-rationalized psychological conception of students or children in school settings or the anecdotal circumstances of school life itself. I also feel that these voices need to be heard and have validity if education is a project that includes students’ diversity and not only their commonalities. I think that teaching/learning environments are richer if teachers allow students to unpack their identities since they will have many more elements to help learners to make meaningful connections with their learning. Third, the short time frame of the study allowed me to gather some valuable data and render some analyses and interpretation for the purposes of my research constructs. Nevertheless, a longer time frame would provide more data to widen the conceptualization of bilingual literacy processes.

## **Conclusions**

The above study has helped me to formulate some conclusions in this particular school context against the larger setting of bilingual education in Colombia, the students, and my future research. I think the school context as part of the landscape of what Colombian

education is today plays a major role in establishing the school agenda in terms of first and second language learning and literacy practices. Most of the students' beliefs and attitudes towards their academic life are framed within the ideas of apprenticeship, school achievements, and evaluations.

With regards to the cases of this study, I have to say that students feel at ease at school and are fond of being students there. They also have very meaningful ideas about their school life and their first and second language learning from the perspectives of identity, subjectivity, and agency; in fact, they seem to be willing participants. I think they try to fall into line with the school ideas. However, there are important avenues of school work and research in terms of students' ideas about their school life beyond accommodation. Certainly, the students' experiences, narratives, and actions provide avenues for reflection around the ideas of text, roles, and contexts.

These three concepts, revolving around the education of these bilingual children, can certainly be plotted through the glimpses of students' identity enriching the gaze of the school ethos; through the literacy practices balancing the yin and the yang of bilingual students' subjectivities as writers/authors; and through the work of legitimate agents taking over the "usual-ness" of the classroom business.

This study has provided me with a start point for further research on bilingual literacy practices. The future research that I intend to conduct will address the limitations of the present study. I think it would be particularly interesting to conduct a study that works with teachers, parents, and administrators in order to piece together the bigger picture of literacy and its impact on education. I also think it would be fascinating to replicate this study with high school students who are in the process of claiming their individuality usually resisting the

“adult” views that tend to pigeonhole them or even worse stigmatize them. They undoubtedly have different views about their education and school life experiences.

The reading and research that I have done for this study have also opened my mind to other promising areas of work in terms of theoretical orientations in education and literacy such as critical literacy, communities of practice, and activity theory. It also showed me the value of other research methodologies for sociocultural literacy research such as narrative inquiry.

Finally, the study gave me further confirmation of Faigley’s explanation for the nuances of the composition pedagogies in terms of cognitivist, expressivist, and social-epistemic perspectives. He affirms that the distinction among them is related to the way teachers determine and assign their students’ subjectivity in the classroom literacy practices.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: PURPOSIVE SURVEY

**Full Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Course:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Read the following statements and choose the answer that best shows what you are as a student in the bilingual program at [REDACTED]. Cross out the one answer that best represents your school life.**

**1. I have been a [REDACTED] student for ...**

- a. \_\_\_ 1 year
- b. \_\_\_ 3 years
- c. \_\_\_ 5 years
- d. \_\_\_ 6 years

**2. I consider that I read in Spanish...**

- a. \_\_\_ really well
- b. \_\_\_ okay
- c. \_\_\_ with some difficulties
- d. \_\_\_ with a lot of difficulties

**3. I consider that I write in Spanish...**

- a. \_\_\_ very well
- b. \_\_\_ okay
- c. \_\_\_ with some difficulties
- d. \_\_\_ with a lot of difficulties

**4. My reading in English is ...**

- a. \_\_\_ really good
- b. \_\_\_ okay
- c. \_\_\_ limited
- d. \_\_\_ deficient

**5. My writing in English is...**

- a. \_\_\_ really good
- b. \_\_\_ okay
- c. \_\_\_ limited
- d. \_\_\_ deficient

**5. When I read and I write, I feel more comfortable in...**

- a. \_\_\_ Spanish
- b. \_\_\_ English

**6. In general terms, my school progress at [REDACTED] is...**

- a. \_\_\_ excellent
- b. \_\_\_ outstanding
- c. \_\_\_ acceptable
- d. \_\_\_ deficient

**7. I would like to take part in a Project that researches reading and writing in Spanish and English.**

- a. \_\_\_ yes
- b. \_\_\_ no

## ENCUESTA

Nombre completo: \_\_\_\_\_

Grado: \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

**El propósito de esta encuesta es el de tener un conocimiento acerca de tus ideas frente a tus procesos de lectura y escritura en el programa bilingüe del colegio. La encuesta no está relacionada con tu información personal o tu desempeño académico.**

**Lee los siguientes enunciados y marca con una equis (x) la respuesta que responde mejor a tu vida escolar como estudiante del programa bilingüe del [REDACTED].**

**1. Yo he sido estudiante del [REDACTED]**

- a. \_\_\_\_ por 1 año
- b. \_\_\_\_ por 3 años
- c. \_\_\_\_ por 5 años
- d. \_\_\_\_ por 6 años

**2. Considero que leo en español...**

- a. \_\_\_\_ muy bien
- b. \_\_\_\_ de manera regular
- c. \_\_\_\_ con algunas dificultades
- d. \_\_\_\_ con muchas dificultades

**3. Considero que escribo en español...**

- a. \_\_\_\_ muy bien
- b. \_\_\_\_ de manera regular
- c. \_\_\_\_ con algunas dificultades
- d. \_\_\_\_ con muchas dificultades

**4. Mi lectura en inglés es...**

- a. \_\_\_\_ muy buena
- b. \_\_\_\_ regular
- c. \_\_\_\_ limitada
- d. \_\_\_\_ deficiente

**5. Mi escritura en inglés es...**

- a. \_\_\_\_ muy buena
- b. \_\_\_\_ regular
- c. \_\_\_\_ limitada
- d. \_\_\_\_ deficiente

**6. Cuando leo y escribo me siento más a gusto en el idioma...**

- a. \_\_\_\_ español
- b. \_\_\_\_ inglés


**7. En general mi proceso escolar como estudiante del [REDACTED] es...**

- a. \_\_\_\_ excelente
- b. \_\_\_\_ sobresaliente
- c. \_\_\_\_ aceptable
- d. \_\_\_\_ deficiente

**8. Me gustaría participar en un proyecto que investiga la lectura y escritura en inglés y español.**

- a. \_\_\_\_ si
- b. \_\_\_\_

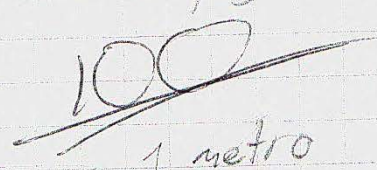
APPENDIX B: MARIA'S WRITING SAMPLE

**THE CAT.** 

**Physical Characteristics:** Four legs, with fur, claws, different colors.

**Domestic:** houses, apartments

**Outstanding Characteristics:** Cats, they don't like water, they lick their selves.

**The Cat** 

solo lo de bambo se coelgan 1 metro

The cat is an interesting animal. It has four legs, fur of different colors. The cat is a domestic animal, so it can live in apartments and in houses with people. It is a mammal because it drinks milk from its mom. This animal loves to lick itself because they hate water. The time that cats sleep are between 12-14 hours a day. Cats are carnivores this means the main ingredient in a cat's diet must be meat. They absolutely need to lay down on whatever reading material you have in front of you. When they stare intensely at a spot where there is nothing you can see, keeping a sentry for long periods, leaving you

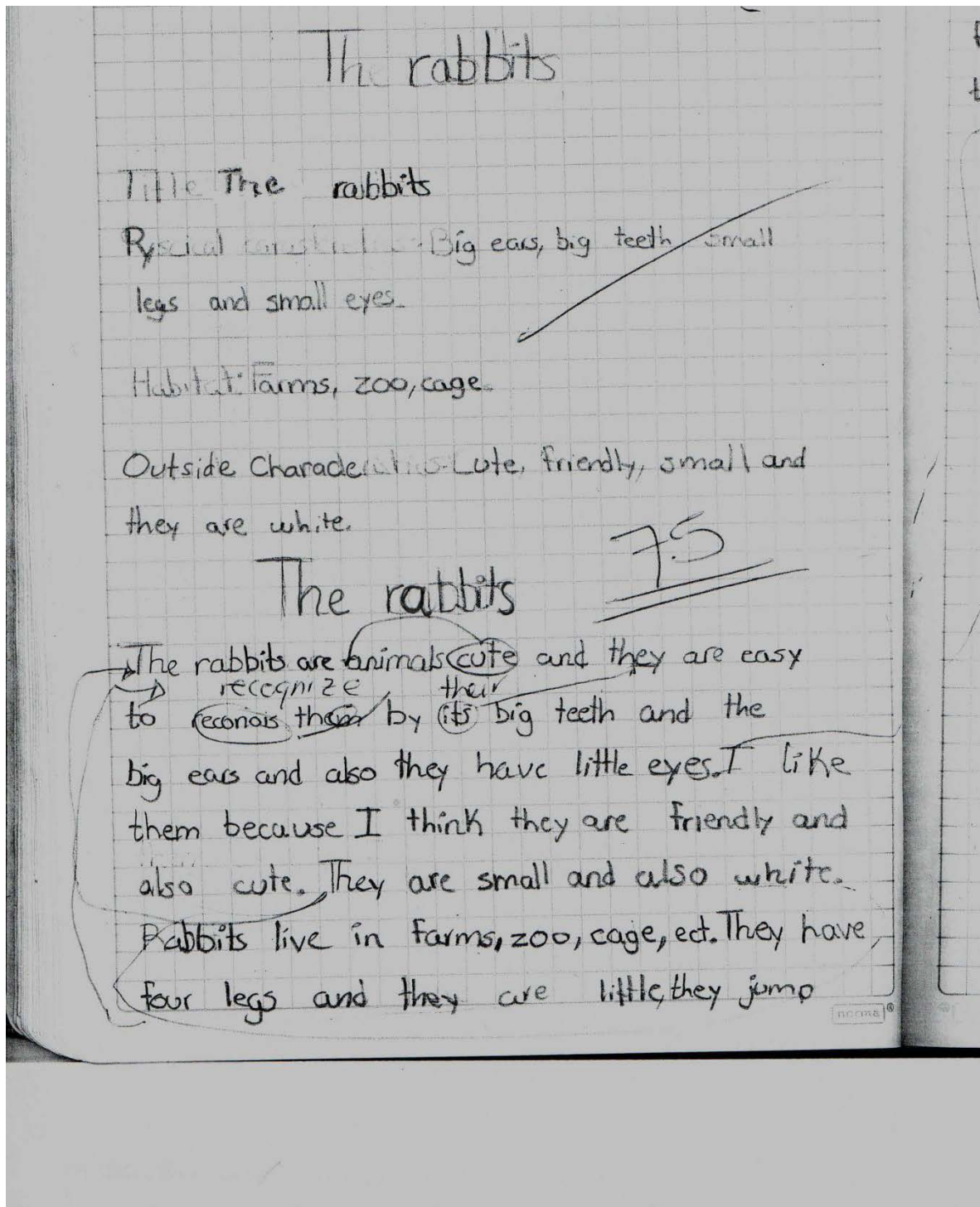
Smile

completely convinced there are ghosts in the house. Their total refusal to do that extremely cute things the ~~always~~ <sup>there</sup> do when someone from outside the household is here to see it. When they are desperate for food, and you are going to feed them the way they need to walk very slowly just in front of you, to make sure you don't change your mind, making you trip every time that way cats are interesting and special animals.

Most of this information I took it from Google. ✓



APPENDIX C: LUISA'S WRITING SAMPLE



far away and they eat vegetables but their  
favorite food are the carrots. I <sup>think</sup> thing we have  
to <sup>take care of</sup> rabbits.

Organize your ideas they way  
It was taught!



## APPENDIX D: PEDRO'S WRITING SAMPLE

B. Based on the reading and the story map, write a well developed and structured 20 line summary of the story "Bo Rabbit". Include the following criteria:

- Correct paragraph structure. (Beginning, middle and ending) **D.D. 17** f
- Include the connectors (First, then, next, after that, finally) Underline them in yellow. **D.D. 19** f
- Use simple and continuous past tense when necessary. Underline them in red **D.D. 7** 40
- Check your punctuation marks and spelling and use capital letters accordingly. **D.D. 20** f

### Bo Rabbit smart for true Summary

Once upon a time one mornin in first-day  
 There was an elefant that was sleeping in his  
~~bed~~. A rabbit named Bo Rabbit was down  
 of the elefant leg. Bo Rabbit woke up the  
 elefant and the elefant said the rabbit  
 that sorry but it said that Bo Rabbit was  
 so little. They made a promis that was that if  
 Bo Rabbit take the elefant out of his bed the  
 elefant will not say it little. And bo rabbit went  
 out to think. First he thinks and think. Then  
 it meet the whale and the whale said him  
 little too. And Bo Rabbit said to the whale  
 that if it take him out of he ocean it  
 wouldn't tell him little any more and they  
 made the promis. Next Bo Rabbit had an  
 idea. After that he brot a very big and  
 long rope and said the two animals that  
 pull the rope the mush that they can.  
 And bo rabbit do it he put out the



## Aliens (extraterrestres)

la vida humana según las investigaciones no es la única, según testigos en video muestran de naves en forma circular y normalmente viajan en triángulo. Como todos sabemos existe varias explicaciones para esto, una, una teoría de Hollywood para ganar dinero o vida extraterrestre en nuestra tierra. Y esa vida se llama alien.

### Significado de la palabra Alien:

alien es un derivado de extraterrestre pero con una deformación totalmente diferente. extraterrestre es la palabra utilizada en la ufología para referirse a la vida proveniente fuera de la órbita de la tierra y alien también es utilizada en la ufología para referirse a la vida proveniente fuera de la órbita de la tierra.

APPENDIX F: ADRIANA'S WRITING SAMPLE

Me llamo Adriana Tengo 10 años. Estudio en el G.U hace 7 años. En Toda mi experiencia en el G.U he aprendido muchas cosas, no solo académicamente sino También Muchas virtudes sobre la humildad, respeto, sinceridad, amor, Tolerancia, responsabilidad y solidaridad. También Tengo muchas amigas que me quieren y me apoyan en las buenas y en las malas, en lo mas importante estan con migo se llaman: Mariana Estava, Catalina Silva Laura Ramirez, Ana Sophia Grayales ("palla") y Mari Vargas. Me parece muy importante lo academico pero También las extracurriculares, Estube en gimnasia por 4 años y estoy en Danzas en verdad creo que Soy buena. Me va bien en el colegio me esmero en tener buenas notas como en (I.T., español, sociales, ciencias, arte, edu fisica, etc.). en estos momentos estoy feliz en el colegio y se que asi va a ser hasta grad 11.



# APPENDIX G: ANDREA'S WRITING SAMPLE

## STORY!

On day in my bed <sup>I was</sup> about to sleep <sup>when</sup> my father <sup>told</sup> me if  
 I want <sup>him</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>to</sup> he read me a story. In that moment I  
<sup>saw</sup> ~~see~~ that my father was the best story teller in ~~the~~  
<sup>life</sup> ~~live~~ but when he was finishing I <sup>told</sup> ~~said~~ him that  
 another story but he said me that no so <sup>I</sup> ~~a~~ glare  
 at him and he said "sleep well" and I said <sup>him</sup> ~~he~~ "ok" glare  
 I Love you" at 12:00 pm it was so cold so my  
 teeth were chattering <sup>then</sup> I <sup>slept</sup> ~~sleep~~ well at the  
 next day my mom <sup>asked me</sup> ~~said~~ if I want an ice  
 cream I said <sup>of course</sup> ~~of course~~ so we <sup>went</sup> ~~go~~ when I was  
 eating my ice cream I started <sup>lapping</sup> ~~laping~~ it and my  
 mom was <sup>laughing</sup> ~~laughting~~ then I said mom I have  
 to go to a library to check out a book for  
 Language that the teacher Maggie said that  
 we have to take for reading we were going  
 when my mom said you want <sup>want</sup> ~~to~~ to see a movie  
 I said yes so we <sup>went</sup> ~~go~~ to a store of movies  
 and my mom <sup>borrowed it</sup> ~~borrowed~~ so we <sup>did</sup> ~~do~~ all and we  
 were so happy

## APPENDIX H: AN EXAM WRITING PROMPT

1. Three parts of an argumentative paragraph (state sentence, 3 facts and 3 opinions, invite the reader to agree) D.D 19(Distinguishes and creates different kinds of texts according to his-her specific purposes.)
2. Appropriate punctuation D.D 20(Uses appropriate punctuation.)
3. Correct capitalization and spelling. D.D 21(Uses accurate capitalization and spelling.)
4. Correct sentence structure D.D 16(Uses correct sentence structure in his/her writings.)

I think parents shouldn't allow children to use internet during weekdays. I think so because it is a fact and it is also evident that some children become irresponsible with school tasks. Sometimes children forget about other interesting activities like reading a book, having sport and also sharing with their families. I think internet is not bad at all but it has to be used in proper way. For example on specific times and under the supervision of their parents or an adult. I hope we all support parents to teach children when and how to use internet.

REMEMBER TO CHECK ALL YOUR ANSWERS



Parents shouldn't allow children go out alone.