

THE LANGUAGE AND LITERACY PRACTICES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
LEARNERS (ELLS) IN A PHILADELPHIA HIGH SCHOOL: THE HYPHENATED  
EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN CONTENT AREA  
CLASSROOMS

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## ABSTRACT

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This multiple case study results from an ethnographic immersion in a local public high school, focusing on English language learners (ELLs) in content area classrooms. The primary goals were to 1) explore the language and literacy practices of ELLs within this setting, 2) gain an understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of the learners' schooling experiences, and 3) discuss implications pertaining to practice and research. Four focal students, each from a different country and each with different home or first languages, are discussed to provide a nuanced perspective of immigrant and refugee students. Importantly, the theoretical framework of "hyphenated reality" and interlanguage contributed to uncovering the ELLs' subterranean layers. The study was informed by qualitative research methodologies, including critical ethnography. Data collection namely included field observations in classrooms, interviews with students and teachers, and student work. Within-case and cross-case analysis was conducted through a general inductive analysis approach.

Major findings include the need to view ELLs as theory constructors, who form sophisticated notions regarding second language acquisition and the linguistic features of the English language, given their unique position as learners of another language and their heightened metalinguistic awareness. ELLs also theorize schooling and act as rational agents within the structure of school. They enter school with a logical agenda and, according to their observations and experiences, adjust themselves and devise strategies for performing school. Finally, the concept of the micro-macro dialectic grew empirically from this study, thereby building upon existing scholarship. The micro-macro dialectic calls for intentionally juxtaposing a larger, contextual layer to understanding ELLs, such that their personal narratives become enriched by “official” facts and vice versa. This framework also complicates dichotomies that have been established to categorize students, academic fields, and pedagogical ideologies, such as the notion of ELLs compared to bilingual/multilingual learners. These supposedly irreconcilable differences exist in the academy and in theory but do not hold up in the hyphenated experiences of learners.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study and the Literature

When third quarter report cards were published, Juan, a twelfth grade English language learner (ELL) from Tezahuapan in Veracruz, Mexico, had a cumulative GPA of 3.7. Approximately seven weeks prior, I had discussed with him his academic performance:

**Lan:** I feel like you're doing well. You don't think you're doing well in school?

**Juan:** No, 'cause I have do it better, like—

**Lan:** You could do better?

**Juan:** Yeah, I know I could—I could, but now I gotta work so I don't really have time too much—too—too much time for school. But I know I could do really very much better.

**Lan:** You think you could do better?

**Juan:** Yeah. This—the schools, like here in the United States. Well, I don't know about the other states, but here at Sunrise High School it's more, too much more easy than the school at my home country.

**Lan:** It's easier?

**Juan:** Yeah, it's too much more easier...

[Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]

Although some of Juan's individual course grades at times fluctuated between an A, B, or C throughout the academic year, overall, he had a high GPA. This example is contrary to the dominant discourse, which often laments the underachievement of

Latino/a students on the whole. Moreover, while media and academic research tend to emphasize the high degree of academic challenges faced by traditionally marginalized student populations, Juan stated that school in the U.S. was “too much more easy than” school in his home country. He also signaled the fact that paid employment was one of his obligations in addition to school. Juan’s case demonstrates the need for a fuller account of the school experiences of ELLs and the necessity of rethinking how we teach and conduct research regarding such students.

As a group, ELLs in K-12 public schools in the U.S. are often characterized as a monolith (see, for example, a discussion by Gutiérrez, Bien, Selland, & Pierce, 2011); as an individual, an ELL is often portrayed as a learner who makes linear transitions, for example, moving from “Limited English Proficient” (to use terminology from the No Child Left Behind Act) to English proficient once they exit from an English as a second language (ESL) program according to official state policies.<sup>1</sup> Such views do not take into consideration the complexity in the experiences and being of ELLs. Moreover, these views are often accompanied by deficit perspectives of ELLs that do not acknowledge their backgrounds and repertoires of language and literacy (see discussions by e.g., Abedi & Gándara, 2006; Gitlin, Buendia, & Doumbia, 2003; Iddings, 2009; Lee, 2005). My work as an observer-participant in ESL programs housed in three different K-12 school settings, in addition to my ESL teaching

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<sup>1</sup> Instead, for example, in discussing bilingual and bicultural learners, Hornberger (1989) argues “that the complex array of possible biliteracy configurations can be accounted for by understanding biliteracy in terms of a series of interrelated continua” (p. 271).

experience, have led me to reconsider the multifaceted nature of the experiences of ELLs as well as their language use and enactment of literacy.<sup>2</sup>

Although I have adopted the term, “English language learner”, and abbreviation, “ELL”, from studying TESOL as a master’s student for two years, my attempt is to disrupt the conceptualization of this term. The term is highly contested and admittedly may tokenize the learners to which they refer. One approach to addressing this issue is to replace “English language learner” with another term, such as “dynamic multilingual”. Although I appreciate such an effort, I do not believe that learning one language necessitates the omission or eradication of another. Specifically, being an English learner does not require effacing one’s home or other languages or one’s lived history and culture. Furthermore, ELLs are not static, and learning English does not imply an unmoving nature, as perhaps suggested by the argument to supplant “English language learner” with “dynamic multilingual”. According to my observations and teaching experiences, understanding that a student is learning English as another language also seems to emphasize the need to support this individual in developing language skills that are essential for his/her success and life chances. It is unfair to diminish this need for English learning in a society in which this form of social capital is undeniably necessary (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

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<sup>2</sup> These reconsiderations have been highly influenced by my fieldwork conducted in the prior two years in a K-8 ESL classroom, which is part of my advisor’s (Dr. Gerald Campano’s) research site, as well as a pilot study last year in content area classes at a public high school.

Informed by Trinh's (1994, 2011) views of immigration and refugee-ism, I propose a theoretical framework for understanding ELLs through which to rethink instruction and research that better align with these learners. Unlike dominant views, this framework embraces the complexity and simultaneity of multiplicity. I primarily draw on Trinh's (1994, 2011) concepts of hyphenated reality to theorize the learning and identities of ELLs within discussions of language and literacy. We would be able to use this understanding of the whole experiences of ELLs to build on who they are when developing curriculum and striving to re-imagine education for them. Without this understanding, we may reproduce schooling where marginalized learners, ELLs included, seem to be set up for failure.<sup>3</sup>

Along with the theoretical framework of hyphenated reality, I also draw on my professional and academic histories to propose increasing the dialogue between two seemingly disparate academic fields, both of which are heavily concerned with language and literacy issues surrounding traditionally marginalized populations: TESOL and sociocultural approaches to literacy. Through a literature review of empirical studies on ELLs in the content area classroom, I propose conducting research and working with ELLs in ways that apply the ethos of a sociocultural perspective without jettisoning the main tenets of TESOL. Rather than reject the so-called cognitive perspective of language and literacy learning (see, for example, Street & Lefstein, 2007), I want to retain what I consider the core of TESOL—its emphasis on

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<sup>3</sup> This view stems from discussions on the theories of the sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), in various courses taught by my advisor in the Reading/Writing/Literacy program.



providing access to power codes through explicit language instruction—but work from an ideological foundation of a sociocultural perspective. This premise of a sociocultural approach to language and literacy is particularly missing in the context of conducting empirical research in content area classrooms consisting of ELLs. I focus on this particular learning context because of its emphasis on access to both English and the content areas. As an educator and researcher, my goal is not to entirely dismantle this oppressive social system and build a new one per se—rather, I hope to effect incremental changes to “fight within and against the system” (Lytle, Portnoy, Waff, & Buckley, 2009). Working within the existing structure where the English language and content area knowledge are power codes necessary for what society considers success, I advocate for equity in education for ELLs by providing them with access to English and the content areas in hopes of ultimately increasing their life chances.

### **Research Questions**

To explore the experiences of ELLs in the context of a content area classroom in a manner that brings to bear the theoretical framework of hyphenated reality while folding in aspects of sociocultural approaches to TESOL, I explored the following research questions:

1. Applying a sociocultural perspective to TESOL, what language and literacy practices enacted by ELLs can be observed in high school content area classes?
2. Given the complexity and multiplicity of the experiences of ELLs, what are their experiences in school, particularly in content area classes?

## **Theoretical Framework**

My theoretical framework informed how I collected, analyzed, and wrote about my data. Here, I present my interpretation of Trinh's (2011) concept of hyphenated reality as they apply to ELLs. Through the lens of this framework informed by Trinh (1994; 2011), I advocate for reconsidering how we perceive and work with school-aged ELLs.

### **Hyphenated Reality**

I introduce Trinh's (1994) concept of "hyphenated reality", what she also terms "between-world reality", to discussions on the experience and context of ELLs, arguing that we should adjust our perspective to see that a singular space (of American language and culture) should not be forced upon ELLs. Trinh (2011) theorizes a hyphenated reality in explaining that "one does not in/un-habit one unitary, or two contradictory worlds" and "we live in many worlds at the same time" (p. 55). To clarify and augment her theory, she presents several ways, as related to encounters in daily life, to think about hyphenated reality, three of which I will discuss.

The 'r' in 'nature': Trinh (2011) describes a "boundary event" as an in-between state in discussing the 'r' in the word, 'nature': "Perceptible to the ear and yet hardly articulated, the r in nature is always half-muted, half-pronounced. It is the very phoneme whose pronunciation remains in parentheses [nache(r)]—that is, somewhere between a sound and a silence..." (p. 60). This observation is in contrast to observing

words such as ‘red’ where the ‘r’ is an unambiguously distinct, standalone sound.<sup>4</sup>

Twilight: A tangible way to view hyphenated reality is twilight, an “encounter between day and night” (Trinh, 2011, p. 62). As such, twilight may also be defined as “a state of uncertainty” or “vagueness” (Dictionary.com, 2013).

Gray: The color gray is another concrete illustration of in-between reality, in which more than one space is occupied. Trinh (2011) invokes the notion of “gray space” by Kisho Kurokawa, a contemporary architect and theorist, to describe an “intervening area between inside and outside and a realm where both the interior and the exterior merge” (p. 72). It should be emphasized that, though gray is made by combining black and white pigments, it has an integrity of its own (G. Campano, personal communication, June 19, 2013). Trinh (2011) further explains, “The new hue is a distinct color of its own, neither black nor white, but somewhere in between—in the *middle* where possibilities are boundless. A midway-between-color, gray is composed of multiplicities...” (p. 72).

Through the lens of hyphenated reality, we see that the experiences of ELLs are not a mere amalgamation of their lives in the U.S. and their lives in their home country; they and their experiences are a much more complex gray. They are simultaneously in

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<sup>4</sup> I will further Trinh’s (2011) idea by discussing the pronunciation of ‘nature’ as informed by phonetics and phonology. In the word, ‘red’, the ‘r’ is pronounced distinctly and can be represented as a stand-alone phoneme according to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA): [r]. However, in words, such as ‘nature’, the ‘r’ is considered a colored-R and, converted into IPA, it would be attached to a vowel sound, here [ə], as a tail in [ər] rather than stand independently (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2007). As such, Trinh (2011) uses this colored-R to articulate the concept of hyphenated reality.

the middle of various worlds that consist of more than one language, culture, and so forth. However, as Trinh (2011) emphasizes, “Middleness in this context does not refer to a static center,” because this “median position” is “where all directions are (still) possible” (p. 70). As she elegantly states, “As such, it is a place of decentralization that gives in to neither side, takes into its realm the vibrations of both, requiring thereby constant acknowledgment of and transformation in shifting conditions” (Trinh, 2011, p. 70). Viewing ELLs as the embodiment of a middle position, their identities and lived histories are seen as dynamic with endless possibilities. For example, though a content area classroom may be established as monolingual, in practice, ELLs in the class may use English and their home language in varying degrees; they may invoke varying cultural resources, informed by life stories in the U.S. and elsewhere. Further, ELLs do not simply move between two disparate spaces in moving between mainstream and ESL classes; they move fluidly while simultaneously occupying multiple spaces.

Although the concept of hyphenated reality emphasizes ELLs’ negotiation of many facets of difference (in language, backgrounds, and more), difference does not necessarily engender conflict, though in practice, we humans seem to elect to make it so. Borrowing from theories in Chinese art and knowledge, Trinh (2011) explains that ‘middle’ (中) is often accompanied by ‘harmony’ (和), but “harmony does not connote uniformity;” rather, harmony cannot exist without difference (p. 70). According to her theorization of “a harmony-difference-middleness,” “[difference] has too often been pointed to as the cause and the source of conflict, whereas difference may be said to exist without, within and alongside conflict” (Trinh, 2011, p. 70). These ideas parallel

that of Anzaldúa's (2012) notion of the "new *mestiza*" consciousness, a consciousness "in the making," a consciousness of a people in the Borderlands, in which worlds intersect (p. 99). Similar to harmony and hyphenated reality, the "new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (Anzaldúa's, 2012, p. 101). According to these concepts put forth by Trinh (2011) and Anzaldúa (2012), for ELLs, attending school in the U.S. should not necessitate the elimination of their home culture, and in terms of language, English-learning does not necessarily conflict with their home language, though schooling in the U.S. has been set up to force this conflict upon ELLs.

Moreover, schooling in the U.S. seems to imply that we have a "monolithic view of this subgroup of children [ELLs], their histories, and practices" (Gutiérrez et al., 2011, p. 233); as such, we have created uniformity in the structure and objectives of instruction, making schooling difficult and oppressive for ELLs, particularly those who immigrated to the U.S. as adolescents, some of whom have been identified as Students with Interrupted Formal Education. Rather than presume a static population and unmoving state of being, I perceive ELLs and their hyphenated realities to be in a state of "internal transformation" (Trinh, 2011, p. 68), in which "one sees oneself in constant metamorphosis, as if driven by the motion of change to places so profoundly hybrid as to exceed one's own imagination" (Trinh, 2011, p. 55). Their between-world realities constantly and fluidly move and take shape.

## **Interlanguage**

When ELLs are expected to produce English output comparable to their native-speaker peers, teachers will more often than not be disappointed, as the language of ELLs is an expression of their hyphenated reality, and therefore, does not necessarily follow the conventions of Standard English. Relatedly, referring to Chicano Spanish, Anzaldúa (2012) states, “We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages” (p. 77). Anzaldúa (2012) expands on this notion with the following:

Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos deficient, a mutilation of Spanish. But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, *evolución, enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *un nuevo lenguaje. Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir*. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language. (p. 77)

Grounded in this perspective of a living language in an ELL’s hyphenated reality, I support a nuanced, respectful understanding of ELLs and their different stages and manifestations of language learning. Further, their English should not be dismissed as an adulterated form of “correct” English, but a living language with its own integrity. I have extrapolated this view to Selinker’s (1972) concept of “interlanguage”, a concept that was groundbreaking in the field of second language acquisition.

Selinker (1972) observes that the vast majority of second-language learners, particularly adults, will not “succeed” in producing native-speaker output. Rather, in attempting to produce output of the target language norm (the target language is English for ELLs in the U.S.), a second language learner seems to draw from “a separate linguistic system” called interlanguage (Selinker, 1972, p. 214). As the learner

produces output in the target language, there may be a blurring between his/her home language and the target language; there may also be new, unexpected elements in the output. I interpret interlanguage to be the language-equivalent of Trinh's (1994, 2011) hyphenated reality and gray. Interlanguage also parallels Anzaldúa's (2012) conceptualization of a border tongue as a living language. As such, we should view the language use of ELLs as an entity that exists in its own right, an evolving entity; their language(s) is/are not static. However, problems arise when teachers assume that ELLs will readily use fluent, Standard English and "[abdicate] responsibility" for teaching ELLs (Harklau, 1994, p. 261), rather than teach ELLs English in a manner that honors their between-world language practices. If the goal is to provide opportunities for ELLs to succeed academically, then an understanding of and respect for their interlanguage and hyphenated reality could inform pedagogical approaches.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **TESOL for Access**

TESOL is under the larger umbrella of applied linguistics, the study of language learning and teaching, and therefore, the focus is on pedagogy and explicit language instruction, which concerns teaching phonology, syntax, morphology, vocabulary, genres, and so forth. Language is typically viewed as consisting of four modalities: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The generally accepted view is that the four develop in an integrated manner to a certain extent (Hinkel, 2006; Shanahan, 1984; Zamel, 1992). Due to the increasingly high stakes of standardized examinations under

*No Child Left Behind* and the influence of reports by the National Literacy Panel, including *Developing Literacy in Second-language Learners* (August & Shanahan, 2006), there has been an increasing emphasis on second language literacy, usually defined as reading and writing for ELLs. Also due to pressure stemming from standardized exams and an increasing population of high school ELLs, content-based language and literacy have become topics of priority in TESOL (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2007; Freeman & Freeman, 2006; Schleppegrell, 2004). In contrast to sociocultural approaches to language and literacy, the discourse around TESOL primarily positions language and literacy as skills that can be learned and should be taught to provide ELLs with access to academic achievement and, by extension, improved life chances. Though language teaching is at the forefront of TESOL, sociocultural theory has also shaped the field (e.g. Delpit, 2006; Freire, 1970; Nieto, 1999).

Practitioners and scholars in TESOL experience a paradox: On the one hand, Standard English is the language insisted upon minority populations by those in power, and therefore, teaching the language would contribute to reproducing the existing power structures; on the other hand, to help students succeed within the current social system, ESL teachers must teach them English language and literacy (Janks, 2010). Janks (2010) has analyzed this paradox closely in the context of post-apartheid South Africa where she taught English to speakers of other languages, arguing for a balance in critical literacy education that includes both an emphasis on providing access to the power genre and interrogating issues of power and domination.



A major concern with TESOL is the notion that English may replace a student's home or first language (see for example, Garcia, Kleifgen, and Falchi, 2008). Although I agree that a student's home language should not be sacrificed for the development of English, some of the research in this area seems to be presented in an antagonistic tone, such that English is named a "killer language" (e.g., Pakir, 1991). Such an approach may divert attention from crucial discussions on how to best work for and with ELLs. We cannot de-emphasize the need for ELLs to learn English because English is a prerequisite for success in our society. Given the status quo, it is our ethical duty to support students in learning English. Concurrently, we can and should work toward systemic change.

### **Sociocultural Perspective**

Unlike TESOL, rather than concentrate on applications to pedagogical practices, a sociocultural perspective on literacy is mainly concerned with issues in power. Literacy is defined as a social practice, not a set of neutral skills (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Collins, 1995; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984).<sup>5</sup> When literacy and language are viewed as neutral skills following an "autonomous model" (Street, 2003), in which these skills are assumed independent of social situations, ELLs and others who "lack" those skills are, therefore, marginalized. However, a more nuanced view of literacy as socially situated counters the portrayal of ELLs as learners who lack

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<sup>5</sup> I extend the notion of literacy as a social practice to language and literacy as social practices.

language and literacy skills. Street and Lefstein (2007) explain the following in discussing the implications of this model:

Many people labeled “illiterate” within the autonomous model of literacy may, from a more culturally sensitive viewpoint, be seen to make significant use of literacy practices for specific purposes and in specific contexts. (p. 42)

This more culturally sensitive viewpoint allows for the valuing of ELLs’ backgrounds and repertoires of language and literacy.

### **Critical Resource Orientation**

The literature on ELLs, language, and literacy is commonly filtered through a deficit model of literacy such that ELLs are presented as students who lack or fail to attain English fluency or literacy. Portraying ELLs as “at risk” and an “urgent” problem is also part of this discourse. A representative example of this framework is a study conducted by Lesaux and Kieffer (2010) aimed to describe the component skills of language and literacy for a sample of language minority students and their classmates. The language minority learners (i.e. ELLs) in the study are described as “struggling readers” characterized by “low vocabulary knowledge” (Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010, p. 596). Moreover, according to the researchers, these learners are part of an “at-risk” population (Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010, p. 597). Similarly, Orosco and Klingner (2010) explain that ELLs “achieve at lower levels (particularly in literacy) than their non-English language learner peers” (p. 269). Noticeably, Orosco and Klingner’s (2010) research was published in the *Journal of Disabilities*, implying that not speaking

English fluently or as a native language is construed as a disability. As Campano (2007) explains, students from immigrant, migrant, and refugee backgrounds often do not “conform to this misguided ideal” of certain skills held by fluent or native English speakers, and are thus placed in lower tracks or remedial programs (p. 49).

Significantly, this deficit view is highly influential in policy. The report by the National Literacy Panel states, “Language-minority students rarely approach the same levels of proficiency in text-level skills achieved by native English speakers” (August & Shanahan, 2004, p. 4). The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) uses similar language, explaining that, though the percentage of U.S. fourth graders who fail to read at a basic level is high, the “incidence of reading failure is even higher” within ELLs (p. v). These reports served as the basis for policy under *No Child Left Behind*, revealing the pervasiveness of extreme autonomous views on language and literacy and a deficit orientation toward ELLs.

Rather than reproduce the dominant discourse, which characterizes minoritized students and high-need populations in a deficit light, scholars and educators who take a resource orientation toward learners emphasize the valuable knowledge and literacies that people bring with them to both in- and out-of-school settings (e.g., Campano, 2007a; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Street, 2003). A resource orientation towards learners might include intentionally incorporating students’ family and building on their linguistic and cultural resources (Campano, 2007; Campano & Ghiso, 2011). As another example, I have often observed that the ESL classroom was established as a safe space for students to use their home language and share about their families—

contrary to the norm where minoritized groups are overshadowed by dominant narratives (Jones, 2006). My study is grounded in the notion that the ELLs I worked with drew on a myriad of resources in “doing” school.

### **ELLs in the Content Area Classroom: A Literature Review**

Through a literature review of empirical studies on English language learners (ELLs) in the content area classroom, I propose for conducting research and working with ELLs in ways that apply a sociocultural perspective while maintaining the main tenets of TESOL. Rather than dismiss the so-called cognitive perspective of language and literacy learning, I want support what I consider the essence of TESOL—its emphasis on providing access to English through explicit language instruction—but work from a foundation of a sociocultural perspective. This approach is particularly missing in empirical research in content area classrooms consisting of ELLs. Drawing on sociocultural approaches to literacy for its emphasis on context and systemic issues, I use this review in an attempt to re-imagine empirical studies in a manner that honors the between-world realities of learners and also aligns with TESOL’s emphasis on language teaching.

### **A Large and Increasing ELL Population**

Conducting and rethinking research on issues regarding ELLs is important for a wide-range of educators given that a significant proportion of the K-12 population consists of ELLs. Writing over ten years ago, Short (1994) explains, “Language educators in the U.S. are very aware of the major demographic changes that have

occurred in the K-12 educational system over the past decade as schools have enrolled ever-increasing numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse students” (p. 581). This increase has continued. About 20% of the U.S. student population consists of children of immigrants (Fix & Passel, 2003). Janzen (2008) observes that this number represents a significant increase over the past 30 years. More recent counts by the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.) show that, in the 2011-2012 school year, 9.1% of public school students (or an estimated 4.4 million students) in the U.S. were ELLs.

Increasingly, teachers in all subject areas must adapt to working with ELLs.

These observations have led to discussions regarding how to best work with ELLs given that they comprise a significant and growing portion of the total student population. The data implies that many educators, not just ESL teachers, will likely need to work with ELLs in some capacity. Empirical research rooted in both TESOL and sociocultural perspectives would contribute to a nuanced understanding of how to work with ELLs, given my observation that studies and resource books written for educators in the field of TESOL tend to focus on either the “technicalities” related to the teaching and learning of English as another language, or if the literature aims to have a sociocultural bent, the focus on the applied linguistics aspect of TESOL seems to be comprised.<sup>6</sup>

### **Equity: Access to English and the Content Areas**

Complicating the situation of K-12 ELLs in the U.S. is the fact that the vast majority represents backgrounds considered to be of low socio-economic status. Data

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<sup>6</sup> For an example of the latter, see Faltis and Coulter (2008).

from the U.S. Census show that ELLs tend to come from low-income households; in 2007, 66% of ELLs lived in homes where the household income was 200% below the federal definition of poverty (EPE Research Center, 2009). Relatedly, the marginalization of ELLs has been documented by scholars (e.g. Abedi & Gándara, 2006; Gitlin, Buendia, & Doumbia, 2003; Iddings, 2009; S. J. Lee, 2005). Also, Brock et al. (2009) underscore research indicating that ELLs have been historically underserved in public schools in the U.S. (Strickland & Alvermann, 2004; Thomas & Collier, 2001). Though not all educators writing about ELLs discuss the deeper, systemic causes underlying the “low” social positioning of ELLs—most salient, ELLs by definition are not native speakers of the dominant language—researchers do commonly highlight the observation that ELLs tend to score lower on high-stakes standardized exams and are placed in lower academic tracks (Hostetler, 2005; Vang, 2006).

One major proposed means of providing access, as advocated by many in the field of TESOL, is to integrate the teaching of English and the content areas. Peregoy and Boyle (2005) directly state that the purpose of integrated language and content area instruction is to provide “access to the core curriculum” and promote English language development (p. 78). Drawing on the American Association for the Advancement of Science (1998, 2001) and the National Research Council (1996), Kaufman and Crandall (2005) explain that there is an “increased emphasis on language across the curriculum” (p. 1). Moreover, “the growing number of English language learners in all classrooms have underscored the need for teachers in all disciplines to be able to address the

specialized linguistic and academic needs of English language learners” (Kaufman & Crandall, 2005, p. 1). As a means of working within the existing educational system to increase equity, I agree with the notion of providing ELLs with access to both language and content learning, but I propose re-theorizing this strand of TESOL by conducting field research that begins by applying a sociocultural perspective.

### **Content Area Classrooms**

In this section, I provide an overview of the different forms of content area classrooms that include ELLs to provide background on the contexts of the empirical studies in this review. In response to the need to provide simultaneous instruction of English and the content areas, educators in TESOL have emphasized the affordances of content-based instruction or teaching language and literacy through the content areas (e.g., Chamot & O’Malley, 1987; Crandall, 1992; Mohan, 1986). The basic notion of content-based instruction “is that language should be taught in conjunction with the teaching of academic subject matter” (Schleppegrell, Achugar, & Oteiza, 2004, p. 68). That is, content area knowledge is not taught or learned in isolation from language (Schleppegrell, Achugar, & Oteiza, 2004), as “English is both a target and a medium of education” (Gibbons, 2003). Murphy and Stoller (2001) explain that instruction that integrates content and language learning objectives (Stoller, 2004) falls under the superordinate term, “content-based instruction”. Subcategories include sustained content language teaching, theme-based language instruction, and sheltered instruction classes. Describing sustained content language teaching (SCLT), Bunch et al. (2001) explain, “In secondary school contexts, SCLT can be seen as an opportunity to integrate

academic subjects that students are expected to master with the associated language development that is both a necessity for mastery of those subjects and a byproduct of studying them” (p. 28). Theme-based instruction is often employed in post-secondary settings, such as a university ESL program for international graduate students. For example, Brinton (2001) discusses one such course she taught at University of California, Los Angeles where she designed ESL instruction around the theme of Los Angeles in literature and film. Despite the variety, these different forms have in common teaching English alongside a theme or content area.

For this literature review, I culled hundreds of empirical studies and selected ones representative of the larger, most relevant conversations, making intentional choices based on my knowledge of TESOL and patterns I noticed in my literature search. For example, I chose articles by Deborah Short, whose name appeared frequently in my searches. She is one of the authors of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, known as the SIOP model (Echevarria et al., 2007), which has been widely adopted by K-12 ESL content area programs. As another example, an additional choice of inclusion is an article whose first author is Anna Uhl Chamot, one of the developers of the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), which is often cited in guidebooks on teaching ELLs in the content areas. As an indication of the popularity of this approach, as of March 17, 2013, *The CALLA Handbook: Implementing the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach* by Chamot and O’Malley (1994) has been cited 850 times according to Google Scholar. Following such a rationale, I curated this review to include studies apropos to ELLs in



the content areas.<sup>7</sup> I also chose less common studies that serve as touchstones for the kind of sociocultural-approach-to-TESOL research I advocate for: studies by Harklau (1994) and Kibler (2011), who conducted classroom ethnographies.

In this review, I discuss two themes that emerged in all the focal studies: (1) pedagogy and the teacher and (2) linguistic challenges and explicit language instruction. Based on my knowledge of the field and literature research, these themes are prominent in TESOL. This review maintains the importance of these features while invoking a sociocultural approach to help us rethink research regarding ELLs in the content areas in a manner that aims to honor the students and their contexts. Further, whereas many studies focus on the teacher and pedagogy, I seek an approach that shifts the emphasis to the students because, ultimately, they are the reason for this work.

### **Pedagogy and the Teacher**

Seemingly representative of research trends, many of the studies focused almost solely on pedagogy and the teacher. Though this point of view is useful, the students' perspectives and experiences should be included in the research. Additionally, the ELLs are implicitly, or sometimes explicitly, deficitized, as teachers are viewed as those

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<sup>7</sup> To be more specific, I began by examining the reference lists of books on teaching ELLs in the content areas and searching Google Scholar (search terms: *English language learner* and *content area*), which led me to book titles that I was familiar with as well as some pertinent articles published in the 1990s. I then used JSTOR and Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (ProQuest) to search for articles, using the following keywords: *English language learner*, *content area*, *ethnograph\**, *English as a second language*, *ESL*, *social studies*, and *science*. In hopes of finding more recent articles, I used 2000 as the cutoff date to limit my review to relatively current work. I examined the reference list of the articles I retrieved to locate additional articles. I read abstracts to limit the review to studies conducted in the U.S. Finally, I chose representative articles on which to focus.

that must be prepared as experts to fill ELLs with language and literacy skills.<sup>8</sup> In this section, I discuss these studies, drawing from both TESOL and sociocultural theory. I also use the studies by Harklau (1994) and Kibler (2011) to inform how the essence of the seven studies can be reformulated from a sociocultural perspective.

**Application of research-based curriculum.** Most of the focal studies were based on the implementation of a curriculum model or lessons created by the researchers such that the ELLs themselves and their sociocultural contexts were not heavily considered. The researchers report on teaching strategies and pedagogy that they consider effective in content-based ESL contexts and mainstream classrooms with ELLs according to observations of lessons and their own recommendations with little or no discussion of the ELLs in the observed classrooms. Examining the students' experiences, lives, and perspectives would have provided insights to the effectiveness of the research-based curriculum.

Short (1994, 2002) researched middle-school social studies classes attended by ELLs, focusing on typical TESOL elements. After analyzing the language of middle school American history textbooks and classes, Short (1994) writes that project staff and ESL social studies teachers developed a curriculum unit designed to integrate language and content objectives about colonial America and to facilitate students' comprehension of the content and improve their academic language skills. Building on this work, Short (2002) formalizes a curriculum model called the Language-Content-Task framework, which "highlights the three areas of academic literacy around which

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<sup>8</sup> See Freire (1970) for the "banking" model of education.

teachers must organize their sheltered instruction during the planning and enactment of lessons, as they manage the teaching and learning process” (p. 18). Veering little from her 1994 study, Short’s (2002) study documents observations of teachers in middle school sheltered social studies classrooms. Skills are treated as neutral, following what Brian V. Street has termed the autonomous model (see, for example, Street, 2003; Street & Lefstein, 2007). A discussion of the arbitrariness of valued skills and the oppression of ELLs who supposedly lack those skills would have complicated the notion of teaching English and content area skills to ELLs.

Similar to Short (1994, 2002), Bunch et al. (2001) and Schleppegrell et al. (2004) emphasize teacher professional development, which is important, but intentionally including ELLs and critical discussions is also crucial. As in Short’s (1994) study, Bunch et al. (2001) explain that the teachers in “academically and linguistically heterogeneous” middle school, social studies classrooms attended an institute “that focused explicitly on integrating academic language and rigorous content in ways appropriate for ELLs” (p. 29). Teachers in Schleppegrell et al.’s (2004) study, which focuses on developing teachers in functional linguistics to enhance content-based instruction “through activities that focus on the role of language in constructing knowledge,” also attended institutes (p. 67). By highlighting teacher institutes for language and literacy instruction, Bunch et al. (2001) and Schleppegrell et al. (2004) emphasize the teachers as experts in the classroom. While I value this perspective, research should also emphasize the roles of students and what they bring to the classroom, as seen in the inclusion of student interviews in the studies by Harklau

(1994) and Kibler (2011). New Literacy Studies here is useful because it helps us to see that characterizing ELLs as “low-literacy” perpetuates their marginalization. Taking a resource orientation (Campano, 2007), we could begin our work by considering how we can build on the language and literacy resources of ELLs, as informed by TESOL.

Of the studies that showcase the researchers’ pedagogical approaches to content-based instruction, Chamot et al. (1992) developed the most prescriptive approach, leaving little room for sociocultural considerations. Their popular approach is the Cognitive Academic Learning Approach (CALLA), in which “curriculum content is used to develop academic language and learning strategies are taught explicitly to increase students metacognitive awareness and to facilitate their learning of both content and language” (Chamot et al., 1992, p. 1). This study differs from the others in this subsection, in that the unit of analysis is the students rather than the teachers, but under the constraints of the highly structured CALLA framework, which emphasizes a particular set of items to teach students. The students’ learning is almost entirely dictated by CALLA. A highly scripted curriculum model does not seem to allow room for teacher and student agency: students might be positioned as empty vessels (Freire, 1970) to be filled with strategies, and teachers might have little voice as they follow an approach developed externally.

By first examining the language and literacy practices of ELLs as well as their backgrounds, teachers could frame a curriculum around who the ELLs are, rather than construct an arbitrary overlay on the classroom. Rubinstein-Avila (2007), who conducted ethnographic observations and interviews to explore what counts as literacy

for a particular Dominican high school student in the U.S., summarizes this approach in stating, “It is essential to acknowledge, build upon, embrace, and incorporate immigrant students’ literacy repertoires of practices” (p. 587). Informed by TESOL and a sociocultural perspective to literacy, we see a need to value the knowledge and expertise of both the teachers and students and consider how to build on those.

**Key features of content-based ESL.** The authors of the focal studies in this review provide explicit or implicit recommendations for teachers working with ELLs, highlighting key features of content-based ESL in a way that does not seem to emphasize the students and their local learning contexts. Short (1994, 2002) and Bunch et al. (2001) both highlight the need to make the content areas accessible to ELLs. Short (1994) emphasizes the teacher’s role in facilitating comprehension of learning materials, while she argues in her 2002 study that the classroom needs to be less teacher-directed to provide to allow ELLs to access content learning through interaction with other students. A significant portion of Bunch et al.’s (2001) article is devoted to a section on “Academic language development through rigorous and accessible curriculum,” in which the authors explain that their curriculum model “offers a set of instructional and curricular strategies intended to produce more equitable classrooms, where teachers teach at a high intellectual level while reaching a wide range of students” (p. 30). Schleppegrell et al. (2004) and Chamot et al. (1992) also directly endorse the particular strategies they developed, contending that their strategies would help ELLs in the content area classroom.

The authors of these studies indicate that their pedagogical approaches were

effective, but I am left asking, “What were the ELLs’ experiences as the teachers implemented these approaches?” A research approach that is intentionally sensitive to the backgrounds of the students may help to understand their uptake of these recommended teaching models. Such an approach would also position students as valuable members of the classroom.

**Teachers and students.** Rather than inscribe a particular curriculum design onto their research site, Kibler (2011) and Harklau (1994) conduct ethnographies at schools to examine both the teachers’ and students’ experiences to position them as experts in their own right, giving a sociocultural spin to TESOL research in the content area classroom. Kibler (2011) frames high school ELLs as adolescent second language writers, and finds that the learners’ and their humanities or science teachers’ perspectives on writing assignments mostly diverge. This finding was made possible through close observations of and interviews with both the students and teachers. Unlike the other studies, this study did not implicitly discount the views of the ELL participants.

Harklau (1994) also takes into account both the experiences and perspectives of the teachers and students in comparing ESL and mainstream content area classrooms at a high school, following four focal ELLs but also examining the students’ pedagogical setting. Similar to Short (2002), Harklau (1994) finds that content area teachers rely on the teacher-led initiation-reply-evaluation sequence (Mehan, 1979), though she explains that a major advantage of mainstream content area classes is that the teachers and non-ELL students provide ELLs with authentic English language input. Observations of the

ESL classes in the same school leads Harklau (1994) to infer that the ESL teachers seemed to have cultivated a safe space for the ELLs, who are minoritized students. While Kibler (2011) seems hesitant to provide pedagogical recommendations—asking more questions in the end—Harklau (1994) expresses the need “to increase mainstream practitioners’ and administrators’ awareness of and sensitivity to learner needs” and provides suggestions on how teachers at the high school can collaborate to improve instruction (p. 268). By highlighting the marginalization of the ELLs and suggesting the need for awareness of and sensitivity to the learners, Harklau (1994) seems to argue for merging ideas from sociocultural approaches into a TESOL context.

Grounded in an ideological framework based on a sociocultural perspective, Kibler (2011) and Harklau (1994) begin with particular research objectives but take an inductive approach to allow for themes and findings to emerge through ethnographic research that explicitly include the ELLs into the picture. If the goal is to provide ELLs with access to English and the content areas, then we should, as much as possible, do so on their terms, keeping in mind the social structure within which we work. We should work with ELLs, rather than treat them as peripheral members of the classroom to grasp the sociocultural context under which they and their teachers are operating.

### **Linguistic Challenges and Explicit Language Instruction**

TESOL and a sociocultural approach to literacy, to some extent, seem to be at odds with each other: the former focuses on explicit language and literacy instruction, and the latter criticizes the view that language and literacy are discreet skills learned and taught in isolation. Sociocultural perspectives also challenge the power structures that

dictate the value of a particular set of skills. Working within and against our existing social system, I support the goals of TESOL to provide ELLs with language and literacy instruction, but we should ground this work in a sociocultural perspective that complicates power differentials and values the learners, their teachers, and their backgrounds. In this section, I take this approach in reviewing empirical studies on ELLs in content area classrooms, focusing on the linguistic challenges ELLs face in those contexts and the need for overt language instruction—both key considerations in TESOL.

I examine this language-focused theme because most schools aim to quickly “mainstream” ELLs, often leaving them to sink or swim. As Harklau (1994) observes, “Language minority students are often placed in mainstream, English medium classrooms long before they develop the degree of language proficiency necessary to compete on an equal footing with native speakers of the school language” (p. 241). Drawing “on a theory of language that perceives how content is construed through language and how language realizes particular perspectives and points of view” (Schleppegrell et al., 2004, p. 90), it can be argued that learning conditions are not conducive to the success of ELLs. As such, the explicit teaching of English in content area classes is crucial for ELLs, especially if we accept Hakuta’s (2011) argument that “[strong] relationships exist between English proficiency development and content area achievement, even using imperfect present-day measures” (p. 171). Schleppegrell et al. (2004) neatly summarize this point, stating, “A focus on language itself is required if we are to help students gain control of the language through which content is constructed”



(p. 90). These sentiments circle back to the argument for striving for equity by providing ELLs with access to English and content area learning.

**Vocabulary development.** Developing curricular materials and strategies related to teaching vocabulary is a common solution for addressing the linguistic challenges of content area classrooms when working with ELLs, but vocabulary learning is usually framed as the acquisition of words without considering the relevance of the words to the ELLs and who has the power to select the words deemed valuable.<sup>9</sup> In her findings based on a linguistic analysis of history textbooks, Short (1994) states, “The treatment of vocabulary in these textbooks is inadequate for English language learners, according to our analysis... The difficulty for English language learners is that many of the important words are not identified as key terms. For students who have received little schooling in the U.S. and therefore generally have limited background knowledge of these words, the vocabulary can be a major obstacle to comprehension” (p. 593). Though Short (1994) advocates for better treatment of vocabulary in history textbooks, she uses deficitizing language (e.g. “limited background knowledge”) to describe ELLs and does not seem to have conducted this research with a particular group of ELLs in mind; therefore, the local situations of the learners were not particularly accounted for. Moreover, a discussion of the American-centric nature of textbooks in the U.S. would have helped to explain the linguistic complexity of textbooks for ELLs who may be unfamiliar with the discourse around American history.

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<sup>9</sup> See guidebooks on teaching ELLs in the content areas, e.g. Kaufman and Crandall (2005) and Peregoy and Boyle (2005).

Kibler (2011), on the other hand, leans toward a sociocultural perspective in her study. Though Kibler (2011) does not discuss vocabulary-learning at length, based on interviews with ELL writers in high school, she intimates the unequal footing of ELLs compared to native English speakers, because ELLs cannot rely on a “backlog” of vocabulary knowledge comparable to that of many of their classmates. Kibler (2011) also uses the students’ home language to gather this information, providing for an understanding of the complications around vocabulary that seems to be missing in most of the other studies, which view vocabulary as simply a repertoire for ELLs to be filled with.<sup>10</sup>

**Linguistic analyses of content area texts.** Studies focusing on linguistic analyses of school texts, though useful, often seem to be removed from the learners, and therefore, might be seen as examples following the autonomous model of language and literacy learning. One group of studies seemingly placed students in the background to meticulously analyze the linguistic features of content area texts. The argument in these types of studies is that raising teachers’ awareness of and teaching them the linguistic features of content area texts will inform the teacher’s instructional practice in working with ELLs. Many researchers (e.g. Christie 1998, 2002; Tang 1992, 1993) have conducted research related to text structure in the content areas, and Schleppegrell has written prolifically on this subject, particularly from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics. In providing a rationale for focusing on the linguistic features of

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<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that Kibler (2011) conducted the “perfect” study, but work such as that study can inform future studies on working with ELLs in the content area classroom.

history texts, Schleppegrell et al. (2004) explain, “History provides a particularly good example of discipline-specific literacy demands because it is constructed through texts that cannot easily be experienced hands-on. History teachers therefore rely heavily on the textbook or other written texts” (p. 88).

Though I support researching and teaching linguistic features, this work should start with the students and their learning situations. For example, while acknowledging the linguistic complexities faced by second language writers, Kibler (2011) argues for drawing on the existing knowledge of ELLs; we do not need to take an approach that calls for creating a list of isolated linguistic features for ELLs to learn without valuing the knowledge and experiences they already live. In analyzing the linguistic features of texts and devising strategies for teaching them in content area settings, we should also investigate who currently has access to this power code and who does not in order to create access for all learners. Harklau (1994) points out that recently mainstreamed ELLs in her study were usually tracked in low-level classes where, by implication, they were likely not given adequate access to learning the linguistic features of textbooks necessary for content area achievement. Harklau explains, “As in many other U.S. public schools, the isolated and marginalized position of the ESL program in an institution that otherwise made no adjustments for non-native speakers produced a makeshift system in which there was no appropriate instructional environment for learners of the school language” (p. 241). This observation addresses issues in power and advocates for a learning environment more suitable for ELLs. Empirical research regarding ELLs in the content area classroom would benefit from such discussions,

which shed light on systemic issues and directly address inequity to provide insight on possible solutions.

### **Room for a Critical Resource Orientation**

Though Harklau's (1994) and Kibler's (2011) studies served as touchstones for the type of research I strived for, I attempted to fold in more of a critical resource orientation, as has been done by researchers whose work seems deeply rooted in a sociocultural tradition in literacy. In providing suggestions for working for and with immigrant newcomers in the English language arts classroom, Musetti, Salas, and Perez (2009), for example, stress first assessing and then working from where the students are in their home language. This approach appears grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) highly influential theory of the zone of proximal development. The pedagogical implication of this theory is that educators could support learners by meeting them at their current level and then working with the learners to guide them in moving beyond that level.

In another ethnographic study examining immigrant students as language learners, Godina (2004) investigated the literacy practices of Mexican-background students. Godina (2004) observed that schools tended focus on the limited-English status of these students, who are often enrolled in the low academic tracks. His findings show that these students demonstrate literacies in their homes and communities that are unacknowledged in school (Godina, 2004). This observation aligns with the argument that we "need to expand current notions of learning context... beyond the confines of the classroom" (Harklau, 2001).

Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, and Meza (2003) also conducted an ethnographic study to examine the literacy practice of translating in immigrant households. The researchers illuminate immigrant children's experience as language brokers or interpreters as a form of family literacy that is typically not valued in schools (Orellana et al., 2003). They argue that, "These daily life family literacy practices are different than typical middle class practices like bedtime storybook reading, but they may be no less significant for children's literacy development" (Orellana et al., 2003, p. 31). This statement seems to tie to Heath's (1983) observation that bedtime storybook reading is a way to prepare children "for the kinds of learning and displays of knowledge expected in school" (p. 51). Orellana et al. (2003) also challenge the current power structure that places teachers as experts, pointing out the central and "authoritative role" taken by children who translate oral and written texts in immigrant homes. This point illustrates the aspect of a critical resource orientation that confronts power structures.

### **Concluding the Literature Review**

A focus on ELLs in the content area classroom can serve as a platform for increasing dialogue between the TESOL and a sociocultural perspective on literacy. Such an interdisciplinary approach can help us to re-theorize these fields and rethink means of empirical research related to ELLs. Because learning is affected by the student's in- and out-of-school context, which in turn is influenced by external forces, research from a New Literacy Studies lens helps us to contextualize our work. At the same time, if we strive to provide ELLs with access to learning opportunities, we cannot ignore their need to learn ESL and the content areas; as such, we must also draw on

TESOL for its emphasis on pedagogy and applied linguistics. Combined, the two perspectives allow for a complex, nuanced research approach. Continuing to break the boundary between these two fields can inform our work with the students, who are at the heart of what we do in K-12 language and literacy research.

## **Research Design**

### **Background and Context**

I conducted my research at Sunrise High School,<sup>11</sup> a public school in the School District of Philadelphia. I was introduced to Sunrise High by my graduate-level school leadership program, through which I completed a principal internship at the school during the 2013-2014 academic year.<sup>12</sup> Sunrise High is considered a neighborhood school in the district, which also consists of special admission schools and an increasing number of charter schools. In the 2013-2014 academic year, the school had 703 students and 46 teachers, but these numbers fluctuated throughout the year. According to the school district's official enrollment and demographic data, during the 2012-2013 academic year, 89% of the students were from low-income backgrounds.<sup>13</sup>

The school took pride in the great diversity of its student population. The principal stated that last year, the students together spoke 22 different languages. I

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<sup>11</sup> Pseudonym

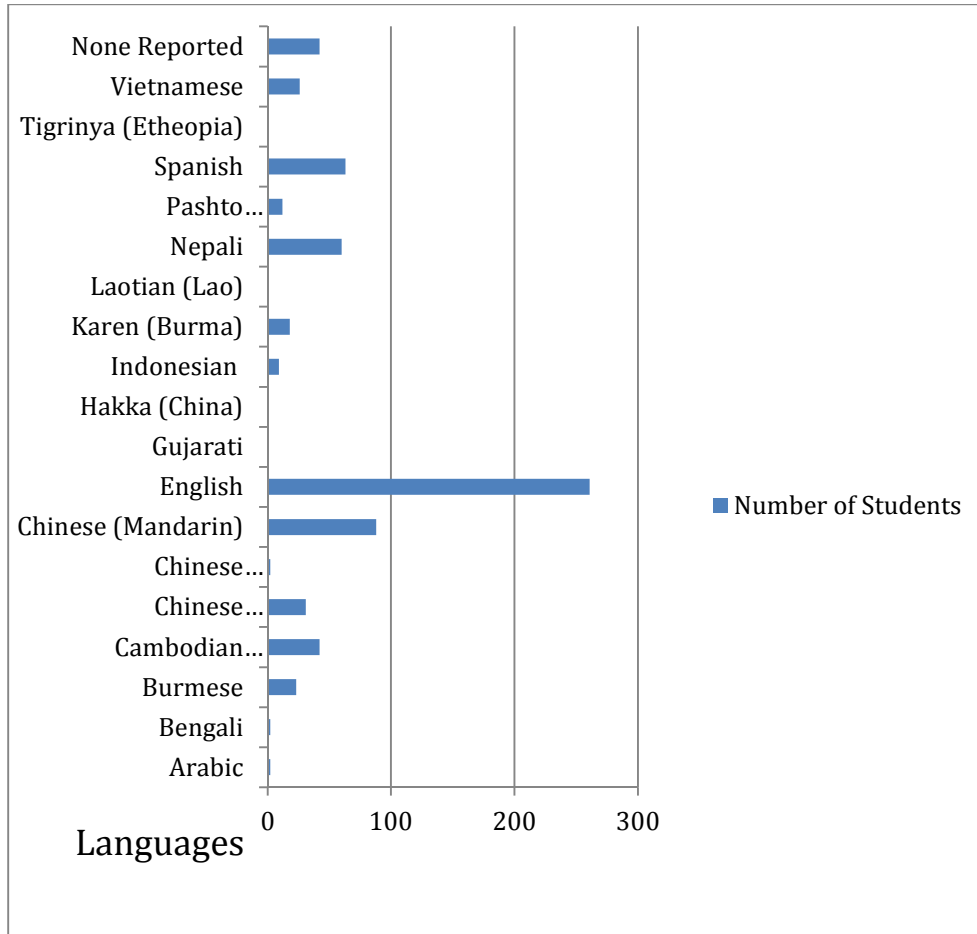
<sup>12</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Diane Waff for her assistance in setting up this internship.

<sup>13</sup> Unless otherwise mentioned, demographic statistics about Sunrise High School was retrieved from the school's official website published by the School District of Philadelphia. To maintain anonymity, the school's website address is not listed in the references.

created the chart below to document the various languages and respective number of speakers of those languages within the student population as of November 2013 based on numbers I retrieved from the school office:

Figure 1

*Languages Spoken at Sunrise High School as of November 2013. List of Languages May Be Incomplete Due to Under-reporting.*



This chart reinforces my suggestion that additional learning could be gained by applying the micro-macro dialectic. On a macro level, the official data highlight the vastness of the school's linguistic diversity, suggesting that the individual students within the school speak various languages. The information also shows that an overwhelmingly large number of students speak English. However, without a complementary micro perspective, details may be lost. Peter, a case study student from



Burma, spoke Chin, Burmese, English, and the Malaysian language. To my understanding, he also spoke the language of his tribe within the Chin population. That is, three of his languages were not accounted for by the above data. Moreover, the accuracy of the figures cannot be confirmed, as it is unclear whether, for examples, ELLs listed English as one of the languages they spoke. From my experience at the school, with the exception of newly arrived immigrant and refugee students, all of the students spoke English, and therefore, the number of English speakers should be near 700, the entire school population, but the count is instead about one-third. This analysis of the chart demonstrates how the macro and micro interact and inform one another.

To provide further demographic information, below is the racial breakdown of the student population according to the school district:

African American: 29.9%

Asian: 48.9%

Latino/a: 11.2%

White: 8.2%

Other: 1.6%

Sunrise High was of particular interest to me due to the high proportion of ELLs.

During the 2012-2013 academic year, 38.4% of the students were officially designated ELLs. In the 2013-2014 academic year, according to unofficial numbers, about half of the student population was identified as ELLs.

To immerse myself into the context of Sunrise High School, I spent 544 hours onsite over the course of an entire academic year, from August 2013 through June 2014.

I spent two full days at the school per week, and occasionally, went to the school on additional days. I used the first semester to acclimate myself to the environment and, more importantly, to develop relationships with the students, school administrators, and staff members. The first semester also served as a time to conduct a pilot study that informed my dissertation research.

During the second semester, I served as a participant-observer in a Social Science class, which consisted entirely of English language learners, two days per week. This class, internally labeled within the school as “ESOL Social Science”, served as my study’s “home base”. I had planned simply to document my observations, gather information from interviews, and collect students’ schoolwork. However, a personal commitment to the students’ learning and success resulted in my making direct efforts to provide individual support to the students. Therefore, as the study progressed, I also included in my data audio-recorded sessions, in which I worked individually with students in areas that they identified as a need, including algebra homework and social science reading.

In addition to conducting naturalistic data collection, my semi-insider’s status as a principal intern in the school allowed me a range of opportunities not typically afforded to a researcher: I worked in the main office where I learned about the operations of the school and constantly interacted with parents/guardians and community members, I observed and assisted in meetings led by school administrators, I attended school functions and assemblies, and so forth. Though these experiences

were not considered an official part of my research, they contributed to a holistic understanding of the multilayered experiences of the focal learners and their context.

## **Methodology**

This study applies a multiple case study approach (Cresswell, 2007) informed by various qualitative research methodologies. I looked to critical ethnography and inductive analysis for a modified form of grounded theory to inform my study. Through conducting this research and analyzing the data, I developed what I call a micro-macro dialectic that allowed for shedding light on the hyphenated reality of the students of focus. Additionally, I drew on practitioner research for its emphasis on researcher subjectivity.

**Multiple case studies.** A case study methodology was appropriate for my research questions, which required a close examination of ELLs. As Johnson (1992) explains in describing research approaches in second language learning, “A case-study researcher focuses attention on a single entity, usually as it exists in its naturally occurring environment” (p. 75). In my study, a “case” refers to a student, the unit of analysis. The purpose of a case study is to understand an issue, utilizing the case as a particular illustration (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). Rather than build my research around one case study, i.e. one student, I worked with multiple cases (multiple students), and explored these cases “over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, 2007), which will be described below.

I began my research with a malleable case study research design, following Johnson’s (1992) explanation that “[discovering] what aspects of the case and its natural

environment are relevant to the goals of the study requires that the research design be flexible... [A] case-study design is further developed as the study progresses” (p. 85). I created a working research design steered by my research questions and made shifts in response to a growing understanding of the context and issues (Johnson, 1992). I developed a detailed description of each case and themes within the case (within-case analysis), and conducted thematic analysis across the cases (cross-case analysis) to arrive at a holistic interpretation (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003).

**A critical ethnographic lens.** I took a critical ethnographic approach to conducting my case studies. The work of Heath (1983) and Street (1984), both of whom conducted and wrote on groundbreaking ethnographic research, served as a springboard for situating language and literacy as sociocultural practices embedded in histories and socio-politics. Similarly, I drew on the work of Lee (2005, 2009), who conducted ethnographic research focused on Asian American students in a high school and highlighted, among many ideas, the notion of “the model minority stereotype as a hegemonic device” (Lee, 2009, p. 6). That is, critical ethnography stresses the need to consider deeply ingrained systemic issues surrounding power in literacy and education research.<sup>14</sup>

Though this study was not one of practitioner research, in which I specifically investigated my own practice for the purpose of improving my teaching, my study was informed by the emphasis on reflexivity, critical consciousness, and the interrogation of

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<sup>14</sup> I would like to note that, though my study applied ethnographic methods, it is not considered an ethnography, as it did not focus on an entire cultural group (Cresswell, 2007).

one's subjectivity in practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). These concepts together stress the importance of "[thinking] through the power, obligations, and responsibilities of social research" (Weis & Fine, 2000, p. 33). Our background knowledge, experiences, and all that encompasses who we are shape our research (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; LeCompte, 1987; Peshkin, 1988). Given my self-perception as an advocate of ELLs, for example, it was imperative that I constantly considered how this position affected my data collection and analysis of data collected from working with ELLs and their teachers.

Additionally, I took into consideration the emic perspective, the "locally held perspective of an individual, group, or institution" (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 44). That is, emic refers to perspectives directly from the participants rather than projected onto them by the researcher. I conducted my study with this definition in mind, along with notions of reflexivity and subjectivity, in an attempt to capture and portray the perspectives of the participants as much as possible. This approach aligns with Maxwell's (1992) concepts of descriptive validity, which concerns the "factual accuracy" of a researcher's account of participants and their surroundings (p. 285) and interpretive validity, which concerns the participants' perspective. Applying these ideas, I attempted to let the data speak with the understanding that my subjectivity influenced how I represented the research.

**Micro-macro dialectic.** I empirically (rather than theoretically) arrived at what I call the micro-macro dialectic for research and data analysis during the process of my study. This methodological framework came into formation as I became increasingly

drawn to the lives of the ELLs with whom I worked and as they let me into their multifaceted lives. Examining the focal students' stories alongside official histories and facts became an important theme, which builds upon the scholarship of, among others, Mohanty (2002). In discussing transnational feminism, Mohanty (2002) writes, "My project was anchored in a firm belief in the importance of the particular in relation to the universal—a belief in the local as specifying and illuminating the universal" (p. 503). She adds, "I did not argue against all forms of generalization, nor was I privileging the local over the systemic, difference over commonalities, or the discursive over the material" (Mohanty, 2002, p. 502). The implication is that the global and local shed light on one another. Similarly, Collins (2002) highlights connections to the domestic and transnational in discussing black feminist thought. My interpretation is that we must listen to individual stories as a way of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, & Tarule, 1986, 1997), but also link local knowledge to the transnational. Along this line of thought, Arnove, Torres, and Franz (2012) frame comparative education as a "dialectic of the global and the local". As Arnove (2012) explains, "There is a process of give-and-take, an exchange by which international trends are reshaped to local ends" (p. 2). I would add that the local also shapes the global.

Applying the micro-macro dialectic calls for an intentional investigation of an ELL's micro-macro context as a multidimensional dialog. The micro and macro are inherently tied, but in the drive to classify human beings, we have separated the two. We can only see the hyphenated reality of learners if we apply both. The micro leverages an ethnographic lens to provide for a detailed view of a person. Though a

learner may be considered a tiny speck in the universe, his/her experiences are bonded to larger, systemic issues. Importantly, the distinct story of an individual also informs the larger histories of the person and his/her heritage. The macro, thus, helps us understand how the particular is situated in a broader narrative. The two are connected by a constant interchange, such that they inform and complicate one another. To provide a concrete example, having learned that one of my study participants identified as an ethnic minority from Burma and a refugee in the U.S., I examined his oral history alongside human rights reports and information published by the UN. Juxtaposing these accounts, I saw that the singularity of his immigration chronicle shaped the official facts reported by authorities and vice versa. That is, an individual encapsulates socio-histories, but he/she is also not an absolute representation of his/her group. Applying the micro-macro dialectic, I found that the schooling experience of the focal ELLs were linked to social dimensions beyond school and that their lived histories also problematized dominant narratives—forming an intricate constellation of factors that molded one another.

**Inductive analysis: Modified grounded theory.** Referring to Strauss and Corbin (1998), Cresswell (2007) explain that the intent of grounded theory is “to generate or discover a theory” such that the development of theory is grounded in data from participants and shaped by the views of the participants (p. 63). Because my research questions focused on the experiences of ELLs, my case study design was reshaped by data I gathered about my participants, as was my findings. However, as Kelle (2007) explains, “...[The] construction of theoretical categories, whether

empirically grounded or not, cannot start ab ovo, but have to draw on already existing stocks of knowledge” (p. 197). In other words, we cannot expect researchers to be free of theoretical preconceptions when collecting and analyzing empirical data (Kelle, 2007). Therefore, rather than attempt to strictly apply grounded theory, I applied a methodology of general inductive analysis. Patton (1980) offers a simple definition:

Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis. The analyst looks for natural variation in the data... (p. 306)

To this definition I added that this approach would allow me to acknowledge my preconceived theories in conducting my study. Bailey and Jackson (2003), citing Charmaz (2000), characterize this approach as “a compromise between strictly inductive versus theory-driven” approaches. This methodology supports inductive coding to help us “remain attuned to our respondents’ views of their realities and deters us from imposing extant theories or our own beliefs on the data” (Bailey & Jackson, 2003, p. 61) while acknowledging that researchers use “sensitizing concepts”, which Charmaz (2000) describes as background ideas informing our research (as cited in Bailey & Jackson, 2003). I do not claim to have conducted my research and analysis on a blank slate, as may be the implication according to grounded theory. However, as best as possible, I allowed for themes to emerge from my observable data to account for the experiences of the participants in terms of how they engage in language and literacy practices in content area classes, while acknowledging that my data analysis was, to a



certain extent, shaped by my own conceptualizations of ELLs, my understanding of how ELLs are portrayed by the dominant discourse in education, and my preconceptions of how learners behave in certain school environments.

### **Methods and Data Collection**

To account for the perspectives of the participants while following case study methodology (Cresswell, 2007; Yin, 2003), the data in this study was collected through various means informed by ethnography and inductive analysis to capture and distill the multiple elements that comprise the ELLs language and literacy practices, their school experiences, and backgrounds. As Thomas (2006) explains in describing inductive analysis, one primary objective is “to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format” (p. 238). In this study, the raw data consisted of field notes, documents, interviews and audio-recorded work sessions, and my memos. Field notes were also analyzed to investigate my research questions. Concurrent with the data collection, data was analyzed through inductive analysis to establish connections between the research objectives and themes emerging from the raw data (Thomas, 2006).

**Participants.** Selection criteria emerged as I conducted field observations and further developed my relationship with students in the school. I aimed for “purposeful” sampling (Patton, 1980), rather than random sampling, in an effort to adequately understand “the variation in the phenomena of interest in the setting” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 293). Specifically, after my pilot study, I identified a Social Science teacher whose class consisted entirely of ELLs—this aspect aligned with my research focus. The

teacher also seemed willing and open to participating in my research, and I was able to confirm his research participation and obtain permission to conduct field observations in his classroom. During the pilot phase, I was also able to develop relationships with students in the class. Eighteen students in the class agreed to participate in my study. Based on the level of access to certain students that I was able to negotiate and gain, I narrowed the number of focal students to eight. I observed the focal students in their other content area classes as well as non-classroom contexts within the school, conducted interviews with them and school staff members, and collected their schoolwork as data. Because I gravitated toward those students that were most open to my research (and vice versa), the volume and depth of data on particular students correlate with the extent of my relationship with the individual. I spent a relatively large amount of research time observing and/or interacting with four particular students, and therefore, I was able to gather a great amount of data related to them compared to my other research participants. Thus, these four students (Peter, Yanjun, Juan, and Maly) are featured as case studies in this research.

It should be noted that, given the idiosyncrasies of individual human beings, guaranteeing a sample that was representative of the population being studied is difficult or impossible. Moreover, the intent of my study was to examine individual learners and their language and literacy experiences within content area classrooms as indicative of systemic societal problems that have largely been taken for granted as the norm.

**Field notes.** Bogdan and Biklen (2003) explain that the goal of field notes “is to capture [a] slice of life” (p. 119). Borrowing this idea in consideration of the notion of hyphenated reality, the goal of field notes in this study was to capture a multilayered slice of the experience being observed in content area classes and elsewhere in the school. In other words, I aimed to gather multidimensional snapshots of the learners with my field notes.

Under the limitation that everything cannot be captured and judgments must be made while taking field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), as my data collection progressed, my field notes focused on elements that emerged as most salient. For example, in my focal content area class, Social Science, I noticed that one of my research participants often spoke out loud and seemingly engaged in one-on-one dialogues with the teacher while most of the other students remained quiet and/or engaged in side conversations; therefore, I started to include in my field notes instances, in which such situations occurred and the utterances made by the student. In general, I captured spoken utterances, observed activities and behaviors, and print in its various forms in the classroom as raw data “within the parameters of the project’s research goals” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 119), which aimed to capture and represent the hyphenated realities and language and literacy practices of ELLs in content area classes.

**Documents.** As Patton (1980) suggests, documents can be used to increase a researcher’s knowledge and understanding of the context of the research. Collecting and analyzing documents was especially key in addressing the role of print text in the students’ language and literacy practices. Given consent, student work was collected as

documents for analysis. Student work I collected primarily consisted of class notebooks and handouts completed in and out of class, primarily on paper, the main mode of assignments at the school. Other documents include typed essays, a PowerPoint presentation, and open-ended writings and drawings. As will be explained, analysis of the focal ELLs' written work played a crucial role in uncovering the theories of language and syntax that undergirded their interlanguage.

**Semi-structured interviews.** Semi-structured interviews served as another source of data for this study. Patton (1980) explains the purpose of interviews as follows:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe... The fact of the matter is that we cannot observe everything... We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world—we have to ask people questions about those things. (p. 196)

As such, the interviews provided information regarding the learners' developing or current conceptualization of their experiences content area classes, in school in general, and in their lives—subterranean elements that I was not able to capture in taking field notes. Information from the students was further contextualized by interviews with school staff members that worked with ELLs.

I conducted in-person one-on-one interviews with eight of my study participants. I interviewed each student at least once; most were interviewed two or three times. Though I would have liked to interview all students more than once, I did

what was most comfortable for the students. For example, there was a student that I was only able to interview once, and she did not want to be audio-recorded, though she was comfortable with my taking notes by hand.

I created an interview protocol of a list of questions in advanced, but I allowed myself the flexibility to probe certain relevant issues that arose during the interviews and asked additional spontaneous questions such that the interviews were not limited by a uniform set of questions (Patton, 1980). This approach assumed that there was common information about the students' experiences in content area classes and as English language learners that could be obtained from each interview (Patton, 1980). In conducting the interviews, I wanted to learn about the participants' "inner perspective" while avoiding "[putting] things in someone's mind" (Patton, 1980). However, I must also acknowledge that my interview questions were colored by my biases.

I extended my interviews to include, with permission of the student, audio-recordings of sessions, in which I worked with students individually to help him/her with content area assignments and readings. These situations arose as my case study students identified areas in which they wanted my assistance.

**Memos.** Throughout the research process, I wrote notes, which I refer to as memos. I have conceptualized the practice of writing memos and its rationale by drawing upon the various descriptions of some form of notes written by the researcher during the process of research given by several authors in the field of qualitative research. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) explain that a researcher may write "think pieces" to reflect on the day's experience in research, to consider what he/she is theorizing, and

to write additional information. Conceptualizing my memos as think pieces allowed for unconstrained, open-ended written reflections on various issues.

In describing an analytic memo, Hammersley and Atkinson (2009) highlight the importance of engaging in the “regular review and development of analytic ideas” through writing these memos (p. 150-151). They continue to explain that, through writing analytic memos, “progress is assessed, emergent ideas are identified, research strategy is sketched out, and so on.” As such, I wrote memos as I analyzed and interpreted data to document my thought process and decisions in data analysis.

Similar to Hammersley and Atkinson’s (2009) recommendation to write analytic memos, Rubin (2005), referring to the interview process, suggests jotting thoughts as a researcher reads an interview transcript; for example, reading a passage of a transcribed interview may trigger a book related to the research. While coding a student’s writing, for example, I was interrupted by triggers of previous relevant literature, e.g. a book about syntax by Carnie (2007). I reviewed my data and notes on the research literature to find the sources of those triggers and made note of them in a memo. In this way, I connected my raw data to other relevant elements of this study.

Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggest jotting down “puzzlements,” things you find puzzling in the context of your own cultural understanding, which I view to be understanding in general. These puzzlements may lead to “puzzlements institutionalized in the literature of a relevant social science discipline,” to which a researcher may refer to gain a better understanding of questions asked and answers provided in relation to these puzzlements (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 79). These

puzzlements helped to shape my research. For example, I found that several students often looked sleepy or tired in the classroom and discovered that most of my case study students held jobs, an observation I did not expect to be as salient as it was. I then used this observation to inform the questions I included in my interview protocol, e.g. “Where do you work?” “Do you use English at work?”

### **Coding and Data Analysis**

I used inductive analysis in coding and analyzing my data, as primarily informed by Patton (1980), Thomas (2006), and Maykut and Morehouse (1994). To this approach, I incorporated my theoretical frameworks regarding hyphenated reality and interlanguage, which guided me in noticing the interconnected nature of the themes that emerged from the data. I first followed this process within each case and then conducted cross-case analysis to examine themes common across the cases. I coded data operating on the general premise that, though data analysis is “guided by the evaluation objectives, which identify domains and topics to be investigated,” my findings emerged from the analysis of the observable data, not from predetermined models or expectations (Thomas, 2006, p. 239). Thus, I referred to my research questions and theoretical frameworks as I reviewed and coded my data such that my research questions provided a focus or “domain of relevance” for the data analysis rather than expectations about specific findings (Thomas, 2006, p.239). Accordingly, I did not create any categories prior to coding my data.

**Forming categories.** As suggested by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) and Thomas (2006), I began my data analysis by engaging in a close reading until I was

familiar with the content and ideas and until I had a sense of the themes covered in the text. After this initial close reading, I re-read the data, asking myself the following questions: “What are the recurring words, phrases, and topics in the data? What are the concepts that the [participants] use to capture what they say or do...?” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

While reading, I wrote memos to document emerging category names. In conducting inductive coding, I used a combination of indigenous typologies and investigator-constructed typologies. Using indigenous typologies required “an analysis of the verbal categories used by participants” rather than creating my own (Patton, 1980, p. 307), and therefore, it may be argued that such typologies most closely represent the “inside view—the actors’ definition” (Pelto & Pelto, 1978, p. 54); in other words, indigenous categories represent the emic (Heath & Street, 2008). For example, “life responsibility”, was a phrase stated by a teacher in an interview in discussing Peter. This phrase became a code for all of the case study students to refer to their paid jobs, role as a caretaker, need to pay rent, and other such responsibilities. However, because particular verbal categories to describe other patterns or themes in the data did not always arise from the participants themselves, in analyzing the data, I also constructed typologies derived from the research aims (Thomas, 2006), but only after determining that indigenous typologies do not seem appropriate. Across the case studies, I created a superordinate category, “subterranean layer”, to describe the aspects of ELLs’ school experience that are often almost invisible. As Thomas (2006) explains, “The lower-level or specific categories will mostly be derived from multiple readings of



the raw data, sometimes referred to as in vivo coding” and the “upper-level or more general categories will mostly be derived from the evaluation aims,” and therefore, the upper-level, general categories in coding this study’s data set were primarily investigator-constructed (p. 241).

As part of the coding process, I reread my data and examined the indigenous and investigator-constructed categories created along the way. When I encountered a text segment that I thought would fit in an existing category, I compared it to another text segment under the existing category under consideration. I made a decision based on whether the text segment in question “looks like” or “feels like” the meaning of the already categorized text segments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). If there was no fit, I created a new category based on the text segment with the understanding that the newly created category may be collapsed into another one. In coding classroom-based field notes related to the case study student, Peter, I created categories, such as “chatted with classmate in English” and “chatted with classmate in another language”; the two were eventually collapsed into “chatted with classmates”. I used this “look/feel-alike” criteria to determine whether a unit of meaning from the data was similar to another unit of meaning, allowing for “salient categories of meaning [to be] inductively derived” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 136). Some text segments were coded under more than one category, a common occurrence in qualitative coding (Thomas, 2006).

Reading and coding across different data while reviewing my memos and research literature, I attempted to apply the constant comparison method. Maykut and

Morehouse (1994) and Bailey and Jackson (2003) cite Glaser and Strauss (1967) in describing the constant comparison method as one that involves inductive category coding while “comparing different people in the study, comparing data from the same individuals with themselves at different points in time, comparing incident with incident, and comparing data across categories” (Bailey & Jackson, 2003, p. 61).

**Refining and defining categories.** While following this inductive category coding and constant comparative method, I refined the categories and constructed definitions for the codes (Bailey & Jackson, 2003; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Patton, 1980; Thomas, 2006). Within each category, I searched for “sub-topics, including contradictory points of view and new insights” (Thomas, 2006, p. 241). In defining the categories, my goal was to distill the meaning carried in the categories by identifying the properties or characteristics that hold the text segments within a category together and to create a rule that would serve as the criterion for including or excluding subsequent text segments in the category (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). To determine whether a category should be combined with another, I identified whether there were attributes of the categories that distinguished one from another (Patton, 1980).

In the case that instances of some categories occurred in such great frequency that the number of segments of text under them became unmanageable, I reviewed these segments carefully and identified subdivisions (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). To illustrate, in coding data under Juan’s case study, I initially had created a category, “learning English”, that described many pieces of text. I later divided the text segments into “English learning prior to Sunrise High School” and “learning English at Sunrise”.

After further inspection of my categories, and after I found that there is no further analysis to do, “or that what could be done is not important enough,” I considered the categories “saturated” and coded no further (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 191).

However, I understood that there was always “room for continuous refinement” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), and therefore, I attempted to continually refine my categories as I coded.

**Analyzing interlanguage data.** Informed by the above process of inductive coding as well as second language acquisition research, I adapted a method for interlanguage data analysis described by Gass and Selinker (2001). A key aspect of interlanguage data analysis is studying “data gleaned from attested interlanguage forms but carefully organized to demonstrate particular structural points” (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 17). I began by carefully reading written assignments produced by a particular case study student. During the second reading, I identified non-Standard-English-like sentences and clauses, such as “Many slave were runaways,” which was written by Maly in African American History class. I then considered “possible interlanguage generalizations that might account for” particular patterns (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 19). In Maly’s case, given a recurring pattern, I hypothesized that an interlanguage generalization entailed placing the base form (or singular form) of a noun after an adjective that signified plurality, e.g., “many”, as in “many slave” instead of “many slaves”.

As Gass and Selinker (2001) explain, interlanguage data are often ambiguous in terms of interpretation, and therefore, there is no “correct” answer. However, “the

function of good argumentation is to lessen the ambiguity of analysis” (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 17). Following this suggestion, I attempted to simplify the data analysis process and present it as clearly as possible. One of my goals was to depict the analysis and tentative results such that they could be used as a model for teachers as they analyze the interlanguage data of their own students. Therefore, I did not aim for “correct” answers, but rather, I aimed to conduct analysis that a typical teacher would be able to perform based on his/her students’ written work without specialized training in applied linguistics. Furthermore, I conducted this analysis from a resource orientation, instead of a deficit perspective, to focus on the strengths of the ELLs and highlight ways in which those strengths could be built upon.

### **Triangulation**

Because each data source had its strengths and weaknesses, I used a combination of observations, memos, interviewing, and document analysis in an attempt to validate and cross-check my findings (Patton, 1980). As Patton argues, “Multiple sources of information are sought and multiple resources are used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective” (p. 155). Similarly, Long and Johnson (2000) refer to triangulation as “the employment of multiple data sources, data collection methods, or investigators. In general, the purpose of this would be to reduce the disadvantages inherent in the use of any single source, method or investigator” (p. 34). Patton (1980) summarizes triangulation within qualitative methods as follows:

It means (1) comparing observational data with interview data; (2) comparing what people say in public with what they say in private; (3) checking for the consistency of what people in a situation say about this situation over time; and (4) comparing perspectives of people from different points of view... (p. 331)

Through triangulating my data sources, I aimed to cross-check for consistency of information obtained from different sources and at different times (Patton, 1980).

The concept of triangulation was particularly important in this study, in that my research methodologies were utilized to disrupt, for example, binaries that overly reduce the complexities of the lives of the students in my study. For instance, in Yanjun's case study, I found evidence that she exhibited characteristics that were typically attributed to students that were "good" and those that were "bad" or misbehaved. These elements emerged as I wove together analyses of data from the following different sources: field observations in Social Science class; interviews with her Social Science teacher, former ESOL teacher, and the Bilingual Counseling Assistant; Yanjun's report card; and her assignments with the teacher's written feedback. Triangulating based on multiple sources and types of data allowed for the notion of "gray" (as opposed to only black and white) to materialize during data analysis as the hyphenated reality of the focal learners emerged from across and within the data.

## Chapter 2: Case Study - Peter

Peter<sup>15</sup> was wearing a black shirt with a black blazer. That is, he was out of school uniform, which consisted of a grey polo shirt and black pants. He had thought it was a dress-down day, though he learned that his only alternative to the school uniform that day—in celebration of the multicultural performances scheduled for the afternoon—would have been the traditional clothing of his people, the Chin.

The teacher, Mr. Abram, was discussing a PowerPoint slide that read, “Double V Campaigning: African Americans attempted to win victory at home and abroad.” Mr. Abram paused from explaining the lesson and said, “Peter, are you writing this down? Please do.” Peter said, “All right,” and started copying from the slide.

Mr. Abram asked the class, “What’s a campaign?” A student responded. Mr. Abram said, “Peter, do you agree?” Peter didn’t respond. As the teacher moved on to explain the slide, Peter sat with his arms crossed, leaning back against his chair. He seemed to have a blank stare. In preparation for a video that the class was about to watch, Mr. Abram distributed a handout for the students to write answers as they watched the movie. While using his iPhone, Peter spoke in Burmese or Chin with the girl in front of him. Mr. Abram said in a sarcastic tone,

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<sup>15</sup> This is a pseudonym. His grandfather gave him a western name, and therefore, I gave him a western pseudonym.

“Peter, I’m sure you’re using your translator. We don’t need it right now.”

Mr. Abram began to go over the handout, beginning by stating, “The first question is, what was the Double V Campaign? You can answer that now.” He continued by asking, “What was the Double V Campaign?” Some students answered aloud. Peter was writing. He yawned as Mr. Abram continued explaining the Double V Campaign and the video that they were about to watch. A moment later, Peter put his head down on his desk for a minute, and then sat up. Then, he put his head back down briefly before sitting up again, with his arms crossed, leaning back against his chair and looking forward. His eyes closed briefly periodically. As Mr. Abram started the video, Peter briefly spoke with the girl in front of him before he put his head back down.

The video, *The Tuskegee Airmen*, started and the captions were on. Peter still had his head down. Mr. Abram went to Peter and knelt next to him to get his attention. Peter put his head up and propped it with his left hand. He was smiling, as if ashamed that the teacher was admonishing him for trying to sleep. He leaned forward, looking at the screen.

Peter did not seem to be able to keep his head up. He put his chin on his arms, which were folded across his desk, and watched the movie. He did not write anything on his handout. Mr. Abram paused the video

and asked, “Which city are they in?” (The main characters in the movie were riding a train.) Some students replied, “Chicago.” The teacher asked, “Chicago is in the north or south?” There were various answers from the students. Peter said nothing.

The video continued. Peter sat up to stretch. He turned his head to his left to look toward Mr. Abram before putting his head back down on his arms on his desk, but he was still looking forward at the screen and watching the movie. Mr. Abram paused the video to ask recall questions. He asked, “What happened?” A few students replied, “The men got kicked out of their seats.” He asked, “Why?” Some students responded. The answer was that they had to give up their seats to the white men. The teacher asked more follow-up questions. Peter didn’t change his position, nor did he write anything. Mr. Abram restarted the video, and then paused it again to ask additional comprehension questions. Peter didn’t change his position, and he said nothing. The video continued. Peter put his head down and seemed to be sleeping.

### **“They Don’t Know Him”**

Speaking with various teachers and staff members in the school, I learned that many in the school had only a vague sense of Peter’s life and background as a learner and as a person. It was known that he had “struggles” and “issues” at home but not



much more. Applying a lens of hyphenated-reality, we would begin with the perspective that there is more beneath the surface.

In an interview with an ESL teacher who was close to Peter, I asked the teacher, Ms. Ardelean, about Peter's work life. She explained that he likely worked five or six days a week in the evenings, and then came to school tired:

**Ms. Ardelean:** ...Then the teachers – you know the teachers don't ask them. They don't say, "Why are you sleeping?" They just think he's another annoying, sleeping teenager, because we have lots of Americans who sleep, and they don't work you know, and so then you're just like oh, you know he's all tattooed up and has his earrings and he's sleeping in my class and he's just a jerk, right? But he isn't, and they don't know him... [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]

As Ms. Ardelean mentioned, Peter's tattoos and piercings gave him a rough exterior, "and if you just look at him you think he's a thug" [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]. He was labeled inconsistent and "flaky", unable to keep up with schoolwork and always "scrambling" to complete assignments. However, as I observed his senior year in high school in connection with other elements that made him a complete whole, I learned about the various, intersecting layers of his reality, and I began piecing together a textured biography of him.

## **My Interactions with Peter**

Initially, I was only a participant-observer in Peter's classes, mainly Social Science and African American History, where I assisted him and his classroom as I circulated the room. As the school year continued, he increasingly viewed me as a resource and requested my assistance with schoolwork on many occasions. I helped him with his assignments, interviewed him, and chatted with him in school whenever possible—at times that did not seem disruptive to his school day, as I did not want to exacerbate the negative impression that some of his teachers already had of him.

As he became comfortable with me, he started seeking my help during crucial times: when he was working on his senior project (required for graduation), when he was caught cheating on his African American History final exam, and when he needed to complete special assignments to pass Statistics and Chemistry in order to graduate. To a certain degree, I acted as a liaison between him and a few of his teachers. In hindsight, I had also attempted to elicit empathy from his teachers.

During a break from practicing for the school's commencement ceremony, Peter and I had a lengthy conversation about his post-secondary plans. He expressed his interest in attending culinary arts school. Considering the exorbitant cost of such a training program and the grueling work of a cook, I suggested other options, such as social work or interpretation work for Burmese and Chin people in Philadelphia or paid vocational training programs that would lead to relatively secure, well-paid jobs. I think, or hope, he found his way. As Ms. Ardelean stated, "He's one of the more resourceful kids..." [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014].

### **Peter's Interactions with the School**

As will be discussed, Peter disrupts the notion that a dichotomy of a “good” student and a “bad” student exists. Though he did not do well academically, he showed that he cared about school and had post-secondary plans. Nonetheless, he exuded an image of a “bad” student, given that he was absent for about 60 days, which was about one-third of the 180 instructional days. Moreover, he was often tired in class, and it was not uncommon to find him with his head down on his desk. His grades at the end of the third quarter of his senior year were two F’s, one D, three C’s, and a B. Compared to the archetypal good student, his schoolwork and notes did not seem organized, and he took only partial notes in class.

However, I learned that he cared about school and his future. He had a desire to pass all his classes and sought help when he was in danger of not graduating. When I worked with him one-on-one, I saw his potential to thrive academically given individual assistance. Unfortunately, school was not set up as such. Moreover, he was relatively reserved and did not share the specifics of his life with many teachers and staff members. A triangular prism disperses light, breaking it up into its spectral components, the colors of the rainbow. If we went beyond the surface, we would see Peter’s hyphenated realities, the rainbow of colors that constituted who he was as an ELL, an employee, and more.

## Subterranean Layers

**Lan:** ...Do you think his teachers understand what's going on with him outside of school?

**Mr. Spruce:**<sup>16</sup> I think some of his teachers do. Particularly the ones that have had him for years, particularly like his ESOL teachers. If he has Ms. Ardelean and some of them, I think, are pretty aware of his schedule and what's going on. Outside of those teachers, probably not. He doesn't – just because he's pretty quiet and reserved by nature, so he doesn't really address it too much. I just found out because those things kept interfering with things I was trying to do with him, so yeah, so probably not too many of them. But certainly some of his ESOL teachers certainly do.

[Interview, Feb. 10, 2014]

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**Lan:** Right, he wasn't here last week. Oh, no. I hope he's okay.

**Mr. Abram** (African American History teacher): I don't know. It's tricky. I mean, who knows what's going on at home especially with, that population, he might have to be, I don't know if he works or

**Lan:** He works.

**Mr. Abram:** Yeah, I think many of the kids do.

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<sup>16</sup> Mr. Spruce was not a school district employee, but he was a staff member of a community-based organization with a full-time office at Sunrise High School where he had been based for the past three years at the time of the interview.

[Interview, Mar. 12, 2014]

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**Lan:** Can you say more about his struggles with I guess handling academic work?

**Mr. Ferry** (Social Science teacher): Could be family situations, um but I will be speaking in an ignorant fashion, and I would be guessing to tell, if I would tell you why he's been out and what the struggles are, uh but he, he's a very nice young man, and I know he wasn't home watching videos in the days he was absent, so I would surmise that there were some family issues that he was dealing with, taking care of younger ones maybe, and possibly working.

[Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]

Schoolwork and an ELL's life beyond school are often framed as oppositional. Teachers, pressured by increasing demands for annual yearly progress given a paucity of resources, have no choice but to notice the schoolwork that a student is *not* doing. However, borrowing Trinh's (2011) notion of development within supposedly conflicting domains, it may be suggested that a student like Peter evolved and lived "within apparently conflictual and incompatible domains, cutting across territorial and disciplinary boundaries, defying policy-oriented rationales" (p. 45). He comprised multiple layers, and the job of educators is to peel back those layers to understand him as a language learner, student, and person.

The above excerpts from interviews with various staff and faculty members that worked with and taught Peter reveal a nebulous understanding of his life as a complete whole. During the 2013-2014 academic year, given the luxury of being a researcher in the school, I was able to spend time with Peter and his teachers to gain a sense of what lied between the various levels of complexity that made up Peter. Near the end of the academic year, in the context of a conversation about Peter's potential to pass his Chemistry class, and thus, graduate from high school, his Chemistry teacher remarked that Peter was "flaky". If school was set up to give this teacher an opportunity to understand Peter's story, would the teacher still characterize Peter as such?

In this section, in an attempt to paint a composite picture of Peter, I trace his migration from his home country, Burma, to the U.S. In between, he lived in Malaysia as an undocumented immigrant before arriving in the U.S. as an official refugee. I use Peter's oral history and knowledge of his own world to chart his journey and the socio-political/historical elements that tinted his path. His story, along with interwoven "official" facts, demonstrates the hyphen of the micro-macro dialectic.

### **In Burma**

Early in my time at Sunrise High School, I learned that Peter was from Burma. Initially, due to my ignorance, I mistakenly referred to him as "Burmese", but I later learned that he identified as Chin, an ethnic minority in Burma. I had the vague notion that minorities were persecuted in Burma but did not understand the weight that this

identity of being Chin carried until I began to read about the experiences of Chin individuals:

[The military intelligence officers] tied my hands together and hung me from the ceiling. They used sticks to beat me. They had a tub of water and they covered my face with a cloth and would dunk my head under the water until I fell unconscious. When I regained consciousness, they would do it again. For the entire week, they didn't give me any water for drinking. I was so thirsty so I told them I wanted to use the toilet. When I got to the toilet I drank the toilet water.

—Former Chin political prisoner from Hakha township, Chin State, Burma. (Human Rights Watch, 2009, p. 3)

In a one-on-one interview with Peter, we discussed the circumstances that eventually led him to leave his home country:

**Lan:** Which country are you from?

**Peter:** I'm from Burma.

**Lan:** When did you come here?

**Peter:** Oh. 2011 here.

...

**Peter:** I thought I left my country in 2008. I've been in Malaysia.

**Lan:** So you went to Malaysia in 2008?

**Peter:** Yes.

**Lan:** Why?

**Peter:** Because my country, you know, the civil war.

**Lan:** Who did you live with in Burma? With your uncle?

**Peter:** Because my parents died.

**Lan:** Can I ask you what happened? Or you don't want to talk about it?

**Peter:** Hmm. No, because exactly I don't know. My sister don't want to tell me. My sister was like five years old.

**Lan:** Your sister was five. And how old were you?

**Peter:** I was maybe three month old.

**Lan:** You were three months old!

**Peter:** Yeah. Something like that.

**Lan:** Your uncle took care of you and your sister?

**Peter:** In Burma. Yeah.

[Interview, Apr. 16, 2014]

Did Peter's parents experience an ordeal similar to that described by the former Chin political prisoner above? These foundational components of his background may have been unknown to many, if not most, of his teachers. However, a question as simple as "Which country are you from?" provided him a platform on which to share these layers that lie beneath.

Peter had a tattoo of three letters on his arm. He said that the letters represented his people. He stated "my people" to refer to the Chin ethnic group and/or his tribe or sub-tribe. An estimated 500,000 ethnic Chin live in Chin State, a remote and mountainous region in northwestern Burma (Chin Development Initiative, 2006;



Human Rights Watch, 2009). The Chin ethnic group consists of at least six primary tribal groups, which can be further categorized by 63 sub-tribes (Sakhong, 2003). I did not appreciate the nuances of his cultural heritage; seemingly, staff and faculty members at Sunrise High School also did not:

**Lan:** ...Is he from Burma? Do you know anything about his background?

**Mr. Spruce:** I don't know.

[Interview, Feb. 10, 2014]

I learned that Chin people were “double minorities” in Burma due to their ethnicity and religion; many are Christians, mostly Baptists (Human Rights Watch, 2009). This notion of a double minority, which is low-ranking compared to the majority population, was devised by humans as a means of categorization (Omi & Winant, 1993). Along this line of reasoning, Trinh (2011) argues, “Thus, despite all the conscious attempts to purify and exclude, cultures are far from being unitary, as they have always owed their existence more to differences, hybridities and alien elements than they really care to acknowledge” (p. 45). This lens creates opportunities for re-imagining school for ELLs. Though certainly challenging, a school can work within this system of ingrained prejudice to make at least incremental changes.

Since the 1962 coup was staged by General Ne Win against the government in Burma, ethnic communities have suffered from abuse by the Tatmadaw, the Burmese Army, and the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the military government; abuses include the following: “extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest and detention,

torture and mistreatment, forced labor, severe reprisals against members of the opposition, restrictions on movement, expression, and religious freedom, abusive military conscription policies, and extortion and confiscation of property” (Human Rights Watch, 2009, p. 4). Considering that it was prevalent for Chin individuals to be forced into labor, in retrospect, I cannot help but see the missed opportunities for links between Peter’s background and his African American History class:

The teacher began the class by explaining the Do Now prompt, which read, “What does it mean to be a slave?” A student in the back of the classroom jokingly said, “I know a lot about it because I was a slave when I was young.” He laughed. Peter turned around to look at him, laughed, and then turned around to face the front of the classroom again. Peter copied from the projector screen, looking up and down between the Do Now prompt and his notebook. [Field Notes, Feb. 19, 2014]

Unfortunately, based on my observations of the students’ interactions with the content and instructional structures in the African American History class, there were limited opportunities for deep engagement in comprehensive thinking in history; that is, critical thinking that required synthesis and reflection across historical and current events. Though Peter did not elaborate on the situation of his home country, he indicated an understanding of the history and status in simply stating, “Because my country, you know, the civil war” [Interview, April 16, 2014]. Given the opportunity, perhaps he would have been able to provide a profound analysis of this topic.

## **To Malaysia**

Mapping historical facts onto information gathered from interviews and conversations with Peter elucidates the backdrop to his migration from Burma to Malaysia. Poverty has been pervasive across Burma, including Chin State, due to military rule, economic mismanagement, and political instability; the dire economic situation for the Chin people is exacerbated by discriminatory practices against non-Burman ethnicities and persecution by the Tatmadaw and SPDC (Human Rights Watch, 2009). There are very few job opportunities in Chin State other than farming, and even farming is not a viable option (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Results from a survey compiled by Bosson (2007) indicate that “the main factors leading Chin to flee Burma are forced labor, extortion and heavy taxation, and food insecurity, all of which are interconnected” (Human Rights Watch, 2009, p. 20).

Moreover, from 2007 to 2009, a unique natural phenomenon increased food insecurity in Chin State. As explained by Human Rights Watch (2009), bamboo that is widespread in the region began to flower and then produce fruit, which attracted rats. When the rats depleted the bamboo fruits, they then devoured farm crops, beginning in 2007, and the disastrous affects were projected to last for at least an additional two or three years. The Chin Human Rights Organization (2008) estimated that more than 20 percent of the total Chin population was affected by food shortages. The timing of this devastating natural occurrence coincided with Peter’s and his older sister’s escape from Burma to Malaysia, undoubtedly in search of a chance at life:

**Lan:** Who did you go to Malaysia with?

**Peter:** My sister already went to Malaysia with her husband then their child--they have two children—with me. We live with my uncle and then my sister send me the money to come there and then we went there. We four live together.

...

**Lan:** When did your sister go to Malaysia?

**Peter:** 2007, I think.

**Lan:** She made some money

**Peter:** Uh huh.

**Lan:** and then sent the money to you?

**Peter:** Her husband is like 2005 and then she went 2007, and then they make together money. We are 2008.

[Interview, Apr. 16, 2014]

Though they fled the abusive military government and stark economic conditions of Burma, life in Malaysia posed its own challenges, as they were undocumented or “illegal” immigrants in their new country.

In 2005, a few years prior to Peter’s immigration to Malaysia, an estimated 12,000 Chin lived in Malaysia (Refugees International, 2005). Refugees International, an independent, non-profit organization that advocates for displaced people, conducted interviews with Chin living in Malaysia. Among their many findings, Refugees International (2005) reports the following:

The Chin refugees left families behind and paid “agents” to assist them to escape from Burma... [Refugees International] did not encounter any Chin who had returned to Burma for a visit. All said it would be too dangerous. (p. 1)

The path that Peter and his family took to Malaysia parallels the above finding. After Peter and his sister were made orphans, their uncle raised them while they were in Burma. Peter continued to stay with his uncle along with his niece or nephew after his sister and her husband went to Malaysia. When his sister and brother-in-law earned enough money in Malaysia, they sent for Peter and their child to come to Malaysia. Agents are paid between 250,000 and 800,000 kyats (250 to 800 US dollars) to smuggle Chin people to Thailand or Malaysia, and the journey lasts days or months on foot, car, or boat (Christian Solidarity Worldwide Hong Kong, 2006, p. 24). Though Peter did not provide specific details about his journey to Malaysia, the following description from a 16-year-old Chin boy in Malaysia provides a glimpse:

My relatives paid for me to travel to Malaysia. I traveled by bus to Rangoon. From Rangoon by ship to Kok Tong. From there the agent took me by car to Malaysia. I was hidden in the boot of the car with two others. (Christian Solidarity Worldwide Hong Kong, 2006, p. 25)

Peter was also about 16 years old when he arrived in Malaysia. He could have told a story similar to the above.

Given no opportunities to attend school in Malaysia, Peter stayed at home for about a year while his sister and brother-in-law continued to work illegally:

**Lan:** How did they make money?

**Peter:** They worked by, you know they work in some boss, some boss in Malaysia, they work by cash and stuff, you know? And then they don't need any information. No passport or any ID, nothing, they don't need it. They just work by cash.

[Interview, Apr. 16, 2014]

As is generally the case in the U.S., the most readily available jobs in Malaysia for involuntary immigrants and those without legal status seem largely menial. After staying home for a year and learning the Malaysian language primarily on his own, Peter began working in a restaurant kitchen, and received payment in cash:

**Lan:** Where did you work?

**Peter:** At a restaurant.

**Lan:** What did you do?

**Peter:** I help some, before they cook, I cut everything [indiscernible], after one year, I cook. When I know how to cook, then I cook.

**Lan:** You were in Malaysia for three years.

**Peter:** Yeah, three years.

**Lan:** You worked for two years?

**Peter:** Yes.

He held a "back-of-the-house" restaurant job and was paid in cash to eliminate the linking of identity with income. Remaining invisible seemed to be a means of survival when he was an "illegal" immigrant in Malaysia.

The precarious nature of life for Peter and his family in Malaysia was further compounded by his sister's need for medical care when she was due for birth with her second child (Butler, 2011). Fortunately, she was able to receive protection from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

**Peter:** ...[My] sister and brother-in-law, they got baby you know, they got pregnant, so when they got pregnant, they go to they have to be in hospital and then they were in hospital. In the hospital, you know hospital too expensive so they don't get enough money and then the UN people, white people—my people just say it like that, they call white people, white people call UN people. So UN people get in the hospital. They don't get enough money, so if they don't get enough money, they are also illegal and they have no passports so they could get in prison, they going to get in jail because they didn't get enough money to born the baby, you know.

...

**Peter:** UN people. They help.

**Lan:** How?

**Peter:** Yeah, they help us. Because, yeah, when they have to go to jail, the UN people came to the hospital and they talk, they interview my brother-in-law, and how they help them. They are refugees so they help them.

**Lan:** I see.

**Peter:** They get their information, their phone number, then they go to the office and in the office, they called them and then they went in there. They give them the card. If you have this card in Malaysia, you can go to work.

**Lan:** So they got the card?

**Peter:** Yeah...

[Interview, Apr. 16, 2014]

In other words, Peter's family received registrations cards that signified they were in the process of refugee resettlement, and as will be discussed, Peter completed a similar process soon after. His account of the procedure aligns with the steps followed by the UNHCR, which works in tandem with the U.S. Department of State on the U.S. refugee program. After learning about the State Department's priority categories, I deduced that Peter and his family fell under the Priority 2 group, which "are whole groups of refugees who require attention because they have been targeted in their home country. Priority 2 refugees for 2010 include ethnic minorities from Burma/Myanmar living among nine camps in Thailand or in Malaysia" (Bernstein-Baker, 2010, p. 21). According to Sunrise High School, Peter enrolled in the school in November 2010. Therefore, Peter and his family likely arrived in the U.S. in late 2010.

In the following, Peter explains how he also received refugee status along with his family:

**Peter:** ...They got a card so when my sister tell them, "I have two child in Burma and then, what is that, one brother," so my name is already in



there, so when I go there, I just go through to the office after I arrive today, and then tomorrow I went to the UN office, and then they give me the card. They take my picture first, like one day I work for one day until 5 pm, and then they had me a lot of interview. They helped me out in Burma. After that, they gave me the card.

**Lan:** They spoke to you in Burmese?

**Peter:** No, they have a translator.

**Lan:** Oh, they had a translator.

**Peter:** Yeah, my people, they have a translator.

**Lan:** Okay. So you got the card to say that you're a refugee?

**Peter:** Uh huh. And then if I had those card, I can go to work in Malaysia...

[Interview, Apr. 16, 2014]

As indicated by Peter, he was interviewed by an official working with the Department of Homeland Security/United States Immigration and Citizenship Service (Bernstein-Baker, 2010, p. 21). This process allowed him to be visible in the world again, though only to some extent. Acquiring legal status enabled Peter and his family to legally work in Malaysia and gave them an identity in the country. Nonetheless, as foreigners, they were not necessarily welcomed, and they experienced blatant discrimination and violation:

**Peter:** ... But some people, they also have the card, but police they are not good. If they saw them on the way, they took phone. If we have phone, you know, they took phone or money. 200 or 300, they took.

...

**Peter:** Because I can't go out whenever I want, like my phone, I can't, if someone call me on the way I can't answer like this, "Oh, hello, hi." Like that. I got to put every time in my pocket. And money, you know, like I can't spend in the store, or take out my wallet. We can't do that. We can put the wallet in here [pointing to front pockets of pants]. If we have our wallet, we just put our card, you know? Just our card or like two dollar or like that. If we have 100 we put it near the front. That's why it was very difficult for me.

**Lan:** Because people in Malaysia treated you differently because they know you're from Burma?

**Peter:** Yeah, they knew, because a lot of Burma people they already get erased...

**Lan:** Get erased? What's that?

**Peter:** Get erased means the police saw them and took money, like, what that mean?

**Lan:** Harassed?

**Peter:** Ah, yeah. Harassed.

[Interview, Apr. 16, 2014]

As indicated by Peter, according to Refugees International (2005), “The Chin do not have an easy life in Malaysia. They are working illegally, jobs are irregular, bribes must be paid to local authorities and police, and there is always the fear of detention and deportation” (p. 1). In Social Science class one day, Yanjun told the class that she witnessed police officers harassing a woman in a Chinese fast food restaurant during Yanjun’s work shift there. As Yanjun continued her story, a Chin student near me remarked to me quietly, “That happens in Malaysia,” and explained that police officers in Malaysia harassed and tried to have immigrants from Burma deported to Thailand. She added, “The people [immigrants] there have no contacts,” implying that they had no social safety net and suffered from discrimination after fleeing persecution in their home country [Field Notes, May 2, 2014]. They seemed welcomed nowhere. They were to “fare as a foreigner on foreign land and as a stranger at home”(Trinh, 2011, p. 54).

### **To the United States**

According to the UNHCR, many refugees live “in perilous situations or have specific needs that cannot be addressed in the country where they have sought protection. In such circumstances, UNHCR helps resettle refugees in a third country as the only safe and viable durable solution” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015). Peter, who was apparently in the above situation, participated in the UNHCR resettlement process, which began with preparations in Malaysia:

**Lan:** How did you come to the U.S.?

**Peter:** How?

**Lan:** Yeah.

**Peter:** So if we have those UN card, you know I told you the UN card? We have appointment like two month, one time, one of the first time [indiscernible], it's just interview, after two months, they call us and they check our blood. They, we have disease or no, they check everything. And then after they check those blood, there is only two month or three month we got to wait and when they call you could go tomorrow.

**Lan:** To the U.S.?

**Peter:** To the U.S.

**Lan:** They just tell you, you can go?

**Peter:** Yeah. Like this. Also we learned two months to come here, how we going to live and stay in here, we learn how we gonna work, if we go to work. Everything like that, we can't pay the bill. They taught us that.

**Lan:** So they taught you about life in the U.S.?

**Peter:** Yeah.

**Lan:** How to budget your money...

**Peter:** How to save money and they taught us, we learned like two week.

[Interview, Apr. 16, 2014]

He and his family continued to receive support once in the U.S. as part of the resettlement process. As he explained, "For three months. They took care of me for everything," and they were given \$200-400 per month [Interview, Apr. 16, 2014]. Two

or three months after his arrival, he enrolled at Sunrise High School. When I asked him to describe his experience as a new student at Sunrise High, he responded, “Oh, my god. It was crazy,” but he also alluded to the help he received from the ESOL teacher who taught newly arrived immigrant and refugee students and his gradual acclimation [Interview, Apr. 16, 2014]. Given that only 1% of the 10.5 million refugees accounted for by the UNCHR undergo the resettlement process (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015), the fact that Peter was here in Philadelphia as a refugee was almost miraculous.

Peter lived many lives prior to his arrival, and his immigration story revealed that he encompassed multiple worlds as a student at Sunrise High School. Trinh (2011) summarizes this sentiment in stating, “Displacement takes on many faces and is our very everyday dwelling” (p. 12). Peter became “displaced” after fleeing Burma. Though now resettled in the U.S., he carried with him this history, and it was a part of who was.

### **External Responsibilities and Tiredness**

**Mr. Spruce:** ...I believe his sister has at least a child if not multiple children that he is essentially helping care for in many ways. So I remember early on trying to do—meet with him and say, can you meet after school? And his after school time was very limited because he either had to get to work, his work hours seemed to be pretty extreme. He always seemed to be kind of working, or he had to get work to help

babysit or help cook or help do something at home. So outside of school, his time is pretty—pretty limited. So when he was in school, there were a lot of times when he was very tired or not engaged, or he'd be scrambling to kind of make it work. He missed out on not being able to do the kind of extra stuff that we're doing around college access, so he's always had an interest and goal to go to college, yet he just hasn't had the time to commit the energy that the other students have toward that goal. [Interview, Feb. 10, 2014]

The subterranean layers that constitute Peter's life are manifested in his school experience, but they are only apparent if we actively seek understanding. As discussed by Mr. Spruce, Peter's external responsibilities, at times, led to absences and late arrivals to school. These responsibilities also caused him to "miss out on" opportunities to use academic English and to succeed in school. In other words, school was not the only component in life he had to tend to. He also had to exert energy and time toward basic needs, including paying rent for his own apartment. This image is a not a typical one we have of high school students, but these elements were a part of Peter's realities as an ELL, a refugee, someone with no parents, and an adult with bills to pay.

### **"His Life Responsibility Was So Hefty"**

**Ms. Ardelean:** If he didn't have to work, if he didn't have to support himself, if he didn't have to worry about twelve thousand things, if he could just come home and play on the computer and watch some TV and

then do his homework and you know get some help... [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014].

Paid work was an integral part of Peter's history and had been a facet of his life since he was a teenager. In the U.S., we might imagine a teenager working a part-time job to earn money for a car or to pay for entertainment, but for Peter, employment was a matter of life. Ms. Ardelean echoed this sentiment in an interview: "He – in his country he – and he's Chin, he ended up having to go to Malaysia, work you know nights, and he was working in restaurants in Malaysia as a young kid, and he's been pretty much supporting himself" [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]. Peter provided details about his work experience in Malaysia:

**Lan:** Where did you work?

**Peter:** At a restaurant.

**Lan:** What did you do?

**Peter:** I have some, before they cook, I cut everything [indiscernible], after one year, I cook. When I know how to cook, then I cook.

**Lan:** You were in Malaysia for three years.

**Peter:** Yeah, three years.

**Lan:** You worked for two years [while in Malaysia]?

**Peter:** Yes.

[Interview, Apr. 16, 2014]

In the U.S., Peter also obtained similar jobs in restaurants to support himself. Working in restaurants took a toll on Peter. While some teachers seemed unsympathetic, perhaps

given the pressures of teaching (for example, I found myself trying to defend Peter by explaining to teachers that work affected his schooling), other teachers and staff members seemed to listen to and watch Peter to better understand his subterranean layers. Mr. Spruce, the site monitor of a nonprofit organization that prepared students for college, was more than cognizant of Peter's need to work for pay, as many of the organization's activities occurred after school:

**Lan:** Do you know what he does for work?

**Mr. Spruce:** I forget exactly – I think it's something around working at a restaurant, something like that, you know, busboy, something like that. I'm pretty sure that's what he was doing.

**Lan:** Do you know how many hours a week he's working?

**Mr. Spruce:** Plenty. I don't know exactly how many but it seemed like he had work just about every evening after school so he would I'm sure he was working well over 20 hours. So yeah.

[Interview, Feb. 2, 2014]

The traditional narrative would call for an open after school schedule, allowing students like Peter to engage in typical extracurricular activities, including music and sports. However, projecting such a privileged value onto Peter would be unfair and perhaps condescending. Many students at Sunrise High School, even as of this writing, work to contribute to their family income and/or to send money to relatives in their home countries. The typical extracurricular activity, then, is a luxury and out of reach.



Apparently, Peter had tried to engage in extracurricular activities, but the need to make cash ultimately prevailed:

**Peter:** School, after school sometime play game or play soccer or play or I mean here. I come here. I was – today I join. I was [indiscernible]. I play drum.

**Lan:** Oh, you play the drums here?

**Peter:** Yeah, but I quit uh when I got a job.

**Lan:** When you started working?

**Peter:** Yeah, when I started working I quit.

**Lan:** Where are you working?

**Peter:** Mmm in restaurant in North Philly... You know before I was working right there uh like five month... Yeah, yeah, before uh the last summer I worked like summer and during school, like five – five month, I worked in there... Yeah, the same place. I worked there, and then I quit because I was starting school, and I quit, and then – and now I started again. They call me again.

[Interview, May 19, 2014]

Working at a Thai restaurant supplanted playing soccer and the drums. Such was the reality for Peter. Ms. Ardelean attested to the fact that work occupied much of Peter's time and was essential to his livelihood: "He has sisters here, but they're kind of – you know everybody's just sort of trying to raise themselves it seems like in his family. It's – it's pretty – he's been working since I knew him. He – he's always worked more than

he's had time to do any kind of schoolwork, usually in restaurants..." [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014].

Another aspect of Peter's obligations was caring for his sister's children. Mr. Ferry, his Social Science teacher, clearly linked Peter's difficulties with schooling to Peter's life responsibilities, highlighting the co-existence of these realities:

**Mr. Ferry:** Uh I think he's – he's a – he's a go-getter, as in I think he's going to adapt and adjust to American life because of his intera – the way he interacts with other people, but uh when it comes to book smarts, uh Peter struggles a little bit, and part of it has to do with I think not attending school as much as he would like to. Um this year he was absent over 60 times.

**Lan:** Can you say more about his struggles with um I guess handling academic work?

**Mr. Ferry:** Um could be family situations, um but I will be speaking in an ignorant fashion, and I would be guessing to tell – if I would tell you why he's been out and what the struggles are, uh but he – he's a very nice young man, and I know he wasn't home watching videos in the days he was absent, so I would surmise that there were some family issues that he was dealing with, taking care of younger ones maybe and possibly working.

[Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]

About a month prior, during one of my interviews with Peter, he had mentioned his duties as a caretaker:

**Peter:** Hanging out and Saturday my nephew and niece, they go to school, and then my sister and brother-in-law keep working. They are working, so I got home – stay at home and cook for them.

**Lan:** On Saturday and Sunday only, not every day?

**Peter:** Yeah, yeah, I take care of the home.

**Lan** Everyday or just Saturday and Sunday?

**Peter:** No, Saturday and Sunday. Everyday is their – they are home.

My sister at home. Only she work weekends, so they work – when they working weekend, I got take care of their children.

[Interview, May 19, 2014]

As a researcher, I obtained these details by asking Peter how he spent his time outside of school. Unfortunately, school was not built for teachers to pause and inquire into the lives of their students. At the same time, it may be reasoned that, even within the current system, we must carve out time for such an inquiry if we are to effectuate at least an iota of change.

### **Tired and Absent**

Similar to many students I observed at Sunrise High School, Peter was habitually sleepy or tired in class. For instance, during Social Science class one day, he directly said to me, “Can I go outside, get some fresh air? I’m so sleepy. I’m so sleepy” [Field Notes, Mar. 19, 2014]. Moreover, the sleepy look in his eyes and his

laying his head in his arms on the desk were clear indicators that he needed sleep. I also viewed such behavior as signs that he was exhausted from his life responsibilities.

During the second semester of the school year, I noticed that Peter was often absent:

As I was examining the seating chart Mr. Ferry gave me, Juan peered at the seating chart and asked me what it was. I explained that the chart told me where all the students sat. Juan pointed to the seat I was in and said, "Peter sits there." Peter is a student that I don't see everyday. I think I've seen him only a couple of times or maybe half of the times that I have observed the class. [Field Notes, Jan. 13, 2014]

At the time, I did not know Peter well, and therefore, he provided me with little information regarding his responsibilities outside of school. Juan, his classmate, also noticed that Peter was frequently absent:

Peter, who sat in front of Juan, was turned somewhat toward me. I asked him whether he came to school everyday. He responded with a smile. I added, "I don't see you all of the time." Before Peter could respond, Juan joined the conversation, remarking, "Oh yeah, sometimes he oversleeps." Peter then said that the alarm function on his cell phone did not work properly, causing him to wake up late. As a result, he would come to class after 12 pm. This class [Social Science] starts at 12:13 pm. That partially explains why I don't consistently see him in this class. [Field Notes, Jan. 23, 2014]

Throughout the semester in Chemistry, Social Science, and African American History class, I found clues of Peter's sleepiness and tiredness. For example, he yawned three times during my observation of his chemistry class [Field Notes, Feb. 10, 2014]. Ten days later in Social Science class, he was also evidently sleepy: "Peter put his head down on his arms, which were on his desk, and yawned... It was time to do an assignment, and Peter still had his head down. He had not written anything for his assignment" [Field Notes, Feb. 20, 2014]. It was not unusual to discover Peter with his head down or sleeping in African American History class. The following is one illustrative example:

The teacher was speaking near the front of the classroom... Peter seemed to be in full sleep. His eyes were closed. His head was on his arms, which were folded across his desk. He was at a desk at the back of the room--not his usual sitting place—as if he had sought the quietest place possible in the classroom to rest... When the teacher turned the lights out to play a video, Peter put his head up. He stretched, sat up, and then leaned back on his chair with his arms crossed.

As the video continued, he leaned forward, and then put his head on his arms, which were crossed on his desk. His eyes were open, and he seemed to be watching the video...

After the video, the teacher asked the students questions and provided explanations at the front of the class. Peter closed his eyes. Again, his head was on his arms, which were on his desk. He seemed to

be sleeping... The teacher further explained the video that they had just watched and provided further explanations. Peter sat up briefly before putting his head down again. [Field Notes, Mar. 10, 2014]

In this excerpt, staying awake in class appears to be a struggle for Peter. Standard expectations would have required that he kept his eyes open and his head up during class. For example, a major charter school network (Mastery Charter Schools, 2011-2012) in Philadelphia has developed instructional standards, which are used to assess teachers, that include as “proficient” instruction these student outcomes:

- “The students' body language conveys buy-in.”
- “Throughout the lesson, 100% of students are actively on task, displaying academic posture and maintaining appropriate focus.”

The implication is that, a teacher would be penalized if he or she were observed to have a student, such as Peter, who often did not display “academic posture”. The adaptation of such standards sets up teachers and students for inevitable failure, given that many students have no choice but to enter the classroom tired from a night of physical labor in a restaurant.

### **Languages and Literacies**

As an occupant of gray space, Peter represented multiple, intertwining languages and literacies. In addition to his knowledge of English as another language, he was able to read, write, and speak Chin and Burmese. He also learned the Malaysian language while he was in Malaysia. These languages were concrete artifacts stemming from his

between-world realities, which treaded across various territorial boundaries (Trinh, 2011, p. 45). He lived where the borders met and acted as both a mediator and creator of various languages (Trinh, 2011). This theoretical framework allows educators to value an ELL's language knowledge. The alternative is to penalize an ELL for his or her non-fluent English and label him or her "Limited English Proficient", as in the official language of policy. In this section, I provide background information regarding Peter's learning of English and his experience with numerous languages.

### **English**

Though Peter's English skills were not considered particularly strong, he did not seem to have great difficulty in interacting in English. He also showed improvements in English, as described by Mr. Spruce, who worked with Peter's cohort from grade 10 through grade 12:

**Lan:** How's Peter's English?

**Mr. Spruce:** Again, much better than it was a couple years ago. I think of some of the students I work with, I wouldn't say he's probably right in the middle of that ELL cohort that we have in our group, he's probably right in the middle in where his abilities are. I don't know that—my communication with him this year, I haven't noticed any challenges in terms of language barriers but certainly, certainly 10th grade year, and even a bit last year, there were some times that I would be explaining

something and would have to re-explain and find different ways to communicate.

[Interview, Feb. 10, 2014]

Despite his growth, English still presented challenges for him, perhaps because he studied English briefly as a child and only started extensively studying and practice English when he immigrated to the U.S. at age nineteen. In an interview, he explained his history of learning English:

**Peter:** Oh, yeah. It was difficult for me little bit because I didn't long to the school. In Burma I only finished fifth grade. In Malaysia, I didn't go to school this way.

**Lan:** Did you learn any English?

**Peter:** Where?

**Lan:** In Burma or Malaysia?

**Peter:** No, you know, only one year until fourth grade we learn English or any language. Up to fourth or fifth grade, up to fifth grade you learn English. Only one year I learned English. Just basic, you know? I didn't know. Only for one year for one year in Malaysia before I started in my first year.

**Lan:** When you came here, how old were you?

**Peter:** When I came here?

**Lan:** To the U.S.?

**Peter:** Nineteen.



[Interview, Apr. 16, 2014]

Peter alluded to two factors that may have affected his English learning. One was that his formal education seemed to have been disrupted when he went to Malaysia. The second possible issue was that he arrived in the U.S. when he was nineteen, beyond what would be the critical period for developing a language with native-like fluency.<sup>17</sup> These issues may have influenced his ability to read and write in academic English, though his social use of English, namely speaking, did not seem to be a major difficulty:

**Mr. Ferry:** I think Peter is uh his speaking skills are better than his writing and reading skills...

...

**Lan:** What's his writing like?

**Mr. Ferry:** I would say below average, noun-verb agreement.

**Lan:** For an English language learner?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes.

**Lan:** Mhmm.

**Mr. Ferry:** For someone who's been at least in my class two – two, maybe three years, below average.

**Lan:** How about his reading?

**Mr. Ferry:** I would say below average also.

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, a discussion about research conducted by Patkowski (1980) in Lightbrown and Spada (2006).

**Lan:** So what percentage of the civics textbook do you think he comprehended when he had to read it?

**Mr. Ferry:** Um I'm guessing no more than 40 percent.

**Lan:** Hmm.

**Mr. Ferry:** But it – trying to put words together using context clues and like I said, he can adapt and adjust, that number would probably go up a little bit, but it was tough to – to evaluate because you know we didn't see him much this year.

[Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]

Mr. Ferry, Peter's Social Science teacher suggested that, given more time to practice and study, Peter's ability to read in English would have become stronger. However, he was often absent, as discussed previously, at times for reasons related to his life responsibilities. Ms. Ardelean, his former ESOL teacher and advisor at the time, hypothesized that, if Peter did not have the burden of taking care of himself, and instead had the time to focus on learning, he would have been academically stronger [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]. This argument could be extrapolated to suggest that Peter would have made greater improvements in English if he were given adequate opportunities. Other dimensions of who Peter was (for example, his identity as a refugee, an employee, and an orphan) influenced his English language and literacy abilities, and thus, his performance in school. These multifarious components seemed to coalesce to form Peter's experience of school.

## **Multiple Languages**

Several languages were integrated into Peter's life. He knew five languages, a fact that may have been discounted because his English looked and sounded "imperfect". However, while 80% of the U.S. population age five years and over in 2006-2008 reported that they "Spoke only English at home" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), Peter regularly attended a Baptist church where he and his congregation sang in Burmese, Chin, and English [Field Notes, Jun. 9, 2014]. By respecting and valuing his many languages, we would be able to recognize his brilliance, which was shaped by the multiple worlds he occupied.

Learning and using more than one language seemed to be a natural part of his life. After immigrating to Malaysia, learning the language seemed to be a given for him:

**Peter:** ...[When] I went into Malaysia I been up to one year before one year, I just stayed home, you know, I didn't go to. After one year, I stayed and studied their language. I studied like with they buy for me the book my sister buy for me the book, and it's have with translate with my language. And I study at home but I watched TV and I have some friends and when I go to work, like after one year, I can speak little bit and after two or three more, I speak little bit well, and not that much difficult for me.

**Lan:** What language?

**Peter:** A Malaysia language.

**Lan:** You learned it at home by yourself.

**Peter:** At home I read the book and then watch TV, something like that. And then also my brother-in-law, they had friend they live together at home, like Indonesian guy. And Indonesian people, we share almost the same language so I learned from him. You know, sometimes I asked him when we watched together TV, or he's a good man, and he taught me a lot...

[Interview, Apr. 16, 2014]

For the average person in the U.S., learning a new language would be a considerable feat. However, Peter was evidently able to learn a new language without great difficulty, as using different languages was a part of his life. At Sunrise High School, this element was seen in his content area classes where I observed him speaking in, I believe, Chin to classmates on five occasions. He had one classmate in Social Science class that spoke Chin and another in African American History. I suspect that I did not observe him speaking Chin more often because he tended to socialize with a linguistically diverse group of students, such that English appeared to be his primary language of communication in school. In addition to speaking in Chin with classmates, he seemed versed in utilizing an online Chin-English dictionary on the computer, as evidenced when he was able to quickly navigate to such a dictionary to look up the word “fertilizer” and other words while I assisted him on a Chemistry assignment [Field Notes, May 28, 2014]. He also explained that he was able to write in both Chin and Burmese, though he was stronger in Chin [Field Notes, Jun. 9, 2014]. He was not

merely an English language learner, he was a mediator of multiple languages and a constructor of output in different languages.

### **Cellphones and Computers: Navigating Written Assignments**

Near the end of the class period, Peter did not look at the teacher as the teacher spoke in front of the class. Peter stretched and then yawned. A few minutes later, he was on his iPhone. Holding his iPhone in both hands, he typed, with his back facing the teacher. [African American History Class, Field Notes, Mar. 5, 2014]

In this section, I discuss Peter's frequent and regular use of his iPhone and other technology for "unsanctioned" activity and as part of his strategy for "doing" school. Field observations reveal Peter's dependence on Internet searches to complete schoolwork, to the extent that he was caught using his iPhone to look up answers during a final exam. It may be suggested that students like Peter need to be disciplined to learn to refrain from cellphone-usage in school. However, I would reason that Peter tended to be on his iPhone when he was not engaged in class and in the content being taught. Furthermore, given that much of his schoolwork, including tests, were not intellectually rigorous, I imagine that, for students, it seemed reasonable to conduct simple online searches to retrieve answers to questions that did not require original ideas.

**Cellphones at Sunrise High School.** No doubt, technology use by students is prevalent in schools, and at Sunrise High School, cellphone usage was typically viewed negatively. Results from a nation-wide survey of students in grades 5-12 in 2013 show

that sixty-two percent of high school students use smartphones for schoolwork at least a few times each month, and two-thirds of the surveyed students use some sort of portable computer, smartphone, or tablet in school daily (Education Week, 2014). However, student use of technology is typically characterized as negative, as in the following comment by Becky Chambers, the manager of the Advanced Placement program for the Georgia Department of Education: “Oftentimes, kids have technology but they don’t use it for substantive work, only social media or for pleasure such as listening to music. They don’t recognize the power of these devices to improve knowledge and skills” (Manzo, 2010, p. 16). Additionally, many school administrators are understandably concerned about cyber safety as well as what they consider inappropriate use of cellphones, and therefore, prohibit cellphones in school (Manzo, 2010, p. 16). Nonetheless, at Sunrise High, blaming students for using their cellphones during the school day often seemed unjustified due to the inconsistency of its cellphone policy in addition to my observation that students’ cellphone use correlated with classroom disengagement that seemingly stemmed from the lack of intellectual challenge.

The official policy at Sunrise High School required that a cellphone be turned off and placed in a student’s schoolbag before he/she enters school. With the exception of lunchtime, staff and faculty members were to confiscate the phone if a student was using it during the school day. In practice, students, including Peter, regularly and openly used their cellphones, as I had discovered during my field observations. ELLs commonly used their smartphones to translate or retrieve definitions, but seemingly more often, students used their smartphones for purposes unrelated to the day’s lesson.

The following examples demonstrate the prevalence of student use of cellphones for non-schoolwork purposes in my focal Social Science class:

While the teacher spoke in front of the class, Meiling used her iPhone. Noticing that she was on her phone, the boy behind her asked in Chinese, “What are you doing?” Meanwhile, the teacher continued to speak and ask the class questions. [Field Notes, Jan. 2, 2014]

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The teacher began speaking in front of the class. He wrote “white collar worker” and “blue collar worker” on the board. Fayu held his iPhone horizontally with two hands and moved his iPhone in different directions, indicating that he was playing a game on his phone. [Field Notes, Jan. 8, 2014]

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Jie showed her iPhone to a boy near her, and the two spoke in Chinese. She put her hand on the back of her head and said, “Headache,” in Chinese. The two continue to speak in Chinese as the teacher continued to conduct the lesson. [Field Notes, Jan. 13, 2014]

These observations suggest that the cellphone policy was often not enforced. At the same time, the principal periodically reminded students of the school cellphone policy during the daily afternoon announcements. The two conditions together conveyed mixed signals to students regarding the appropriateness of cellphone usage. Given

these inconsistent messages, it was unsurprising to see that cellphone usage was prevalent (or the norm) in the school.

**Cellphone usage for non-schoolwork.** Unsurprisingly, along with his classmates, Peter often used his iPhone in Social Science and African American History class. However, his cellphone usage should be viewed as a reflection of his classroom experience, which featured a dearth of opportunities for intellectual or creative engagement. The following are examples of what would be considered Peter's inappropriate use of his iPhone in class during times that seemed to require little creative or cognitive capacity:

The teacher introduced a campaign commercial sponsored by a political action committee against Obama. While the commercial was playing, Peter had his iPhone on his desk, and the texting or messaging app was open... The teacher asked the class to copy the chart in their notebook. Peter briefly texted on his iPhone before copying the chart in his notebook. [Social Science Class, Field Notes, Feb. 10, 2014]

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Peter worked quietly by himself. In one hand was a pencil. He used his other hand to point at the handout as he read. As usual, the assignment was for students to read a passage on one side of the handout and write answers to recall questions on the other side... With about twenty minutes remaining in class, Peter was on his iPhone. [African American History Class, Field Notes, Mar. 17, 2014]



The above are illustrative examples of Peter's disengagement with the material. Opportunities for deep, intellectual engagement may have reduced participation in other activity, including using a cellphone for recreational purposes.

Moreover, Peter's use of his iPhone for non-schoolwork purposes seemed equivalent to, for example, chatting in class, as seen in the below episode from his African American History class:

Peter was on his iPhone as the teacher started describing the Harlem Renaissance. The teacher paused to say, "Peter, put your toys away." Peter smiled at the teacher, put his iPhone away, and gave the teacher a thumbs-up. Peter had a pencil in his hand, but he was not copying notes from the PowerPoint slides. He also did not have his notebook out. He looked at me, smiled, and waved.

Eventually, he took out his notebook. He also took out his iPhone again and started typing on it as the teacher continued talking and asking the class questions. The teacher changed to the next PowerPoint slide and said to the class, "Write 'The Great Depression and World War II'." Peter opened his notebook and wrote. While writing, he and the boy behind him spoke in Chin. [Field Notes, May 14, 2014]

Peter appeared to exhibit disengagement during this episode through various means: he was on his iPhone when the teacher began lecturing; he did not copy notes; he did not have his notebook on his desk; he took out his iPhone again after the teacher had told him to put it away; and he spoke with a classmate in a language other than English

when the teacher asked the class to take notes. That is, Peter's use of his iPhone (at times) was merely one of several points of behavior that may be construed as disengagement. From the perspective of the African American History teacher, cellphone usage indicated that a student was "off task":

After class I spoke with the teacher to debrief his lesson. I began by asking him how the lesson went... He said that all the students were on task; they weren't talking about unrelated topics, and they didn't have their phones out. [Field Notes, Mar. 12, 2014]

This example illustrates the common viewpoint that smartphones are "contraband" rather than educational accessories (Manzo, 2010, p. 16), and a student that is "on task" would not be on his/her cellphone. However, rather than label a cellphone as "contraband" or accuse a student of being "off task", we need to take the standpoint that the student's behavior is a reflection of his uptake (or lack thereof) of the teacher's instruction and the content being taught. Through such a lens, we would be able to question our pedagogy and push ourselves to better reach the student. Working within the constraint of materials that were not engaging, Peter developed a strategy for meeting the (minimum) requirements of his content area classes, given that a significant portion of his classwork involved copying notes and responding to recall questions, which merely required regurgitation.

**Strategy for doing school.** Although Peter used his cellphone to text and participate in other unsanctioned activity in the classroom, one of his strategies as a student and ELL was to use his cellphone (and the computer) to complete schoolwork.

For example, after being asked to copy notes from a series of PowerPoint slides, Peter said, “Oh, my God,” retrieved his iPhone, and took a photo of the PowerPoint slide projected onto the screen instead of hand-copying the notes [Field Notes, May 14, 2014]. More importantly, based on observations of his use of his iPhone and the Internet, a large portion of his written work could be completed by utilizing a search engine to locate information. That is, a noticeable amount of his schoolwork did not require him to think deeply or produce original work. If answers to simple questions can be found on the Internet, it should be no surprise that students would look up and copy information on a smartphone or computer. This method seemed to become one of Peter’s major strategies as a student.

To respond to cloze exercises given a word bank and other questions requiring knowledge of content area vocabulary, Peter seemed to habitually use the Internet as a resource to overcome the challenge of being both a learner of English and a learner of content-specific words. In both his Social Science and African American History class, he was routinely given handouts to complete. To illustrate, in Social Science, he used this strategy of retrieving information from the Internet to complete a handout about economics:

The second question on the handout asked, “What is revenue?” Peter used his iPhone to search for the word online. He showed me what he found, and then copied the first two lines. [Field Notes, Mar. 19, 2014]

During Social Science class one day, he also used his iPhone to search for information for his Chemistry class:

Most of the students were still reading when Peter started writing in his notebook. Upon inspection, I found that, rather than work on the topic at hand, he was using his iPhone to search for information to respond to the chemistry questions his teacher had given him, and he was copying the information in his notebook. [Field Notes, Jun. 4, 2014]

To provide context, Peter's chemistry teacher had given him three questions that he needed to prepare for, as he would be orally quizzed. This assignment was the teacher's method of providing Peter with an opportunity to pass Chemistry class, and thus, graduate high school. Prior to the above observation, Peter had requested that I help him with these questions. We spent about half an hour on the computer in the school library using Google to search for responses to questions, including "What is an equilibrium constant and how are they used?" While searching and copying from the Internet, Peter also used an online English-Chin dictionary to look up words that appeared in our search results. In other words, Peter showed evidence of utilizing his iPhone and the computer as educational tools. The observations discussed thus far also reveal the ease with which responses to questions posed in his content area classes could be found by simple Internet searches, which appeared to be one of Peter's key strategies for completing school requirements.

**Civil War test.** A close analysis of Peter's test on the Civil War administered in his African American History class highlights two of my main points in this subsection: 1) Much of his schoolwork did not require original ideas and/or intellectual engagement, and 2) Peter used the Internet as a strategy for completing schoolwork.

Near the end of the academic year, in May 2014, Peter completed a test on the Civil War in his African American History class. Though I did not have access to his notes from African American History, I do have Maly’s notes from the same class period as research data. Her notes reveal that students were given information to copy in preparation for the Civil War test. Examining Peter’s test and Maly’s notes side-by-side, I created Table 1 below. The left column contains items 1-15 of the test, which consisted of ten multiple-choice items and five fill-in-the-blank statements. The underlined responses indicate Peter’s choice and one-word written response, respectively. Next to each test item in the right column is the part of Maly’s notes that correspond to the question. Together, the two columns demonstrate that many (if not all) of the test items relied on simple recall. For example, the first question asked, “Who won the US Presidential election in 1860?” The notes provided in class as copied by Maly read, “Who won the election 1860?” and the answer provided in the notes was “Abraham Lincoln”, which was the correct response on the test.

Table 1

*Items 1-15 of Peter’s Civil War Test and Corresponding Information From Maly’s Class Notes*

<b>Peter’s Civil War Test in African American History Class, May 2014</b>	<b>Maly’s African American History Notebook, “The Test”, May 7, 2014</b>
1. Who won the US Presidential election in 1860?	(2) Who won the election 1860?  *Abraham Lincoln

<p><u>A. Abraham Lincoln</u></p> <p>B. George Washington</p> <p>C. Jefferson Davis</p> <p>D. Thomas Jefferson</p>	
<p>2. The 54th Mass. protested unfair?</p> <p>A. Supplies</p> <p><u>B. Wages</u></p> <p>C. Punishment</p> <p>D. Use in the war</p>	<p>9) What discriminatory army policy did the 54th boycott?</p> <p>*lower pay for “colored” regiments.</p>
<p>3. The South formed a new country called the ___States of America.</p> <p><u>A. Confederate</u></p> <p>B. Rebel</p> <p>C. Slave</p> <p>D. Southern</p>	<p>(4) What new country did the South form?</p> <p>*The confederate States of America.</p>
<p>4. The first battle of the Civil War took place at ___.</p> <p>A. Appomattox</p> <p><u>B. Fort Sumter</u></p> <p>C. Fort Wagner</p> <p>D. Gettysburg</p>	<p>(6) Where did the first battle of the war take place?</p> <p>*Ft. Sumter, SC</p>

<p>5. The famous black unit in the US military from Boston was the ____ regiment.</p> <p>A. 1st Pennsylvania African</p> <p>B. Louisiana Colored</p> <p><u>C. 54th Massachusetts Volunteer</u></p> <p>D. 101st African-American</p>	<p>(not included in Maly's notes for "The Test")</p>
<p>6. The Emancipation Proclamation only freed slaves in the ____ states.</p> <p><u>A. Border</u></p> <p>B. Confederate</p> <p>C. Slave</p> <p>D. Union</p>	<p>10) Exactly which slaves did the Emancipation proclamation set free?</p> <p>Only slave in Confederate territory.</p>
<p>7. Who was the commander of the 54th Mass. Regiment in the Civil War?</p> <p>A. Robert E. Lee</p> <p><u>B. Robert G. Shaw</u></p> <p>C. Ulysses S. Grant</p> <p>D. William T. Sherman</p>	<p>8) Who was the Commander of the 54th Mass?</p> <p>*Col. Robert Gould Shaw</p>
<p>8. Who assassinated Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre?</p>	<p>Assassination of Lincoln: John Wilkes Booth</p>

<p>A. John F. Kennedy</p> <p><u>B. John Wilkes Booth</u></p> <p>C. Lee Harvey Oswald</p> <p>D. Robert E. Lee</p>	
<p>9. The top General of the Union army was ____.</p> <p><u>A. Robert E. Lee</u> (marked as incorrect by the teacher)</p> <p>B. Robert G. Shaw</p> <p>C. Ulysses S. Grant</p> <p>D. William T. Sherman</p>	<p>(not included in Maly's notes for "The Test")</p>
<p>10. General ____ destroyed military and civilian targets in his famous "March to the Sea".</p> <p>A. Robert E. Lee</p> <p>B. Robert G. Shaw</p> <p><u>C. Ulysses S. Grant</u> (marked as incorrect by the teacher)</p> <p>D. William T. Sherman</p>	<p>(not included in Maly's notes for "The Test")</p>
<p>11. The word <u>secession</u> refers to the southern states leaven the Union.</p>	<p>(3) What does "secession" mean in this context?</p>



	*Southern state leaving the union.
12. The <u>Appanealrox</u> were slave states that did not leave the Union. (marked as incorrect by the teacher)	5) What were the “border states”? *slave states that did not secede.
13. Runaway slaves that joined the Union army were called <u>contrabands</u> .	(7) What were slave that ran away and joined the Union army called? *Contrabands.
14. Lee surrendered to Grant at <u>Confederate</u> , leading to the end of the war. (marked as incorrect by the teacher)	(not included in Maly’s notes for “The Test”)
15. The <u>13th Amendment</u> ended slavery everywhere in the United States.	(11)Which Amendment finally abolished US slavery 13th Amendment.

The table implies that a student in the class would have done well on the test by copying and memorizing class notes, and then, marking or writing the correct answer on the test. By extension, a student could have also done well on the test by looking up the information online in advance, and then memorizing the information for the test.

Peter’s responses to items 16-20 on the test reveal that he may have followed the latter strategy, as he did not have complete class notes for African American History. The instructions for these five items read, “Write the definition or explanation of the terms of people.” Having observed his strategies for doing school, and given that his

written definitions on the test did not align with writing I would expect from an ELL in his context, I surmised that he had written definitions retrieved from the Internet. Google searches of his test responses confirmed my hypothesis. For example, in explaining Jim Crow, Peter wrote, “the former practice of segregating black people in the US,” and the information I found on Encyclopedia.com reads, “1. the *former practice of segregating* black people in the US”—the two responses are nearly identical. The first column in Table 2 below contains Peter’s responses to these test items. The second column in the table contains definitions that mirror what Peter had written, and the third column includes the corresponding online source.

Table 2  
*Definitions or Explanations Written by Peter on His Civil War Test and Corresponding Online Information With Their Sources (Text in Italics in Column One are Peter’s Responses)*

<b>Peter’s Civil War Test in African American History Class, May 2014</b>	<b>Information from Online Source</b>	<b>Online Source</b>
16. Frederick Douglass: <i>was a fiery orator and his speeches were often published in various abolitionist newspaper.</i>	“ <i>Frederick Douglass was a fiery orator and his speeches were often published in various abolitionist newspapers.</i> ”	Cliffnotes.com

<p>17. Dred Scott: <i>United States slave who sued for liberty after living in a non-slave state.</i></p>	<p>“United States slave who sued for liberty after living in a non-slave state...”</p>	<p>Vocabulary.com</p>
<p>18. Underground Railroad: <i>was a network of secret routes and safe house used by 19th century slaves of African.</i></p>	<p>The Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes and safe houses used by 19th-century slaves of African descent...”</p>	<p>Wikipedia.org</p>
<p>19. John Brown: <i>was a white American abolitionist who believed armed insurrection was only way to overthrow.</i></p>	<p>“John Brown (May 9, 1800 – December 2, 1859) was a white American abolitionist who believed armed insurrection was the only way to overthrow the institution of slavery in the United States.”</p>	<p>Wikipedia.org</p>
<p>20. Jim Crow: <i>the former practice of segregating black people in the US.</i></p>	<p>“1. the former practice of segregating black people in the US”</p>	<p>Encyclopedia.com</p>

Peter may have retrieved the information from his iPhone during the test. That is, he may have cheated on the test, using his iPhone. Two weeks before graduation, Peter requested that I speak with him regarding an issue in African American History class. He was caught cheating on the final exam, and as a result, Mr. Abram gave him a score of a zero. Peter explained that he and other students in the class used their smartphones during the exam: “We use for you know multiple choice. We put the question, and then it’s – it not give us the answer, but it’s gave us a lot of information, so we read – we read and we understand...” [Interview, Jun. 3, 2014]. I advised that he speak with Mr. Ardelean, who I believed would have been able to effectively advocate on his behalf. Taking into consideration my data regarding Peter’s literacy practices in school, it seemed that Peter was trained to retrieve information from the Internet to complete requirements of his content area classes. If school has been set up to require students to complete a series of motions, then it is no surprise that a student would develop searching for answers online as a strategy for performing school, including when completing final exams.

As Ms. Ardelean stated, many teachers did not know Peter and his subterranean layers. He belonged to a minority group that was persecuted in Burma. He escaped to Malaysia where he was still unwelcomed. He was fortunate to be one of a small fraction of refugees to be resettled in the U.S., but he faced new challenges, including working to make a living while negotiating school life as a learner of English, which was his fourth or fifth language. His tiredness and disengagement in class exuded the impression that he was not a “good” student. Though he had devised a means for

navigating rote, written tasks that required little intellect, his strategy was deemed a form of cheating. However, Ms. Ardelean and others paused to ask him questions and consider his context, providing a reminder that there is more to a student than his/or her façade shows.

### Chapter 3: Case Study - Yanjun

After the class finished watching the movie, *Mean Girls*, the teacher wrote “Lindsay Lohan” on the board and asked the class what they knew about her. Yanjun said, “In drug.” She added, “Very bad. And she steals stuff.”

Mr. Ferry continued to ask the class several questions, and Yanjun responded frequently. One strand of the discussion went as follows:

Mr. Ferry: Why do you think movie stars take drugs?

Yanjun: She is very stressed. So skinny. But girls never think they’re perfect. They want more skinny.”

Yanjun then continued this conversation in Chinese with one of her female classmates sitting behind her in the aisle to her left. She used her index finger to draw lines under her eyes to indicate bags under one’s eyes, and said in Chinese, “Because she uses drugs so often.”

After a class activity that required students to move into the hallway to write on poster paper, the students returned to the classroom, and the teacher began a discussion about movies. Yanjun took out her compact mirror and looked at it while participating in the class discussion and answering questions.

The discussion transitioned to the topic of Hollywood. Mr. Ferry asked, “What is Hollywood?” Yanjun responded immediately and loudly,

“California!” Mr. Ferry said that there was a famous monument in Hollywood. Yanjun said out loud, “It says ‘Hollywood’, right? On the mountain?” Mr. Ferry asked, “What color?” Yanjun responded, “White.”

[Field Notes, Jan 2, 2014]

Yanjun, a student who immigrated to the U.S. from China at age ten, participated often in class, as evident in the opening excerpt from an observation of her Social Science class. She was vocal and relatively loud, in both English and Chinese. She was considered strong in academics and the English language. However, she routinely engaged in behavior that would typically not be considered “good” school behavior: she chatted in class, spoke in Chinese, played with her iPhone, spoke with students across the classroom, and so forth. It seemed that such behavior was forgiven because she often participated in class discussions and produced relatively high-quality work. I surmise that another student engaging in such behavior would be considered a “bad” student. In sum, she was unofficially and officially one of the top students in the school.

On the surface, Yanjun was a high-achieving student. Her high performance may have led to the misconception that she did not require support and resources—a line of reasoning that possibly stems from the model minority stereotype. However, she explained to me that she regretted passing the ESL exit exam because she would have liked further support in learning English. Moreover, a high-achieving student such as Yanjun at Sunrise High School, according to my estimation, was not at the level of the

“best” students in the school district, though she could have been if given the opportunity. That is, she did not seem to receive the support she needed to flourish academically, although she was an A-average-student.

Another layer involved in Yanjun’s experience was the fact that she worked ten to fifteen hours per week in a Chinese fast food restaurant and sent 40 to 50% of her earnings to her mother, who lived in another state and was unable to work due to health reasons. These details signal financial hardships of Yanjun, which played into her life at school. Taken together, the elements that constitute Yanjun’s schooling experience were far from linear or one-dimensional. That is, describing her as a “good” student—which I was also guilty of—would imply that she inhabited a unitary world. Instead, she was part of many worlds and in a “median position” where many directions described her situation, and all directions were still possible (Trinh, 2011, p. 70).

### **My Interactions with Yanjun**

I was a participant-observer in Yanjun’s Social Science class, the same class attended by all my study participants. The class was listed as “Social Science” on school report cards, but unofficially, it was an “ESOL Social Science” class, in which all the students were ELLs. Whereas many of her classmates often asked me for help, she did not. She was the most noticeable student in her Social Science class because she was outspoken and spoke loudly. She was similarly talkative when I observed her at lunchtime in the cafeteria and in her art class.



In addition to observing her in Social Science during the academic year, I chatted with her in the classroom, hallway, and gym. I encountered her once in the main office when she asked for her transcript while I was working there. I found her to be open to interact with me, frank during our interviews, and usually in positive spirits.

### **Yanjun's Interactions with the School**

In this section, I provide an overview of Yanjun's position within the context of her school and discuss the notion that she was a theorist of schooling. The following major points are presented: 1) Yanjun was a high-achieving student at Sunrise High School but did not necessarily seem to be an academically thriving student. In other words, her school environment did not seem to cultivate her potential. 2) The label of "good" student was often projected onto Yanjun. Also, though Yanjun evidently fit the model minority stereotype, we must not consider her representative of Chinese immigrant students in the U.S.

Yanjun transferred to Sunrise High School as a junior from Northern Lights High School. Due to circumstances related to a violent episode, in which many Asian students were attacked at Northern Lights, Yanjun made the decision to transfer to Sunrise High, though the commute was taxing: "Um like um I have to wait for a bus, and then transfer to subway, and then transfer it to another bus, [number] bus" [Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]. This information was a gesture toward the importance of school for her. Moreover, she may have constructed theories regarding an educational

environment conducive to learning in choosing to attend a school that is further from her home than her previous school. At Sunrise High, she seemed to have little interaction with the main office, which spent a significant amount of time on discipline, because she was a model student that did not cause trouble. The discourse surrounding the archetypal “good” student, in terms of academics and discipline, was pervasive at Sunrise High, and Yanjun was emblematic of such a student.

### **Honor Roll Student**

The data collected illustrate Yanjun’s role as a student with high academic performance relative to her peers at Sunrise High School. As of April 2, 2014, she ranked eight in the senior class with a 3.82 grade point average. Her cumulative grades for the 2013-2014 academic year as of April 24, 2014 reveal that she was an A-student with the exception of one B:

Table 3

*Yanjun’s Cumulative Grades as of April 24, 2014*

<b>Class</b>	<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Rating on a Scale of 100</b>
Art 1	A	96
AP Calculus AB	B	84
English 4	A	97
Health	A	98
Internship	A	94
Physical Education Core Curriculum	A	99

Senior Seminar	A	90
Social Science	A	98

Table 4

*School District Subject Rating Scale*

A	90-100	Advanced
B	80-89	Proficient
C	70-79	Basic
D	65-69	Below Basic
F	0-64	Failing

Moreover, she was on the school honor roll, and at the commencement ceremony on June 17, 2014, she received the award for the highest average in Social Science.

Yanjun was well aware of her status, though she seemed hesitant to admit this awareness in an interview:

**Lan:** How are you doing in school here, in high school?

**Yanjun:** In this one?

**Lan:** Yep, how are you doing here?

**Yanjun:** Hmm, okay.

**Lan:** Just okay?

**Yanjun:** Yeah.

**Lan:** Don't you uh get really good grades?

**Yanjun:** Honor roll, yeah.

**Lan:** You're on the honor roll.

**Yanjun:** Mhmm.

[Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]

As will be discussed below, her academic achievement seemed directly correlated with her desires or hope for the future.

### **College and Academic Rigor**

**Lan:** How come you do so well in school?

**Yanjun:** Uh coz I want to like to put my effort on there. Like I don't know, just for like future. I don't know.

**Lan:** Do you want to explain that?

**Yanjun:** Hmm, I want to go to college.

**Lan:** Which schools did you apply to?

**Yanjun:** [The name of three universities and a community college.]

[Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]

Yanjun wanted to do well in high school because she planned to attend college, but attending the country's most prestigious universities, such as the Ivy League institution less than five miles from Sunrise High School, was apparently never in her plans:

**Lan:** She's applying to colleges

**Ms. Lau:** Yeah, but, yeah. She, I think she will go to [community college]. She told me she'll go to [community college]...

[Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]

More than two months later, a month before graduation, she confirmed with me that she would attend the local community college:

...I spoke with Yanjun about her plans after graduation. She's planning to go to [the local community college]. She took a placement exam for ESL. She said she got a 98, which is a high score. My assumption is that the score is out of 100. Getting this score means that she only needs to take one semester of ESL, and then she can take English 101, which is the typical English class at the college.

She also got a score of at least 168 on the math test, which is also fairly high as she explained. She can begin by taking a college level math course, Pre-Calculus, without any preliminary courses. She's currently taking AP Calculus AB, which is supposed to be equivalent to college-level calculus, but she said that college-level math is at a much higher level than in high school. Therefore, she will take Pre-Calculus in college, instead of immediately taking Calculus. She wants to major in Accounting, but she's not sure. She plans to transfer to [a local university] after going to [community college]. She has an appointment to talk to a counselor or advisor at [the community college] within the next few days.

[Field Notes, May 20, 2014]

Significantly, my conversation with Yanjun underscores her awareness that high school was not sufficiently rigorous; in particular, her math class was supposed to be college level but was not. She was conscious of what school had to offer her and what she could receive from school. The amalgamation of implications based on such data leads to these questions: Was her academic potential held back? What constitutes academic achievement?

### **“Good” Student and the Model Minority Stereotype**

**Lan:** What are your general thoughts about the Chinese students in - here?

**Ms. Lau:** Uh-huh

**Lan:** The students from China

**Ms. Lau:** In general--but before long time ago, they are very good, but now they change... If they hang out with wrong group, this is how they cut school, you know, uh, go to, just go to play around, they no come to school.

**Lan:** Are most of the kids like that?

**Ms. Lau:** Not most of the kid, no, no some. Some kids good... And Yanju - Yanjun. Oh, okay, this a girl. She...she's good, right? Yeah, she work hard by herself... But she's - her grade is good, her grade is good.

[Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]

The label of “good” student was commonly used to describe Yanjun, as demonstrated by the Chinese Bilingual Counseling Assistant above, but may have oversimplified her context. I too adopted this piece of common discourse:

**Lan:** Yeah, because I remember um I think I had to help with something, and I know that you’re a good student.

**Yanjun:** Yeah.

[Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]

A factor underlying the discourse surrounding good students may be the model minority stereotype, which paints Asian American students as overachievers and disciplined learners. As Lee (2009) argues, “Images of Asian American math geniuses, computer science experts, and high school valedictorians are ingrained in the minds of Americans” (p. 61). This view is reflected in Mr. Spruce’s comment that his colleagues at his community-based organization assumed that his job was easier than theirs because he was based in a school where the majority of students were Asian Americans:

**Mr. Spruce:** ... Yeah, I think I’ve kind of seen that perception from outside peers of mine. So, several other schools and most of those other schools are at their heavy minority populations, but it’s typically black students... But yeah there is kind of the – it’s not always spoken, but it’s just this perception, “Well, oh, he’s got the Asian kids, so of course they’re working hard; they’re doing better.”

[Interview, Feb. 10, 2014]

This description corresponds neatly with McKay and Wong's (1996) argument that "Asians and Asian Americans both are characterized as hardworking, disciplined, academically inclined..." (p. 586).

However, this stereotype ignores inter- and intragroup diversity. Great variations within the population of Sunrise High students who immigrated from Mainland China existed, and Yanjun was certainly not representative of this subsection of students. A snapshot of a few of her Chinese peers at Sunrise High School support this notion:

- Fayu: His English level was considered to be very low. He did not graduate with Yanjun and his senior class because he was missing credits for at least two classes. He was frequently late or absent and had a negative reputation in terms of academics. Near the end of the academic year, he was included in the list of seniors potentially failing at least one class.
- Jie: She did fairly well in school but likely could have done better. She referred to herself as "lazy", the same term a teacher used to describe her. She worked at a nail salon, uncommon for Chinese immigrants. Ms. Ardelean suggested that Jie was a student with relative means, in that she lived with both her parents and was also able to spend the summer in China, i.e. she seemed well taken care of relative to her Chinese peers.
- Xiaoli: During the previous academic year, she dropped out of school for a semester to work to pay rent. She did not live with her parents and had to support herself.



These glimpses serve as a reminder that a high-achieving student like Yanjun does not represent all Chinese immigrant students in the U.S. To begin to gain a full understanding of each ELL, we must look deeper and uncover the richness of the unique histories and context of the learner. This case study is an attempt to investigate and understand the manifold interlocking pieces that made up Yanjun and her school experience. As will be discussed, Yanjun was not merely a “good” student--rather, she encompassed a complexity of hyphenated subterranean layers.

### **Subterranean Layers**

The model minority stereotype, which emphasizes the academic and economic achievement of Asian Americans—particularly East Asian or Chinese Americans—effaces the stories of ELLs and immigrant students, such as Yanjun. In this section, I discuss Yanjun’s immigration status against the backdrop of Chinese Americans (native- and foreign-born). I then present data about Chinese Americans in Philadelphia to provide context regarding Yanjun’s position in the larger picture. Finally, I describe Yanjun’s work experience and its intersections with her schooling.

#### **Chinese Americans<sup>18</sup>**

**Lan:** Which country are you from?

**Yanjun:** China.

**Lan:** And when did you come here?

---

<sup>18</sup> In this study, I do not refer to Chinese nationals staying temporarily in the U.S. for school, work, business, and other reasons.

**Yanjun:** Hmmm, 2003.

**Lan:** Why?

**Yanjun:** Skip.

**Lan:** You want to skip [the question]?

**Yanjun:** Mhmmm.

**Lan:** Okay...

[Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]

Despite their large number, in certain ways, Chinese immigrants remain invisible in the U.S. According to C. Suarez-Orozco, M. M. Suarez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008), Chinese immigrants “represent the new Asian migration to the United States” and are also “the second-largest newcomer group after Mexicans” (p. 7). Zhao (2010) analyzed U.S. census data and found that, in 1960, the number of people identified as Chinese was 237,292. Since 1965, the number has doubled every decade, and the 2000 census indicates 2.9 million Chinese in the U.S., though many undocumented immigrants were likely excluded, and therefore, officially nonexistent (Zhao, 2010).

As implied by my interview with Yanjun, her story is only partially known. In an interview with the Chinese bilingual counseling assistant, Ms. Lau, who was assigned to work at Sunrise High two days a week, I asked, “Why do you think most [Chinese] people decided to come here?” Ms. Lau responded, “I don’t know why” [Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]. Similarly, Ms. Ardelean, who had a strong relationship with many of the ESOL students, stated, “Um I don’t know too much about her [Yanjun’s]

personal life” [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]. On a larger, systemic level, the story of students like Yanjun fade into the background as the dominant discourse spotlights Chinese Americans as academic overachievers and the beneficiaries of higher education and upward mobility.

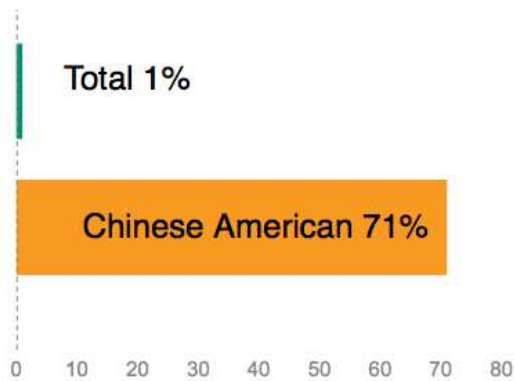
As was the case for many of the other Chinese immigrant students at Sunrise High School, Yanjun’s exact immigration status was unclear to faculty and staff members, though it seemed known that at least some of the students from China were undocumented. Ms. Lau surmised that most of the students from China arrived in the U.S. with valid passports, “[but] they want stay, but they’re not supposed to ... they [the passports] should be expired...” Ms. Ardelean implicitly corroborated this conjecture in remarking, “This was shocking to me that we have so many illegal Chinese students. That I didn’t realize” [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]. As Zhao (2010) explains, many undocumented Chinese immigrants arrived in the U.S. with valid passports and visas for short-term stays but stayed after their visas expired. They stood in the hyphenated borderlands of here but not here. This portion of the population seems invisible, in that they are not included in the U.S. census for two main reasons: First, the Census Bureau determines the number of people based on their “usual residence”, but many undocumented immigrants do not have stable jobs and are “highly mobile”; second, lack of trust of government agencies may discourage undocumented immigrants from participating in the census (Zhao, 2010). Based on the information I was able to collect, I hypothesize that Yanjun was undocumented. My impression is that staff and faculty

members, such as Ms. Lau and Ms. Ardelean, shared the same hypothesis but did not want to invade the privacy of students by asking them about their immigration status.

### **Chinese Americans in Philadelphia**

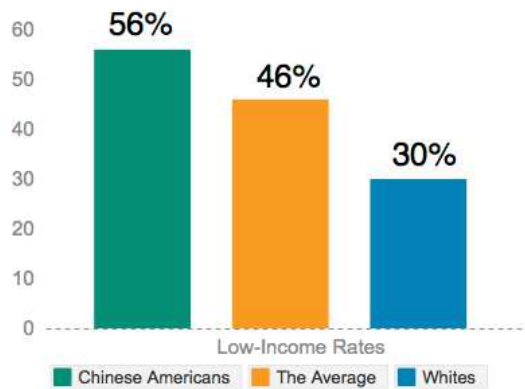
Demographic data regarding Chinese Americans in Philadelphia shed light on Yanjun's context:

Figure 2: *Growth 2000 to 2010*



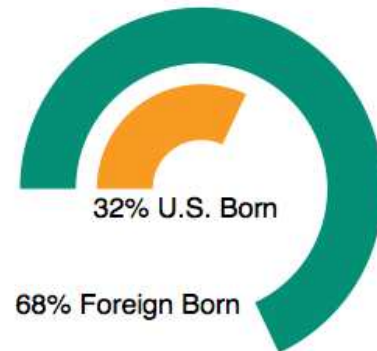
The Chinese American population in Philadelphia (including foreign born and born in the U.S.) grew by 71% while the total population grew by only 1% (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

Figure 4: *Low-Income 2010*



In an analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), Asian Americans Advancing Justice (2013) found that “56% of Chinese Americans in Philadelphia are low-income, exceeding the average (46%) and much higher than that of Whites (30%)” (p. 42).

Figure 3: *Foreign Born 2006 to 2010*



The 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates reveal that 68% of Chinese Americans in Philadelphia at the time were foreign born, i.e. they are immigrants (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Figure 5: *Poverty 2010*

In poverty:

- 33% of Chinese Americans
- 14% of Whites
- 30% of Blacks or African Americans
- 41% of Cambodian Americans
- 40% of Latinos
- 31% of Vietnamese Americans

Contrary to the model minority stereotype, which touts the economic success of Asian Americans, “33% of Chinese Americans...in Philadelphia live in poverty...” (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2013, p. 42; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

An examination of the data indicates that the stories of Yanjun and her classmates do not align with the model minority stereotype, and she as well as many Chinese Americans should not be neglected when identifying groups that need support.

### **Working Adult and High School Student**

Similar to many of my other study participants, Yanjun appeared to be an adult rather than a teenager, in that she worked and did not live with or depend on her parents. Yanjun came to the U.S. with her uncle at age ten in 2003, and at the time of my study, she lived in Philadelphia with her uncle. Ms. Lau insinuated that students who lived with their parents were privileged compared to students who did not live with their parents. Referring to Jie, a classmate of Yanjun who was also from China, Ms. Lau stated the following:

She's [Jie] a—she's a happy girl. So, she's lucky that her—because I think, she have a family...you know—a normal family... Yes, they have a father, mother, you know. Three...but this one [Yanjun], you know, uh... By herself.

[Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]

Ms. Lau continued to explain that Yanjun lived with her cousin: “Anyway, a cousin’s different. Your parent is different, right... They don’t have a parent...” [Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]. The implication was that Yanjun was at a disadvantage because she did not live with her parents, while students like Jie was “lucky” to be with both of her parents. Living under the care of parents seemed to be a luxury rather than a given for Yanjun and many others at Sunrise High.

Yanjun explained her situation to me [Field Notes, May 20, 2014]. When she came to the U.S., she lived in Philadelphia with her parents. When she was fourteen years old, she and her parents moved to Iowa. However, after two years, at age sixteen, she made the decision to return to Philadelphia to live with her uncle, because Iowa was too quiet for her, and she had already established friendships in Philadelphia. Apparently, her agency led her back to Philadelphia, and though she lived with her uncle, she seemed quite independent.

It was well known that Yanjun worked part-time while attending high school fulltime.

**Lan:** ... What kind of restaurant do you work in?

**Yanjun:** Takeout.

**Lan:** What kind of food?

**Yanjun:** Chinese food.

**Lan:** What do you do when you work? You only answer the phones. Anything else?

**Yanjun:** I cook, too.

**Lan:** You cook?

**Yanjun:** Mhmm.

**Lan:** What do you cook?

**Yanjun:** Like burgers, cheeseburgers, chicken wing you know, the deep fry stuff.

...

**Lan:** How did you find the job?

**Yanjun:** It's like my uncle, he owns that restaurant, so I just go in there, and then he tell me in that, but when I was twelve, I'm just like helping a little bit, but right now like I could do like everything.

[Interview, Mar. 26, 2014]

Ms. Lau noted that she often saw students from Sunrise High School, including at least one of my other study participants, working in a restaurant in Chinatown. In discussing Yanjun with me, one of the first remarks Ms. Lau made surrounded the effect of work on Yanjun's attendance: "Yeah, she work hard by herself... And sometime she no come to school because she work really late, like working, she's working" [Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]. During the 2013-2014 academic year, as of April 24, 2014, she was late 13 times and absent 19 times (and present 117 days). Work occupied a significant amount of her time; as Yanjun stated, "I have to squeeze my time to do my homework" [Field Notes, May 20, 2014]. In 10th and 11th grade, instead of eating during lunchtime, she used the time to complete her homework. During the previous academic year, lunch was forty-five minutes long. The time was reduced to thirty minutes for the 2013-2014 year, causing her to feel more pressured for time. Unlike what we might consider a typical high school student, Yanjun, who worked ten to fifteen hours a week and longer hours during school breaks, did not have the luxury of time for traditional extracurricular activities.

Yanjun, worked in her uncle's fast food restaurant, a situation that is similar to that of many undocumented Chinese immigrants in the U.S. To gain a better



understanding of the immigration status of students like Yanjun, I asked Ms. Ardelean about her knowledge of the immigration stories of the students from China. She described their status as “illegal” and provided a plausible explanation for the observation that many of the Chinese immigrant students and their family members worked in restaurants:

**Ms. Ardelean:** ... I mean you could come as a visitor on a visitor visa and overstay your visa, but I – the way that they describe these journeys, it doesn't sound like that, so I don't understand. Like some kids were telling me that people pay up to literally sixty thousand dollars. I kept saying, “Do you mean six-zero or one-six?” He said six-zero. I hope it's one-six, but up to sixty thousand dollars, which then they have to earn off, so they're not expected to give somebody the sixty thousand dollars, but they come here. They live in the restaurant in a room, and then they have to work there until they...paid off their journey, and I've heard that now from more than one person, so I feel like that's accurate information...

[Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]

Ms. Ardelean implicitly pointed to the Chinese “ethnic economy”, which rests on the notion that “regardless of their socioeconomic background, native-place affiliation, and reasons for leaving their homeland, the majority of the undocumented Chinese rely on the same ethnic networks to survive” (Zhao, 2010, p. 18). Based on Ms. Ardelean's observations, perhaps many of the Chinese immigrant students at Sunrise High School and their parents needed to work to pay off the debt resulting from payment for their

migration to the U.S. Those in other circumstances may, nonetheless, also work in restaurants because job opportunities elsewhere are limited due to the language barrier and lack of training (Zhao, 2010). Like many Chinese immigrant business owners, Yanjun's uncle employed family members, who were paid little or nothing:

**Lan:** Do you get paid?

**Yanjun:** Yeah.

**Lan:** Can I ask you how much or

**Yanjun:** Seven fifty an hour right now, but when I was younger, I don't get pay.

**Lan:** Because you were just helping.

**Yanjun:** Yeah.

[Interview, Mar. 26, 2014]

When I asked how she learned to cook at her uncle's restaurant, she responded, "You just go in there, and they will teach you" [Interview, Mar. 26, 2014], insinuating that the job did not require special skills. The Chinese ethnic economy includes employment agencies that serve Chinese clients, usually newly arrived immigrants, and refer them to jobs in restaurants, garment factories, and other areas that require menial labor (Zhou, 2010). Yanjun's uncle may have relied on this ethnic economy to open his restaurant.

The way in which Yanjun spent her money was another indicator that she was concurrently an adult and a high school student. When she discussed the allocation of her earnings, she explained that she used a portion of it to go shopping, though she laughed, as if embarrassed about spending her money in this manner [Field Notes, May 20, 2014]. She added that she sent forty to fifty percent of her earnings to her mother,

who was not able to work. As she explained this situation, she made gestures toward her body, I believe, to indicate that her mother had a physical condition that prevented her from working. As such, Yanjun was simultaneously an employee, a high school student, and a caretaker, as was the case for the other three focal students in this study. These multiple layers shaped Yanjun's schooling experience.

### **Languages, Literacies, and the Content Areas**

#### **Displaying Social Science Knowledge**

Yanjun performed well in her Social Science class and actively displayed her content area knowledge by verbalizing answers and ideas out loud, perhaps as an outlet for her intellectual curiosity and sense of humor, but the class did not seem to be academically challenging for her. Her engagement in the class appeared to indicate that there was a match between her teacher's instructional approach and her learning style or preference. She seemed self-reflexive and highly aware of what school could offer her. She adjusted her behavior accordingly and tested limits with her sass and audacity in class.

The data highlights Yanjun's achievement in the class. As of January 6, 2014, her grade in Social Science was 95.6 (out of 100); her grade increased to 98 by April 2014; and she was awarded for the highest average in Social Science at graduation. Her strong performance was recognized by many, including herself:

**Lan:** ... So how are you doing in social science? That's the class I'm in with you Mondays and Wednesdays.

**Yanjun:** The best class.

**Lan:** That's your best class.

**Yanjun:** Yeah.

[Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]

Asked to share his thoughts about Yanjun, Mr. Ferry, her Social Science teacher, emphasized her academic achievement and strong performance in his class:

**Mr. Ferry:** Yanjun uh won the award for the social science – won the Social Science award for the highest average, um a complete student. She understands well. She speaks well, reads well, writes well. Um she's going to be success – successful.

[Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]

Yanjun's active participation, which usually dominated whole-class discussions, was seemingly encouraged by Mr. Ferry, possibly as a form of instructional differentiation and to provide her with a chance at intellectual and academic rigor because the material did not appear challenging for her:

Class was over and all of the students left. I briefly talked to Mr. Ferry... I said I noticed that Yanjun answered a lot of questions and Mr. Ferry seemed to feel bad and said perhaps he shouldn't call on her so often. I tried to emphasize that he didn't call on her; she would just answer herself. He explained that she was on a very high level. He said

that sometimes he felt bad because he may be holding her back. I could see why he would let her talk out loud and answer all of the questions.

[Field Notes, Jan. 23, 2014]

This conversation highlights Mr. Ferry’s concern for Yanjun’s education and acknowledgement that her learning needs were not being adequately met. Perhaps, to mitigate this insufficiency, he allowed Yanjun to speak often and to ask questions, although such a classroom dynamic may have hindered the participation of her classmates.

**Speaking out loud.** Yanjun’s active participation, engagement, and eagerness in whole-class discussions were made evident by tracing verbalizations of content area knowledge she made in the class. Perhaps based on her theories of schooling, she developed for herself her role within the classroom. In one fifty-minute long class period, there were up to five instances, in which Yanjun vocalized her knowledge, as shown in the following table:

Table 5

*Yanjun’s Open Display (in English) of Content Area Knowledge in Social Science Class*

Date	Field Notes	Analysis
Dec. 23, 2013	The word ‘lesbian’ was mentioned during the movie. Mr. Ferry paused the movie and wrote the word on the board. Some students read the word out loud. Yanjun, who had spoken out loud at least two times already, said, “Girl like girl.”	Yanjun orally displayed her knowledge regardless of whether the teacher asked for a response.

	<p>...</p> <p>After another scene in the movie, Mr. Ferry paused the movie and said, “You hear the word ‘grounded’ in America. What does that mean?” Yanjun immediately responded, “You don’t go outside.”</p>	<p>Without prompting, she shared the definition of ‘lesbian’ with the class. Later, she also provided a definition when Mr. Ferry asked the class for the meaning of ‘grounded’.</p>
<p>Jan. 2, 2014</p>	<p>Mr. Ferry: Why do you think movie stars take drugs?</p> <p>Yanjun: She is very stressed. So skinny. But girls never think they’re perfect. They want more skinny.”</p> <p>...</p> <p>The discussion transitioned to the topic of Hollywood. Mr. Ferry asked, “What is Hollywood? Yanjun responded immediately and loudly, “California!” Mr. Ferry said that there was a famous monument in Hollywood. Yanjun</p>	<p>In the discussion about Hollywood, Yanjun made three consecutive responses that revealed her knowledge about the topic. Two of the responses were solicited by Mr. Ferry, and one was a response she offered herself.</p>

	<p>said out loud, “It says ‘Hollywood’, right? On the mountain?” Mr. Ferry asked, “What color?”</p> <p>YanJun responded, “White.”</p>	
<p>Jan. 6, 2014</p>	<p>Next, Mr. Ferry asked, “What’s a gang?” YanJun said, “Bad boy.” Peter, in a lower voice but also out loud said, “A group.”</p> <p>...</p> <p>There were three questions on the board. Mr. Ferry announced, “If you can answer all three, I’ll give you \$3.” The following was written on the board:</p> <p><i>Political Parties</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>What are they?</i></li> <li>2. <i>How many are in USA?</i></li> <li>3. <i>What political party does Obama belong to?</i></li> </ol> <p>YanJun raised her hand and provided the following answers:</p>	<p>There were at least five instances during this class period, in which YanJun vocally displayed her knowledge.</p> <p>The teacher stated, “Oh, you are good!” to praise YanJun for knowing that the 2008 presidential candidates included McCain and Palin.</p>

<p><i>Part of government. Two parts.</i></p> <p><i>One hundred.</i></p> <p><i>Democracy.</i></p> <p>Mr. Ferry said, “Sorry, you got all three questions wrong.” He then discussed the answers, and Yanjun said, “Oh, I got number three correct.”</p> <p>Mr. Ferry responded, “You said ‘democracy’. It’s supposed to be ‘democratic party’ because a democracy is a noun or an idea, and the democratic party is a group of people.”</p> <p>...</p> <p>The discussion moved on to the topic of unions.</p> <p>Mr. Ferry said, “I am part of a union,” to which Yanjun responded, “Teacher union. I’m part of the union—student union, too.”</p> <p>...</p> <p>The class was still discussing the different views between the Democratic and the Republican Parties. Mr. Ferry asked, “What’s abortion?”</p> <p>Yanjun responded, “With baby but you don’t</p>	
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	<p>want it.”</p> <p>...</p> <p>The following dialogue occurred:</p> <p>Mr. Ferry: Let me show you the presidential candidates in 2008.</p> <p>Yanjun: McCain.</p> <p>Mr. Ferry: Here you go, here are the eight guys or eight candidates.</p> <p>A student: Nine.</p> <p>Mr. Ferry: Let me show you the prettiest candidate. [Mr. Ferry asked a student to turn the lights off to allow the student to see the Promethean Board better.</p> <p>Yanjun: Sarah.</p>	
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	Mr. Ferry: Oh, you are good!	
Jan. 8, 2014	<p>The topic was abortions. Mr. Ferry asked one of the Chinese students, “Do you know how to say it in Chinese?” She responded “No.” A moment later, the following dialogue occurred:</p> <p>YanJun: Have to be over 18.</p> <p>Mr. Ferry: Yes, you need to have your parent’s permission if you’re under 18. What would be some of the reasons why a woman would want to have an abortion?</p> <p>[Some students responded out loud.]</p> <p>YanJun: If the baby is unhealthy, or there is damage to the brain. Disability.</p>	<p>Rather than merely offer a definition of the word, YanJun provided information about the requirements for having an abortion. Moreover, she responded to Mr. Ferry’s follow-up question with details.</p>
Jan. 13,	<p>Mr. Ferry led the class in checking the answers. He has a routine of bringing snacks to class, and</p>	<p>YanJun’s comment, “I already know I want. I</p>

2014	he gives them to student that volunteer to come to the Promethean Board and share their responses with the class. On this day, he had a banana, a pretzel, and another snack. As he called on students to go up to the board to write answers, Yanjun said, "I already know I want. I want a banana."	want a banana," indicated that she was prepared to answer a question at the board. She also exuded confidence.
Jan. 15, 2014	Mr. Ferry shared a brief story about his school experience when he was younger. He had to bend over his teacher's lap and to be hit with a ruler. He posed a question to the class: "The ruler didn't hurt, but what was the problem?" Yanjun immediately answered, "Well, everybody laughing at you." Mr. Ferry responded, "Yes, it was very embarrassing to have that happen."	Even in tangential discussions that were not directly related to the lesson's content, Yanjun still provided correct responses to Mr. Ferry's questions.
Jan. 23, 2014	The Promethean Board showed several different methods of political propaganda. Mr. Ferry asked one of the Chinese boys, "Which method of propaganda is the most expensive?" Before the boy had a chance to reply, Yanjun said,	Yanjun was often quick to respond to questions posed by the teacher and was usually correct. She

<p>“Commercial.” The boy then said, “She answered for me.”</p> <p>Yanjun continued to provide answers to many questions, though Mr. Ferry was not asking any student in particular...</p> <p>After watching an Obama campaign commercial, the teacher asked which strategy was used in the commercial. A discussion of three turns ensued. Mr. Ferry then asked, “What else?” Yanjun replied, “Got a job, went to college.”</p> <p>Mr. Ferry showed the next commercial, which was a commercial about Obama, sponsored by the McCain campaign. Immediately after the conclusion of the commercial, Yanjun named the strategy that was used out loud: “Name calling.”</p> <p>Mr. Ferry said to her, “You’re good!” His next question was “What did the lady [narrator] call him [Obama]? Starts with a ‘c’.” Yanjun was the</p>	<p>frequently provided responses, typically dominating the whole class discussion. Mr. Ferry praised Yanjun (“You’re good!”) for her rapid-fire responses. Her classmates seemed to require more time than her and/or simply did not show their knowledge by speaking up in class.</p>
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	first to answer (correctly), “Celebrity.”	
Jan. 27, 2014	<p>Referring to the Promethean Board, the student teacher asked the class, “What are these examples of?” Several students provided a response along the lines of ‘opposite’. Yanjun said, “Antonym.” Though she didn’t place the stress on the correct syllable, she was the only student who responded with a relatively advanced vocabulary word.</p> <p>...</p> <p>The student teacher explained the meaning of mudslinging. She and Mr. Ferry enacted mudslinging, making several funny remarks. Students added to the remarks. For example, Yanjun said that Mr. Ferry cheated on his wife three times, and the class burst out in laughter. There was a lot of laughter throughout this demonstration of mudslinging.</p>	<p>In this excerpt, several students in the class, including Yanjun, responded out loud. However, Yanjun shared an advanced vocabulary word.</p> <p>During the mudslinging demonstration, Yanjun demonstrated her knowledge of the term by offering an example. She also exhibited her wit and was able to contribute her humor to the class.</p>
Jan. 29,	The student teacher called on students to come up	In addition to sharing her responses orally,

2014	to the Promethean Board to answer the Do Now questions... Yanjun completed the first question.	Yanjun also had opportunities to convey her content area knowledge at the board, either by volunteering or being called on by the teacher.
Feb. 10, 2014	As Mr. Ferry continued to go over the answers to the Do Now questions, a student and Yanjun spoke up to point out a typo.	Yanjun was not hesitant to highlight a typo made by the teacher. This example reveals that she engaged in a close reading of the questions posed by Mr. Ferry and was also not shy about sharing her knowledge.
Feb. 12,	Mr. Ferry called the students' attention to the board to go over the answers. He asked a student	Not only did Yanjun answer questions, but

2014	<p>to read the first question, which included the acronym, PACs (political action committees). After she read the question, the teacher said, “[Student name], don’t say ‘P-A-C’. Say ‘PACs’.”<sup>19</sup> Yanjun asked, “Where did the ‘s’ come from?”</p> <p>...</p> <p>Mr. Ferry asked, “Why do some Americans think PACs are bad?” Yanjun said, “Give them too much power.”</p>	<p>she also put forward her own questions. This particular incident hints at her inquisitiveness regarding language and the content area.</p>
Feb. 19, 2014	<p>Mr. Ferry explained electoral college votes, stating that regular people don’t vote. Yanjun asked, “Who gets to vote?” Mr. Ferry said that they get chosen to vote for the people. Yanjun asked, “Is it go by population?” Mr. Ferry explained that people get picked to be in the electoral college. Yanjun asked, “How do you pick?” Mr. Ferry explained and wrote some notes on the Promethean Board for the students to copy.</p>	<p>In asking about the electoral college, Yanjun presented her apparent knowledge that the number of delegates was chosen according to population size, as in the House of</p>

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<sup>19</sup> As in “pæks” according to the International Phonetic Alphabet

		Representatives and the Senate
Feb. 20, 2014	<p>Each student had a mini-white board and a dry erase marker on his or her desk. They were writing answers to questions that were on the Promethean Board. Yanjun rattled off her answers.</p> <p>...</p> <p>Mr. Ferry changed the slide on the Promethean Board to show a map of the Obama vs. McCain election. Each state was either red or blue to indicate either Republican or Democrat. The number of electoral votes for each state was also indicated. Mr. Ferry asked, "Which color do you see a lot of?" Yanjun answered, "Blue!" though the answer was red. Mr. Ferry held up Yanjun's white board, which was written in blue ink. There were also a lot of scribbles in blue such that her entire white board was covered in blue. Mr. Ferry jokingly said, "This is why she said blue." The class laughed. Yanjun, laughing, responded, "I'm</p>	<p>Yanjun stated her answer but was incorrect. Nonetheless, she seemed to remain engaged in the exercise and responded to Mr. Ferry's joke by laughing and mocking herself. Though the class may not have been particularly challenging for her, the learning environment and Mr. Ferry's approach seemed to suit Yanjun, as she discussed in an interview [Interview, Mar. 24, 2014].</p>



	color blind.”	
May 7, 2014	The class went over the true/false statements on the Promethean Board... Yanjun said out loud, “True, true.”	I did not take note of the correct answer, but this excerpt highlights Yanjun’s confidence in and readiness to respond to questions out loud.
Jun. 4, 2014	Mr. Ferry transitioned to discuss wills... Yanjun asked about an old man who had a will, but his family went to court to dispute the will. She asked, “Why did they go to court if they have a will?” Mr. Ferry was able to deduce that Yanjun was discussing the case of Anna Nicole Smith. Mr. Ferry used Google to pull up news stories and images related to this story to show the class on the Promethean Board.	Yanjun’s broaching of the topic of Anna Nicole Smith and her question showed her ability to make connections between classroom content and pop culture, the news, and so forth.

Several observations stand out from the table: 1) Yanjun provided responses regardless of whether the teacher sought a response from the class. 2) Not only did she answer questions, she also asked questions. 3) She was able to incorporate knowledge not directly linked to the content of the class with the materials and topics presented in the lesson. 4) Though her responses were correct the majority of the time, Yanjun did not always provide accurate responses. Apparently, the risk of stating the “wrong” answer did not deter her from speaking out loud. 5) Humor played a role in Yanjun’s class participation, as further discussed below. These observations also underscore Yanjun’s theorizing of school and her reactions. For example, because she was not challenged in the class, she seemed to take control of the class and her place within it whenever possible by dominating discussions, making jokes, speaking up, and so forth. Moreover, speaking out loud frequently may have contributed to her relatively high level of English.

**Learning theory: Humor.** Mr. Ferry’s pedagogy, which included humor, matched Yanjun’s learning preference or style, and she conveyed her theory that humor fostered her engagement in the class. This approach may have been a means for Mr. Ferry to cultivate a humanistic relationship with his students. In almost all (if not all) of my observations of Mr. Ferry’s class, he made jokes, mimed concepts, and injected humor into the lesson whenever possible, and Yanjun responded well to this approach. She also made jokes, as seen in the table. In one of my interviews with her, I inquired about the reasons for her high performance in Social Science:

**Lan:** Why are you – why are you doing so well in there?

**Yanjun:** Because I like Mr. Ferry. I like the way he teach.

**Lan:** But what –

**Yanjun:** It's not boring. It's like funny, so when I get in there I want to like pay my attention on it.

**Lan:** What do you mean it's uh what – it's not boring, because it's interesting?

**Yanjun:** Mhmm, mhmm.

**Lan:** Because he's funny?

**Yanjun:** Like, like social science supposed to be boring, but he make it interesting. You know how he act and stuff, yeah.

**Lan:** So, he's very engaging.

**Yanjun:** Yeah.

**Lan:** Makes you want to watch and listen?

**Yanjun:** Yeah.

The notion that humor and making material interesting is key in teaching aligns with suggestions offered by Cary (2000), a second language learner specialist. Cary (2000) illustrates the role and effectiveness of humor in teaching a sheltered social studies class:

But there it was again, right in the middle of fourth period, SDAIE [Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English] World Studies— explosive, operatic, and infectious. Karen [the teacher] had found something unintentionally funny in the social studies text and was roaring her head off. Karen's ninth and tenth graders caught the laugh

bug and roared along. After a few seconds, everyone quieted down and returned to the book. (p. 49)

He explains that this “ha-ha factor” creates a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere for learning (Cary, 2000, p. 58). We might also view humor as a human factor in teaching. Cary (2000) adds, “The freedom to laugh and make jokes translated into the freedom to risk with language, a prime requirement for language growth” (p. 58), a phenomenon that seems to describe Yanjun’s situation. By reflecting on her schooling experience, Yanjun arrived at the theory that humor is effective in teaching, the same theory at which Cary (2000) arrived from his ESL teaching, research, and consulting experience.

**Displaying knowledge in writing.** In addition to displaying content area knowledge by speaking out loud, Yanjun also did so in writing. Mr. Ferry often praised her writing as “college level”. Though not perfect according to Standard English, Yanjun’s writing, nonetheless, revealed her ability to at least compile and summarize information cogently. In response to questions about the Federal Reserve, she wrote the following (in bullet points), dated February 26, 2014:

- The Federal Reserve controls the money supply in America.
- All the tax money goes to the Federal Reserve, one of the tasks that congress assigned to the Federal Reserve was to meet the nations need for cash.
- The Federal Reserve is the daddy of all banks. When the local banks in America needs money, they could ask the Federal Reserve districts to lent them money, when they had the money they have to pay it back.

Her written responses comprised of information from the class textbook, *Economics for Everybody* (Antell & Harris, 2003), and notes provided by the teacher, e.g., “The Federal Reserve is the daddy of all banks.” Although there are two run-on sentences, her sentences are otherwise well constructed and sophisticated compared to her classmates, though I did not have strong reasons to believe that her writing was “college level”, considering my experience in working with undergraduates on their writing. She was able to leverage her English skills to write clear sentences about the lesson’s content. Note that, unfortunately, much of her written output consisted of responses to recall questions that, arguably, did not require higher-order thinking.

Similarly, Yanjun revealed her relatively strong English skills and content area knowledge in a Social Science essay assignment for the class’ “Quarter 3 Test” assigned in March or April 2014. For this assignment, she received a grade of 9.6/10. To provide background, an excerpt from the assignment instructions is below:

Write a 400-500 word essay about any one corporation. It must be written in four-six paragraphs...

What to write about:

\*The history of the corporation

\*What products does it sell?

\*The success of the company

profits, stock market price in March 2014

\* interesting information

Yanjun chose Whole Foods Market as her topic. The second and third paragraphs of her essay are below:

The Whole Foods Market are best known for selling organic foods and products... Even their potato chips are made out of organic potatoes. They also sell salads, Japanese foods, American foods and Italian foods. The Whole Foods Market started to change the world by bringing healthier food to the world. In fact, in February 28, 2014 12:36 pm the Whole Foods Market's stock market price is \$51.09 per stock. The profits of Whole Foods Market in the year of 2013 is 551 million dollars.

The Whole Foods Market have stores in the U.K, Canada and the U.S.A. They have two stores in Philadelphia... It has become one of the most popular supermarket in the United States. They provided very good service to every customer who came in to the store. The worker there are very professional and polite...

Again, this piece demonstrates Yanjun's ability to convey content area knowledge in writing. However, much of the information seems to be a summary. Also, the point regarding the company's stock price disrupted the cohesiveness of the paragraph. Regardless, relative to writing produced by her peers, Yanjun's writing was usually superior, a situation that perhaps led Mr. Ferry to write, "Nice work," in the margin of her second paragraph and "Fine job" in response to her third paragraph. She also

completed her work with relative ease. I discussed Yanjun with the student teacher, who worked with the class for almost the entire academic year:

**Lan:** Why do you think she's able to work more quickly than others?

**Student Teacher:** I – I – I don't know if it's a language thing, if she just has higher English proficiency, or if it's maybe better or more education in her background that's kind of giving this edge or if it's just her intelligence. Like her mode of intelligence, whatever it is, is more of like written work and reading...

[Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]

Although her written assignments, in conjunction with her oral verbalizations, underline her grasp of the material presented in class and her ability to produce output in English, she did not seem challenged. That is, involvement in the content, for Yanjun, did not seem equivalent to engagement in academic rigor.

### **Behavior in Social Science Class**

Yanjun fulfilled the role of a “good” student due to her relatively strong skills in English and Social Science, as discussed in the section about her interaction with Sunrise High School; however, she concurrently regularly exhibited what would typically be considered inappropriate classroom behavior. Field observations and interviews reveal that she was not reprimanded or considered a “bad” student. She also received the highest mark for “citizenship” on her school report card. She received a rating of 1, the highest possible, for the first three quarters of the 2013-2014 year in

Social Science and all other class, with the exception of the first quarter of AP Calculus AB, for which she was not given a citizenship rating. The construct of citizenship was defined by the following, as documented in school district report cards:

Demonstrates responsibility, gets along well with others, shows respect for others, demonstrates self-confidence, respects materials and supplies, follows rules and shows appropriate citizenship in classroom and other areas.

This description coupled with her high citizenship ratings suggest that she was deemed a “good” student in terms of behavior and discipline, in addition to being a student with good grades. She seemed to exert her agency and leverage her English skills and Social Science knowledge to push the boundaries by engaging in behavior traditionally deemed inappropriate (and seemed cavalier about it) while maintaining her stronghold as a good student. Her good grades and display of knowledge perhaps overshadowed her behavior that may have otherwise been construed as irreverent. That is, other students may have been reprimanded for the same actions, but Yanjun seemed to know that she would not. Her behavior outside of what would traditionally be considered “good” fell into three major categories: working while chatting or engaging in other seemingly noncompliant activity, chatting and actions that occurred after completing work, and blatantly being off task.

**Compliance and noncompliance.** The first category illustrates Yanjun as a counter-example of the model minority stereotype in at least one dimension, in that she was not homogenously an all-around, so-called good student. She exhibited elements



considered to be “good” (especially in terms of academics and usually in regards to discipline), but at the same time, she also engaged in actions that are typically labeled “bad” student behavior:

Mr. Ferry discussed the topic of movies. Throughout the beginning of this discussion, Yanjun was looking in her compact mirror, but she also participated in the conversation and answered questions.

[Field Notes, Jan. 2, 2014]

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The teacher changed the slide on the Promethean Board. It showed the difference between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. The teacher asked the students to take notes. Yanjun along with three other female Chinese students spoke in Chinese throughout the entire time that the class was copying notes. Yanjun spoke particularly loudly. A male student sitting in the front of the classroom eventually exclaimed, “She talks too much!”

[Field Notes, Jan. 6, 2014]

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Yanjun and two other female Chinese students chatted more loudly than usual in Chinese while they were copying notes. Perhaps they took more liberties in talking because the student teacher was leading the day’s lesson rather than their regular teacher, similar to having a substitute teacher.

[Field Notes, Jan. 27, 2014]

Such observations were also made in Yanjun's Art 1 class, in which she and the same group of female Chinese students chatted (entirely in Chinese) during almost the whole class period as they worked on their art projects [Field Notes, May 14, 2014]. Yanjun was able to live the hyphen of a high performing student that pushed the boundaries in terms of her in-class behavior.

In observing immigrant high school students in the U.S., McKay and Wong (1996) found one student, Michael (from Taiwan), to be in a similar situation when he completed a writing assignment, in which he aired his grievance about the teacher that assigned the work. McKay and Wong (1996) explain, "Michael played the 'good student' by adhering to the letter of the assignment while expressing a spirit of defiance and opposition" (p. 593). Observations of Yanjun parallel that of Michael, in that Yanjun completed her work as required but also expressed a spirit of defiance or opposition by simultaneously chatting (loudly) with friends or engaging in other noncompliant behavior. As such, she exemplified the idea of gray as a "midway-between-color" that "is composed of multiplicities" (Trinh, 2011, p. 72).

**Done with classwork.** Yanjun engaged in seemingly inappropriate behavior often after she was done with classwork or during the last few minutes of class, which were usually designated as free time by Mr. Ferry. One day, when her student teacher was teaching the Social Science class, Yanjun seemed to use this opportunity for "horse play": she and a classmate, Jie, were out of their seats, both attempting to touch their toes without bending their knees. Yanjun provided Jie with instructions in Chinese:

“Your feet have to be together. You can’t separate them” [Field Notes, Jan. 29, 2014]—all while the student teacher was attempting to lead her lesson. In another situation, while the class quietly copied notes, having finished copying, Yanjun broke the silence by speaking in Chinese with a classmate [Field Notes, Feb. 10, 2014]. Similarly, while almost all the students in class were still reading during independent reading time assigned by Mr. Ferry, Yanjun chatted with a classmate in Chinese [Field Notes, May 2, 2014]. Given Yanjun’s high grades in Social Science (and overall), there seemed to be little reason for teachers to admonish her. Furthermore, these examples, which are only a small sample, force educators to rethink the notion that talking in class is disruptive (see, for example, Olivo, 2003).

**Off task.** Field notes from thirteen observations of the Social Science class include at least one instance coded to indicate that Yanjun demonstrated behavior that would traditionally be construed as inappropriate in class. Eight of those observations included instances that seem to represent actions or behavior that were openly “off task”. In one observation, Fayu spoke to another Chinese male student in Chinese, and Yanjun paused from her conversation with two Chinese female students to join Fayu’s discussion and make a remark about Facebook [Field Notes, Jan. 6, 2014]. When Mr. Ferry gave students time to collaborate on an assignment, many students left their seats to obtain paper and move near classmates they wanted to work with. Some students took this opportunity to “goof off”; for example, Yanjun jumped onto the back of one of the Chinese male students before moving on to complete the task [Field Notes, Jan. 8, 2014]. Moreover, Yanjun did not seem shy about openly using her iPhone to play

games and such in the middle of class [e.g., Field Notes, Jan. 27, 2014; Field Notes, Mar. 5, 2014]. However, such behavior was not specified as incongruent with her classification as a good student.

Drawing on Harklau's (2000) research on identity and ESL students at the secondary level, it may be suggested that Yanjun "appropriated and recreated prevalent" "institutional images" of Asian American students (p. 35). Though the representation of "good" student seemed to be projected onto Yanjun, she enacted agency by not consistently following the expected pattern of that label. Thus, she illustrated that "representations are temporary artifacts that serve to stabilize and homogenize images of identities" (Harklau, 2000, p. 37), whereas a learner is far from static or unitary.

### **Languages and Literacies**

Yanjun's language and literacy practices included using both English and Chinese to navigate content area material. A prominent theme I noticed was her use of spoken English to converse and build rapport with her teachers. Furthermore, an analysis of her Social Science notebook reveals her theories about linguistic features of the English language.

### **Speaking Out Loud: English Skills and Bilingualism**

Yanjun asked many questions out loud as Mr. Ferry discussed the Mummer's Parade [a New Year's tradition in Philadelphia] at the front of the classroom. She also added many responses, in a playful tone, to

Mr. Ferry's discussion. For example, Mr. Ferry explained that you had to pay a lot of money to participate in the parade because the costumes were really expensive. Yanjun then inserted responses as if to engage in a two-way dialogue between only her and the teacher. Her responses to Mr. Ferry included "You said that they don't get paid, though" and "You go? You became a Mummer?" There was a back-and-forth between her and Mr. Ferry as they discussed the parade. In the meantime, two Vietnamese students, who sat near the center of the classroom, quietly spoke in Vietnamese to each other. [Field Notes, Jan. 2, 2014]

To reduce the potential disruption of my presence in the Social Science classroom during observations, I often stood or sat in the back of the classroom, and only re-positioned myself when circulating the room to assist students with in-class assignments. During my observations, Yanjun sat in either the first or second row of desks; she was quite far from me relative to many of her classmates. Nonetheless, because she often spoke in a high volume and spoke frequently, I was able to capture many of her utterances in my field jottings, whether I was recording student-teacher interactions or student-student interactions. My field notes indicate that in 17 of my 31 observations of the Social Science class (over 50%), Yanjun spoke out loud in English at least once, usually more than once. Note that the number 17 is an understatement because, in some cases, when I was observing particular students, I was unable to note Yanjun's actions and speech.

My observations suggest that being vocal in class served two main purposes for Yanjun. One was that speaking frequently and loudly may have served as a means to display her English and content area knowledge and skills while contributing to the classroom in a way that is typically valued in U.S. school settings. Second, speaking in both English and Chinese and engaging in talk (not necessarily always related to the lesson) may have provided an outlet for exercising agency. Another purpose may have been to practice oral English.

Yanjun's classroom talk also points to the notion of hyphenated reality from two angles: 1) she balanced both talk that was sanctioned and traditionally unsanctioned, and 2) English and Chinese co-existed in her world without damaging her brand as a "good" student who had strong English skills. These elements (sanctioned versus unsanctioned and English versus home/first language) are often posed as conflicting, but I did not observe that the relationship between these elements carried tension. Yanjun's case reminds educators that an ELL's world comprises of intertwining worlds that are only conflicting if we perceive them to be so.

**Displaying English skills and participating in class.** In her Social Science class (which consisted entirely of ELLs), Yanjun routinely responded to questions posed by the teacher, Mr. Ferry, and contributed her thoughts out loud in class, following a practice valued from an Amerocentric perspective on school success. Though Mr. Ferry spoke to the entire class, he and Yanjun would inevitably be the two main participants of the class discussion, while the other students acted as onlookers or did not engage in the discussion. Speaking often and loudly in class seemed beneficial

to Yanjun, as she was able to display her relatively high level of English, build rapport with the teacher, and further develop her English by practicing. This idea is in line with the perception that “English-speaking ability is felt to be an index of cognitive maturity, sophistication, degree of Americanization, and general personal worthiness...” (McKay & Wong, 1996, p. 584). The student teacher’s remarks about Yanjun reflect this view:

**Lan:** Hmm, what do you know about Yanjun?

**Student teacher:** You’re going to have to

**Lan:** She’s the girl that sits all the way in the front that always answers questions and talks out loud.

**Student teacher:** Okay, um very talkative, very – like her abilities in class I think are above some of the other students. I don’t really like categorizing them like that but just seeing how quickly she can get through work and understand it and kind of um just kind of – I don’t know if she’s really at a more critical thinking level, but I think sometimes you see it come out, or it’s more she can get through it faster, maybe understands the language better, so it doesn’t take her as long um and very talkative though...

[Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]

The student teacher was able to quickly identify Yanjun based on my description of her as the girl “that always answers questions and talks out loud.” As evidenced in the student teacher’s response, apparently, the ability to speak English is at times equated with cognitive and social abilities.

Though Mr. Ferry spoke to the entire class, he and Yanjun would often become the two primary participants of the class discussion, while the other students seemed to be spectators or did not participate in the discussion, as seen in the opening vignette where two students engaged in a conversation in Vietnamese in the background while Yanjun and Mr. Ferry conversed. This dynamic of classroom talk, in which Yanjun dominated the discussion with the teacher, seemed to also occur due to her strong English skills, which allowed her to comprehend the English-medium content and respond in English more quickly than her classmates. As Baker (2006) contends, “ELL students with well developed English oral skills (especially phonological awareness) achieve greater success in English literacy than those with less well developed skills” and also experience greater reading achievement in the traditional sense (pp. 299-300). Given Yanjun’s relatively high overall English level, she was able to actively participate in class. Another representative example of this observation can be seen in the following:

Mr. Ferry changed the PowerPoint slide to show a short news story about the former Mayor of Toronto, infamous for his use of cocaine while serving in office. Yanjun spoke a lot and loudly during the discussion of this story:

Yanjun: But it’s drug. Isn’t it illegal?

Mr. Ferry: Yes.

Yanjun: How come he didn’t get arrested?

Mr. Ferry: I think he was snorting cocaine in his house.



Yanjun: Cocaine is legal in Canada?

Mr. Ferry: It is illegal.

There was a back-and-forth between Yanjun and Mr. Ferry. Yanjun then transitioned the discussion from cocaine to marijuana. She said said, “Marijuana is legal in California.” Mr. Ferry (mistaking ‘Colorado’ for ‘California’) said, “Yes, in Colorado.” Yanjun said, “In California, too.” Mr. Ferry said he wasn’t sure, but he didn’t think marijuana was completely legal in California. He turned the discussion to the student teacher, who was from California, and asked her if it was legal... [Field Notes, Jan. 13, 2014]

This observation highlights Duff’s (2001) argument that academic success includes “the ability to enter quick-paced, highly intertextual interactions” (p. 120). My field notes include many such examples, in which Yanjun dominated (and at times controlled) classroom discussions by employing her relatively strong English speaking skills.

Such a demonstration of her English skills, especially oral English, seemed to contribute to the narrative of Yanjun as an honor roll student. When I asked Mr. Ferry for his thoughts about Yanjun, he responded with the following:

Yanjun uh won the award for the social science – won the Social Science Award for the Highest Average, um a complete student. She understands well. She speaks well, reads well, writes well. Um she’s going to be success – successful” [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014].

The implication was that being a “complete student” required both achievement in the content area and strong English skills. Yanjun displayed both of those through her active participation in classroom discussions.

Furthermore, Yanjun utilized her English speaking skills to build rapport with the teacher to engage in seemingly “natural” conversations. In the discussion about the Mummer’s Parade, Yanjun asked Mr. Ferry whether he had personal experience with the parade. In the discussion related to the former Mayor of Toronto, Yanjun was able to maneuver the conversation to engage both the teacher and student teacher in her intellectual curiosity, (likely unintentionally) steering their attention away from the rest of the class. Although such tangential talk from a student is traditionally viewed as oppositional to classroom work (see, for example, Olivo, 2003), my observations suggest that Yanjun was repeatedly able to leverage this kind of commonly unsanctioned talk as effectively as official classroom talk, blending lesson-specific discussions with the seemingly irrelevant.

Yanjun’s ability to use spoken English to inject “silliness” and humor into classroom talk was also positively received. In one instance, Mr. Ferry and the student teacher acted out the political term, ‘mudslinging’, by exchanging insults with one another. The class was full of laughter. Yanjun inserted herself into the role-play by jokingly exclaiming that Mr. Ferry cheated on his wife three times, to which the class erupted in laughter [Field Notes, Jan. 27, 2014]. This situation contrasts with results from Olivo’s (2003) research on classroom talk, in which a teaching assistant in an ESL class stated, “If they’re just being silly, I say, ‘Let’s get back to work’” (p. 58). The

mudslinging example is representative of Yanjun's ability to combine humor with her strong English speaking skills and understanding of Social Science to actively participate in the classroom in what was viewed as a positive way. This observation echoes McKay and Wong's (1996) argument that "colonialist/racialized discourses as well as social school discourse...place a premium on spoken English as an indicator of functionality in U.S. society..." (p. 592). Yanjun was able to use her English speaking skills to function as an active contributor in class.

**Classroom talk and bilingualism.** In addition to sharing out loud with the class in English, Yanjun showed that English and her first language co-existed, in that she frequently used Chinese to both engage in "side talk" and to discuss the lesson or task at hand. Concurrently, though Mr. Ferry did not speak Chinese, he seemed open to having students speak in their home/first language, including Chinese, and at times invited students to speak their home/first language. Moreover, I had never observed him telling students to stop speaking their home/first language. This situation is in stark contrast to the view that ESOL classrooms embrace Howatt's (1984) "monolingual principle", which "emphasizes instructional use of the target language (TL) to the exclusion of students' L1 [first language], with the goal of enabling learners to think in the TL with minimal interference from L1" (Cummins, 2007, p. 223). I did not observe that any of the 18 students in my study solely used English.

**Bilingualism for content area learning.** Yanjun's seemingly unabashed use of Chinese as well as a classroom environment that welcomed other languages allowed for English and Chinese to co-exist in a way that was not detrimental to Yanjun's

reputation as a high-achieving student with strong English skills. She routinely spoke in Chinese with other Chinese immigrant students in class to complete her assignments. The below illustrative examples exemplify Yanjun's purposeful use of spoken Chinese to engage in the course content and assignments:

Two pictures were projected onto the screen and the class was to write about the differences between the two. Two Chinese boys, Yanjun, and another Chinese girl discussed the assignment in Chinese as they wrote in their notebooks and looked at the screen. [Field Notes, Jan. 6, 2014]

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The teacher continued to discuss the two major political parties in the U.S. and pointed out the main differences between the Democrats (the left-wing party) and Republicans (the right-wing party). The three Chinese girls sitting in the front of the classroom spoke in Chinese:

Yanjun: 他说不喜欢改变是哪边? [Which side did he say does not like change?]

Student A: 右边。 [The right side.]

Student B: 他说右边。 [He said the right side.]

[Field Notes, Jan. 8, 2014]

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Yanjun and Student A spoke in Chinese about the questions projected on the screen. Referring to the question that asked, "Why do some Americans think PACs are bad?" Yanjun said in Chinese to Student A, "

影响很大 [Their influence is large].” As they continued working, discussing, and writing responses, Yanjun referred to the next question and exclaimed to Student A, “不用写 [We don’t need to write it]!” to indicate that copying the question was unnecessary. Student A responded, “要写 [We need to write it]!” [Field Notes, Feb. 12, 2014]

The above excerpts illustrate Yanjun’s use of spoken Chinese as an integral part of engaging in content area material by interacting with classmates. Drawing on cognitive psychology research conducted by Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000), Cummins (2007) contends, “If students’ prior knowledge is encoded in their L1 [first or home language], then their L1 is clearly relevant to their learning even when instruction is through the medium of L2 [second or target language]” (p. 231). That is, Yanjun was able to utilize her home language skills to complete assignments and perform well in Social Science. She completed this feat by speaking in Chinese to navigate the content of Social Science and tasks with her classmates. In one of the examples, rather than ask the teacher for clarification, which she often did, she seemed to make the choice to ask her peers in Chinese to confirm what the teacher said. The other two examples reveal her tendency to speak in Chinese with her peers, though she was capable of making those same statements in English. Yanjun’s use of both languages to negotiate content area learning demonstrates Baker’s (2006) suggestion that “[if] the students have understood it in two languages, they have really understood it” (p. 297). The utilization of both languages seemed to aid her learning.

**Side talk in Chinese.** Although Yanjun often spoke in Chinese to negotiate the content of her Social Science class, she also regularly used Chinese to engage in “side talk” irrelevant to the day’s lesson or immediate task. The following excerpt is an illustrative example of her side talk in Chinese:

A statement on the screen read, “Something Awful Happened in Florida Yesterday,” and the teacher began to discuss the related news story. As the teacher began class, Yanjun spoke with another student about recommendation letters. Yanjun said that she needed four letters. The two students continued conversing as the teacher distributed a handout about the news story. [Field Notes, Jan. 15, 2014]

Though Yanjun discussed a matter relevant to academic success, she was clearly “off topic”. That is, she was simultaneously engaged in talk that would be associated with both a student who cared about school and a student who might be accused of being off task. Moreover, Yanjun often chatted in Chinese with other students in class while completing assignments. It was common to find her and other students around her chatting in Chinese while they copied notes [e.g., Field Notes, Feb. 10, 2014]. At other times, she and other students engaged in relatively loud conversations in Chinese:

The class was assigned to answer questions and then write their own questions using political terms. Yanjun and Fayu, who sat several desks away from each other, spoke in Chinese (not about the work). [Field Notes, Feb. 20, 2014]

Later during that same class period, Yanjun and four other Chinese students spread around the classroom all participated in a discussion in Chinese. Because she usually finished in-class assignments before most of the class, Yanjun commonly began chatting in Chinese with one or two other female students before the class transitioned to the next part of the lesson. For example, having presumably completed their independent reading assignment, Yanjun and another female student chatted in Chinese [Field Notes, May 2, 2014].

However, chatting in Chinese did not negatively affect her image as an honor roll student with strong English skills—I conjecture that she was aware of this phenomenon and pushed the boundaries. Perhaps she leveraged her role as the best student in Social Science to speak in Chinese almost seemingly according to her terms. Regardless, her use of English and Chinese was one major manifestation of her hyphenated reality, which included the blending of the two languages both for social and academic purposes.

### **Yanjun, Language Theorist**

Viewing Yanjun as a language theorist sheds light on the theories she formed about English syntax, as particularly evidenced in her writing, based on her knowledge of English and her home or first language, Chinese. Her Social Science notebook and completed handouts reveal a relatively accurate use of English grammar. As Mr. Ferry explained in discussing Yanjun’s English language skills, “I mean just small mistakes but no – nothing that you would say, ‘Oop, you got to redo this’...” [Interview, Jun. 20,

2014]. Her written work also included occasional writing in Chinese to support her content area learning. As an ELL, her writing shows errors in Standard English but in regular patterns, suggesting that she had constructed theories about the structure of the English language.

This section discusses an analysis of Yanjun’s writing in her Social Science notebook, which contains 42 pages of notes copied from the Promethean Board or whiteboard and written assignments from September 12, 2013 to April 28, 2014. This discussion is not exhaustive—rather, representative examples of patterns in her English grammar are examined.

**Past tense.** One salient aspect of Yanjun’s writing in English is the overuse of the simple past. One possible reason is hypercorrection, the “overgeneralization of a rule in language use” (Richards, Platt, & Weber, 1985, p. 131), a phenomenon common among ELLs. Social Science textual information contains a blend of factual statements or truths (written in the present tense) and historical facts (written in the simple past). The following is an example of Yanjun’s blending of the present tense with the simple past:

The Congressman make \$15,000 a year and for 2 years they had to make elections, if people vote for them they could work for another 2 years.

[Yanjun’s Notebook, Oct. 22, 2013, underlining added]

Celce-Murcia, Larsen-Freeman, and Williams (1999) explain the present tense, as informed by Lewis (1986): “The present tense conveys immediate factuality,” and an example is “The earth rotates around the sun” (p. 112). A parallel statement in Social



Science would be “The presidential election in the U.S. occurs every four years.”

However, an element that may be confusing to ELLs reading Social Science text is that the simple past is also incorporated in classroom texts to state facts, with a sense of remoteness at its core (Knowles, 1979; Celce-Murcia et al., 1999). For example, “The Toronto Blue Jays won the World Series in 1992” conveys a sense of remoteness in time (Celce-Murcia et al., 1999). A corollary is U.S. history and politics may be regarded as remote to ELLs, especially immigrant students, in high school, perhaps leading them to overuse the simple past in writing about those topics.

Yanjun’s use of the past tense when another form would be considered standard was persistent throughout the academic year. The past tense, especially the simple past, was used in place of various verb forms. In the below excerpt from Yanjun’s notebook, she used the simple past, *graduated*, instead of the future perfect, *will have graduated*.

1) I think a person must be 35 years old to become the President because on age of 35, you grauated from college already and you have enough life experience... [Yanjun’s Notebook, Nov. 15, 2013, underlining added]

The future perfect form did not appear in her notebook at all, indicating that she may not have grasped this form. This observation also suggests that she did not have much (if any) exposure to this form in class, and therefore, she relied on her knowledge of English at the time—which included the common usage of the simple past.

In the following excerpt, Yanjun used the simple past, *had*, instead of the simple present, *have*:

1) Yes, I think a woman should be allowed to have an abortion because the baby is belong to that woman she has the right to decided if she wants or not. The government don't had the right to forced the woman to keep the baby because the government is not the one who pregnant and give birth of the baby. [YanJun's Notebook, Jan. 8, 2014, underlining added]

Interestingly, she also used the past form of *decide* and *force* in constructing the infinitive (“to decided” and “to forced”). These examples illustrate hypercorrection that may have evolved with time, as earlier parts of her notebook (earlier in the academic year) reveal the standard usage of the infinitive:

- President Obama had picked 9 Judges to work in the Supreme Court. [YanJun's Notebook, Oct. 28, 2014, underlining added]
- I think a person must be 35 years old to become the President... [YanJun's Notebook, Nov. 15, 2013, underlining added]
- 2) The purpose of the Supreme Court is to serve the final court of appeals... [YanJun's Notebook, Nov. 21, 2013, underlining added]

One might hypothesize that she overused the past tense in forming the infinitive as she was increasingly exposed to the past tense in texts, though more data would be needed to substantiate this notion.

The use of past tense in place of the gerund is seen in the following:

4b) People save money to go to college or future use like buying a house, raised children and travel around.

That is, *raised children* was used instead of *raising children*, though Yanjun used the gerund form in *buying a house*. Perhaps guiding Yanjun and other ELLs in examining their own writing would encourage them to notice and investigate their theories of English grammar. I would have liked to ask Yanjun why she used a gerund for *buy a house*, whereas she used the simple past for *raise children*. Regardless, *raised children* may be viewed as hypercorrection and an overusage of the past tense.

Based on the data, it may be conjectured that Yanjun's overuse of the past tense stemmed from an attempt to emulate the genre of Social Science text by frequently using a combination of both the present tense and simple past.

**Subject-verb agreement.** It is common to find that ELLs whose home or first language does not have affixes (prefixes and suffixes) do not follow the standard rules of subject-verb agreement in English. Chinese is one such language. In what appears to be notes copied from class, Yanjun wrote, "Autocracy – one person control everything" [Yanjun's Notebook, Sep. 12, 2013, underlining added]. In this clause, Standard English would require the -s singular verb inflection on *control* to match the singularity of *one person*. However, we could reasonably state that "one person control everything" conveys the same information as "one person controls everything." In other words, marking the singularity of the verb, *control*, is redundant because we already understand that the subject, *one person*, is singular. From this perspective, Yanjun's omission of -s is logical.

Yanjun's notebook provides numerous examples of "errors" in subject-verb agreement; below is a small sample:

- Each state have 2 senators... [YanJun's Notebook, Oct. 22, 2013, underlining added]
- 3) Judges has responsibility... [YanJun's Notebook, Nov. 21, 2013, underlining added]
- 9) C) I think if the people knows how important... [YanJun's Notebook, Jan. 29, 2014 - Feb. 10, 2014, underlining added]
- 3) Mr. Ferry have very good social attitudes, everybody likes him. [YanJun's Notebook, Mar. 6, 2014 - Mar. 14, 2014, underlining added]

These example clauses demonstrate the omission of the rule that the number feature of the noun determines the verb number in the English language. However, if we perceive ELLs to be theory constructors, who produce English based on data gathered from the language as well as their home or first language, we can see that YanJun's choices in English grammar are rational.

**Plural form.** Similar to the issue of subject-verb agreement, the inflectional morpheme *-s* to denote plurality, e.g., *-s* as in *cats* (Carnie, 2007), was often omitted in YanJun's writing:

- Founded how many year ago [YanJun's Notebook, Feb. 10, 2014, underlining added]
- They carry one gun and some bullet and a stick. [YanJun's Notebook, Feb. 25, 2014 - Mar. 6, 2014, underlining added]

Similar to the case of subject-verb agreement discussed, this omission may be considered an example of first language transfer, in which rules from the learner's home

or first language (here, Chinese) are transferred to the target language (English). As previously mentioned, Chinese does not have affixes. In the phrase, *some bullet*, because *some* already captures the idea of “more than one”, we can see that marking *bullet* with an inflection *-s* to signify a plural noun is redundant.

This section only includes a small sample of the many language patterns exhibited in Yanjun’s notebook to illustrate the idea that an ELL’s “errors” in Standard English reveal the theories they have formed (and the hypotheses they are testing) as they negotiate English as another language. Rather than view these errors as a deficiency, teachers could utilize them as a springboard for further language development that builds on what a learner already knows and thinks about English and their home or first language. Their hyphenated reality, as revealed in their interlanguage, is a foundation to build upon to support their English language development.

## Chapter 4: Case Study - Juan

Each student had a mini whiteboard and a dry-erase marker. They were to write sentences using vocabulary words projected onto the screen. Juan was done with the assignment and sat quietly as most of the class continued working. He had written the following on his mini whiteboard:

1. My profit wasn't that good this week.
2. The proprietor of McDonald's is very rich.
3. My friend is entrepreneur.
4. I don't like partnership because you have to split the profit.

Pointing at his third sentence, I told him to add "an", and then asked, "What does your friend do?" Juan added to the sentence, "He started a business."

After most students had finished the assignment, the teacher stood in front of the classroom and discussed the upcoming test. He asked, "Juan, when's the test?" Juan looked at the board (where the test date was written) and said, "I can't see." I recalled that, previously, he was unable to see the board when the teacher asked students to copy a table from the board. In response to the teacher's question, several students responded out loud, "Wednesday."

After discussing the test, the teacher gave an example of selling stock. After some discussion, the teacher asked students to copy a

PowerPoint slide on the screen. Juan had a handout on his desk, but he did not have his notebook out. The teacher circulated the room, and when he passed by Juan, he said, “Juan, you have to copy.” Juan opened his backpack, retrieved his notebook, and began copying. The teacher began discussing the notes as the class continued to copy. The students then read from their textbook before beginning the next activity.

For the next activity, the teacher gave the students the option of creating a “cross tic” or a poster about the corporation, McDonalds. He provided examples of both and explained the requirements. Many students started their work, but Juan did not. Referring to the cross tic and poster, I asked him, “What are you going to do?” He responded, “Sleep. That’s what I want to do.” Then, he started working on the assignment. [Field Notes, March 19, 2014]

An undocumented student from a small village in Veracruz, Mexico, Juan decided on his own accord to enroll in Sunrise High School. He had his own rationale for attending school that did not necessarily align with the school mission but was, nonetheless, reasonable. He was known to be intelligent and generally did well in school—observations that stand in contrast to the usual portrayals of Latino students as “struggling” in school. My observations of him in class reveal that he was engaged at times and disengaged at other times. He often finished his work quickly and efficiently; therefore, he had time to rest while his classmates continued working. I inferred that he was not being intellectually challenged at school. At the same time, school presented

difficulties due to its demand on his time. He worked 55 hours per week at various restaurants while attending high school fulltime.

Moreover, Mexico seemed to play a role in his life and decisions while he was in the U.S. He spoke about Mexico and his parents, who were both still in Veracruz, on several occasions, and he chose to complete his senior project on the topic of Mexican holidays. He was not simply a high school ELL. The positions he occupied included, but certainly were not limited to, that of restaurant employee, full-time student, undocumented immigrant, and Spanish speaker.

### **My Interactions with Juan**

I was a participant-observer in Juan's Social Science and Algebra classes where I assisted him and others as I circulated the classroom. I interviewed him and chatted with him whenever possible--at times that didn't seem disruptive to his schooling

As he became comfortable with me, he expressed concern about his declining grades in Social Science and Algebra due to incompleteness of homework; this situation was a result of his limited time to devote to homework due to his work at restaurants. He sought me to help him with completing his homework. For example, the following interaction took place during Social Science class:

Juan caught my attention and said, "Maybe you can take me out of second period [gym class] to work on my senior project. Are you coming on Monday?" I said, "No, Wednesday." He said, "Wednesday? Okay." [May 2, 2014]



In addition to assisting him with his senior project, which was required for graduation, I also assisted him in completing Social Science and Algebra assignments. I developed a determination to help him graduate and acted as his liaison or advocate. I asked his gym teacher if I could work with Juan in the library during gym class, as Juan had explained that he was doing well in gym class. I spoke with Mr. Ferry and encouraged Juan to do the same regarding submitting assignments late for credit. Approximately two weeks before commencement, I had a lengthy conversation with Juan about his post-secondary plans. He explained that he wanted to stay in the U.S. to work for at least one more year to save “enough money” before returning to Mexico. These various elements of his life highlighted the complexities of the experiences of high school ELLs.

### **Juan’s Interactions with the School**

Juan made the decision to attend high school, despite discouragement from his brother and cousin, who cautioned him that attending school would decrease the number of hours he would be able to work in restaurants, leading to a lower income. He enrolled in Sunrise High School in December 2011 as a student in grade 10. In general, he was viewed positively in school. As of June 4, 2014, he was absent only nine days, which was 5% of the total instructional days. As of April 24, 2014, he was late only twice during the academic year. Also as of April 24, 2014, he had a cumulative GPA of 3.70, and his senior year cumulative grades after the third marking period were the following: four A’s, two B’s, and a C. That is, Juan’s academic

experiences did not align with the commonly discussed observation that Latino/a students in the U.S. do not perform well in school. For example, in a longitudinal study of students ages 9-14 of various racial backgrounds, C. Suarez-Orozco, M. M. Suarez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008) report the following:

Nearly half (47 percent) of the Chinese youth in our sample maintained high grades across the course of the study, whereas only 18 percent of Central Americans, 13 percent of Dominicans, 11 percent of Haitians, and 17 percent of Mexicans were in this high-achieving group. (p. 296)

Note the common juxtaposition of descriptive statistics about Chinese Americans as high-achieving compared to numbers about Latino Americans as not high-achieving. Furthermore, this information was reported seemingly to suggest that a relatively small percentage of Mexican youth in the U.S. are performing well academically. However, as evidenced in Juan's grades, his experience did not match these statistics.

In addition to holding a strong attendance record, he did not "cause trouble" in school. In class, he was generally on-task, though he was disengaged at times. He did not chat in class as often as his classmates, though he appeared sociable, especially in terms of his comfort with interacting with classmates from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. According to my work with him and my observations, he was above average in terms of traditional academic abilities and was strong in English. Although he insinuated that Social Science and Algebra were not particularly difficult, he also

stated, “I’m not smart,” a statement that I found to belie his academic capabilities and ability to navigate life [Field Notes, Jun. 4, 2014].

Juan’s interactions with the school seemed to present conflicting situations: paid work versus school, engagement versus disengagement, strong academic abilities versus his perception of himself as “not smart”, school as intellectually simple for him versus school as a challenge due to the time commitment, and more. Considering Trinh’s (2011) theory of hyphenated reality, this notion of conflict in this context seems artificial. These various spaces that learners like Juan must negotiate are simply a part of their multifaceted lives, which defy unitary definition. If we attempt to describe Juan according to a neat compartment, we would create for ourselves a sense of conflict. However, if we begin from the standpoint that our learners cannot be categorized into simple slots, we would be able to embrace their complex, multilayered experiences and create platforms for them to build on their various strengths and the many elements that make them who they are.

### **Subterranean Layers**

I have to admit I miss my family in my country and I don’t really like to live here, but sometimes we don’t have choices. [Juan’s Blog, Jun. 11, 2013]

Writing about four years ago, Cave (2011) reported in *The New York Times* “that the illegal Mexican population in the United States has shrunk and that fewer than 100,000 illegal border-crossers and visa-violators from Mexico settled in the United

States in 2010, down from about 525,000 annually from 2000 to 2004.” In the media, immigrants from Latin America are often described in a negative light. In the above, the emphasis is on the “illegal” Mexican population, which consists of “illegal border-crossers and visa-violators”. This type of dominant discourse devalues the experiences of immigrants, including our immigrant students in our public schools. To gain a more nuanced understanding, we must take both a micro and macro approach. In this section, I aim to present my understanding of Juan from a micro perspective (afforded by the case study method) situated within a larger context.

### **Background Data**

Juan would be part of a group considered “foreign born” and “Latino or Hispanic” by the U.S. Census Bureau. My calculations based on the 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015) provide preliminary background information to build from in considering ELLs like Juan:

Table 6

*Foreign Born or Not a U.S. Citizen Within the Total Hispanic or Latino Population in the U.S. Estimated Total Hispanic or Latino Population in the U.S.: 51,786,591*

	Estimated Number	Percentage of Total Hispanic or Latino Population in the U.S.
Foreign Born	18,749,094	36%

Not a U.S. Citizen	12,943,426	25%
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Table 7

*Percentage of Total Hispanic or Latino Population with Income in the Past 12 Months Below Poverty Level*

Estimated Total Hispanic or Latino Population	50,724,885
Income in the Past 12 Months Below Poverty Level	12,507,866
Percentage of Total Hispanic or Latino Population with Income in the Past 12 Months Below Poverty Level	25%

Table 8

*Percentage of Hispanic or Latino Population 5 Years and Over in the U.S. Who Are Foreign Born and Speak English Less Than “Very Well”*

Estimated Hispanic or Latino Population 5 Years and Over in the U.S.	46,668,454
Foreign Born	18,663,912
Foreign Born and Speak English Less Than “Very Well”	12,570,945
Percentage of Foreign Born That Speak English Less Than “Very Well”	27%

Of note are the following facts regarding the Hispanic or Latino population in the U.S.: A noticeable proportion is foreign born and/or are not U.S. citizens; approximately one-fourth had an income below poverty level at the time of the surveys; and over one-

fourth of the foreign born group aged five years and over speak English less than “very well”. However, these numbers only convey a minute fraction of Juan’s story and experience.

### **From Mexico to the United States**

According to the “About me” section of Juan’s blog, he was born in Mexico and arrived in the U.S. when he was 16 years old [Juan’s Blog, Jun. 11, 2013]. Mexico continued to play a role in his life even though he was in the U.S. at the time of the study. In my first interview with Juan, he described his immigration story [Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]. At the time, he was twenty-one years old. He came to Philadelphia from Mexico with one of his brothers, who was thirty-four years old at the time of the interview. I later learned the name of his small, home village: Tezahuapan, in Veracruz [Field Notes, Jun. 4, 2014]. He provided details about his immigration status:

**Lan:** Was it hard to come here?

**Juan:** No.

**Lan:** It was easy?

**Juan:** Yeah, it was.

**Lan:** Can you tell me how you came here?

**Juan:** Yeah I came by—like a—they—they give you visas, like for work, right? But the visas are only for six months. Six months, you gotta come back. Six months, eight months—from six to eight months. But—but I did not come back, I—I stay here. But I was supposed to come back six—like, eh, four years ago.

...

**Lan:** Are you worried about that?

**Juan:** No.

**Lan:** No?

**Juan:** No.

**Lan:** Why not?

**Juan:** 'Cause I don't make trouble, so I don't think they would kick me out from here.

[Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]

Juan insinuated the need to maintain a low profile, given his immigration status. This reasoning also seemed to influence his actions and behaviors in school. As discussed previously, he did not cause trouble in school, and he did not seem to make himself known among the school administrators. As a principal intern from August 2013 to June 2014, I never saw Juan or anyone speaking on behalf of Juan in the main office. Juan's situation is, then, a vivid example of the blending of an ELL's various worlds: his status as someone who overstayed his visa seemed to help shape his school experience.

When asked whether there were obstacles to enrolling in Sunrise High School, he stated that the process was not difficult. He provided further context by explaining that he was the youngest of seven children and family dynamics forced him to be on his own:

**Juan:** So, I was the youngest. I was always alone. So, if I need something and you know, over there, my—my parents didn't—didn't

have a really—a—like a good relationship. So they were fighting, right, and, you know, they didn't pay a—that much attention to us. So I gotta do this stuff for myself. So I learn and I grew up alone most of the time.

Juan shared an apartment with his brother and his cousin. That is, at age 16, he began living as an adult with adult responsibilities. Whereas, in the U.S., for many (privileged) high school students, tasks, such as school enrollment forms, and other responsibilities would be completed by parents, Juan had to rely on himself. Attending school may have been another task for Juan to complete, along with paying for rent and bills and going to work.

Though he had made a life in the U.S., Mexico was still deeply a part of him. He mentioned Mexico (“my country”) often, although he said that he did not regret coming to the U.S. [Field Notes, May 7, 2014]. He also mentioned his family several times. As he explained, “...I don't have anyone who depends for me—maybe—probably my parents because now they're sick,” adding that he sent money to his parents [Interview, Mar. 12, 2014]. For his senior project, for which he chose his own topic, he prepared a presentation about every major Mexican holiday, discussing each in detail and incorporating his own experiences into the descriptions. While giving a practice presentation of his senior project to me, he paused after describing Mother's Day (El Dia de la Madre) to tell me about his buying gifts for his mother. He sent money to one of his sisters, with whom he had a good relationship, and asked “her what does she [his mother] need...sweaters...dresses” [Field Notes, May 8, 2014]. His sister would then buy the items to give to their mother. He also informed me of his plans to



return to Tezahuapan after working for at least one more year—which would double his amount of savings. In one of my interviews, he mentioned sending money to his parents because they were ill and, I assumed, were unable to work [Interview, Mar. 12, 2014]. In addition, according to one of my conversations with him, he had already paid for construction on a house to begin in his home village, and he was contemplating attending college in Mexico to become an English teacher, though he seemed quite unsure about his future plans [Field Notes, Jun. 4, 2014]. Though he was far away from the village that he had left several years prior, elements of his family and home country were incorporated into the present and thoughts about the future. To a certain extent, his hyphenated reality included a transnational melding of Mexico and the U.S.

**“Actually, I Work 55 Hours a Week.”**

2012-2013 school year.

I am excited about next year, because it is my last year at school, I want to see what the future has for me, I would like to learn different things, not just at school, but at my work. [Juan’s Blog, Jun. 11, 2013]

From 2008 to 2010, 17.4% of Philadelphia’s restaurant workers were Latino and 10% reported their place of birth as Latin America, while only 10% of all workers in the city were Latino and 6.9% reported their place of birth as Latin America (Restaurant Opportunities Center of Philadelphia, Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, & Philadelphia Restaurant Industry Coalition, 2012, p. 14). In other words, Latinos and those in the U.S. that were born in Latin America are overrepresented in Philadelphia’s

restaurant industry. For Juan, working in restaurants to earn and save money was a part of his reality, but high school was also. Though the dichotomy between in-school and out-of-school spaces is often emphasized in research, for Juan, his jobs at restaurants were, to some extent, integrated into his school experience. The above piece from his blog reflects his view that both his place of employment and school were sites of learning. Moreover, Juan exerted effort to simultaneously manage work and school, because the two were major components of his world. Some of his teachers seemed to do the same in recognition that Juan's need to earn money and attend school were intertwined.

### **Work and School**

**Ms. Ardelean:** ...He is naturally gifted because he's—he does read. He's—he reads for pleasure, but he doesn't have much time. He—if he—if that—that's such a classic example. If that boy didn't have to work, he could play at sports. He could never play sports, and he loves sports, and he couldn't play because he had to work. You know he—he's another one. He had to grow up before his time... [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]

Work and school were inseparable for Juan. His employment responsibilities informed how he performed school. He did not participate in traditional extracurricular activities, such as sports or community service, nor did he stay after school to receive free tutoring, though he indicated that he wanted to. Concurrently, attending school reduced the number of hours Juan was able to work, and hence, the amount of money he

was able to earn annually. One component of his life informed another to create an equilibrium in the midst of a space that may typically be characterized as full of conflict.

In school, Juan seemed to complete assignments in a perfunctory manner. The goal was apparently to simply complete the assignment. In an interview, he described Sunrise High School as “pretty much more easy” than school back in his home village in Mexico, explaining that time constraints were the main issue for him here in Philadelphia:

**Lan:** So school is not difficult for you?

**Juan:** No, the only thing make–makes it difficult for me because I don’t have time to study or to do homework. That’s the only thing. But I think it’s pretty much more easy.

[Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]

Given his demanding schedule, he devised strategies to complete schoolwork. One strategy seemed to be to work efficiently, regardless of the quality of the end product:

Juan said to me, “I can find the definition of ‘electoral college’.” I showed him a page of the textbook where the term appeared, and he copied the sentence that included ‘electoral college’. He then said to me, “I’m done.” I looked at what he had written and told him that he was supposed to write his own sentence rather than copy the sentence from the book. He wrote, “Electoral college voted for Obama,” and said to

me, “Happy now?” I responded, “Looks good.” [Field Notes, Feb. 7, 2014]

I interpreted such an observation as an indication that he aimed to complete his schoolwork quickly and efficiently. I often found him done with his schoolwork before the majority of his classmates. I can only conjecture that he used this time to rest or perhaps daydream. Mr. Ferry, his Social Science teacher, seemed to have formed a similar impression, implying in an interview that Juan did not always complete his assignments to his fullest ability. However, Mr. Ferry qualified his statement by explaining, “. . . I also understand the fact that he’s working sometimes until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning” [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]. That is, there was an understanding of the blending of paid work and school for Juan. Juan also described for me a specific strategy he employed to complete school assignments:

**Lan:** How do you finish your homework?

**Juan:** Ah, sometimes I do, sometimes I don’t. But the homework I do, I finish here. When I have any free time, then—then is when I do some work

**Lan:** When do you have free time?

**Juan:** Or when, for example, if the teacher say, “This is homework” but [mumbling] he is still explaining the homework, while—while he’s explaining it, I’m doing it. So probably I got like a three questions left when I go home. So it’s pretty much more easy

**Lan:** Right. So today in math class, you finished half of it.

**Juan:** Yeah, probably

[Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]

Some students gave the teacher their full attention while he/she explained the homework. Others chatted with their classmates. Juan started the homework assignment during this time as a strategy for doing school. Homework and in-class assignments, then, became one and the same for Juan, because he did not have the privilege to complete assignments at home.

However, these strategies did not consistently buy Juan sufficient time to complete his schoolwork because school has not been set up to account for the complexities of a learner's life. When I inquired about his performance in his Algebra 2 class near the end of the academic year, Juan explained that his abilities were deserving of a grade of an A, but he likely had a B:

**Juan:** Yeah, it can probably have more this—of, it will be very much better, but because pretty simple, in my math class there is—there is—we can stay after school to make work makeup or test makeup, but I cannot stay here, so my grades, it's not that bad though. It's—I think it's B, almost getting to A, but if I—probably if I come one day, it will—I will—I will get an A, but it's okay.

**Lan:** Why can't you stay after school?

**Juan:** Work.

**Lan:** Because you're working.

[Interview, Apr. 9, 2014]

I also asked him about his academic status in Social Science, and he provided a similar response:

**Juan:** Social is – it’s good. I guess I’m getting a C.

**Lan:** What happened?

**Juan:** Homework.

**Lan:** You don’t do your homework?

**Juan:** No.

**Lan:** Why not?

**Juan:** Homework, because I don’t have time at home, and probably pretty simple, the last assignments were, I have to – I had to write – probably like 300 words, and some word or pages – some probably too much writing. It’s not too much writing, but I don’t have time to do it.

**Lan:** Can you ask him if you can still do it? Maybe you can do it during –

**Juan:** I don’t like to bother people, because it is not his fault. It’s my fault...

[Interview, Apr. 9, 2014]

Despite Juan’s insistence that it was his own fault for not completing the 300-word assignment, I spoke with Mr. Ferry, who indicated that he was more than willing to accept the assignment late. With the support of the gym teacher, I was able to assist Juan on this assignment during his gym class. I discovered that Juan had already written the assignment on notebook paper, but he simply had not found the time to type the essay, as required according to the assignment instructions. This example highlights the view that a student’s life responsibilities does not need to obstruct his/her schooling,

but school would need to be reformatted, and we would need to reshape our ideological framework regarding how school should operate.

### **Tired**

Juan's identity as an employee seeped into his life as a student, blurring the line between the two worlds that have traditionally been depicted as disparate. At the time of my study, Juan worked in two restaurants in Philadelphia: an establishment well known for brunch and a tavern, which he described as "The same, like um, most—they are like appetizers, you know, drunk people" [Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]. On Saturdays, he worked from 2 pm to 11 pm (in other words, a nine-hour shift). He explained that the labor was not as exhausting as in his home village in Mexico:

**Lan:** ...Aren't you tired?

**Juan:** Ye—I'm used to it. And I start working at young age. When I was in my country I start helping my—my father. So, and then, one—yeah, so I'm—I'm used to it. And it's—over there it's pretty much more hard than here. Here it's like you are playing with the spatulas. It's nothing it's—

**Lan:** You're playing with the spatulas?

**Juan:** Yeah, it's like, I feel like I'm playing. Over there it's too much hard, you got—you got tired over there. After, after eight hours work, you just, just want to go to sleep.

[Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]

Although work in his home village may have been more exhausting, he was nonetheless tired or sleepy in class at Sunrise High School, as seen in the following observation in Social Science class:

I circulated the classroom to help students with the assignment and to make sure that they understood it. Juan had his head in his hands. His eyes were open, but he didn't look well. He looked like that a couple weeks ago when he was sick. I asked him if he was sick. He said that he was tired. I asked him why. He said that he had worked late the previous night. I said, "What do you do?" He replied, "Cook," adding, "I cook but not with a pan." He said, "I'm tired," and explained that he had worked seven and a half hours the previous night (a school night). He added, "Actually, I work 55 hours a week."

[Field Notes, Feb. 19, 2014]

The following day, he was again tired in Social Science class:

Juan yawned very loudly. During the class period, he yawned loudly at least three times. I spoke with him:

Lan: You're tired?

Juan: Take a nap.

Lan: You want to take a nap?

Juan: A nap of eight hours.

[Field Notes, Feb. 20, 2014]



During seven different class periods in the second semester of the 2013-2014 academic year, I observed some indication of his sleepiness or tiredness, in addition to comments from his teachers and him regarding the toll that working 55 hours per week while attending high school full time seemed to take on him.

The following instances of sleepiness and tiredness in Juan's Social Science and Algebra classes illustrate the notion that his work life was not separate from his schooling:

Juan said that he was tired. I asked him whether he had work afterschool that day. He told me that he worked everyday. [Field Notes, Feb. 26, 2014]

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At 12:36 pm, Juan's face was on his backpack, and his two hands were on the back of his head... At 12:48 pm, Juan still appeared to be sleeping. Now, his head was on his hands, which were resting on his desk. [Field Notes, Mar. 5, 2014]

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Juan didn't seem to be starting his work. Referring to the two options for the assignment the teacher had provided, I asked Juan, "What are you going to do?" He said, "Sleep. That's what I want to do." Then, he started working on the assignment. [Field Notes, Mar. 19, 2014]

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The teacher asked the class a question. Juan erased something in his notebook and then wrote. He put his pencil down and looked at the white board. He used his right hand to cover his face very briefly. Then, he copied from the board, looking up and down repeatedly. He gently slapped himself on the cheek repeatedly as if to keep himself awake. He leaned his chin on his left hand, seemingly to prop his head up. He continued to look toward the whiteboard where the teacher discussed factoring and simplifying polynomials. [Field Notes, April 23, 2014]

Similar to many of his classmates, Juan's bodily expressions in class were, at times, a manifestation of the hours of labor he completed outside of school. That is, he was not intentionally disengaging from school when he slept in class. It would be unjust to label a student like Juan as "lazy", but such categorization often occurs with little investigation into the lives of our students.

Juan walked along a balance beam, weighed down on one side by his employment at restaurants, and weighed down on the other side by school. When I was a classroom teacher, I lamented the fact that students did not submit their homework and were off-task. Why didn't they do what they were supposed to do? However, what if we turned this argument around? That is, what if we took into account the fact that, for many ELLs, school cannot be their only priority? In Juan's case, coming to the U.S., paid work was initially his only priority. However, as will be further discussed, he decided to make school another priority, given his desire to learn English. School, then, actually interfered with his ability to work more hours in restaurants, although the

traditional perspective would suggest that his life outside of school disrupted his schooling. As he stated, instead of working more hours in restaurants and earning more income, “I spend two years of my life in this school” [Interview, Jun. 4, 2014]. If he had not attended school full-time, he would have been “ready” to return to Mexico, i.e. he would have been able to work more, would have earned his target amount of money, and would have made arrangements to return to Mexico. Instead, he let school into his life and negotiated a mosaic of various facets to accommodate school. Juan exerted effort to fit school into his life—to live the hyphen of employee-student. School needs to reciprocate and fit the lives of students into its structure.

### **Languages, Literacies, and the Content Areas**

#### **Social Science Class**

Juan did not perceive Social Science to be difficult, and by my estimation, he had a relatively strong grasp of the material, yet he did not have the top grade in the class. He was an example of a student for whom grades did not necessarily reflect academic capability or intellect. As discussed in an earlier section, he was responsible for completing both school and duties at his places of employment. Therefore, he did not have the privilege to solely prioritize school, in which case, I would surmise that he would have excelled. Moreover, following the dominant discourse, we may be tempted to categorize Juan as a typical underachieving, Latino ELL. However, such a label would be inaccurate, given that the material was actually not challenging for him.

Looking beyond the façade, I saw a highly capable and intelligent student that received mediocre grades in Social Science.

On at least two occasions, Juan stated that Social Science was “easy”. However, one might not make this assumption based on his progress in the class, as shown in the below table:

Table 9  
*Juan’s Second Semester Social Science Grade at Various Points Throughout the Semester*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Source</b>
January 6, 2014	C	Grade calculations by Mr. Ferry
February 10, 2014	B	Statement from Juan recorded in field notes
April 9, 2014	C	Interview with Juan
April 24, 2014	B	Juan’s report card
May 10, 2014	B	Statement from Juan recorded in field notes

During an interview I asked him to tell me his thoughts about the class:

**Lan:** Uh, let’s go back to talking about Social Science. Tell me more about that class. What do you think about it? Is it easy, difficult, so-so?

**Juan:** Mmm. I think it’s kinda easy

**Lan:** Why?

**Juan:** Because, I don’t know. I think, I think if you like something it’s easy and I kinda like it. And I have seen that before any class I don’t like it’s pretty hard. But any class I like, it’s pretty easy.

[Interview, Mar. 12, 2014]

In the “About me” section of his blog, he also implied his interest in Social Science:

“...I like to read mostly when the topics are about politic or news all over the world”

[Juan’s Blog, Oct. 15, 2012]. On another occasion, I worked with him individually on a Social Science assignment, which he completed quickly:

**Lan:** Yeah. That seems like easy for you. Was it easy?

**Juan:** Yes.

**Lan:** Why?

**Juan:** I don’t know. It’s easy. It’s like math, It’s easy.

**Lan:** Oh, okay. Like math.

**Juan:** Yeah, it’s easy.

**Lan:** You think this is like math?

**Juan:** Yeah. It’s easy because it’s easier to learn. Somehow it’s easier for me to learn, to memorize.

[Transcript, Apr. 16, 2014]

I was able to gather this information by simply asking Juan to reflect on Social Science class, given the relative ease with which he completed the assignment. This example highlights learning about a student by pausing to ask for a simple reflection, a type of assessment that could inform teaching. Note that Juan compared Social Science to Algebra 2, for which his cumulative grade for the first three terms of this senior year was an A as of April 24, 2014. I would urge educators to incorporate into their practice pauses to gain insights on their students.

In addition to learning that Social Science was “easy” for Juan, I was able to infer that navigating Social Science was not particularly difficult for him by observing his interaction with lesson materials. For example, I observed that he completed an activity in class before other students with accuracy:

The students had to define four words. I looked at Juan’s mini whiteboard, and all of the answers seemed correct, though very short. His answers consisted of one word or just a few words. For the word, “run”, as in “run in a campaign”, he wrote “compet”.

[Field Notes, Jan. 13, 2014]

For another activity, he was able to complete his assignment fairly quickly once he received brief assistance. The assignments required that students write questions for which the answer would be key vocabulary words from the lesson:

Juan asked me for the definition of “primary”. I showed him the word in the textbook, and he read a sentence that contained the phrase, “primary election”. He asked me whether “primary” was a type of election, and I replied, “Yes.” He then wrote a question that was along the lines of “What’s a type of election?” [Field Notes, Feb. 20, 2014]

The above excerpt reveals that Juan was able to comprehend information from the textbook and translate it into a form to meet the requirements of the assignment. That is, he did not reveal a sign of struggle with the material, as I had observed in the case of other ELLs in his class, who had difficulty reading the textbook and/or completing written assignments without extensive individual assistance.

I also inferred Juan's understanding of Social Science while assisting him individually to make up assignments that Mr. Ferry had agreed to accept late. During one such one-on-one session, he was able to convey a cogent argument that revealed his understanding of the lesson, which focused on corporations and investments:

**Lan:**... [Reading from a handout] "Short answer: What advice would you give to a person who invests in the stock market?"

**Juan:** If it is new, it is not really it's no secure to invest in the companies.

**Lan:** Just because sometimes, say that again. What's "it"? A company?

**Juan:** Uh huh. It's new companies, they aren't always good, but it's an old one that is secure, or any other big companies.

[Transcript, Apr. 16, 2014]

During another one-on-one session, Juan applied his knowledge of Social Science vocabulary to complete Algebra 2 homework:

**Lan:** ...[Reading from the homework handout] "The manufacturing company uses the expressions below to estimate revenue and expenses based on the production of N units." Do you remember what "revenue" is from Social Science?

**Juan:** No. Revenue is money?

**Lan:** Yeah. If you're in a company –

**Juan:** It's the money that comes to you.

**Lan:** Yeah, exactly.

**Juan:** But it's not the profit because the profit is the net?

**Lan:** Yes, so you're probably, I don't know if they're going to ask you to find net, but this is the money you say comes to you, and expenses is what?

**Juan:** What you spend on products?

**Lan:** Yeah, exactly...

[Transcript, Apr. 23, 2014]

Juan clearly exhibited an understanding of terms from Social Science class while completing word problems for Algebra 2. Furthermore, applying knowledge from one class to another may be deemed representative of higher-order thinking skills (see for example, Miri, David, & Uri, 2007).

Juan's written assignments also indicated his thorough understanding of Social Science. For example, his Social Science student teacher commented on Juan's strong grasp of the material when I interviewed her:

**Student Teacher:** ...[And] the work that I've gotten from him has been creative and very thoughtful, um and you can tell that he puts a lot of like emotions and thought and like care into his work and tries hard...

...

**Lan:** Can you recall any specific examples of his work?

**Student Teacher:** Um we did a – I'm trying to think what it was because he turned in a really thoughtfully written. Um it wasn't like an essay. It was just like a short response. I think about um voting and elections. I



taught a little bit on that and like how voting rights had changed and I – it might have been – I mean it was short, 200 words or something, but he really reflected on how voting rights have like increased for certain – so many people and why that was a good thing in this society, and why continuing to increase the voting rights is good and um just was saying like how unfair it was that women used to not be allowed to vote and how now it's becoming more and more fair, and he was very thoughtful about it.

[Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]

I was able to retrieve this piece of writing, which is presented in the below figure:

Figure 6

Juan's Writing about Voting Rights (Underlining and Editing Likely by the Student Teacher)

Voting rights have always been a controversy, people have always struggled to get the right vote since this country was colonized, but through the time things had changed given the people the right of voting. In colonial times only white people who owned land could vote, it was a Traditional English law and custom basically the rich people have total control of the government. In 1821-1850 all white man could vote, they gave each state the power to decide what is own rights voting would be, but it was too unfair yet women could not vote, but then in 1924 the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment was promoted it would give women the right of voting, which I think is very important because women definitely had helped this country to grow up, and so I think women deserve to be treated in the same way. Same year was passed the Indian citizenship Act, Indians had the same right voting as white men, African American people were supposed to be allow to vote since 1870 but people who were in charge didn't let them vote till the 24<sup>th</sup> amendment.

was passed in 1965,  
Washington is not a state and does not  
have any power in Congress, that was the  
reason they couldn't vote, but in  
1964 23<sup>rd</sup> amendment will change that  
statement, and finally after the  
second world war the 26<sup>th</sup> amendment  
would change the age of voting  
with only allowed people who were  
21 years old to vote, now young men  
who were 18 years old could vote.

Rather than merely present a summary of the history of voting rights, Juan seemed to incorporate an analysis that emphasized systemic issues related to inequality in stating, for example, "...basically the rich people have total control of the government."

Similarly, he underscored issues of power and race in writing, "...African American people were supposed to be allowed to vote since 1870 but people who were in charge didn't let them vote till the 24th amendment..." This piece of writing is a representative example of his assignments, which displayed his understanding of Social Science (even though they may have been perfunctory, as previously discussed).

Juan's Social Science grade, which fluctuated between a B and C, gave the impression that he did not have a strong comprehension of the material. However, looking beneath the surface, I learned that the material was not particularly challenging

for him, and he was able to navigate the lesson assignments with relative ease. His school experience did not correspond neatly to a classification, such as “B student” or “average student”. Within school, for various reasons, he seemed to straddle the realms of “high-performing” and “not meeting his potential”, complicating the binary of “high-achiever” versus “under-achiever” and “good” versus “bad” student. These antithetical identities were constructed but do not necessarily hold true on the ground.

### **“I Came Here to Learn English”**

Juan’s school experience included an intersection of his realities as a restaurant worker and as a full-time student and ELL. He explained how working in restaurants in Philadelphia informed his decision to attend Sunrise High School for the purpose of learning English, rather than for the purpose of obtaining a high school degree. Such a goal seems to be incongruent with the typical mission of high schools, which often incorporates the notion of equipping students with “21st century skills”. Instead, Juan emphasized the utility of learning English as another language. That is, he developed his own agenda, suggesting that we need to perceive ELLs as agentive learners. Furthermore, these observations highlight the artificial nature of the divide between the objective of TESOL and education that is based on a sociocultural perspective, in that it is possible to embrace Juan’s desire and need to learn English while honoring the other dimensions of his schooling and identity.

## **English Learning Prior to Sunrise High School**

Juan had learned English in school in Mexico, and he also learned English in his workplaces in Philadelphia before he became a fulltime student at Sunrise High School.

In an interview, he explained his experience with learning English in Mexico:

**Juan:** ... You know, I had good grades at English, I got always A. But because I always memorize the stuff, I-I was good at it. I'm good at it, like if I read something, I can memorize it. So next day, I will, will be ready, right? But like, one week or two week later, I will not remember anything. So that's why, I did not know—when I can hear everything, even not how to say, “Hi, how are you?” Like but, I learn all the stuff. I learn it, but I forgot it.

As seen above and in other discussions in this study, Juan did not seem satisfied with his English abilities and strived to further his learning. After arriving in the U.S. and while working in restaurant kitchens, he seemed to take advantage of opportunities to learn English at work. Because his co-workers in the kitchens were also from Mexico and spoke little English, he sought “the people in the front who speak English, like American people” as resources for English learning and routinely asked them, for example, “How do you say this?” [Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]. To expand his learning outside of work, he watched music videos that included song lyrics in English. When he encountered words he did not understand, he used a translator. However, he turned to his English-speaking co-workers when the translator was insufficient:

**Juan:** ...But you know, some-sometimes translator don't translate as it is. So then is when I, when I, when I, when I went to work, and I ask them "Why-why do you use in this way? Why do you use in that way?" And that's how I learn more.

[Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]

Though Juan actively learned English by utilizing his co-workers as resources, he, like many immigrant laborers "in so-called back-of-the-house positions", nonetheless, had limited opportunities to interact with English speakers (Gerdes & Wilberschied, 2003, p. 41). Such a circumstance has several implications, including "few opportunities to reinforce or test new English language" (Gerdes & Wilberschied, 2003, p. 41).

Moreover, although workplace literacy and ESL programs are expanding, funding for such programs is greatly limited (Burt, 1997), and Juan did not mention the availability of formal English learning programs at his places of employment. Eventually, his English skills and interest in learning the language seemed to outgrow the limited English learning opportunities of his workplaces.

### **High School and Learning English**

To overcome this limitation, Juan exercised his agency in choosing to be a high school student, blending the worlds of work and school. During the duration of this study, Juan worked 55 hours per week in restaurant kitchens. Prior to enrolling in Sunrise High School in December 2011 as a grade 10 student, Juan worked even more

hours, but reduced his workload to accommodate attending high school fulltime. He explained his reason for enrolling in high school:

**Juan:** I did not come to school because I want to graduate from high school. I came here because I want to learn more English, because I did not know any people. So I want to learn English, that's why I came here. Because it was for me—I'm like an independent, I don't like to depend from anyone...

**Lan:** You de—you decided yourself—

**Juan:** Yeah, oh yeah.

**Lan:** to come to Sunrise?

**Juan:** Yeah, my brother ask me, "Are you sure?" He—he asked me like twice. Because he, he knows, like, when I come here, I wouldn't earn that much money as I was earning before. Because...actually I'm—I did have part-time, only part-time before. Now I'm—I'm like a, it is like a full-time but before it was like a couple hours, couple days.

**Lan:** Because you're here [at school] the whole day.

**Juan:** Yeah...

[Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]

This situation relates to Skilton-Sylvester's (2002) research involving the context that influenced a group of Cambodian women's participation and investment in adult ESL programs. She concludes that "the realities of students' lives intersect with decisions to learn English and/or go to class" (Skilton-Sylvester, 2002, p. 11). In making the

decision to attend high school full-time to learn English, Juan chose to sacrifice some of his income, despite his brother's protest, and was able to rearrange his work schedule to align with the school day. Drawing on the scholarship of Rodby (1992), Skilton-Sylvester (2002) also suggests "rethinking the traditional separation between what happens in classrooms and what is real" (p. 22). Though the dominant discourse poses a dichotomy between school and "the real world" (Rodby, 1992), it is especially clear in Juan's case that school was part of his real world just as working to make a living was.

### **Utility of English**

Juan highlighted the usefulness of English by providing two main reasons for actively studying the language. First, knowing the language gave him freedom and perhaps protection in a country that is primarily monolingual in English:

**Juan:** ...I came here [Sunrise High School] to learn English because anytime that, every time that I want to go anywhere to buy something—clothes, or to go eat, I gotta ask someone else to, to make it—to make me, to give me the food, to to help me, to translate. Or to help me to—to ask for stuff. And I did not like that because sometimes they have time, sometimes they don't. Or sometimes they have, they—they have time when you don't got time. And then it's pretty hard. Sometimes I need the stuff and they, they weren't always available to go with me...

[Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]



His description perhaps referred to “survival English”, which taught in isolation as a curriculum may not encourage an ELL to flourish in terms of language and academic development. Nonetheless, as underscored by Juan, learning English is a real need among immigrants in the U.S.

Second, learning English provided concrete, monetary benefits. The U.S. has been shifting from a manufacturing to a service-based economy since the late 1980s, and increasingly, employment requires literacy (in the traditional sense) and proficiency in English (Burt, 1997; Gillespie, 1996; McGroarty, 1993). Juan seemed to understand this pattern well. Noting “a positive change” and improvement in his English approximately 1.5 years after enrolling in Sunrise High School, Juan reflected, “Learning English has given me many things including more money, because now I can communicate with my boss or workmates” [Blog, Jun. 11, 2013]

Juan directly expressed his desire and need to attend school for the sake of learning English. Contrary to the belief of the need for bilingual education, which is emphasized by the field of bilingual/bicultural education and seemingly projected onto learners, Juan did not enroll in Sunrise High School to build his Spanish skills. A common, almost anti-English-learning, argument is presented below:

In the United States, these students are often referred to as English language learners (ELLs) by educators or as Limited English proficient students (LEPs) by legislators and the federal government. I argue here that emergent bilinguals might be a more appropriate term for these children.

Labeling students as either LEPs or ELLs omits an idea that is critical to the discussion of equity in the teaching of these children. The term emergent bilinguals refers to the children's potential in developing their bilingualism; it does not suggest a limitation or a problem in comparison to those who speak English. (Garcia, 2009, p. 322).

I agree that the term "LEP" reflects a deficit orientation. However, the term, "English language learner" and the emphasis on the need to learn English does not necessitate the erasure of the other facets of a learner. For example, Juan regularly spoke in Spanish with at least one classmate in his Algebra 2 class, and his hometown in Mexico played an ongoing role in his life and imagination about the future. These elements were a part of his hyphenated reality as a Spanish speaker from Mexico who was in the U.S. learning English. In his case, stressing his need to learn English and supporting that goal would have been the best means to honor him as an agentive learner, as he arrived in Sunrise High School with a clear agenda of English learning. Developing English skills is also a necessity in a society where English is the dominant language and needed for success. Furthermore, a statement such as the above stems from a privileged position, as it is eloquently written in the English language, a genre of power. As educators, we cannot simply place our frameworks of what we think is "correct" education onto learners. We need to observe and listen to individual learners while taking into consideration the large context.

## Language Learning Theory: Speaking in English

2012-2013 school year.

This year was great, I see an improvement in my English even though I don't speak too much...

My friends at work and family have told me I have a better English, it may not be a better English it might be that I just started to talk a little bit more, but anyway it is a positive change, I feel more comfortable when I speak English, as consequence I have more friends, it is very interesting what you can learn talking to people from different culture, but English is always a big obstacle. [Juan's Blog, June 11, 2013]

The students in my study held keen knowledge regarding what they needed as language learners, as revealed in the theories of language learning they formulated. We need to view ELLs as theorists of second language acquisition and development, and take seriously their findings regarding how they can best learn English.

Juan, in particular, stressed the necessity of oral English practice in order to master the language:

**Juan:** Like I don't really like talk too much. That's why I know my, you know that's that what probably one of things did not let me learn that much. My accent is always like not good, because I don't talk too much, just couple of friends, and I'm like that. I have seen people that is separate or we can – Sonia, she always talk too much. She talks every – all the time, and when I – she came here, she have – I have better

English, and now she got better English than me, but she talk too much.

[Interview, Apr. 9, 2014]

I prompted Juan to elaborate on his theory that speaking English improves one's skills or proficiency in that language:

**Lan:** So some people think that when a student first comes, and if the student doesn't know English, the person should be in a class with other students that speak the same language, so for example, you speak Spanish. When you first came here, maybe you should have worked with another student that speaks Spanish, so that that person can help you. Do you think that would have helped you or –

**Juan:** No.

**Lan:** No? Why not?

**Juan:** Because I would not try to speak English. If I don't understand English, I would say – I would ask my friend. He would tell me in Spanish.

**Lan:** So you would rather have a situation where everyone only spoke English to you, and they just said, "You need to speak English."

**Juan:** Mhmm.

**Lan:** You want to be forced to speak English?

**Juan:** Yes, that's the only way that I can. You got to be forced. [Interview, Apr. 9, 2014]

Researchers of second language acquisition commonly support Juan's notion that practice in speaking English is key for ELLs to develop the language. One major

barrier for Juan was the lack of opportunities to speak English given the structure of the school and his classes. For one, the school population consisted of approximately 50% “official” ELLs and additional students that were English learners but had exited from the ESL program. In an analysis of newcomer schools, which consists entirely of ELLs, Feinberg (2000) argues that ELLs “need to try out their developing English skills in conversation with fluent speakers” (p. 224). However, being in a school with a large population of ELLs (or only ELLs in the case of newcomer schools), presents a challenge because “[both] the quality and the quantity of actual, real life use of the target language in authentic social contexts is limited” (Feinberg, 2000, p. 224). Along this line of reasoning, Olivo (2003) draws on well cited second language acquisition research by Krashen (1980) and Swain (1985) in suggesting that “the act of talking”, i.e. “practice” or “rehearsal”, is “part of the work learners must do in order to develop competence in a second language” (p. 57). The implication is that ELLs need to be provided with opportunities to do this “work”. By seriously considering language learning theories proposed by students like Juan in conjunction with findings by “official” practitioners and researchers, we as educators would be able to shape pedagogy and instructional structures to meet students’ needs.

In addition to rehearsing and practicing spoken English, Krashen (1980), Swain (1985), and other researchers in the field of second language acquisition underline the role of exposure, i.e. “input”, to English in learning the target language. Juan added to this body of research when he reflected on setbacks in English learning during his first two years in the U.S. when he only worked and did not attend high school:

**Juan:** Well, it takes me a lot of time. Because first, I like, when I came here, I didn't come right away to school... So I did not learn that much English because all my workmates were, were ah Mexicans. And then all of them were speak Spanish, so I did not learn that much. [Interview, Mar. 5, 2014]

Feinberg (2000) echoes Juan's finding regarding the negative affects of language segregation in arguing, "Effective cross-cultural communication strategies require more than English language proficiency, narrowly defined. What is required is experience in the negotiation of meaning with members of the host society" (p. 224). Cummins (1999) refers to the situation highlighted by Juan and Feinberg (2000) as "impoverished input in the target language" (para. 5). Juan revealed a strong understanding of this concept when he expressed his dissatisfaction with the dearth of English input provided in Social Science class one day:

The class was watching a martial arts movie in Cantonese with English subtitles. Juan, in an annoyed tone, blurted to no one in particular, "Why it's in Chinese? No Chinese. No." ...Toward the end of the class period, the teacher announced that they would finish the movie the next day. He asked whether the movie should be played in English or Chinese. Students shouted various responses. Juan shouted, "English!" [Field Notes, May 12, 2014]

This example reiterates Juan's goal to be exposed to English and his main reason for attending high school.

Though Juan emphasized the need to speak English to learn the language, he characterized himself as being quiet, as seen in his blog post at the opening of this section, and teachers also made similar observations. The “About Me” section of his blog states, “...I am shy with strangers and I don't like to talk to much...” [Juan’s Blog, Oct. 15, 2012]. When asked to comment on Juan, the student teacher of his Social Science class remarked, “[He’s] very, very quiet though in class, at least like as part of a whole class discussion, um which I wish I could hear his voice more because I think he has a lot to add” [Interview, March 24, 2014]. I also observed that he did not speak often in class, not even to repeat after the teacher during choral readings in Social Science class:

The teacher read from the textbook, and the students were to repeat after him. After he read a clause or sentence, many students repeated after him, but not Juan. [Field Notes, May 2, 2014]

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After the students were given time to read in their textbook, the teacher asked the students to repeat the word “mandatory”, which he had written on the board. Many students repeated after him, but Juan did not. [Field Notes, May 7, 2014]

Similarly, during a series of commencement ceremony practices in June 2014, I observed that Juan rarely repeated after the teacher, who taught the senior class to sing three songs (in English) for commencement. Because Juan wanted to speak English to

bolster his language development but was quiet, he may have benefited from classroom structures that specifically allowed him to participate through speaking in English.

However, spoken interactions relevant to content learning in his Social Science class followed the traditional format, in which the teacher led the allocation of opportunities to speak (Olivo, 2003), as seen in the following:

For the next topic, the teacher led a discussion of same-sex marriage, and he asked students whether students were in favor. The teacher asked Juan to share his thoughts. Juan responded, “Yes,” and said something along the lines of, “They have feelings just like everyone else.” [Field Notes, Jan. 8, 2014]

The above was one of three instances in which I observed Juan’s sharing his thoughts out loud with the class during six months of field observations. Moreover, note that he only spoke because the teacher called on him. In another example in Social Science class, Juan shared his response, but almost in a whisper:

Information about a scandal in the news was shown on the next PowerPoint slide on the screen. The teacher gave the students some time to read the information independently before they discussed the topic. The teacher then asked a series of comprehension questions, and some students responded out loud. One student said, “Drug.” The teacher followed up by saying, “When you put drugs in your nose, it’s called...” Another student responded, “Drug.” Juan said in a very low voice, such that the teacher did not hear, “Snorting.” Class continued as if Juan had



said nothing. I rarely hear him speak out loud. I don't think I've ever heard him voluntarily speak loud enough for the entire class to hear.

[Field Notes, Jan. 13, 2014]

These observations mirror those conducted by Harklau (1994), who examined interactions in classrooms that included ELLs. The predominant activity of the classes she observed were teacher-led discussions, which she considers a misnomer because the teacher dominated the talk the vast majority of the time (Harklau, 1994). She found that many teachers “elicited student response by addressing questions to the entire class. This format favored the students who could most loudly or confidently bid for the floor and allowed more reticent students...to simply not respond” (Harklau, 1994, p. 294). That is, a quiet student like Juan would rarely bid for the floor, as I had observed. For Juan and other ELLs that require practice in speaking English, Olivo (2003) suggest practice sessions that resemble spontaneous conversation instead of typical classroom interactions. Regardless of the exact mechanism of the teaching method, we should take into account the learner's theories about his/her own language learning needs.

In a conference presentation in which I mentioned Juan's theory that he needed to “be forced” to speak English, I was warned of the danger of taking heed of such an idea--that Juan and others like him did not know what was best for them. The person cited examples of supposedly misguided advocacy by Latina/o immigrant parents who wanted to remove bilingual programs from K-12 schools. However, Juan clearly benefitted from placing himself in an English-speaking environment and received an increased income due to his improved English skills. How can we claim that Juan did

not know what was in his own best interest?

### **Financial Literacy**

People use money as an exchange, so you give money and you get money or goods. Every thing has a certain value and so that's how money is used. As more expensive as more money you give. Many people save their money at home but rich people use banks. [Juan's Written Assignment, Feb. 26, 2014]

The above was written in response to this prompt in a Social Science assignment:

Give a 25-50 word description of each phrase and/or example:

- Money is a medium of exchange
- Money is a method of saving
- Money is a way of calculating value

A noticeable attribute of Juan was his engagement in financial literacy, which he implied he developed growing up in a “poor family” [Interview, Mar. 12, 2014]. Apparently, his lived experiences had shaped the way he theorized the world and sculpted his guidelines for budgeting. He had a deep working knowledge of personal finance and seemed quite comfortable with numbers—these aspects were perhaps reflected in assignments, such as the above, and his strong performance in Algebra 2. His financial literacy was also a manifestation of his identity as an adult, working to support himself and saving for the future. By recognizing the hyphenated-reality of our

ELLs, we would be able to see that he was not only an ELL in high school; he was an adult that was very capable of navigating society.

Budgeting and saving money seemed to be a significant component in Juan's life. When I inquired about the content of his Senior Seminar class, he described a lesson or unit, in which students were to create an imaginary family and plan the family's budget. He expressed his great interest in the subject and provided his reasons:

**Juan:** Because, it—it I think is, because it give you an idea how your life is and how hard it is. Because when, you know, be—like childrens around this age, they don't know anything about responsibilities. But when you see how much your parent do for you, how much your parent sacrifice for you, you probably, ah, love them more. And...it gives you an idea so you can be, you know, can be aware. You know? Prepared, like prepared? And that's why I like it.

[Interview, Mar. 12, 2014]

Through interacting with Juan, I developed the hypothesis that he was skillful in managing his money. I wanted to confirm my assumption:

**Lan:** Are you good with your money?

**Juan:** Yeah, yeah I—yeah because I, you know I come from a poor family, but—but they, they work, like um, before they were poor, but now they work hard but they know how to administrate money. So, I have always seen money, you know...

[Interview, Mar. 12, 2014]

In-school and out-of-school learning about money coalesced to inform Juan's perspective on money, blurring the line between "formal" and "informal" knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Juan continued, describing his ability to budget his earnings for rent, bills, food, and savings:

**Juan:** ...I always try to keep that, like don't mix money. So I can say, the part I had I save it, save it. And because I have seen many, you know, many people from my country come here and they spend money on things they don't need. You know, for example, um, shoes. They have two pair of shoes but they want more just because they look like, probably old. But I'm not like that, like, I have never worry about what I wear. You know, I um, wear expensive stuff ever. Because s—I know someday I will need that money. Not for me, but maybe for my familia.

[Interview, Mar. 12, 2014]

He had made a similar argument in his blog about two years prior:

About me

... I see a lot of people living their lives doing crazy things, spending so much money, they don't care about a future but when they get old they wonder why they live like that poorly and unhappy, I had lived many things you can't even figure out, I had suffer, that is why I care about future... [Juan's Blog, Oct. 15, 2012]

As in my interview with him, in his blog, he invoked his history and experiences to contextualize his views about money. I learned that he saved approximately

75% of his earnings, and as mentioned in a previous section, his post-secondary plans entailed staying in the U.S. for at least one additional year before returning to Mexico to allow him to continue working in restaurants to earn and save more money [Field Notes, Jun. 4, 2014]. Ms. Ardelean, who was very close to Juan, corroborated this information in stating, "...I think what his plan was—is that he wants to spend one more year saving money" [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014].

Juan's subterranean layers reveal his hyphenated identities that include, but is not limited to, ELL, undocumented immigrant, restaurant employee, and caretaker of parents. His experiences push educators and researchers to question the categories of "high-achieving" and "under-achieving". His work life seemed inseparable from school, as the two seemed to be in dialogue: he was unable to complete class assignments and was tired during the day due to his restaurant jobs; at the same time, school helped to increase his earnings because he strengthened his English abilities. The data also underscore the need to respect Juan as a rational agent, who made the decision to enroll in high school based on his own mission to learn English. Moreover, he is a constructor of theories regarding second language acquisition and an expert in financial literacy. A critical ethnographic approach allowed for us to see his rich stories and the transnational knowledge he brought to school. The micro-macro dialectic also forces us to rethink abstract, academic frameworks that are projected onto individual students without asking the learners themselves (e.g., the idea that, especially, Spanish-speaking students should be in bilingual education). Instead, we must embrace ELLs as theorists who are in conversation with "official" scholars.

## Chapter 5: Case Study - Maly

The teacher explained the classwork to be done. The students needed to respond to two prompts shown on a PowerPoint slide:

- “What problems can occur when different cultures are living closely together? Write about an example from history or your own life.”
- “How can different cultures live together peacefully?”

Maly started copying from the screen immediately while other students asked the teacher questions and made remarks. Maly looked up and down between the screen and her notebook as she copied from the PowerPoint slide. She paused to ask the teacher for an example of a response to the first question. The teacher explained an example, and as he spoke, Maly continued to write. Some students in the class were chatting, but she seemed to ignore everything around her. She looked up at the screen and down at her notebook as she continued writing, mouthing the words from the PowerPoint slide. She did not stop writing.

After copying from the PowerPoint slide, she started writing without looking up. She wrote nonstop bent over her desk. Ten minutes had passed, and she had not spoken at all. [May 12, 2014, Field Notes]

Academically, Maly’s records indicated that she did well in school, and she consistently completed her classwork. She was the archetypal “good” student. However, I question whether she was prepared for college, which she planned to attend, especially in terms of her English abilities. As will be discussed, characterizing Maly as merely a good student effaces the intricate layers of reality that tell her story.

### **My Interactions with Maly**

I was a participant-observer in Maly's Social Science and African American History classes, which I circulated to help students. (Peter was in both of those classes; Yanjun and Juan were in the Social Science class.) Early on, I noticed that Maly always seemed to do her work and start her assignments immediately. She did not need any prompting from teachers. Though being quiet seemed to be the default for her, she was willing to seek help from me and others to complete her work. This observation extended beyond classwork. For example, she sought help from Mr. Spruce on college applications. She also asked me for help on one of her college applications and when she needed assistance in mailing a college financial aid form. Periodically, I spoke with her when she was done with her class assignments and was waiting for the teacher to provide the next assignment. However, I found that it was difficult to speak with her, because at times, I was uncertain if she comprehended what I said, and I was not able to take the time to explain to her, given the short duration available to talk.

### **Maly's Interactions with the School**

Maly was known to be a good student with good grades at Sunrise High School, but she was also known to not have the strongest English skills (this case stands in contrast to Yanjun's, who had good grades and was known to be strong in English). Maly's grades and positive image seemed to reflect her effort and compliant behavior rather than her English skills, a situation that may not have been conducive to adequately preparing her for college.

Her grades and attendance record attest to her status as a good student. As of April 24, 2014, her GPA was 3.60; her cumulative grades were four A's and four B's; and she was present on 132 days and absent on only four days. She received a citizenship rating of "excellent" for all her classes in the first three quarters of her senior year, with the exception of a rating of "satisfactory" in her computer class for the first quarter.

A term frequently used to describe Maly was some form of "hard working". The student teacher in her Social Science class referred to Maly as a student that "definitely works hard" [Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]. Similarly, Mr. Ferry commented, "Maly, another hard worker" [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014] when asked to describe her. These comments reflect my observations of her. She was routinely "on task" and rarely veered from working on class requirements. Occasionally, in Social Science class, she socialized with classmates when the teacher allowed the students to use the last few minutes of class as "free time." However, I did not observe her socializing in African American History class, which did not have a designated social time. That is, her apparent tendency was to socialize when doing so was sanctioned. In general, she seemed quiet and would be described as a "good" student. It was almost easy to overlook her in the school, as she did not take any actions or engage in any behavior that required the attention of faculty or staff members.

All of the interactions I observed between her and her teachers were positive or neutral: she either contributed to the class or asked the teacher a question about an assignment. Teachers commented that her English required great improvement, but she



was seen in a positive light and obtained good grades because she completed all her work and showed effort. For example, Mr. Spruce commented, “Maly has been an honor roll student most of the time as well despite some of the language barriers earlier on” [Interview, Feb. 10, 2014]. In studying Chinese immigrant students at a high school in California, McKay and Wong (1996) made a similar finding, in which an ESL student did not appear advanced in terms of English, yet he seemed to have a reputation as an achiever, perhaps due to his compliance with authority figures. Though Maly’s English had improved greatly over the past few years, to a certain extent, it seemed that her English skills were seemingly forgiven (for lack of a better term) because she played the role of a good student and diligently completed all that was required of her.

While observing Maly in school, I worried that, though she was doing academically well at Sunrise High School, she would be evaluated differently in college due to her current English level. Olivo’s (2003) research in ESL classrooms reveal an “explicit connection made between the students' lack of skills in speaking English and their polite behavior” (pp. 56-57). A similar image may have been projected onto Maly, whose English was on the lower-end relative to other ELLs in the school. I was given the impression that Maly took “the safest strategy of doing what [she] thought the authority figure expected” (McKay & Wong, 1996, p. 597) and was rewarded for such. Was her high school doing her a disservice by giving her good grades while not better preparing her for college?

### **Subterranean Layers**

...Cambodia have a big problem to Khmer people. The people have to live together and they didn't get a lot of food to eat they work to hard for them and the leader was take the thing that Khmer do to give to [indiscernible]. but now we are free to do what we have to do and all the people was get freedom to live and they can go to school. I feel so happy with this thing happen to my Khmer people in my country.

[Maly's African American History Notebook, Apr. 28, 2014]

Each learner brings with him or her a thick history that would go unknown if we did not pause to ask questions and look beyond the surface. Maly, who is from Cambodia, comes from a background tinted by a recent genocide that caused the death of nearly one-fourth of the population. Now, she is in a country that was complicit in this genocide. In an attempt to peel back the layers and understand Maly's context, I pieced together information gathered from her, her teachers, and those that have studied the Cambodian American experience. However, I realized that more time with Maly would have been helpful, as even the teachers that sought to learn about her did not have a clear sense of her background.

### **Family and Immigration**

The information I gathered about Maly's background is far from complete, but nonetheless, it provides hints about her family and immigration story. Because she did not want her interview to be audio-recorded, I was only able to jot notes as she spoke.

Also, I was uncertain whether she fully comprehended all that I said, and she spoke sparingly [Interview, Apr. 7, 2014]. I learned that her family's immigration story began in 1993, when her 45-year-old sister came to the U.S. Her parents came to the U.S. in 2005. She lived with her brother and sister-in-law in Cambodia where she attended school and did not hold a job. She was able to come to the U.S. in 2010, when her family "sent" for her. They decided to indicate that her sister had sent for her because her income was slightly higher than her parents. I deduced from her explanation that she likely immigrated through a family reunification process, which she remarked was difficult. As part of the process, she was interviewed, and she also took a test.

Although I gathered from the interview and a previous conversation with her that she lived with her parents, this status was unclear, as illustrated by her Social Science student teacher:

**Student Teacher:** I don't know if her parents are here. I was really – I think at least her mom is here, but I was very unclear on who's here because I tried to help her with [indiscernible] and stuff, and she was like, "Well, I don't live with my parents." And – but I was really confused by that. I think both of her parents are here. I really have no idea, um but I – but it sounded like she maybe lived with siblings, but then other questions it was like she was the only one with her parents. I was very confused about like her family background um but definitely works hard and I think kind of enjoys school, even though I think she finds it challenging.

[Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]

Ms. Ardelean, her former ESOL teacher and one of the faculty members most involved in the lives of ELLs at the school, also implied that Maly's family structure in the U.S. was not well-defined:

**Ms. Ardelean:** ... I'm not sure exactly, and I think she's here with her sisters, not her parents.

**Lan:** ...[She] said awhile ago, in the beginning of the school year that she's um her mom's here.

**Ms. Ardelean:** Her mom's here. Her mom's here.

**Lan:** And her mom's sick.

**Ms. Ardelean:** That's right, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Lan:** So she takes care of her mom it sounds like.

**Ms. Ardelean:** I remember that now. Her mom is here but – and her sister. I don't think the father is in the picture...

[Interview, Jun. 20, 2015]

These observations highlight the challenges educators face as they attempt to uncover the layers that encompass a student's reality. Nonetheless, we must at least try.

An integral part of Maly's background is what she referred to as "my Khmer people in my country" in the excerpt from her class notebook. Her writing appears to be an allusion to the Khmer Rouge. Because this piece of history is essential to those of Khmer heritage, I present below the clearest, most succinct synopsis of the history of the Khmer Rouge by Hein (2006), a sociologist:

Prince Norodom Sihanouk had ruled Cambodia since independence from France and he kept the country neutral during most of the Vietnam War. In 1970, however, General Lon Nol took power in a coup supported by the U.S. military, which wanted a pro-American government in Phnom Penh (Kiernan, 2004; Shawcross, 1977). U.S. bombing in Cambodia dramatically escalated during the 1970s as the Cambodian Communist guerrillas known as the Khmer Rouge expanded their own military activity with the support of China and North Vietnam. The U.S. military subjected approximately one-third of Cambodia to almost unrestricted indiscriminate bombing... As a result, American military intervention in Cambodia during the early 1970s actually increased popular support for the Khmer Rouge by enabling them to blame the United States for killing civilians (Kiernan, 2004, 1996). (p. 55)

The Khmer Rouge finally ended, though via a bitter-sweet means:

More an effort to gain control over its neighbor than an act of humanitarianism, Vietnamese troops defeated the Khmer Rouge in early 1979 and remained in the country until 1989. From a population of 7 million, at least 1.7 million died of starvation, disease, and execution during the four years of the Khmer Rouge regime. (Hein, 2006, p. 57)

By mapping the information provided by Maly onto the time line of the Khmer Rouge, we can infer that her sister was born in about 1969, and the Khmer Rouge took place during the 1970s. Therefore, her immediate family members were at least witnesses of

this era, though I do not have any information about their experience. Given this background, it seems that, while sitting in the classrooms of Sunrise High School, Maly's reality did not merely consist of the present. Instead, it was a hyphenated blend of the weight of a history marked by a genocide and other elements concerning the here and now.

**Cambodians Americans.** Cambodian Americans are often grouped under "Asian American", a title that serves to build solidarity among the pan-Asian community but, unfortunately, it is often misappropriated to describe Asian Americans as a model minority. This myth obscures the lives and histories of individuals. In a review of Southeast Asian American education, Bic Ngo and Stacey J. Lee (2007) argue that this the experiences of this population has been "reduced to binary extremes," such that they are either positioned within a discourse of success as "hardworking, high achievers," or "they are positioned outside this discourse of success and portrayed as high school dropouts, gangsters, and welfare dependents (B. Ngo, 2006)" (p. 416).

Quantitative data provides a starting point for understanding the experiences of Cambodian Americans, though the data should be used in tandem with information about context and the individual. According to the U.S. 2010 census, 231,616 people reported "Cambodian: one detailed Asian group" as their group, and 23,881 reported "Cambodian: two or more detailed Asian groups" for a total of 255,497 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Data from the 2010 census show that there were 9,912 people who identified as Cambodian in Philadelphia (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In Philadelphia, 55% of those identifying as Cambodian were foreign born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Descriptive statistics suggest that the experiences of Cambodian Americans are incongruent with the myth of the model minority. In Philadelphia, “Cambodian American (52%) adults are less likely to have a high school diploma or GED than all other racial ethnic groups,” and 9% of Cambodian Americans “are college graduates, rates similar to those of Latinos (11%) and Blacks or African Americans (12%)” (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2013, p. 41). In contrast to the economic prosperity supposedly characteristic of Asian Americans, approximately “52% of Cambodian American youth live in poverty, a rate among the highest across racial and ethnic groups, surpassing the citywide youth poverty rate of 35%” (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2013, p. 42). An examination of this data in terms of Maly’s multiple layers reveals that her experiences fall in and out of the various categories named above. Her lived realities do not fit neatly into a silo, and describing her as such would be inaccurate or even dehumanizing<sup>20</sup>.

### **Work, School, and Tiredness**

Earlier in the academic year, I helped Maly with one of her online college applications, primarily the section on extracurricular activities. I helped her type responses as she explained her activities. I asked her several questions to prod her to give me as much information as possible, as I had conjectured that she was doing a great amount of work that might not traditionally be considered extracurricular.

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<sup>20</sup> This argument was inspired by the work of Campano (2007).

I learned that she worked about 20 hours per week, folding clothes, apparently at a garment factory. In the summer, she worked even more hours per week. She described her summer workplace as a “garden”, but it appeared to be a farm or nursery. She brought water to plants, moved supplies, and worked long hours. In addition to working in the summer and during the school year, she cared for her mother, who was ill. [Memo, Jan. 17, 2014]

Maly’s story is characterized by hyphens and multiple elements. She was an ELL, a high school student, an employee, and a caretaker. Her paid job shaped who she was in school, such that, when asked to describe her, both her Social Science student teacher and Ms. Ardelean discussed the fact that she worked. Her employment also impacted her school experience, in that she was tired at school and scheduled her homework time to accommodate her job. She made the effort to incorporate school into her life. As such, school seemed to be but one of her many responsibilities along with paid employment.

**Work.** An integral part of Maly’s life, her employment was a dimension in her academic experience. As Bic Ngo and Stacey J. Lee (2007) found in their review of research on Southeast Asian American education, “Poverty has been identified as a particularly significant barrier to academic success for Cambodian American students” (p. 433). Drawing on research by Um (1999, 2003) and Rumbaut and Ima (1988), B. Ngo and S. J. Lee (2007) also highlight the finding that parental education within the Cambodian American community is low, and many Cambodian youth leave school



early to work to financially support their families. Anecdotally, a staff member at school who was a Cambodian refugee mentioned to me that she and her husband picked blueberries in a neighboring state in the summers to earn income to supplement their salaries, which were inadequate for raising their family.

Statements from Maly's teachers align with these observations regarding the Cambodian American community, as seen in the following account by her Social Science student teacher:

**Student Teacher:** ...I know that she works most nights and doesn't get as much like sleep and stuff, um and so I wonder if like that's hard on her. It doesn't give her a lot of time to do homework or whatever it is but um works hard. [Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]

Ms. Ardelean, Maly's former ESOL teacher, commented on the connection between a low income and manual labor in Maly's context:

**Ms. Ardelean:** ...Um she's a hard worker. She's – she works a lot in um agriculture when she's not in school so summers, spring breaks, any extra time – chance she gets she works pretty hard in nurseries... she's worked in nurseries, and planting things, and um so she's definitely on the lower level of the socio-economic spectrum. [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]

Maly's socioeconomic background and partaking in manual labor are part of her education experience. That is, the multifarious facets that constitute a human being cannot be erased once one steps into a school building.

**Tired at school.** The impact of Maly's life responsibilities, especially work, was evident in the classroom where she often appeared tired or sleepy. Her Social Science student teacher commented on the little amount of sleep Maly is able to obtain due to her job:

**Student Teacher:** ...[She] um works like I said almost every night, if not every night um and um I'm confused so she – like every day I'll ask her, "You work last night?" And she's like, "Yeah." I'm like, "How much sleep you get?" She's like, "Oh, two hours, three hours." And I'm like, "Oh, my gosh, I don't know how," and I mean she really like comes and tries to stay awake in class all the time, where other kids, like they would just want to sleep in class um and pushes herself... [Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]

In the two classes in which I observed her (Social Science and African American History), it was not uncommon to find her exerting effort to stay awake. During one Social Science class period, I witnessed Maly seemingly asleep—her head rested on her arm, which was on her desk, and her eyes were closed. When she was up and alert, I spoke with her:

She explained that was tired because she had worked until 1 am the previous night. She worked for five and a half hours and waited for her older sister for two hours before returning home. Routinely, she started her homework at 1 or 2 am after work. [Field Notes, Feb. 19, 2014]

Being sleepy or tired was part of her school day, as evidenced in my field observations. For example, one day, I observed her in the morning in her African American History class. At 10:17 am, one minute before the end of the period and after she had finished her assignment, Maly put her head down. To use a term from Yanjun, Maly seemed to seize that one minute to “squeeze” in a moment to rest [Field Notes, Apr. 21, 2014]. Later that day, I watched her battling to keep her head up in Social Science class. From 12:40 pm to 12:54 pm, she repeatedly put her head down to rest and then put her head back up. I observed three iterations of this motion within fourteen minutes [Field Notes, Apr. 21, 2014].

Near the end of the academic year, this physical expression of tiredness and sleepiness did not wane. For instance, in Social Science class, after reading her textbook quietly to herself, Maly put her head down; after a moment, she put her head back up [Field Notes, May 14, 2014]. About two weeks later in her African American History class, after she wrote a response to a question assigned to the class, she put her head down, and eventually placed her right hand under her chin to prop her head up, seemingly forcing herself to stay awake [Field Notes, May 28, 2014]. My field notes indicate more of such instances of sleepiness and tiredness.

Maly was a representative example of the intertwining embodiment of labor and school that I observed in many of the students in my study beyond the four presented as case studies here. The students’ visceral manifestation of their hours of labor was too blatant in the classroom to ignore.

## **The Content Areas**

### **Social Science**

According to my observations, Maly's experience in Social Science class did not differ drastically from her experience in African American History class. Namely, she would be characterized as hardworking and exhibited compliant behavior in both. One difference may be that she spoke out loud more often in Social Science class; nonetheless, she seemed hesitant to share her responses or ideas out loud. Here, I provide a brief overview of my understanding of Maly's experience in Social Science class.

Maly rarely failed to appear engaged in Social Science class (with the exception of displaying tiredness from staying late at her job). For instance, for one assignment, Mr. Ferry distributed copies of a map that indicated the number of electoral votes and which state voted for which party, but he was short on copies. While many students used the shortage of map copies as an excuse to not complete the assignment, Maly appeared determined to finish the task. She raised her hand to ask me a question that revealed she had carefully examined the map [Field Notes, Feb. 20, 2014].

I also found many examples from my observations that showed that Maly consistently followed along with the teacher during class, as in the below:

Mr. Ferry continued to discuss various occupations in the U.S. and their respective salary. He reviewed how to convert percentages to numbers with a decimal. In covering one example, he asked, "How many places

do you move the decimal?” Maly was on her iPhone, not to text or such, but she was entering numbers into the calculator application. [Field Notes, Mar. 7, 2014]

This type of classroom participation continued throughout the semester. On another day, mini white boards were distributed to students, and they were to write a response to the “Do Now” prompt, which asked students to write the characteristics of certain people, including a spouse and a model. Maly and two other students near her began writing as soon as they had read the prompt, and they wrote neatly [Field Notes, Apr. 21, 2014]. This example is representative of Maly’s engagement in class and willingness to complete all her classwork without “causing trouble”.

Such observations likely contributed to the narrative that Maly was hard working and earned good grades, despite her difficulties with English as another language. A detailed discussion and analysis are provided in the following section.

### **African American History Class: Doing School Correctly**

In this section, I discuss the idea that Maly was rewarded in her ESOL African American History class, at least to some extent, due to her compliant, diligent, and quiet behavior. Two major issues intersect. First, the aforementioned characteristics are often ascribed to Asian American students according to the model minority stereotype. Second, rewarding compliant, quiet behavior may encourage passivity and also may not encourage intellectual engagement and the production of creative output (in any language). Maly performed the identity of a model student; however, school seemed to

be a disservice to her, in that it did not provide her with the academic support she needed. At the same time, Maly enacted agency by apparently shielding distractions from her to maintain a keen focus on classwork.

Maly's senior year, third marking period grade in African American History was an A with a perfect total score of 100 out of 100. Though she seemed to know what to do to perform well in the class, it is difficult to gauge her mastery of the content material based on my observations, given that class time was routinely devoted to reading handouts and completing mostly recall questions. Nonetheless, I would be reluctant to claim that she mastered this content area.

The academic year was divided into four marking periods, and the third marking period lasted from February 12, 2014 through April 21, 2014. During that time period I observed her African American History class ten times, and three additional times after the third marking period; Maly was absent during one of my observations, as she was likely on a community service field trip. I quickly noticed from my observations of Maly earlier in the academic year during the pilot phase of my study that she fit the mold of a model student.

Lee (2009) draws on the work of Suzuki (1980), who examined the education and socialization of Asian Americans, in arguing that "schools [reward] certain cultural traits (e.g., self-discipline, obedience, respect for authority)" (p. 63). Along similar lines, McKay and Wong (1996), who conducted an ethnographic study that focused on Chinese immigrant students in a high school, noted that one of the teachers whose classes they observed "apparently rewarded Chinese-speakers for quiet, compliant

behavior” (p. 587). In particular, they found that the teacher reduced the ESL hours of one of their focal students, a Chinese immigrant whose “behavior was observably more compliant” than her classmates, although her work was “mediocre” compared to others (McKay & Wong, 1996, p. 587)—a reduction in ESL hours was supposed to signal the student’s reduced need for ESL support due to achievement in ESL. In Maly’s African American History class, she seemed to be rewarded for doing exactly as required by the teacher.

During my observations of Maly in her African American History class, she rarely veered from the teacher’s expectations, and the few times she spoke in class were to directly address class-related material or activity. She consistently complied with the class routine with little or no hesitation. Typically, the class followed some form of this sequence: Copy the “Do Now” prompt on the PowerPoint slide projected on the screen, answer the Do Now prompt, listen and contribute to a class share-out of responses to the Do Now prompt, copy notes from the PowerPoint slides, listen to the teacher discuss the slides, and complete a two-sided handout (one side has a reading passage, and the other side has reading questions). Maly fulfilled every step, as seen in the example below:

Maly wrote immediately. She flipped through her notebook and referred to a page of notes as she wrote the Do Now, which asked, “What was the Declaration of Independence?” At 8:36 a.m. Sokha was still writing her Do Now response while the teacher led this share-out... At 8:39 a.m. the teacher explained a handout that the students were to work on. There was a reading on one side of the handout and questions on the other side,

much like the previous handouts I've seen him use. The teacher explained that they needed to read together in pairs... As soon as Maly received the handout she started to read it immediately. [Field Notes, Mar. 12, 2014]

Maly's above observed behavior was not a one-time occurrence. Each time I observed her class, she seemed ready to be on task, with the exception of two observations when she appeared especially sleepy (likely due to working late at her job, followed by staying up to complete schoolwork). The following table presents this theme of "on task" by chronicling representative examples of Maly's typical, observed behavior in African American History class throughout the second semester. One major purpose of the table is to provide an image of classroom instruction in Maly's African American History class as reflected by her experience within this context. Importantly, the table demonstrates the inductive analysis that allowed for tracing Maly's apparent behavior of obedience and quietness as an ELL in a sheltered content area classroom.

Table 10

*Maly's Compliant Behavior in African American History Class*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Field Notes: Representative Examples</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
Feb. 12, 2014	This was the first week of the second semester. Because African American History is only one semester long, a new set of students was in Mr. Abram's second	Maly displayed model student behavior in her attendance pattern. As of April 24, 2014, she was



	<p>period African American History class...</p> <p>Maly was absent because she went on a community service field trip where students helped to pack canned food to be distributed to those in need.</p>	<p>never late to school, and she had only four recorded absences. School field trips were not considered absences.</p>
<p>Feb. 19, 2014</p>	<p>Maly started writing immediately. She wrote continuously. When she stopped writing, she looked down at her notebook as she untied and retied her hair. She tore a sheet from the notebook and tore off the edges to make a clean edge. She got up, walked to the teacher's desk and gave the paper to the teacher. The teacher said, "Thanks." He added, "Anybody else who needs to give me homework from yesterday? Maly wasn't here yesterday, so she's not late, but anyone else, late is better than not at all."</p>	<p>Maly seemed determined to finish homework that she had missed the previous day due to her absence. She began writing as soon as she could, and did not stop writing until her work was complete. Because the ultimate goal appeared to be completion, often, in my opinion, her written work seemed perfunctory.</p>
<p>Mar. 5, 2014</p>	<p>At 9:55 a.m. the boy next to Maly had moved his desk close to hers for the purpose of working together on a handout.</p>	<p>Maly spoke sparingly in this class, and when she did, the content of her talk</p>

	<p>Maly wrote on her handout, writing almost nonstop. At 10 a.m. Maly briefly spoke with the boy next to her. Then, she said to the teacher, "Can you check this for me?" She held her handout out to the teacher. The teacher said, "Yes." She wrote a little more on her handout before giving it to the teacher.</p>	<p>was usually directly related to a class assignment. Also in this excerpt, Maly asked the teacher to check her handout to ensure that her work was according to his criteria.</p>
<p>Mar. 7, 2014</p>	<p>Maly was looking toward the front of the class where a PowerPoint slide was projected. Her chin was in one of her hands, and her elbow was on her desk. She wrote in her notebook when the teacher changed his PowerPoint presentation to a slide of notes. Two boys near her spoke in Nepali while copying the notes. Maly was quiet while she copied. She looked up and down, copying one word at a time. She copied nonstop until she was done.</p>	<p>As required by the instructional structure of the class, Maly spent a great amount of time copying notes. She did so without hesitation or complaint while other students were at times openly hesitant to copy notes, e.g., Peter exclaimed, "Oh, my god," when the teacher displayed a PowerPoint slide to be</p>

		copied [Field Notes, May 14, 2014]. Maly also did not engage in “side talk” while copying notes as other students often did.
Mar. 10, 2014	The teacher was speaking near the front of the classroom. Maly had her head on her desk. She put her head up when I walked near her. A couple minutes later, Maly’s head was leaning on her left hand. Her elbow was on her desk such that her left arm was propping her head up.	Maly was struggling to stay awake, but nonetheless, attempted to perform the role of a “good” student, who was attentive and held her head up, especially in the presence of a teacher or authority figure.
Mar. 12, 2014	The boy next to Maly moved his desk next to hers. They each started to read a two-sided handout independently. One side had a reading passage, and the other side had reading questions. The boy pointed at something in the reading. He said, "This one." Maly pointed at his paper and said,	As told, Maly worked with a classmate on a handout. She was reticent for the majority of this supposed pair-work and seemed more focused on reading the handout than on

	<p>"Number one." Maly flipped her handout over, and wrote her name and the date.</p> <p>Then, she flipped the handout over again to return to the side with the reading and continued to read.</p>	<p>collaborating with a classmate.</p>
<p>Mar. 17, 2014</p>	<p>I noticed that Maly had highlighted words she didn't know, as instructed by the teacher. Because she was apparently done with her work and was waiting for the teacher to continue with the next portion of class, I asked her to try writing the definitions of the words... She looked up the word "delegate" and wrote, "It mean the person that..." but could not finish because the teacher began speaking, asking students to copy the notes from the next PowerPoint slide. As soon as Maly noticed the slide, she quickly took her notebook out and copied notes.</p>	<p>I felt I had disrupted her workflow because she was not able to start copying immediately as usual.</p> <p>There was a lag due to my asking her to write definitions; that is, I seemed to have been a distraction from her classwork.</p>
<p>Mar. 24,</p>	<p>The lights were out in the classroom as the students watched a video about Frederick</p>	<p>Maly had difficulty staying awake during the video.</p>

2014	Douglas. Maly had her head down, and she was not looking at the video. The teacher tapped her on the shoulder, and she put her head up to face the screen. Her head was propped up by her right hand, and her right elbow was on her desk.	After the teacher signaled for her to pay attention to the video, she made efforts to do so by propping her head up and facing the screen.
May 12, 2014	Maly paused from writing, held her paper in her right hand, and looked at it. She put it down and continued writing. Two minutes before the end of class, she closed her notebook and put it in her backpack. She stood up, went to the teacher's desk to turn in her class assignment, returned to her seat, and waited quietly for the bell to ring.	She did exactly as was required without causing trouble. She was quiet even after she completed her work (while other students in the room chatted, regardless of whether they had completed the assignment).
May 14, 2014	Maly entered the room and sat down. She poked the boy next to her. He was looking at some forms. The two spoke with each other quietly and briefly as the teacher discussed the content of his PowerPoint presentation. The teacher changed the	This instance was the only time, in which I observed Maly talking with a classmate in her African American History class about a topic unrelated to

	<p>PowerPoint to the next slide, which read, “Black Americans in 20’s.”</p> <p>Maly took out her notebook from her backpack, opened it and copied the notes. She used both a red pen and a blue pen. In her previous notes, she used the red pen to write the heading or titles of the PowerPoint slides and used blue ink to write the main text of the notes. I assumed she was using the colored pens for the same purpose.</p>	<p>the lesson. Regardless, she spoke briefly and quietly.</p> <p>Also, she and her classmate spoke about forms. My hypothesis is that the forms were related to graduation or college, given that those were common topics of discussion among students that were doing well in school, and graduation was a month away.</p>
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As implied in my table of observations and analysis, Maly seemed to have learned to mechanically do school, leading me to ask the following: What does it mean for ELLs to be successful in high school content area classes? What does it mean for high school ELLs to flourish academically? In her ethnography of first- and second-generation Asian American students at a high school, Lee (2009) “found that Asian American students were rewarded for being quiet, polite, and respectful” (p. 71), as I had observed in Maly’s case. Lee (2009) eloquently summarizes why such a phenomenon is problematic: “In the process of passing Asian students along on the basis of behavior, teachers at Academic High were encouraging passivity. Additionally,

the school was failing in its duty to prepare students academically” (p. 71). If we want our ELL students to thrive in high school and beyond, it is our responsibility to provide education opportunities that prepare them for what the larger society considers success.

### **Languages and Literacies**

In addition to her reputation as a good student, Maly was also known for her major improvements in English but simultaneously characterized as “never strong” in English [Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]. Unfortunately, the school did not appear to have the capacity to meet her individual need for additional support in learning English. Here, I discuss Maly’s background in learning English, as she described in an interview dated April 7, 2014. I then examine the status of her English skills according to teachers and Mr. Spruce, the site monitor of a nonprofit that offered college preparation programs. The data suggest that Maly’s English learning needs were not met.

### **Learning English**

Maly’s home or first language was Khmer (also known as Cambodian). She was able to read and write in Khmer, as she attended school in Cambodia. (I found a few instances of Khmer writing in her African American History notebook.) Because she had no Khmer-speaking classmates in the classes that I observed, I did not find her speaking the language. She described her English learning in Cambodia as “a little” and “not good,” as the teachers were not good in English according to her estimation. She studied English grammar from books, read in English, and took tests. However,

she spoke in English only “sometimes” because the teachers spoke in Khmer much more often.

When she arrived at Sunrise High School, school was difficult because “not same language”. In terms of her English level, she “just know a little, not too much,” especially because the English she had learned and was exposed to in Cambodia was different from the English here. As she reflected, classes were difficult “because I don’t know English. They all speak English, but we don’t understand. The teachers spoke English.” The classes she took in her first year of high school in the U.S. included ESOL 1, Algebra 1, Art 1, Chemistry, Speaking, Writing, and World History. Of those classes, Algebra was the most enjoyable: “Fun because math understand more.” She underscored the relative ease of math given that numbers were used: “When the teacher explain, he write the numbers.” To my understanding, she found it helpful to be in classes consisting of other ESOL students that did not speak Khmer, as she then had to speak English—an argument that Juan and other non-focal study participants also made.

### **“Language Obstacles”**

Maly’s teachers as well as Mr. Spruce highlighted her challenges with English. Even though she had made vast improvements in English, her progress was still depicted as inadequate. Mr. Spruce described the difficulties associated with English when providing college preparation assistance to Maly (and Peter):

**Mr. Spruce:** ... Being that I only speak English myself, that’s how I communicate with the students. Coming into Sunrise High School, that



was very early on very clear a challenge that I was going to have to overcome. With many of our students, and Peter and Maly being no different, it did present some obstacles in communication when we're talking about college.

[Interview, Feb. 10, 2014]

While Mr. Spruce hinted that Maly's English level would be considered low, Ms. Ardelean, who taught her in ESOL 2 and a technology class, spoke frankly in stating, "She's very limited," though she spoke from a place of concern [Jun. 20, 2014]. She provided context by explaining, "We get kids from Cambodia that can be really advanced like [names of three students] where they clearly went to private schools. They were very educated. They come with a very strong literacy background, and then you have kids that sometimes come like Maly..." [Jun. 20, 2014]. Ms. Ardelean's hypothesis was that Maly did not begin studying at Sunrise high with a substantial foundation in English and literacy. She provided further details regarding her informal assessment of Maly's English level:

**Ms. Ardelean:** Maly was never strong. Her comprehension is very low. You can sit and have a whole conversation with her and feel like when she walks away, she doesn't really know what you said. You know she gets the topic, but those nuances are missed you know.

[Interview, Jun. 20, 2014]

In isolation, such comments may seem to stem from a deficit orientation. However, given that Ms. Ardelean had built strong relationships with many of the ELLs in the

school, my interpretation was that these reflections were linked to concerns about Maly's life chances in a society where English is crucial for success.

Assessments of Maly's English abilities from her Social Science student teacher and teacher were in concert with Ms. Ardelean's reflections. The student teacher seemed to offset her comments about Maly's language "struggles" with positive remarks about Maly:

**Student Teacher:** Oh, I really like Maly and she's an 8th period intern, so I've gotten to like talk to her during then, too, and um she definitely struggles some with like the language, and when I've seen her like turn in written work um it's a little bit hard to follow sometimes, just the way that she's like jumping from maybe topic to topic or things like that um but works really, really hard... Her writing's a little, like I said, sketchy but for the most part, you can make out you know what she's trying to get at and um that kind of stuff. She's great...

[Interview, Mar. 24, 2014]

Mr. Ferry, the Social Science teacher with whom the student teacher collaborated, also suggested that Maly held admirable qualities, despite her "struggles" with English as another language:

**Lan:** Do you think uh she would be comfortable writing an academic essay about Social Science?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, because she want – she would want to do it, and if your heart wants to do something you're going to get it done. It may not be in

a – in – in – in a Harvard College – Harvard University way, but it'll be done in a fashion that you could – someone could tell she worked hard at this and she put forth an effort, and she would do it admirably. It wouldn't be a copy and paste type of activity.

**Lan:** How's her reading?

**Mr. Ferry:** Reading I think is average. Uh I think she struggles with some terms but uh the more and more she's – that I've seen her – that I saw her in class, the more she picked up but average reader.

**Lan:** Uh so what percentage of the civics book do you think she understood?

**Mr. Ferry:** I would say 60, 65 percent.

The implication was that Maly was rewarded for her efforts and compliance in school, rather than her English skills, as discussed in a previous section. Certainly, I agree that she should not have been penalized for her English level. At the same time, she did require more resources for learning English, but the school system simply was incapable of accommodating her. Is the ability to understand only 60 to 65 percent of a textbook all we expect of a student?

Maly's teachers were in a difficult position. On the one hand, they wanted to reward Maly for her hard work, improvement in English, and the completion of all that was required of their classes. On the other hand, they implied that her English was not at a level required for success in the broader society. This dilemma presented an opportunity to provide Maly with focused support that she needed to progress in

English. However, the school system was not set up to help her flourish and grow into the student she evidently wanted to be. Although Maly had an A average three-fourths of her way through her senior year, and she ultimately obtained a high school degree, given her plans to attend college but her English skills were not at college level, it appears that the education system had failed her.

### **Interacting with Handouts**

Classroom observations indicate that a substantial element in Maly's content area literacy practices involved reading passages, completing recall questions on handouts, and flipping between the front and backside of these handouts. Such an activity apparently occupied a remarkable amount of time in her African American History class. Each handout was double-sided: one side contained a reading passage, and the other had questions about the reading. Maly developed a strategy for completing these handouts, as they were done habitually in the class, and her physical interactions with the handouts showed that she relied heavily on the text to produce written responses to the questions. Though she succeeded in accomplishing the task, I cannot gauge how much content she learned, given that the work seemed to primarily entail hunting for and copying answers.

A series of representative data in chronological order illustrate the routine of completing double-sided handouts of readings and questions. I begin with a detailed observation from March 2014:

She flipped the handout to the side with questions, flipped it to the passage, flipped it back to the questions, flipped back to the passage, flipped back to the questions, and wrote more for question one before flipping back to the passage to read and track with her finger as she was reading. She flipped back to the questions again. She talked with the girl in front of her about the handout. Then, she flipped back to the passage while trying to finish number one.

I decided to keep count of how many times she flipped her handout over while answering a question. For question number one, she flipped her handout over approximately fifteen times...

She asked the boy next to her about question number three. She flipped the handout to the questions and then looked at his answers. After her fourth and sixth flips while working on this question, she paused longer than the other times to read the passage. After her seventh flip, she used her pencil to track the text as she read. The boy next to her asked, "Find it?" She responded, "Yeah." In total, she flipped her handout over seventeen times while working on question number three.

For question number four, before she started to write a response, she flipped her handout over two times. After the third flip, she said to the teacher as he walked by, "Excuse me? This one is..." The teacher explained the word "encouraged." Maly responded, "Oh," and flipped to

the passage to read. In total, for question number four, she flipped her paper 20 times to complete a written response.

[Field Notes, Mar. 12, 2014]

The incessant flipping of the handout from the reading side to the side with questions underscores Maly's strategy of searching for answers directly from the given text. This action may also highlight unfamiliarity with the language. From my own foreign language learning experience, I find that I frequently refer to a piece of foreign language text while producing writing in that language. When I was assisting a student in the class during the previous marking period, he was completing a similar handout. One of the responses to the reading questions included 'Montgomery Improvement Association', which appeared in the reading passage. The student flipped his handout back forth for almost every other letter in that term as he copied the three words. I wrote 'Montgomery Improvement Association' in my notebook for him to copy because I could not bear to watch him continue flipping his handout [Field Notes, Jan. 29, 2014].

Although the above excerpt may seem to show an extreme example, I learned that completing such a handout was a typical part of the class. The following week, I observed Maly engaging in a similar activity:

Mr. Abram asked the students to look at the side of the handout that had a list of questions (the other side had a reading passage).

Students were to choose eight questions to respond to. Because the handout did not leave space for writing responses, Maly immediately

started writing in her notebook, beginning by copying the first question on the handout... She wrote her answer to number one in her notebook, referring to the passage as she wrote.

After completing the first question, she flipped the handout over to copy question number two in her notebook. Then, she flipped the handout to the side with the reading and read for some time before writing in her notebook... She asked me if the answer to the second question was in the paragraph beginning with, "In Philadelphia the Constitutional Convention could hardly dodge..." I responded, "I don't think so..." and attempted to assist her.

[Field Notes, Mar. 17, 2014]

In this situation, the need to flip the handout over was reduced because Maly copied the questions onto a notebook page, allowing her to refer to the reading passage while writing responses in her notebook. Regardless, this observation provides further indication that she searched for answers in the reading.

More than a month later, I discovered that Maly had taken her strategy for completing these reading questions to another level:

The students were working individually on a handout. On one side of the handout was a reading. On the other side were questions. Maly was writing and working seemingly nonstop. She was looking at a photo of the reading on her iPhone while writing answers to the questions. The

sound of students flipping the handout back and forth could be heard throughout the classroom.

[Field Notes, Apr. 21, 2014]

During this class period, Mr. Abram said to the class in a humorous tone, “Many couldn’t find the answer to number four, and I couldn’t either,” to which Maly and other students laughed [Field Notes, Apr. 21, 2014]. He took this opportunity to ask the class what they thought about the question. After a brief class discussion, Maly asked out loud, “How about number five?” She flipped her handout over to the side with the questions, and then flipped it back to the side with the reading. Mr. Abram approached her and pointed to the answer in the reading passage. This observation underscores two points: First, the teacher insinuated that responding to the questions required finding the answer in the reading passage. Second, the teacher’s open-ended discussion of question number four with the students signaled the possibility of moving beyond recall questions—a type of learning that I, unfortunately, did not see Maly engage in often.

Maly’s visceral interaction with the handouts provided visible data about her uptake of the learning material and the teacher’s instructional approach. Evidently, she did as was required and utilized reading passages as sources of answers when writing responses, but the effectiveness of this process in learning content cannot be ascertained. This type of task also limited the amount of practice in other ways of thinking. Moreover, this discussion highlights a value proposition offered by the case study research method. A microscopic examination of a case surfaced a larger issue. Double-sided printing was required to save paper due to paper rationing at school, and



this paper ration was tied to the school district's budget crisis. That is, this larger budget problem clearly impacted and was manifested by Maly's interaction with handouts.

### **Theorizing English in African American History Class**

Maly's interlanguage as revealed in her writing suggests that she constructed theories about English syntax. Her interlanguage was informed by both Khmer and English, and as such, it represented an aspect of her hyphenated reality. An analysis of Maly's African American History notebook, which consisted of 96 pages of both notes copied in class and her own writing in response to assignments, reveal over 170 tokens of language structures that would be considered different from Standard English. However, these deviations should not be dismissed as deficiencies. Taking the perspective that ELLs are language theorists, as discussed previously, we can see patterns in Maly's writing, suggesting that her interlanguage stemmed from her knowledge and understanding of Khmer and English. To illustrate this argument, this discussion highlights four common patterns in her writing to show that Maly created regular structures, rather than haphazard errors, as a part of her hyphenated reality. These patterns are also evident even in notes copied from the teacher's PowerPoint presentations, suggesting that perhaps Maly processed the notes into her interlanguage as she copied them.

**The simple past.** A salient pattern in Maly's writing was her use of *was* followed by a verb (usually in base form) to indicate the past. The below table provides five representative examples.

Table 11

*'Was' to Indicate the Simple Past*

<b>Page in Maly's Notebook</b>	<b>Type of Writing</b>	<b>Excerpt (bold font added)</b>
p. 18	Response to prompt	After that the whit man <b>was capter</b> him.
p. 21	Response to prompt	Because some of the slave <b>was death</b> by dissease and some death by hungry and the whith man killed.
p. 57	Response to prompt	some of the white people <b>was help</b> slave to run away by used the underground Railroad and other white <b>was give</b> hous when the slave <b>was run</b> away they gave food, cloth when they run away to get their freedom.
p. 62	Response to prompt	Sam <b>was fall</b> in love with Kizzy when he saw her the first time.
pp. 62-63	Response to prompt	She also talke to much when Kizzy <b>was goes</b> to see her parents and about Mrs. Morore that shoot George.

Though the sentences above do not strictly follow the conventions of Standard English, for the most part, they can be understood. Moreover, a minimal understanding of the structure of Khmer provides plausible evidence of first language transfer. As described by the UCLA Language Materials Project (n.d.), “Khmer is a language that is devoid of inflection in either nouns or verbs... Verbs are unmarked for tense, aspect, mood, and other categories. These, if marked at all, are indicated by auxiliaries, which can precede or follow the verb.” Decomposing this description of Khmer reveals the logic behind Maly’s regular use of *was* followed by a verb to indicate the past, as in *was help* instead of *helped*. In English, we would add the inflection *-ed* to the word *help* to create the simple past tense. However, Khmer is a language without inflections that mark tense. Instead, if a verb is marked at all, it would be indicated by an auxiliary (what is often referred to as a “helping verb”). In *was help*, *was* can be seen as an auxiliary that marks the verb, *help*, as the past tense. Therefore, Maly’s regular usage of *was* followed by verb was likely informed by her knowledge of Khmer. That is, I conjecture that her English was a form of a hyphenated language that drew on syntax rules in Khmer and English.

Interestingly, the formation of the simple past was inconsistent throughout Maly’s notebook, highlighting the in-between nature of her interlanguage. Though she used *was* with the base form of a verb to indicate the simple past in many cases, another pattern evidenced in her writing was the use of the base form of a verb alone to indicate the simple past, as seen in the examples in the following table.

Table 12

*Base Form of a Verb to Indicate the Simple Past*

<b>Page in Maly's Notebook</b>	<b>Type of Writing</b>	<b>Excerpt (bold font added)</b>
p. 5	Response to prompt	Mansa Musa <b>is</b> king from 1307 to 1337. He <b>know</b> about the peace and security.
p. 37	Response to prompt	He <b>go</b> to fight for war.
p. 46	Response to prompt	Thing that made slaves happy was when they <b>get</b> some freedom from the owner or when they <b>have</b> some holiday that they can celebrate. [Indiscernible] holiday and they <b>have</b> dance sing.
p. 60	Response to prompt	He <b>kill</b> owner and his family and <b>move</b> on to kill 60 (including woman & children)

A larger sample of Maly's writing would be needed to determine the possible factors that would lead to one form over the other to convey the simple past. Regardless, this second pattern also seems to be consistent with Khmer, in that the verbs in this pattern of structure do not take an inflection.

**Plural.** The explanation that "Khmer is a language that is devoid of inflection in either nouns or verb..." (UCLA Language Materials Project, n.d.) also elucidates the

possible rationale behind the omission of the plural *-s* (similar to the discussion of Yanjun’s use of the plural in English). That is, in Khmer, a suffix (or prefix) is not added to a noun to indicate plural. Instead, “number is inferred from context” (UCLA Language Materials Project, n.d.). Maly’s writing suggests that she applied this rule to the English language in forming constructions, including *many island* (instead of *many islands*), as seen in the following table.

Table 13  
*‘Most’ and ‘Many’ as Markers of Plural*

<b>Page in Maly’s Notebook</b>	<b>Type of Writing</b>	<b>Excerpt (bold font added)</b>
p. 16	Class notes	<b>Most slave</b> captured in war
p. 24	Class notes	<b>many account</b> of uprising on slave ships
p. 25	Class notes	slave outnumbered colonists on <b>many island</b>
p. 36	Class notes	Restrictions placed on their activities; still had <b>more right</b> than in other areas.
p. 45	Class notes	There were <b>many community</b> of free black, both on the North and in the South.

The term *many island* contains sufficient information to indicate that the speaker is referring to more than one island due to the word *many*. As such, Maly’s theory may have been that, borrowing from the rules of Khmer, *many* already indicated the plural,

and thus, adding the inflection *-s* on *island* would be unnecessary. Maly may have also applied this theory in phrases that included a numeral followed by a noun, as in *1,000 slave*, which omits the plural inflection *-s*. Again, adding a suffix to the noun to mark it plural could be seen as repetitive, given that *1,000* already carries the meaning of “more than one”.

Table 14

*Numerals as Markers of Plural*

<b>Page in Maly's Notebook</b>	<b>Type of Writing</b>	<b>Excerpt (bold font added)</b>
p. 29	Response to prompt	one form can be have <b>20-30 slave</b> in their farm
p. 31	Class notes	By 1780 Virginia imported <b>1,000 slave</b> each year.
p. 58	Class notes	Led uprising on August 21, 1831; killed owner and his family and move on to kill <b>60 white</b> (including women & children)
p. 67	Class notes	<b>7 souther state</b> _South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas secede (leave) the US.

**Emergent spelling.** Attempts at spelling are also seen throughout Maly's African American History notebook. For example, she spelled *written* with one *t*, which is reasonable, given that, phonetically, the word contains the /t/ phoneme only once. The examples in the below table illustrate her emergent spelling.

Table 15

*Examples of Maly's Emergent Spelling*

Page in Maly's Notebook	Type of Writing	Excerpt (bold font added)
p. 13	Class notes	No <b>writen</b> language.
p. 35	Class notes	What new law did England pass that angered the American colonies? / sugar Act taxes / <b>-stem</b> Act
p. 38	Class notes	The Growing <b>Disput</b> with Great Britain
pp. 62-63	Response to prompt	[Classmate's name] summary is ok but she should tell more <b>detel</b> [indiscernible] George at the <b>chickend</b> fighting and she not talk about the man that want to buy his <b>freedome</b> .

Although her spelling would be considered incorrect, the words can, nonetheless, be deciphered. Her emergent spelling also indicates her development of phonemic awareness in English. As educators, faced with this information, we would have two

options: One would be to simply label such spellings as incorrect and ask the student to make corrections. The second option would be to take the perspective that these spellings provide information about how to build on the learner's current linguistic strengths, and consider ways to guide the student's further development of English. The latter honors the student's interlanguage and multilayered reality, while creating a venue to concretely help the learner succeed in society.



## **Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications, and Final Thoughts**

### **Discussion**

Policy makers, in particular, as well as other stakeholders seem to constantly seek a simple how-to guide to teaching ELLs and students deemed to be “struggling” in school. I cannot provide such a guide, and I would be wary of anyone that did. In the discussion that follows, I offer frameworks that may be reshaped to fit the needs of a particular context. My approach is similar to that of Kumaravadivelu (2003), who provides “macro strategies” on teaching ELLs and examples of corresponding “micro strategies” as a model of a means of developing specific pedagogy appropriate for a certain context according to a larger framework. Here, I discuss approaches that may be adapted. In the implications section, I suggest respective concrete steps to inspire teachers, administrators, and researchers to take action.

### **ELLs as Theory Constructors**

In many respects, ELLs are theory constructors in regards to the English language and the teaching and learning of English. We need to honor ELLs as more than students and more than, for example, “informants” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Although they certainly enter the school building and content area classroom with knowledge, they are also constantly building knowledge and theorizing language, teaching, and learning.

**Theorizing the English language.** ELLs are in a unique position to theorize the English language, in that their metalinguistic awareness provides them special access to the understanding of second language acquisition. As Gass and Selinker (2001) argue, “The ability to *think* about language is often associated with an increased ability to *learn* a language” (p. 302). Drawing on the research of Bialystok (1988), they further contend, “In fact, bilingual children have been known to have greater metalinguistic awareness than monolingual children” (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 302). In this study, the learners seemed to apply some elements from their home or first language to rules they have learned or observed about English, highlighting the notion of transfer, which refers to the idea that learners of another language (L2 learners) use knowledge and experiences from their home or first language (L1) to help them complete L2 tasks (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). In other words, they form a hyphenated language, or interlanguage, by combining aspects of their home language and the target language. We need to view the students as scientists studying the English language: they observed and collected data; based on the data, they formed hypotheses; if a hypothesis could not be disproven, it became a theory until counter-evidence was observed. Deviants from Standard English in their interlanguage (“between-language”) reveal their thinking and understanding of the linguistic structures of English. Therefore, errors should be viewed as logical, rather than simply dismissed as wrong. Educators would then be able to build on what learners already know about English to help them excel in the language. This perception of ELLs as theorists of the English language embraces the

knowledge that they construct and contribute to their own learning as well as to the field of TESOL.

**Theorizing second language acquisition.** Constructing theories about English learning and teaching seems to be an inherent part of being an ELL. In this study, Juan theorized that he needed to speak English and be surrounded by speakers of the language to learn the language. One of his classmate from Vietnam, Anh, similarly commented on the need to be surrounded by ELLs that do not speak the same home or first language: “If we don’t have no one to talk to my language, so we can like, uh, start to – to speak and you don’t – you don’t afraid to – to – to – uh – to speak [English]...” [Interview, Mar. 17, 2014]. This theory aligns with the notion that producing “comprehensible output” (Swain, 1985) in the target language is crucial, as argued by well-known scholars of second language acquisition. However, we must bear in mind that such a theory, as in pedagogy and academia, is only one among many, given that ELLs are individual learners with particular needs. As such, when I asked Anh what teachers should do to best support ELLs, she responded by describing her experiences with content area teachers who accommodated the needs of their students: “But I like – I like – I like, [my previous chemistry teacher] and Mr. Ferry, they know;” she continued to explain that the teachers knew what the students needed to do to learn and supported them accordingly [Interview, Mar. 17, 2014]. By asking and learning from ELLs, we would be able to better support their English language and literacy learning. We need to disrupt the dichotomy between official and unofficial knowledge (Cochran-

Smith & Lytle, 2009) and consider the insights of ELLs alongside those of practitioners and scholars in the field.

### **ELLs as Rational Agents and Theorists of Schooling**

In addition to theorizing the English language and second language acquisition, ELLs also construct theories about school and act as rational agents within the structure of school. As seen in this study, ELLs are not passive about their schooling. Instead, they enter school with a rational agenda and, based on their observations and experiences of school, adjust themselves and devise strategies for performing school. Peter developed the strategy of retrieving information online to complete his assignments for African American History, given that the assignments did not require intellectual or creative engagement. Yanjun seemed to have a strong grasp of school functions and perhaps leveraged her identity as a “good student” to be bold, and even sassy, in Social Science class. Maly enacted her agency in seemingly blocking out the noise and chatter from her classmates to maintain a sharp focus on completing her work, especially in African American History, and was rewarded with perfect grades. Juan enrolled in Sunrise High School with the sole intention of learning English, needed for survival and to increase his income. As such, he constructed the meaning of schooling for himself. As is said, the curriculum is in the student’s head. We must view ELLs as self-reflexive learners who adjust their behavior according to data they gather through their lived experiences. Their “hyphenated consciousness” (G. Campano, personal communication, February 11, 2015) stemming from their

multilayered experiences as employees, caretakers, high school students, and more shape their theories of school, what schooling provides for them (or does not provide), and what they can obtain from school.

### **Creative and Intellectual Production**

ELLs should be provided with opportunities to produce creative and intellectual output in writing and speaking as a means of language learning and academic engagement, and to vocalize elements of their hyphenated reality. Yanjun, who was an exception in my study even considering all 18 participants, spoke out loud in class frequently. Doing so may have contributed to her English proficiency, which was viewed to be at a high level. However, we must not neglect the fact that she arrived in the U.S. at age ten, years before the other three case study students. Regardless, she may have benefitted from outlets for writing that challenged her. Also, I observed that Juan, Maly, and Peter had few opportunities for creative and intellectual production in writing and speaking. Juan plainly informed me that he wanted to speak more, Maly was very quiet in class and seemed to write mechanically, and Peter chatted socially but seemed to complete written assignment in a perfunctory manner. The learners appeared confined to simplistic written work and were not given space to vocalize their creative or imaginative thoughts in the classroom.

In applied linguistics, these limitations may be perceived as hindrances to the development of an ELL's competence in English. A typical definition of "competence" is as follows: "a person's internalized grammar of a language. This means a person's

ability to create and understand sentences, including sentences they have never heard before” (Richards, Platt, & Weber, 1984, p. 52). Pierce (1995), drawing from Bourdieu (1977), incorporates a critical dimension, arguing that “the definition of competence should include an awareness of the right to speak—what Bourdieu calls ‘the power to impose reception’” (p. 75). I would also add the right to write. Along this line of reasoning, Duff (2001), who conducted research focusing on ELLs in mainstream classrooms, contends that classrooms are seemingly structured such that ELLs generally lack a “sense of entitlement or license to speak about their concerns, backgrounds, issues, and views” (p. 120). Such a condition exacerbates their marginalized position and limits the cultivation of their English skills, which are needed to improve their life chances.

Creative and intellectual production by ELLs is also necessary, taking into consideration the need for “comprehensible output” (Swain, 1985), which is oral and written production as a means of language learning (Gass & Selinker, 2001). The notion of comprehensible output is complementary to a concept posed by Krashen (1985): “comprehensible input”, which is “input language [that] contains linguistic items that are slightly beyond the learner’s present linguistic competence” (Richards, Platt, & Weber, 1984, p. 54). It is suggested that both comprehensible input and comprehensible output are needed for language acquisition or development to occur. As such, ELLs cannot be treated as passive recipients of English output; they must also have opportunities to produce output that pushes their current English level. Gass and Selinker (2001), for example, explain that through interactive speaking, learners build

on their language skills and metalinguistic awareness by clarifying and questioning their own and their interlocutors' language use. Similarly, Verplaetse (2014) advocates for language-rich classroom practices that include interactions to facilitate ELLs' collaborative construction of content area and language knowledge (Rosebery, Warren, & Conant, 1992). Conscientious effort must be made to provide a platform for rich comprehensible output that engenders the right to speak and write about one's multilayered experiences.

### **Academic Rigor**

Data from this study suggest that the ELLs were not particularly challenged in terms of academics in their content area classes. Juan, for example, stated that his Algebra 2 class was “pretty easy”—such a comment might only be expected from a student receiving straight-A's in school. Yanjun was aware that her Advanced Placement calculus class, which was nominally college level, was in fact not. Though she did well in school, her Social Science teacher admitted to his worry that she was not intellectually engaged, and I would agree with that observation. Peter appeared to misbehave in class, but if he were given opportunities to participate in rigorous and creative schoolwork, we might have observed increased class involvement from him. Maly routinely completed her work but did not necessarily show a strong grasp of the content presented in class. In such situations, how can we expect our ELLs to flourish?

The learners often appeared to be involved in a type of bureaucratic literacy that may have hindered intellectual growth.<sup>21</sup> Maly and Peter, especially, frequently completed rote—seemingly unthinking—exercises as they completed handout after handout. Also, technology, namely PowerPoint slides projected in the front of the classroom, was not mobilized to foster engagement. Instead, the slides could be likened to an advanced set of multiple blackboards full of notes for the students to copy. The teacher may have resorted to this strategy, given that the school district apparently did not have the funds to purchase textbooks. Juan and Yanjun finished their in-class assignments perfunctorily—because school implicitly endorsed this approach—and doing so became a means to buy them time to rest or socialize. These motions were reflective of the reductive characteristic of schooling, which stood in sharp contrast to the students’ mosaics of histories. Navigating school, then, was not too dissimilar to filling out a form, in which the goal was to simply complete the task as painlessly as possible. When school becomes a mechanical course of procedure, it is no wonder that students develop strategies of copying from classmates and/or retrieving information from the Internet. After all, the point is to simply “get it done.” Even under the pressures of a less-than-optimal school district, we must be vigilant of lesson activities and structures that require only superficial intellectual engagement, and actively build and implement curriculum that provides entry points for ELLs to deeply participate in language and content area learning.

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<sup>21</sup> This discussion of bureaucratic literacy is inspired by Taylor’s (1996) research on “toxic literacies” and “bureaucratic texts”.



### **Hyphenated Reality and the Micro-Macro Dialectic**

I asked Anjay whether his teachers knew about his life in a refugee camp in Nepal. He said that they didn't, and I asked him, "Do you want to talk about this with your teachers?" He responded, "I want to, but they don't tell me," meaning, he wanted to talk about his life and his background, but teachers didn't ask him to. [Field Notes, May 12, 2014]

Applying the micro-macro dialectic to working with ELLs would surface their hyphenated reality and necessitate a humanistic approach to pedagogy and schooling. To an extent, the identities and experiences of ELLs at Sunrise High School were invisible. Certainly, many teachers, especially the ESOL teachers, had profound relationships with their students and actively sought to understand their subterranean layers, but the general methods of school did not seem to allow for this approach. Peter was a double-minority in Burma, as he was Chin and Christian. Juan was from a small village, Tezahuapan, in Veracruz, Mexico, and had overstayed his visa in the U.S. Maly was her mother's caretaker, and came to this country with a past shaded by a genocide. Yanjun immigrated to the U.S., moved to Iowa, and then returned to Philadelphia; also, she was possibly undocumented. My pseudo-insider status as a principal intern, a role through which I interacted with faculty and staff members in various spaces within Sunrise High School, led me to surmise that most did not, for example, differentiate among the different Asian groups at the school. That is, I found little evidence of the investigation of the micro-macro histories and legacies of students.

Because the micro-macro dialectic is based on a two-way dialogue, in intentionally juxtaposing a historical and contextual layer to understanding ELLs, their personal narratives become enriched by the official facts and vice versa. This framework also complicates dichotomies that have been established to categorize students, academic fields, and pedagogical ideologies, as in the following discussed throughout this study:

- ELL vs. bilingual/multilingual learner
- TESOL vs. bilingual/bicultural education or sociocultural perspectives on language and literacy
- Good vs. bad student
- Model minority vs. black or Latino/a students
- School vs. home life

These supposedly irreconcilable differences exist in the academy and in theory but do not hold up in the hyphenated experiences of ELLs, as observed in the setting of school. Specifically addressing the claim that TESOL is in opposition to bilingual/bicultural education, society has determined the arbitrary need to learn English for survival and success. However, explicitly learning English (and emphasizing this need) does not necessarily diminish the learner's identity or his/her rich knowledge and background. As the focal students have shown, it is possible to have a critical consciousness about language, power, and schooling while still learning the technical aspects of English. Researchers and scholars tend to live on either side of the hyphen, but students do not.

A micro-macro view highlights and embraces the complex multiplicities encompassing an ELL's school experience.

### **Life Responsibilities**

...[Peter's] got life considerations every single day to worry about, to pay rent, to buy groceries, to cook his meal, to – every single thing that he does is of his own accord, and he has to be responsible for himself... [He's] had to be independent from the time he was...very young teenager at the very least, and that takes its toll and – and it's hard to care about school. It feels so unimportant.

[Interview with Ms. Ardelean, Jun. 20, 2014].

The focal students in this study were living the hyphen of employee-student-caretaker-ELL and more. School was not their only responsibility. Having to earn an income is a reality for many immigrant and refugee learners, who often come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Peter held a job in a restaurant kitchen and paid rent for his own apartment. Juan worked at two or three restaurants at a time, contributed to rent with his brother and cousin, and sent money to his parents in Veracruz, Mexico. He also made the decision to initially reduce the number of hours he worked in order to attend high school full time. Maly worked in agriculture and garment factories while serving as her mother's caretaker. Yanjun started helping out at her uncle's fast food restaurant when she was twelve years old, and she sent money to her parents, who lived in Iowa. In the U.S., the culturally dominant assumption is that school is the main focus

for youth and adolescents. However, school almost seemed to be another job for the ELLs in my study. Mr. Spruce commented, “For a lot of our students that aren’t considering college or it’s kind of a second thought for them, they tend to come from families where they’re expected to contribute immediately financially to their family’s needs...” [Interview, Feb. 10, 2014]. The implication is that we need to provide even more support to our young people in this position. Attending school requires great effort on the part of many students. They go to school despite the fact that they need to work and tend to responsibilities. Because they exert effort to allow school to be a part of their lived experiences, we as educators need to, at the minimum, meet them halfway.

### **Complicating the Model Minority Stereotype**

The model minority stereotype makes invisible the within-group diversity and singular experiences of Asian Americans. Lee (2009) provides a critical perspective on the utility of this stereotype: “Asian Americans as model minorities are the ideal neoliberal subject—motivated, self-sufficient, and successful. The model minority success of Asian Americans is interpreted as evidence that markets are neutral and color-blind” (p. 11). Similarly, Museus and Kiang (2009) draw on research by Suzuki (2002) and Uyematsu (1971) in arguing that this “myth has been used strategically by opponents of equal opportunity policies and programs to support the notion of meritocracy with evidence that racial discrimination does not exist or impede the educational and occupational progress of racial/ethnic minorities” (p. 6). The success of students, such as Yanjun and Maly, is highlighted, ignoring the oppression they face as

learners from marginalized backgrounds. The model minority stereotype, in effect, makes hidden the complex and varied experiences of Asian Americans (Lee, 2009) and neglects the hyphen that they live as people that are more than “Asian American”.

The myth of the model minority seems to be used against the very people that it glorifies. Museus and Kiang (2009) contend that there is a misconception that Asian Americans are not really racial and ethnic minorities. Funding agencies often do not consider Asian Americans to be underrepresented racial or ethnic minorities, suggesting that this population does “not face challenges similar to those of other minority populations and therefore do not require the attention given to black, Latina/o, and Native American groups” (Museus & Kiang, 2009). A concrete, illustrative example can be seen in the non-profit organization, The Actuarial Foundation, which offers a “Diversity Scholarship” but excludes Asian Americans from its definition of “diversity”, as seen in the following: “The Actuarial Diversity Scholarship promotes diversity within the profession through an annual scholarship program for Black/African American, Hispanic, Native North American and Pacific Islander students” (The Actuarial Foundation, 2015). These observations align with the notion that Asian Americans are positioned as “honorary Whites” (Tuan, 1998), who are self-sufficient, attain a high level of education, and are able to climb the socio-economic ladder. However, Museus and Kiang (2009) have found evidence that suggests that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders “face many challenges similar to those other groups of color because of their minority status” (p. 8). Examples from Cress and Ikeda (2003), Lewis, Chesler, and Forman (2000), and Museus (2007, 2008) include findings that

Asian American college students frequently report that they experience “racial prejudice and discrimination, pressure to conform to racial stereotypes, and difficulties posed by the cultures of predominantly white institutions” (Museus & Kiang, 2009, p. 8). In short, a plethora of evidence shows that the model minority stereotype does not hold true, and it may be harmful.

### **Implications**

In this section, I describe practical implications regarding the study findings. These results are not merely theories occupying the academic sphere—rather, they can be applied on the ground from the perspective of teachers, administrators, and researchers and scholars.

#### **Position ELLs as Theory Constructors**

ELLs are intellectuals who form theories about the English language and how to learn English according to their experience and knowledge. By seriously considering their theories, we could build on their strengths to provide further support.

Examples of what teachers can do:

- Although it is challenging to accommodate all the needs of the students, there are basic ways to move toward that goal. Start by differentiating at least a selection of lesson materials, ones that you would likely be able to reuse the following school year.
- Ask about and take note of students’ theories about the English language and language development. Apply recurring ideas from these theories to create

different structures for collaborative learning and teacher-led or teacher-facilitated activities while incorporating your own theories and knowledge.

- Study the linguistic structures of students' writing and/or speaking. There would be a large amount of data, but the load can be manageable, e.g., for each assignment, select the work of three to five students to analyze; look for common patterns to address with the whole class as mini-grammar lessons
- Based on analysis of interlanguage data from ELLs, build on their existing knowledge to help them reach the next level.

Examples of what administrators can do:

- During classroom observations, highlight differentiation strategies geared toward ELLs that seem successful. Offer at least one suggestion on how to differentiate an activity or assignment that would align with the needs of ELLs.
- Devise creative scheduling to facilitate the exchange of information between teachers. For example, two teachers could trade classes for the last fifteen minutes of the period. Each teacher will have set up an assignment for students to complete in their respective classroom. The visiting teacher would circulate the classroom to assist students, meanwhile collecting data regarding the theories constructed by the students. This process would provide a different perspective on how to differentiate instruction to align with the ELLs' theories of learning, teaching, and the English language.
- During professional development sessions, reserve at least thirty minutes for a teacher to show a small piece of representative interlanguage data to the

teaching staff and engage them in a short language-focused lesson as a model.

Such a program could be led by a designated team of teachers, including ESOL and content area teachers, with a strong background in working with ELLs.

Examples of what researchers and scholars can do:

- Blur the line between official and unofficial knowledge and theories. Place the theories of study participants in conversation with those of scholars.
- Use information from study participants to support your argument just as you would cite scholars and researchers.
- In courses about content areas and/or teaching methodologies in a school of education, include practice in designing differentiated instruction throughout. That is, do not feature differentiation as a one-time topic. Differentiating lesson materials and instruction is often new and difficult for teachers, and therefore, as much practice as possible would be beneficial to education students.

### **View ELLs as Rational Agents and Theorists of Schooling**

Many earners go to school with their personal missions in mind. By providing opportunities for sharing their agendas, we could guide the students appropriately and respectfully. Also, we should perceive ELLs as theorists of schooling, as they are often well aware of the services (or disservice) offered by the school and respond accordingly. From this viewpoint, they act as a mirror to instructional practices and school policy. Therefore, we can learn much from observing and listening to them.

Examples of what teachers can do:



- Ask students to periodically complete self-assessments or reflection exercises that allow them to express their thoughts about your class and/or school in general. Providing a sanctioned venue for expressing their agency and theories about schooling may increase their motivation and validate their ideas and rationale.
- Incorporate the above exercises into assignments when possible. For example, if students need to infer the goals of Abraham Lincoln in a history lesson, as a scaffold, bridge the students' context with the content material by engaging students in an activity that first asks students about their goals in school.

Examples of what administrators can do:

- This ideological shift calls for increasing your and the faculty's awareness of the notion of ELLs as rational agents and theorists of schooling. One way to increase this awareness is as follows: In the beginning of the academic year and once per term, ask advisory or homeroom teachers school-wide to administer short questionnaires that ask students about their goals and purposes in school. Ask each teacher to provide a brief summary or bullet-point list of key themes according to the responses to be shared during a faculty meeting. Together, identify common themes that recur across the school.
- Compile the themes from the above as a means to obtain a snapshot of the student body. Consider steps that need to be taken to cultivate a school culture that is responsive to this snapshot. For example, if you find that students consider school to be an unjust place, consider concrete steps to address signs of

injustice in the school. If you find that students view school as a vehicle for economic rewards, build on this theory by providing further motivation for academic achievement.

Examples of what researchers and scholars can do:

- In providing recommendations for policy, school restructuring, and so forth, gather data from students and give as much weight to that information as you would to theories generated by scholars and researchers.
- In representing students in research articles and/or presentations, rather than speak of them as subjects in the study, position them as theorists who can contribute to theory and practice.

### **Foster Creative and Intellectual Production**

By carefully examining the work produced by ELLs and their behavior, we can determine whether we are sufficiently challenging them and supporting their ability to, not just pass a class, but to flourish. That is, pedagogy and instructional materials need to be updated and changed in response to the learners.

Examples of what teachers can do:

- Minimize the amount of time spent lecturing in front of the classroom. Instead, plan and implement structured debates, discussions, and/or role dramas, which would require every student to participate in a role (Duff, 2001). Start with small collaborative activities, such as pair-shares, and gradually shift to increasingly elaborate structures, such as organized debates.

- Building on the above, design structured collaborative opportunities for students to write and speak in small groups. Understand that these structures initially require a great amount of scaffolding and modeling and might not be executed smoothly during the first few attempts. However, the class will gradually become familiar with these structures as they become routine.
- Experiment with different turn-taking formats that provide low-pressure, safe opportunities for every student to speak out loud in class. For example, provide each student with a set number of “talk cards”; each turn a student takes requires one card. Students who deplete their cards must give other students opportunities to use their talk cards.
- Incorporate free-writing and writing assignments that intentionally promote higher-order thinking skills (see for example, L. Ngo, Goldstein, & Portugal, 2012). Also, pose writing assignments as invitations for students to share about themselves.

Examples of what administrators can do:

- Devise creative scheduling for teachers to spend at least five to fifteen minutes exchanging ideas regarding class structures or assignments that were successful (or unsuccessful) in allocating speaking and writing time to every student.
- Encourage teachers to stand outside of their classroom near the entrance during passing period. Teachers could then speak to other teachers during passing period to quickly exchange small ideas about classroom structures for speaking and writing and to model collaboration for students.

- Minimize the amount of time used to deliver information during professional development meetings by emailing or providing hardcopies of the information beforehand. Then, during the meeting, briefly review the information, highlighting main points. Use the time spared to facilitate professional development that allows for every teacher to speak and/or write, thereby providing a model for the teachers and ideas that they can implement in their classrooms.

Examples of what researchers and scholars can do:

- Regardless of the course you are teaching in an education school, incorporate a field component that asks education students to observe learners and/or examine their work. Such an exercise should be coupled with providing resources or actionable suggestions to the cooperating teacher to support him/her in teaching in ways that foster creative and intellectual output from the students.
- Provide practical recommendations and specific examples regarding what teachers and administrators can do to foster creative and intellectual production in the classroom and school.

### **Strive for Academic Rigor**

Although learning basic or “survival” English is certainly crucial, our ELLs must also have access to rigorous school experiences. This issue is one of equity. If we do not avail learners of academic rigor, we would be complicit in perpetuating their marginalized positions. We must support ELLs in what society considers academic success while working to make changes to the education system.

Examples of what teachers can do:

- Incorporate structured opportunities for students to work in pairs. Each person has knowledge to contribute, and together, they would be able to co-construct and build on one another's ideas.
- For lessons that focus on grammatical forms, have students complete open-ended writing and then focus on the mechanical aspects of writing, whereas these two activities are often done in reverse (Fanselow, 2004). That is, we often observe drilling of grammar or other linguistic features before flexible writing, but this pattern may restrict creative thought.
- Fanselow (2004) explains that the majority of the time spent on reading exercises is actually used by ELLs listening to vocabulary explanations by the teacher, answering questions after reading the passage, or reading passages orally, sentence by sentence. He proposes that we instead view reading as a process (see for example, Grabe & Stoller, 2002) and see that texts provides only part of the information; one's experience and knowledge must be applied to reading. From this perspective, students should be given more time to interact with texts throughout rather than only after reading. They should be able to explore what they are reading, just as we explore new smells, tastes, music, and so forth (Fanselow, 2004).

Examples of what administrators can do:

- Make serving as an instructional leader a priority. This argument may be difficult to accept in schools where disciplinary issues often require immediate

attention. However, in interacting with school leaders and observing teachers for whom discipline is not a major disruption, I have learned that prioritizing instruction helps students develop a sense of responsibility and increases their involvement in learning, thus decreasing the need to address behavior.

- Provide professional development to department heads on leading effective meetings, and provide very structured guidelines for department meetings. It is common for department meetings to derail into grieving sessions without the principal as an overseer. Instead, we want to ensure that these meetings are productive, lead to actionable next steps, and establish goals for moving forward.
- Encourage teachers to collaborate asynchronously by using online tools, which would help teachers overcome time barriers (L. Ngo, Goldstein, & Portugal, 2011)
- Consider how to cultivate conditions that encourage and allow teachers the space to plan academically rigorous curricula and lessons.

Examples of what researchers and scholars can do:

- For those that study curriculum development and pedagogy, provide concrete, actionable advice regarding how to improve in these areas such that ELLs are afforded with opportunities to engage in academic rigor. However, do not dismiss basic or “survival” English, as such a skill is indeed crucial for everyday life.

- For researchers that act as participant-observers in schools, provide additional, practical support to the teachers or administrators based on your observations to help them increase opportunities for their students to be challenged. For example, in interacting with one teacher and observing her students, I found that the teacher was not familiar with working with ELLs. The teacher also admitted to this area that needed improvement. After my study was completed, I asked her for her lesson materials and later sent her versions of the materials that were specifically modified to provide entry points to give ELLs opportunities to be intellectually engaged. In short, proactively give back to the community that has graciously welcomed you as a researcher by providing relevant and needed services.

### **Consider the Concepts of Hyphenated Reality and the Macro-Micro Dialectic**

Examining both the singularity of a learner's story (the micro) and the larger narrative provided by official facts (the macro) provides a more holistic view than if either one were solely studied. This approach supports the understanding of a student's hyphenated reality. We must also consider how the micro and macro interact and shape one another.

- Explicitly teach English as another language while fostering a space for criticality and the sharing of the self.
  - Let us examine an example for ESOL teachers. According to the Suggested Planning Scheduling Timeline for ELD 1 and ELL Writing, i.e. the first level of ESOL (School District of Philadelphia, 2012-2013),

the content objective for week 1 of the academic year includes, “Students will identify and examine the home countries of their classmates,” and one of the language objectives is “Students will accurately identify, pronounce, and spell words containing short and long vowel.” A teacher could address the learning objectives by including opportunities for students to study one another’s varying reasons for coming to the U.S., possibly surfacing issues of persecution and so forth if students feel comfortable volunteering such information. At the same time, the language objective would be addressed by, for instance, learning the different vowel sounds produced by the letter ‘I’ in the words ‘immigrate’ and ‘China’.

- Similarly, content area teachers who have ELLs in their classroom should identify both content and language objectives and develop activities that allow students to draw on their backgrounds. For example, a lesson related to the civil rights movement could involve students’ retellings of their experiences with prejudice and racism—in a manner that aligns with the content area and language objectives.<sup>22</sup>
- Teachers (and administrators) need to be learners. Ask students about themselves, and look up relevant facts and historical information online. Given

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<sup>22</sup> A comprehensive explanation on how to craft content and language objectives is beyond the purview of this discussion. However, a commonly used reference is *Making Content Comprehensible for Secondary English Learners: The SIOP Model* by Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2007).



the large proportion of refugees from Nepal at Sunrise High, I read about the circumstances leading to their refugee status. Then, during downtime in school, I chatted with Anjay (and Juan joined the conversation). I asked Anjay to show me photos of his refugee camp in Nepal. He used Google images to display examples of what his school looked like. He explained his daily duties, detailing that he lived in one of the three main camps, Beldangi 1, which was divided into sectors (he lived in Sector G). After school, I searched these keywords to retrieve official information to bolster my learning.

Examples of what administrators can do:

- Make students' histories and backgrounds a part of the curriculum. As seen in the above discussion regarding teachers, content and language objectives published by a school district are generally flexible enough to allow for the incorporation of learners' lives.
- Invite students to share about themselves in faculty meetings.
- Collaborate with teacher leaders to develop school-wide routines for honoring the stories of learners. For example, a school-wide class project might entail a student's biography with an accompanying image. These projects could line the hallways, boosting a positive, unifying school culture.

Examples of what researchers and scholars can do:

- In conducting qualitative and/or quantitative research regarding students, keep in mind that learners are humans, and frame them as such.

- Historicize who study participants are and provide space for their micro narratives. Connect “official” facts with actual people on the ground.

### **Take into Account Learners’ Life Responsibilities**

Many students from low-income backgrounds must work to survive and to support their family. They may not have the privilege to participate in traditional extracurricular or afterschool activities. School is but one of their obligations, and they should not be expected to view school as their sole priority.

Examples of what teachers can do:

- During informal conversations, intentionally ask ELLs questions to better understand the hyphens that they live. Ask them whether they work, where, how many hours per week, and additional questions. This information would contextualize reasons for late submission of homework assignments, tardiness, absences, tiredness in class, and other observed behavior. Understanding their subterranean layers will, at the minimum, cultivate empathy and a desire to meet the students where they are.
- Assist students with their extracurricular list for their college applications and/or resumes. Draw out items that traditionally are not considered extracurricular activities, including household duties and caretaker responsibilities.
- Provide ways for students to make connections between their life responsibilities and lesson content. For example, a character study in English Language Arts can include writing or a graphic organizer that compares the responsibilities of a character in a novel with that of the student.

Examples of what administrators can do:

- In addition to sponsoring tutoring or homework help during the traditional afterschool hours, identify time slots in which students who hold jobs could receive additional support. Members of the National Honor Society could offer peer-tutoring in a quiet space or in a classroom that a teacher volunteers to allow students to use her/his space during his/her lunch period.
- Serve as an example to your faculty by modifying your language in recognition of the hyphenated reality of ELLs. For instance, instead of remarking, “The student is too busy with work to do his homework,” you might state, “The student needs to work for a living, but he’s making an effort to make school a major part of his life. What can we do to support him?”
- If your school has a community service or Senior Project requirement, take into consideration students with paid jobs. Honor those experiences as ones that are just as valuable as typical community service activities and unpaid internships.

Examples of what researchers and scholars can do:

- Seek to understand the hyphenated reality of the ELLs that are in your study. Do not explain their supposed under-achievement by providing only reasons related to English as a challenge. Investigate their life responsibilities and how obligations affect their schooling.
- In working with high school ELLs, treat them as adults. All of my 18 study participants were at least eighteen years old. Many ELLs start at a lower grade relative to their age upon arriving in the U.S. to obtain more time to learn

English, and therefore, they are often older than their peers. Because many immigrant and refugee students come from low socio-economic backgrounds, some hold paid employment, such that school is merely one of their duties.

### **Disrupt the Model Minority Stereotype**

The model minority and other racial stereotypes hurt certain groups and erase the individual. Conscientious effort is required to counter the human tendency to categorize.

Examples of what teachers can do:

- Incorporate issues of race into lessons. Doing so may be uncomfortable in the beginning, but start by taking a small step to include a minute element of racial issues in a lesson. In my teaching experience and classroom observations, learners (especially ELLs) seem open to discussing race and are well aware of race as a prominent issue. For example, when Anjay confirmed with me that his family had to leave Bhutan because they were Nepali and spoke Nepali, Juan entered the conversation, stating, “They’re racist” [Field Notes, May 12, 2014].
- Actively seek opportunities to incorporate issues of race into lessons, even in lessons that may not seem obviously appropriate. For example, a math lesson could incorporate demographic data from the American Community Surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau or analyses of such data.

Examples of what administrators can do:

- Invite students to professional development sessions to share about their experiences with racial discrimination and prejudice.

- Allocate time for teachers to share successful lessons that incorporated issues of race they have implemented. Doing so would help to cultivate a safe space for open discussions of this sensitive topic.

Examples of what researchers and scholars can do:

- Similar to Museus and Kiang (2009), complicate the term “underrepresented minority”.
- Avoid pitting one minority group against another. For example, a common argument is that Latino/a ELLs deserve the greatest attention because they constitute 85% of the ELL population. However, this viewpoint seems to advocate for foregrounding one minority group while placing other groups in the background.
- Disaggregate data regarding Asian American and other populations, rather than lumping them together, e.g., people identified as black Caribbean or Latino/a from various countries.
- Engage in reflexivity to consider whether your statements or arguments reify racial stereotypes.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Approximately nine months after the end of my study, and after I had witnessed all of my focal students receive their high school diploma, I saw Juan working in the kitchen at a local restaurant where I was about to sit down for dinner. He had started working at this restaurant, though at a different location, when he arrived in the U.S.

about six years ago. I had already known this information based on my interviews and interactions with him. As I watched him working, I observed that he moved almost nonstop to prepare dishes for the diners. As it turned out, he made the meal I had that evening. The experience affirmed for me that it would be erroneous to claim the he was merely a “research subject” in my study. He is a human being.

The focal ELLs in this study show that learners defy unitary categorization. The students featured in the case studies lived the hyphen of ELL, high school student, employee, caretaker, and more. Honoring the simultaneity of their multiplicity allowed for deepened understandings of their language and literacy practices in content area classrooms and their larger schooling experience. ELLs are not simply learners of new knowledge; they build knowledge and theories about the English language, language development, and school structures. By embracing their theories and carefully observing them, we can calibrate our pedagogy and lesson materials to support them in the production of creative and intellectual output. We would also learn what we can do to engage them in academic rigor, such that they may thrive in society. We must bear in mind that time for homework and extracurricular activities may be a luxury for immigrant and refugee students, many of whom hold paying jobs to support themselves and/or family members. Racial stereotypes present one source of barriers to gaining insight into our learners, and therefore, we much intentionally problematize these overgeneralizations. The micro-macro dialectic may play a helpful role in mediating between the larger, group narrative and the individual experience.

Certainly, through this study, I do not claim to have provided an antidote to inequities in education. However, the objective of my life's work is to inspire micro-revolutions, such that we are constantly fighting within and against the system, regardless of whether one is a teacher, student, administrator, professor, or in another role. As Susan Lytle might state, to engender change, we must engage in constructive disruption. We must push forward and must not forget why we are in the field of education--we are here for the students.

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