

LET'S TALK:
MULTIPLE VOICES ON LANGUAGE AND POWER IN AN EXTENDED FIRST GRADE
LEARNING COMMUNITY

by

JENNIFER ANNE MCCREIGHT

(Under the Direction of JoBeth Allen)

ABSTRACT

For some children, the patterns of speaking they learn at home do not correlate with the Standardized English spoken in most schools. This often causes children to believe their home language is inferior to Standardized English, and they can struggle to connect their home and school worlds (Delpit, 1994; Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). Through a combined ethnographic and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach, this study chronicles the experience of 1st-grade students who spoke Spanish or African American Vernacular English (AAVE) at home and in their larger community, as they engaged in a study where they investigated language and its power in a contextualized way. Three questions guide the research: how the stories and home language of students/families contributed to this linguistic curriculum, the connections they made between language in different contexts and its purpose in their lives, and the use of SFL as both a pedagogical and methodological tool to analyze language used and power enacted by participants.

To address these questions, the dissertation tells how 1st graders, families, teachers, and community members drew on background knowledge, experiences, and relationships to co-construct a metalanguage with which to discuss language, its use in different contexts, and opportunities to share diverse language with others. The story builds on the work of such critical scholars as Heath (1983/1996), Delpit (1994), Dyson (2001), and Allen (2010) to support the stance that language study which builds from students' background knowledge leads to a nuanced understanding of language use in the world. By

incorporating SFL, the relationship-based interpersonal metafunction reveals both the relationships present and roles enacted by the study's participants, as well as the basis for the classroom community's metalanguage (Halliday, 1994).

Implications for teachers, schools, districts, and researchers are woven into the study, and practitioner/school suggestions for implementation are discussed at the conclusion of each chapter. They include the importance of teachers partnering with students and their families in constructing a contextualized language study, and the rich connections students developed between language and issues of social justice when they were encouraged to examine words in their world.

INDEX WORDS: Standardized English, African American Vernacular English, Spanish,
 Contextualized language study, Critical theory, Systemic Functional
 Linguistics

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DEDICATION

To my students and their families, whose strong voices and rich experiences made writing this dissertation a joyful experience.

To my professors and colleagues, who challenged me to think differently about the world.

To my family and friends, who always believed I would meet the demands of this degree, and never allowing me to think otherwise.

And to my husband, Chris, whose willingness to listen, supportive hugs, unconditional love, and nourishing dinners made it possible for me to write these words.

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CHAPTER 1

WHO ARE WE?

OUR COMMUNITY FINDS REASON TO STUDY LANGUAGE IN USE

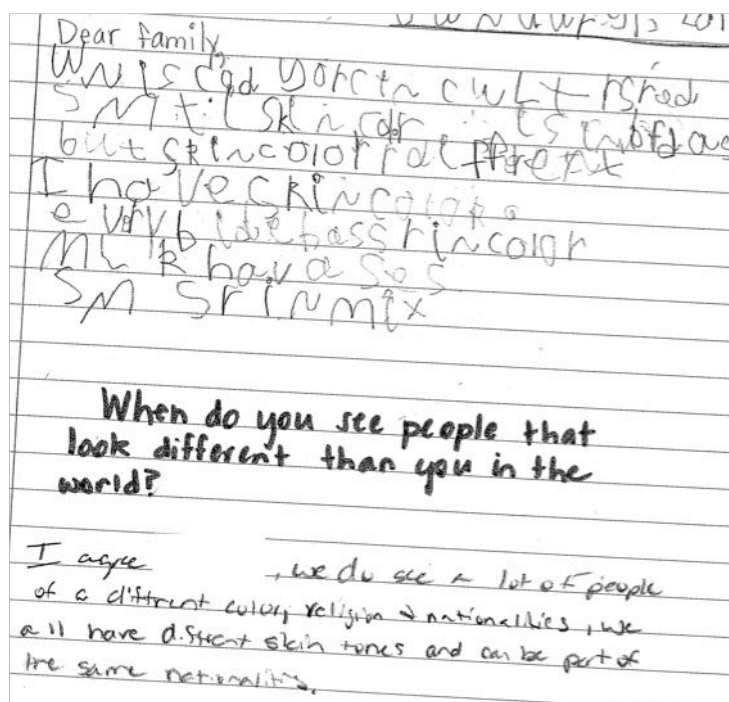


Figure 1.1: Mack's Journal

Dear family,

Some skin color is the same. But some skin color is different.

I have skin color. Everybody has skin color.

Mack finished reading aloud an excerpt from his family dialogue journal (*See Figure 1.1*). The journal was a compilation of letters written back and forth between families, students, and teachers, as a way to capture our co-constructed classroom experience together in one central, albeit grubby after months of use, location. This week, we had learned and chosen to write about people with different skin

colors, asking our families, “When do you see people that look different than you in the world?” Mack’s mother, Natalie, responded, calling for all people to work together to see beyond skin color, saying, “We all have different skin tones and can be part of the same nationality.” As Mack read her words in his clear, high voice, his long brown fingers grasping the sides of his journal, it was as if she were there in the room with us. In many ways, by sharing her words, she was.

As was our classroom practice, Mack finished reading and looked up at his classmates.

“Does anyone have any questions or connections?” he inquired.

Hector’s hand shot into the air.

“Hector?” Mack called, inviting him to respond to his journal entry.

Hector’s deep chocolate-colored eyes immediately filled with tears. They glistened, combining with the wildly curly brown hair framing his round face to sharply contrast his striped, collared shirt. The mood in the room immediately became tense, as we all began to realize something was wrong, *really* wrong, with Hector.

These students and I had worked and learned together for the entirety of both their kindergarten and first grade years, and we had come to care deeply for one another. I began frantically trying to link bits and pieces of Hector’s family and home life to Mack’s journal, but was unable to identify an immediate connection between Natalie’s reference to different skin tones and Hector’s mother, father, five-year-old sister, and infant brother.

I braced myself.

“Someone called my house yesterday,” Hector began. “He said that my family shouldn’t be here because we don’t speak good English, and that we should move back to Mexico. We’re moving in February.”

My thoughts began to whirl, with phrases like, “It’s going to be okay,” and “I know that must be so hard,” tumbling through my brain like shoes in an empty dryer. They hit too harshly against the silence that was now present in our usually chatty first grade classroom. I found eighteen students and three student teachers from past and present semesters staring at me. I felt as though they believed I would say

something, anything, to dissolve this tension, and this nearly paralyzed me. I sat silently, realizing that language, a topic that had been at the crux of our classroom learning all year, was failing me.

Somehow, I spoke, if for no other reason than my determination that I not allow Hector to continue uncomfortably facing his unusually quiet friends.

“Hector, your home is *here*. You have a home in Mexico, but you have a home *here*.” I connected Hector’s line of thinking to Mack’s journal entry, and added, “You know those people who we’ve talked about who thought people with different skin colors shouldn’t be together?”

Michael nodded vigorously, simultaneously raising his hand and stating, “Yeah, it’s just like that. Sometimes people don’t like different languages, just like they didn’t like different skin colors.”

Michael had raised this point earlier in his first grade year, as we contemplated the focus of co-authored, multilingual books we were creating with our families and other teachers. This connection was an appropriate one; though the students, families, and teachers that were part of our ever-expanding classroom community discussed valuing and respecting linguistic diversity, we were aware that this was not always the case.

Christopher rose from Rest Stop, our classroom spot for engaging in contemplation, deep breaths, and quiet time due to stomachaches or homesickness. His slight frame quickly wound its way around rectangular tables and stray chairs, and he raised his hand even before he sat down. One of our student teachers leaned over to whisper in my ear, “He came over just to say something.”

Hector noticed this, as well, and asked Christopher what he wanted to contribute. The rest of the class watched, still wide-eyed, as Christopher said, “Hector is my best friend. I don’t want him to move! I came over here because he is sad and I want to hug him. I don’t want him to move!”

We all watched as Christopher swiftly rose and gave Hector a long, tight hug. I was thankful for the simple brilliance in this action, and reiterated Christopher’s point. “We *a//*love you very much, Hector. No matter what, you have a family in this classroom.” Hector nodded bleakly, tears still on his face and looking a bit shell-shocked, as if he were reliving this event in its retelling.

Inwardly, I began to wonder how Hector had heard this conversation, what truth there was in the threats being made to his Spanish-speaking family, and whether I should contact anyone from his home to both share this classroom event and possibly ask for some clarification.

Outwardly, I did the only thing I could think to do.

We had a hugging party.

Each one of us put our arms around the other, squeezing tightly and laughing, trying to convince ourselves in the sheer physicality of this moment that we were okay. Everything would be fine. Linguistic bias would not infiltrate the walls of our classroom, the halls of our school, in the same way pending immigration legislation had infiltrated our southern state's legislature.

We would be fine.

Right?

Finding Relevance in Studying Language

While Hector's story was the first, students periodically told friends and teachers about a "bad man" who called the homes of "all people who speak Spanish and who are from Mexico" to tell them to move back, "unless they have papers." Families pre-packed "big ol' bags," and mothers told their children they may be moving to Canada. Google searches done by older brothers and sisters convinced their first grade siblings that this faraway place was a land with lush green grass and a garage attached to every home. These homes, and the moves accompanying them, took up conversational space from Morning Meeting until recess.

Each time a single child shared, others made our classroom "connection" sign with their hands, their thumb and pinky fingers held high in a silent but clear indication that they had encountered something similar in their own homes. Their experiences made the anti-immigration legislation sweeping across the country come alive in our classroom.

As these stories grew legs and began to walk in and among our conversations, evading the understanding of children whose families were African American or European American but treading heavily and tangibly on the thoughts of children whose families were from Mexico and Guatemala, we all

had to reconsider the focus of our classroom's co-constructed language curriculum. We were learning about the different functions of language and creating texts that celebrated linguistic diversity, but as tales of prejudice against Spanish speaking families spread, we began to realize this was not enough.

"I wish," Michael said, "that people with different skin colors and different ways of talking could just be together."

Creating a Language Study: Learning from Scholars

Since the beginning of these students' first grade year, which was our second academic year together, we had engaged in study centered on the contextualization of language based on social situations. I took to heart Frances Christie's (2005) beliefs about children's language learning, as she stated:

A great deal of language learning is of course not conscious, because it is learned while engaging in activities in which it is the activities, rather than the language used, that are held to be important. However, school learning – and especially learning of literacy – does require that children develop some conscious knowledge about the language system and how it works to create meanings. Learning about language can in any case be pleasurable and fun, causing children to reflect on the ways language is used, and encouraging them to play with it, examining the effects that can be created by different patterns of language use. (p. 65)

Language learning and its contextualization, then, could be *fun*, an opportunity for learning about and playing with words in our world. As a teacher whose career began seven years prior, in the thick of the standardized testing movement, and whose students' linguistic background rarely matched the grammar found on these exams, I had long been passionate about teaching students how to code-switch between and among multiple languages and dialects. I centered my original focus on language study on the fact that language questions on standardized tests only measured a students' ability to speak Standardized English (Hudley & Mallinson, 2011), the dialect spoken on television, in most books, and in offices around the country. While I believed that all children's home languages should be welcomed into written and spoken classroom discourse, the students I taught needed to know how to speak the language of

power (Delpit, 1995), and it was my responsibility to teach it to them. As Knapp & Watkins (2005) stated, “The more we know about what language is doing, the greater chance we will have to make it work for us as speakers and writers” (p. 35).

Research from both the larger body of literature and my own informal studies supported this view. African American scholars such as Lisa Delpit (1995) and bell hooks (1989) have asserted their belief that all educators should teach their students how to speak Standardized English, because they will be at a distinct disadvantage if they use other home dialects or languages to write term papers, apply for a job, or construct a college essay. Delpit and hooks both cite conversations with families from the African American community who agree with them, lamenting the fact that well-meaning European American educators often do not teach Standardized English because they don’t want their students to feel bad about their home language. Historically, researchers have found that adults oftentimes consider a child speaking African American Vernacular English or Spanish as less able and less intelligent than the child who speaks Standard English; such dialect/linguistic prejudice follows these children into their teenage and adult years (Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 1999; Ramirez & Milk, 1986).

I realized just how consistent my students’ experiences were with this larger body of scholarship around language use when I informally analyzed a first-grade language arts achievement test created by my school district. I was shocked to find that, although only one of the elements embedded in our state standards discussed grammar (subject-verb agreement), twenty percent of the district’s test questions were language related. Out of this twenty percent, which consisted of ten multiple-choice questions, eighty percent explicitly asked, “Which word *best* completes the sentence?” The creators of the test decided the “best” response was the answer that followed the rules of Standardized English. Therefore, in the test’s gross overrepresentation of one element covered in the first grade standards, our district made clear the emphasis it placed on the importance of learning how to speak Standardized English. Practically applied, it also made even clearer the need to expose children of all linguistic backgrounds to this powerful language. I found Hicks (*Discourse, Learning, & Teaching*) was correct when she stated, “Children must learn not only what to say and how to say it, but also when to say it” (p. 64) when

learning how to negotiate the discourse of school. So, I made this exposure to Standardized English my early focus.

Of course, simply reconstructing the status quo does little to change it. Scholars such as Delpit (1995) and Nieto (1999), wrestling with the best way to teach students Standardized English, have long contemplated concrete ways to help them push back against the inconsistency present in a world that insists they must conform before they can stand out. As Linda Christensen (1996), a European American who taught for 30 years in the inner city of Portland, Oregon, asserted:

We must teach our students how to match subjects and verbs, how to pronounce lawyer, because they are the ones without power and, for the moment, have to use the language of the powerful to be heard. But, in addition, we need to equip them to question an educational system that devalues their life and their knowledge. If we don't we condition them to a pedagogy of consumption. (p. 212)

In my earliest years of teaching, when I taught my students to code-switch from their home language/dialect to Standardized English, I considered what such calls to action, balanced by the harsh realities of a slow-to-change society, would look and sound like in my own classroom.

I began reading the work of multiple scholars, soon realizing that linguistic discrimination, whether presented through the questions on a standardized test or simply through teachers' lowered expectations, was common (Dyson, 2001b; Hudley & Mallinson, 2011; Schleppegrell, 2010). I felt as though my students and I were up against a wall, a wall made up of mandates and societal beliefs. I felt powerless to change the grammar rules that had so strongly embedded themselves into our daily instruction, and believed I needed to incorporate activities that helped my young students understand the relevancy of learning how to speak Standardized English (Gebhard, Harman, & Seger, 2007).

So, I did what I could my first six years of teaching. I employed the ideas of educators in Heath's (1983/1996) study *Ways with Words*, using language detective journals to study words we used in different contexts. Impressed by the work of Wheeler and Swords (2004), I worked with my students to create translation charts to practice moving back and forth between "home" and "school" languages.

Similar to our discussions on how books often overlap in their genre specifications (i.e. historical fiction, a children's book with rhythm and rhyme), we had conversations about the overlap between forms of language we used in different contexts (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). We focused on the importance of function and relevance in the midst of an educational environment that, at the institutional level, ignored the possibility or presence of linguistic diversity.

I was constantly on the lookout for opportunities to engage in action-oriented language work, never knowing just how much to delve into discussions on power structures and prejudice with six-year-old children. Maybe it was my hesitancy, my uncertainty, but in those early years, we never did make the jump from yielding to pushing against unrelenting linguistic expectations.

Throughout all of this, continually tugging at my consciousness was the realization that I was missing something. What, I remained unsure of, but I was not satisfied with the language work my students and I were doing. I thought, *There needs to be more relevancy. Why should they care?*

Creating a Language Study: Learning from Families

It was during my seventh and eighth years as a teacher, as I got to know the students in Hector and Michael's class and paused to listen to and dialogue with them as they offered stories and anecdotes about their rich and fulfilling lives, that I identified the gap I'd intuitively felt in the way I addressed linguistic study. In my earlier language studies, students' most relevant linguistic models, the adults in their lives that knew them better than anyone else, were largely *under* or even *un*represented in our discussions around code switching, or alternating between dialects or languages depending on the person addressed or other aspects of a situation (Genishi & Dyson, 2009), and the contextualization of language use. As I finished one academic year and began another with these students and their strong, caring families, I realized a study about language and its usage was an opportunity for all of us to strengthen and deepen our family/school partnership, as well as the students' understanding of the relevancy between home and classroom learning. As Anne Haas Dyson (2001a) stated, "The larger processes of children's lives always penetrate the space of schooling, although...they are not always recognized, acknowledged,

or responded to” (p. 15), and it became my focus to more intentionally build our language study off of these immensely rich and important cultural and familial ties.

My interest in inviting families into our classroom to work and learn with us was something that has interested many other teachers and researchers, as well. As our community crafted our own unique understanding of what family/school partnerships looked like for us, I read about and learned from the experiences of others. Shockley, Michalove, and Allen (1995) challenged us to construct relationships based on *partnerships* rather than *programs*, stating, “Programs are implemented; partnerships are developed...A program cannot constantly reinvent itself, change with each year, be different in every classroom, and for every teacher-family-child relationship” (p. 91). The last thing our community needed was another program, our district having already spent millions on packaged curriculums touting the effectiveness of their grammar worksheets and their grounding in best practice. What was necessary, I felt, was a co-construction of learning, and a representation of multiple voices and perspectives, to bridge the gap between students’ linguistic identities at home and in school. This, I hoped, would lead to the students’ nuanced understanding of the purpose and relevancy of multiple languages and dialects in a variety of places; we would still learn about “school talk,” but as one of many forms of speaking that were part of their multifaceted linguistic lives.

Multiple books and articles continually reminded me that families brought to their children’s classrooms a wealth of knowledge. If school curriculums honored, supported, and expanded this knowledge, it represented vast opportunities for the creation of a more inclusive linguistic curriculum (Allen, 2010; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Henderson, Johnson, Mapp, & Davies, 2007). My prior experiences with these particular students and families told me that they had a deep-seeded interest in supporting their children in whatever ways possible, and it was my responsibility to invite this knowledge and experience into our classroom.

The teacher/researcher team of Solsken, Willett, and Wilson-Keenan (2000) wrote about their experiences in creating open spaces for hybrid, multi-layered pedagogies to emerge through dialogue, and

their honest recounting and assessment of this experience effected my thoughts on family/school partnerships perhaps more than any study. They stated:

By positioning the children and their families as hosts and teachers, we hoped a new sense of agency would emerge. By positioning ourselves as learners and interrogating our own practices and ideologies, we hoped to learn how to construct a more democratic, multicultural pedagogy. (p. 181)

In other words, if I wanted to open up this partnership, I had to remember that this was not my show. The goals of our language work could not be only mine, and the route we would take to reach our goals could not consist only of my ideas. A collaborative linguistic study would only truly emerge through dialogue, a focus on hearing and understanding one another with no hidden agendas and a willingness to learn about others' perceptions of language use in the world (Freire, 1972).

Merging Language Study and Family/School Partnerships

Armed with the powerful realization that families were absent from my earlier attempts at meaningful language studies, I began to open up our classroom doors in ways I had not done before. It was in the midst of this partnership between students, families, other teachers, and me that critical realizations about language use in classrooms began to emerge. We shifted the conversation in unexpected ways through the implementation of family dialogue journal entries focused on language use, invitations to share language in person and through surveys, home visits, and interviews (Allen, 2007). Though we began by primarily considering the context in which we spoke differently, and the intricacies and overlap among and between these contexts, we eventually moved toward contemplating the linguistic discrimination that Hector and others faced. With the support and input of our families, we identified possibilities for action. Our initial fear and uncertainty became an opportunity for educating others.

Every family, including Hector's, finished their first grade year in our classroom, surrounded by the familiar faces of friends and teachers, and living in the same homes where some of them received those troubling phone calls from the anonymous man threatening Spanish speaking families. While our conversations about linguistic context and action did not make their fears or uncertainties disappear, this

openness offered all involved a safe place in which they could freely share Spanish words, question injustice, cry when uncertain, and laugh while experimenting with words. As we shared the familial and cultural connections that made us who we were, we better understood language and its power to make us feel both big and small. Examination of, and talk about, the origins of our verbal and written discourse so convinced us of the validity of diverse linguistic backgrounds that together we sought out opportunities for social justice around issues of language and dialect.

Who We Are

My students and I lived and learned in a Southern town, stuck somewhere between the classifications of “suburban,” “urban,” and “rural,” with neighborhoods fluctuating between the three, and never quite fitting fully into any one category. Our particular elementary school was a Professional Development School, which meant it partnered with our local university by welcoming a large number of student teachers and faculty into our classrooms, while also learning from and with them in after school meetings, through committee work, or on professional development days. The school served students and families from mostly a rural background. I often heard roosters crowing on my way to work, and I heard children whose families were from Mexico and South America refer to their family’s agricultural ventures in regards to both the slaughter of chickens or the harvesting of gardens in the backyards of the small, multi-colored trailers in which many of them lived. Others resided on quiet, tree-lined streets lacking sidewalks, where they played in large grassy areas and waved to neighbors riding by on bicycles, far removed from the farming background described above; the African American and European American students I taught fell mostly into this category.

Latino/a students made up 70% of our class, with the families from this background traveling to the United States from Mexico and Guatemala. The rest of the class was composed of African American (25%) and European American (5%) students. Almost 100% of the children received free or reduced lunch, and many of them arrived on buses early in the morning to eat the breakfast provided by the school. I was a European American female in my late 20s that year, my eighth year as a teacher, with pale skin and ancestors from Germany and England. I had lived a middle-class existence all my life.

Therefore, asking the families I worked with to engage in conversation about language was essential for me to learn about the ways in which verbal communication played out in their lives. I wished to better understand these families as individuals, rather than simply as part of a larger cultural group, so it was crucial that we co-created a classroom in which the children and their families felt we had authentically represented their home lives.

When I initially thought about how I would like to enter into dialogue with families around their language use in different contexts, I spent a significant amount of time considering the children and adults with whom I might closely work. Though I knew I would conduct the language activities with my entire class, I knew that I could more meaningfully study students'/families' reactions to this work if I maintained intimate contact with only a few class members. Considering the demographics and home languages of our class, I decided to invite two Latino and two African American families to work closely with me. By our second academic year together, I had formed close relationships with them, and I extended these invitations to enter into dialogue early in the first grade school year. They agreed to be part of this work, and their voices were vibrantly present throughout our language study. It is important to note that, while other family members were consistently present in these students' lives, I was primarily in contact with their mothers, which is why I share their voices here.

Hector and Elena

Hector often walked into our classroom with a mischievous grin on his face, boasting mature yet childlike features and unruly dark curls, and speaking a mixture of Spanish and English to his friends and teachers. He was always smiling, always questioning, always ready for a conversation. I was in awe of his proficiency in both Spanish and English, since he spoke mostly Spanish in his home and neighborhood. I remember once sitting at his family's kitchen table during a home visit, eating mouth-watering steak tacos and homemade flan and listening to the chatter around me, as Hector fluidly, seemingly effortlessly, moved among conversations by code-switching from Spanish to English.

Hector's mother, Elena, was also a strong figure in the life of our classroom, and she contributed immensely to our conversations around language use. She enjoyed speaking with students about growing

up in Michoacan, Mexico, and shared wistfully about the freedom she used to feel while wandering its hillsides as a child. Her use of English was limited, making her sympathetic to my almost non-existent Spanish, and she was always patient with me as I tried to communicate with her. She was short in stature, yet what she lacked in height she made up for with her commanding presence and loud, almost abrasive voice, coupled with bursts of laughter that sprung forth willingly and often.

Lorena and Rosalita

Lorena was the first, and to my knowledge only, Spanish-speaking student in my class to use Spanish curse words right under my nose during group work time. *She knows how to use language to her advantage*, I remember thinking. Her build was slight, and her smile took up a great amount of space on her light brown face, but I learned early on to not let her physical stature fool me; Lorena's personality was as large as they come, and she knew just how to push her boundaries without going so far that a consequence would follow. She was also fiercely protective of her family, and would do anything for them. By the beginning of first grade, she and her cousin were working together to teach Lorena's younger sister English. She believed English was important for her sister to know, saying, "My little sister goes to Head Start now"; English, in her mind, was meant for school. Lorena was chatty and honest, which were two characteristics that proved to be essential as we engaged in talk with classmates and one another about language.

Lorena's mom, Rosalita, was less likely to engage in conversation with us than her daughter. Although the paraprofessional we worked with in our room, a brilliant man from Honduras, spoke Spanish and was always there and willing to translate, the linguistic communication gap always seemed to effect the depth of our relationship. Her daughter's honesty came from her, though, and she was always willing to share her perspectives on language use, whether through verbal conversations or written mediums. One of her favorite topics of conversation was her Guatemalan family, most of whom had recently moved to the United States and lived around the corner from their own family's cozy trailer. Family and home were important to Rosalita, and she took great pride in decorating her living room,

displaying family portraits, colorful artwork made by her children, and even Lorena's "Child of the Day" poster from Kindergarten.

Mack and Natalie

Mack was an incredible conversationalist. He had a thoughtful demeanor when discussing ideas that were important to him, such as the work of Wangari Matthai or Martin Luther King, Jr. "Let me say somethin' about that," became his characteristic phrase, and he spoke with an authority that was unexpected when coming from a child with such a slight build as his. Yet, the seriousness etched in the lines of his dark brown skin was always enough to convince me that we must stop to listen to his wise words. As his mother once told me, "Lord have mercy, Mack, when we was talking like he just knew what he was doing, like he was just all together. And I said, that's Mack. That's Mack. That's just who he is." He added a great deal to our understanding of language and how the children used it in their lives.

Natalie, Mack's mother, was a beautiful woman with a bright smile, who always opened up to me with a candid honesty when talking about her son. She and Mack had conversations at home about everything he was learning in and out of school, and she often left notes in his agenda to update me about their discussions. Mack's mom worked in a school, so she had a lot of experience as an adult within the walls of an elementary building, giving her a unique perspective regarding the use of language in this context. As part of an African American family who had lived in the same town for generations, Natalie talked about her struggle to linguistically operate between her home and work worlds; having to code-switch between two dialects sometimes caused her to feel that she didn't belong in either. "When I graduated," she laughed, during one of our conversations, "I was working at the doctor's office..., and my husband was telling me when I came home, why are you talking like that?" Natalie recognized both the necessity of and difficulty in speaking more than one dialect, and was eager to be part of classroom discussions around this topic.

Michael and Maggie

I had never met a first grader with an older soul than Michael, although he was technically the same age as his classmates. His chocolate brown skin, round face, and large brown eyes were the physical

manifestation of a serious, thoughtful child. His mom often told stories highlighting his amazing memory, as Michael recalled details of events that happened when he was only three years old. When others showed their surprise at this, Michael only grinned and shrugged his shoulders, asking why this was so strange to everyone. Michael was a conversationalist, and delighted in telling jokes just as much as he enjoyed engaging in serious topics, with one of his favorites being that of the Civil Rights Movement. Michael's ability to understand and discuss abstract topics added immensely to the depth of our linguistic conversations. As his mother once mentioned, "If he doesn't understand it, he'll tell *you* how to tell him what he wants to know."

Maggie, Michael's mother, was a teacher in our school, so she knew firsthand the language patterns that were prized and upheld on standardized tests. She was incredibly interested in what her son had to say, and I admired her willingness to engage in critical conversations with him around such issues as Martin Luther King's death. Maggie encouraged Michael's interest in the Civil Rights Movement, understanding his desire to remain connected to these pivotal events in the African American community.

Other Community Members

As you continue reading, you will meet many other community members, all of whom I invited to participate in our language study. Below, I have provided a visual representation of these community members and their general relationship to the students and teachers in our everyday classroom (*See Figure 1.2*). While its stark lines cannot convey the intricacies and interwoven nature of the relationships we formed with one another, I hope it will offer a quick point of reference as people appear and reappear throughout the text.

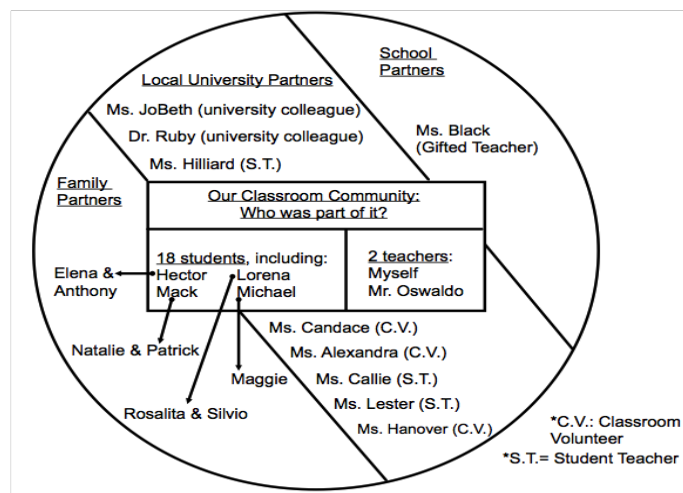


Figure 1.2: Classroom Community Members

What We Did

In many ways, we were different from one another, an unlikely collection of collaborators from a variety of cultural, familial, and linguistic backgrounds. Our growth as a community of diverse learners centered on the multiple influences present in our language practices, and the subconscious links we created between them as we moved from one linguistic environment to another (Andrews, 2001). Prior experiences, societal expectations, and family practices all influenced our interactions, which uniquely combined to shape our understandings of how we used language in different places (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). The “common qualities of...our world-making” included the “interweaving of different kinds of symbolic material and the juxtaposition of cultural material from diverse social spheres” (Dyson, 2001b, p. 420), and family members, teachers, and the children themselves worked to contextualize their linguistic experiences through a co-constructed language curriculum.

The students repeatedly demonstrated through conversation and written work that language was meaningful to them only in the context of their lived, breathed, interrelated experiences. The way our class used words, the vocabulary we chose and topics we extended, created a linguistic curriculum that built on itself in complex and ever expanding ways. We found relevance in the idea that “language is both natural and cultural, individual and social” (Knapp & Watkins, 2005, p. 14). The only possible angle from

which we could view and discuss our language use, and later from which I could examine our linguistic choices, was deeply personal, interconnected, and hybrid in nature. The conversations we had about words and their application were used to “consciously bridge” the linguistic “practices, knowledge, and beliefs of our local community” (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999, p. 291), and we used them to acknowledge aloud the differences between the linguistic choices we subconsciously made as we moved from one context to another.

As both the teacher and researcher in this work, I kept this in mind as I carefully chose the questions I would ask and tools I would use to examine how the study of language played out within our classroom community. I believed these questions needed to focus “on what children did within a communicative space (and, of course, on the nature of the provided spaces), on the forms of agency children exercised, and the materials they themselves deemed relevant to the social action at hand” (Dyson, 2001b). I recognized early on that students’ fluidity of language use, as well as their desire to categorize language based on places and people important to them, would call for me to examine our work together from an equally fluid theoretical vantage point. Hard and fast definitions of difference, linguistic rules set in stone, representing “school” and “home” talk as inherently distinctive forms of speaking – all of my attempts at pinpointing and holding onto the intricacies of word choice fell short when considered in light of the experiences of my students and their families. We needed to create “pedagogical spaces that valued uncertainty and reflection” (Solsken, Willett, & Wilson-Keenan, 2000, p. 179), that wrestled openly with critical questions and thorny, complicated inquiries.

Additionally, while I wanted to carefully and systematically consider the interconnected nature of our use of language in our world, I didn’t want to be so methodical that I reduced the dynamic nature of these linguistic events to easily identified, isolated examples of code-switching. Instead, I needed to highlight the many connections we were making between the words we chose and our continually complex understandings of the linguistic world. These connections were both consciously and subconsciously made, uttered in reference to both personal experiences and societal expectations. I needed questions and tools, therefore, which would reign in this complexity while still celebrating it.

Formulating Research Questions

With this weighing heavily on my mind, I have asked specific questions. As we discussed issues of language and power within our classroom's curriculum, one of the most prominent had to do with how we framed these oral and written conversations. In other words, how did these written and oral texts find their way in, and eventually contribute, to our linguistic curriculum?

Sifting through months of anecdotal and field notes, lesson plans, audiotapes/transcriptions, and student/family writing, I decided the best way to examine this overarching question was by analyzing five specific language-related literacy events. I chose events that could stand on their own in substance and depth, while each also uniquely contributed to a long term understanding of the linguistic growth that occurred over our nine-month study of language.

As I considered the specific words and phrases generated by students, families, and teachers in reference to each of these events, I wanted to look at the connections they made to other experiences, understandings, and societal values present in their lives, while they discussed language use in context. The connections we chose to continue referring to, as well as those that we dropped or ignored, provided insight into the familial, classroom, school, and societal influences that were most significant to us as we co-constructed our understandings of language in meaningful contexts (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Stuart-Faris, 2005).

I also wanted to examine how the language used in these literacy events both fostered and constrained our community from making joint connections between the knowledge and experiences we brought to the table (i.e. family dialogue journals, conversations with family and friends, media influences, standardized testing, first grade state level standards, proposed immigration legislation). Was my belief that our community had co-constructed our language unit simply a delusion? Did certain community members' words have more weight than others, in that we wove their expressions more often into the fabric of our larger language discussions? Had I unknowingly used my power, which I inherently possessed as the teacher of record, to halt or change the direction of the connections others were making to our language curriculum? I am sensitive to this power deferential, understanding that I cannot (and

wouldn't want to) take myself out of the equation completely; my perspective and knowledge base were valuable in helping to shape our experiences with language. However, it was *one* perspective, and *one* knowledge base, and therefore it was essential that I looked back on this academic year with a critical eye, not blindly searching for surface-level connections, but closely analyzing the intricate details of participants' links to content and how our community of learners supported or denied them.

Theory and Methodology

These questions, and the interconnectedness of the linguistic data I collected, have led me to examine our linguistic study using a tool called Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which focuses on social and contextualized language. More specifically, I found SFL's concept of register, the Context of Situation in which our talk occurred, resonated with and allowed me to describe our classroom's work with language categorization. This theory helped my students and me to identify and name the linguistic structures our community acknowledged and operated within, our self-proclaimed spoken genres of "friend talk," "family talk," "teacher talk," and "other adult talk." At the same time, I have used SFL to think through these registers and how we constructed them, as a way to illuminate the intricacies of our co-constructed curriculum. These intricacies have proven to be at once exciting and disappointing, revolutionary and conforming. While I do not always include the tables, charts, and graphs I created to identify and check for patterns in how we all understood the importance and function of language in our lives, SFL and register were critical tools in forming any conclusions I made throughout this text.

Systemic Functional Linguistics. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) helped me to analyze who the active participants were in constructing our community's linguistic categories, as well as how sturdy or lopsided the construction of this base had been. It addressed the who, the what, and the how of our linguistic choices. It provided a methodical way to think through the implications of texts like Hector's, offering tools to contextualize what he said at the micro-level (how his words related to personal experiences), meso-level (how his words were informed by the institution of schooling), and macro-level (how his words incorporated societal and cultural values) (Halliday, 1994). SFL researchers study text through recognition of the interconnected nature of all written and spoken words, and they do

so in three distinct ways: 1) the ideational metafunction (field), or *who* is doing *what* to *whom*, 2) the interpersonal metafunction (tenor), or the relationships between participants, and the textual metafunction (mode), or the way communication is occurring (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The interpersonal metafunction most closely aligned with the linguistic work our community engaged in, helping me to identify both the power structures present in conversations and whether specific connections participants made were extended, discussed further, or dismissed (Halliday, 1994).

As I pored over the transcriptions of classroom events and the dialogue present in family journals, I understood that “people simply do not answer questions [or offer information], in any situation, without first making some assessment of who is asking and why” (Cameron, 2001, p. 14). We *all* do this, subconsciously considering the situation we are in and aligning what we say to this context. With this in mind, I used one of SFL’s three main tenets to systematically consider how students, families, teachers, and I constructed our language curriculum. In doing so, I chose to focus on relationships instead of “how a text forms a unified whole” (textual metafunction) or “who did what to whom” (ideational metafunction) (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). I incorporated the interpersonal metafunction, or the “who” of language, as a way to better understand the impact of all our relationships on the way we co-constructed conversations and made meaning of our linguistic world (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Here, I examined my historically powerful role as teacher, to determine whether my voice was dominant and controlling our curriculum’s flow, or was simply one of many contributors.

Register (Context of Situation). Register, or SFL’s Context of Situation, opened up a way for me to see our language use as societally influenced and somewhat structured in its composition, while still part of a social process of communication that was open to individual interpretation and reinvention. As Halliday and Hasan (1989) explained, “A register is...a configuration of meanings that are typically associated with a particular situational configuration of field, mode, and tenor. But since it is a configuration of meanings, a register must also, of course, include the expressions...that typically accompany or realize these meanings” (pp. 38-39). In other words, we could only understand texts, whether written or spoken, in the context from which they were composed, because they were

fundamentally social, associated with a particular space and time, and reconstructed in the process of their own composition (Rymes, 2009). Linking register to classroom spaces, Rymes (2009) stated:

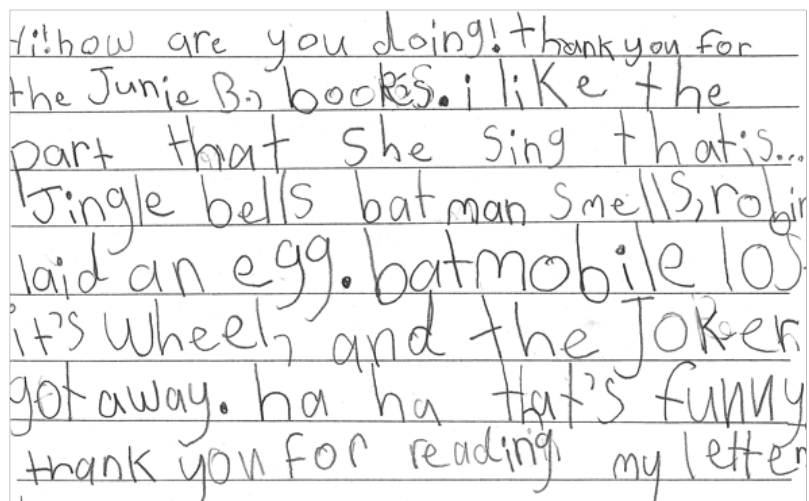
Registers are ways of speaking that vary according to activity. For instance, most students will use a ‘casual’ register (less concerned with standard grammar/pronunciation, sprinkled with youthful vocabulary and idioms) when talking with friends on the playground and a ‘formal’ register (marked by standard grammar, pronunciation, and punctuation) when greeting the principal or delivering a graduation speech. (p 126).

With Rymes in mind, I chose to examine how our texts (both written and spoken) conformed to or pushed against the typical boundaries of informal, conversational registers and formal, institutional registers.

Rymes also recognized, though, that students’ conceptions of particular registers may vary; Mack’s use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) when speaking with our principal was different than Lorena’s second language use of Standardized English, although both students would recognize this social context called for a different level of formality than they might employ when talking to their friends on the playground. After all, “no language is static or uniformly used by all of its speakers” (Justice, 2004, p. 247). Echoing this, Halliday (1994) would say that every text is unique, due to the dynamic relationship between it, the speaker and their experiences, and the context of the words. When Hector wrote to his family about how Spanish books sometimes incorporated English, this text was informed by the literature he had seen in his home and at school, by the way adults and classmates referred to the language in books, and by the representations of Spanish and English Hector had come across while watching television. His word choice was also informed by the fact that he was writing to his mother while sitting in a classroom as I, his teacher, looked over his shoulder. His text, as is the case with any other, was hybrid in its construction, influenced by countless interactions he’d been part of, and the particular space and time in which he was writing. These connections between the words Hector wrote and the worlds of which he was a part clearly influenced any linguistic meaning he made.

In other texts, the children distinguished more clearly between “formal” and “informal” writing, as is evident in the following examples, authored by Lorena. In the text below (*See Figure 1.3*), Lorena is

writing to Ms. JoBeth, a university friend and colleague who came to visit our classroom on multiple occasions. On this day, Ms. JoBeth brought each child a book based on their interests, and Lorena received *Junie B., First Grader: Jingle Bells, Batman Smells! (P.S. So Does May)* (Park, 2009). Lorena wrote the letter below to thank Ms. JoBeth for the book, and to share with her what she found humorous about the author's style and characters.



Hi! how are you doing! thank you for
the Junie B. books. i like the
part that she sing that is...
Jingle bells batman smells, robin
laid an egg. batmobile lost
it's wheel, and the Joker
got away. ha ha that's funny
thank you for reading my letter

Figure 1.3: Lorena's Letter to Ms. JoBeth

Hi! how are you doing! Thank you for the Junie B. books. I like the part

that she sing that is...Jingle bells batman smells, robin laid an egg. Batmobile lost it's wheel, and the

Joker got away. Ha ha that's funny. Thank you for reading my letter.

The letter is very conversational in tone, as if Lorena has run breathlessly up to Ms. JoBeth to thank her for her book; after recounting a particularly funny paragraph from *Junie B.*, Lorena quips, *Ha ha that's funny*, as she might do if they were speaking in person. This tone was reflective of Lorena and JoBeth's relationship, which was longstanding and built on conversational interactions that occurred in small groups or one-on-one discussions.

Lorena's conversational, informal tone shifted, however, when she wrote a letter inviting our school's principal to come to a goods/services showcase the students had created based on a social studies unit (See Figure 1.4).

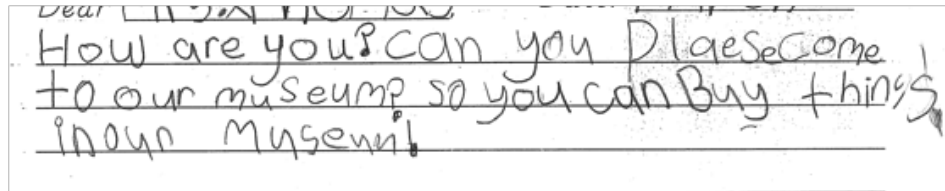


Figure 1.4: Lorena's Letter to Her Principal

How are you? Can you please come to our museum? So you can buy things in our museum!

Lorena and her classmates had already discussed the importance of being polite and inviting in a letter like this, especially since we did not know our principal as well as we knew our friends or family. *Can you please come?*, then, is indicative of this more formal relationship between Lorena and her intended audience. Even her greeting, a formal *How are you?*, sits in contrast to the *Hi! How are you doing!* she penned to Ms. JoBeth. These subtle shifts in register convey Lorena's underlying acknowledgement that the relationship between her and who she communicated with was as important in written text as it was when speaking.

This was the way the acknowledgement of register worked in our classroom. Lorena's and Hector's written words were part of a social process that at once breathed new life into and reformatted previous texts as they both fashioned their own unique understanding of what language meant to them. Students' overarching look at the dynamics of word choice in different contexts; the way we constructed our words based on where we were, with whom we were speaking, and what we were doing; and the acknowledgement that reshaping language could, over time, subtly shift our common understanding of a particular register, was at the heart of our curriculum.

Contextualizing language was also a key consideration in discussions our classroom community had around place-based and person-based registers, with place-based consisting of "home talk" and

“school talk,” and person-based ways of speaking centering on “friend talk,” “family talk,” and “teacher talk,” and “other adult talk.” When we talked about our different speaking registers, we found that “we used quite different structural and grammatical resources” (Knapp & Watkins, 2005, p. 21) when speaking with our friends than with our principal. In recognition of this, our entire class dissolved into fits of uncontrollable laughter when Jacob played with the boundaries of our “other adult” genre, when he offered, “sup, old woman,” as a way to refer to our school’s principal. He, along with everyone else, understood he was operating outside of our understanding of how we speak to “other adults,” which allowed him to know how/when to push against this framework (to the delight of his friends, and the discomfort of his sometimes-prudish teacher).

Additionally, connections the children made to their home lives and experiences as we engaged in our language curriculum played a large part in richly constructing the registers within which we operated. When Lorena spoke to me about her understandings of the different person-based registers we had constructed, she said that the sentence *Ms. Viola’s chickens be so scared* (McKissack, 1989) was an example of “family talk,” because “other grown ups might not understand,” and they “might not think you said it right.” In this exchange, Lorena clearly demonstrated her nuanced understanding of register; she believed that certain grammatical structure belonged in one register over another, so the people in communication could understand what one another was saying. There was no judgment on her part regarding which was superior or inferior, although her use of the word “right” conveyed she had some understanding of others’ potential perceptions. Instead, as might occur when discussing how to categorize books as “persuasive” or “informational,” she simply discussed the characteristics of each and used her prior experiences to determine where each sentence would best fit.

Registers, then, were there. They were present in our co-constructions of dialogic space, and in our definitions of “person-based” and “place-based” speaking patterns. Registers were also present in my analysis of these events, providing me with a framework from which to consider the fluid yet stable constructions of language surrounding us.

Constructing a Contextualized Language Study

My students, their families, and I did not study grammar rules or sentence diagramming to learn about the intricacies of language use in different contexts; instead, we had conversations, we made charts, we talked to one another, we read diverse literature, and we asked our families to share their linguistic experiences with us. This led to our own nuanced construction of language, and the co-creation of spoken genres that best fit into our understanding of the world based on prior experiences.

We did not stop there. We considered the ways we could make our understandings of register work for us, like when we wrote persuasive letters to ask a university friend to send us some of our favorite books. We pushed against others' beliefs that the "family talk" of our Spanish- and African American Vernacular English-speaking members was inferior by writing books in different languages and sharing them with others. In these ways and more, our general understanding of how speech operated in specific contexts both supported us and allowed us to take linguistic risks (Knapp & Watkins).

Further, we contextualized our study of language by choosing to forego prescriptive grammar study, and instead focus on the words we used in our world by discussing, categorizing, and using them in our writing and speaking. Using the work of Wheeler and Swords (2004) as a starting point, we moved beyond acknowledging registers I, the teacher, found to be relevant, and instead invited the children to co-construct these registers with me. While I drew attention to relationships between register, power/equity issues, and the relevancy of this to my students, we used the experiences and suggestions of the children to build our entire study. In these ways, we studied language, but in an intentionally contextualized way.

An Invitation to Readers

Consider, then, the influence of registers in the following pages. As you read, I encourage you to recall its presence both in our understandings of how to operate linguistically in any given situation, but also in our understandings of how to push against previously defined linguistic and cultural boundaries. The multifaceted connections we made to previous experiences served as guides, acting not prescriptively but as sources of support. When Hector told us about the "bad man" on the phone, insisting he and his family leave the country because they did not speak English, we were able to draw on a multitude of prior

conversations about language when framing our connections to him and support of him. Our “person-based” register discussions around language served to communicate that all students’ ways of speaking were valid and important, and Michael later pushed us to share our beliefs about language in action-oriented ways; all of this and more constructed our communal respect for diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Most of all, consider the uniqueness of our classroom, of these students and families and teachers, and the experiences we brought forth that wove their way into our language curriculum. As Mack once said, in response to a question I posed to him about how he made his own linguistic choices, “I still have my voice.” This was true for us all, although our voices were not just our own. The sound may have come from our bodies, but our individual voices connected to others in great and ever-expanding familial, classroom, school, cultural, and societal systems. We were, at once, uniquely ourselves, while also part of something much larger. This interconnectedness was special, in that it gave us common linguistic ground on which to stand, while the individual experiences we brought with us to this point allowed us to incorporate our common discussions, activities, and action plans into our linguistic frameworks in increasingly individualized ways. For we shared some experiences, and were part of some of the same cultural and societal systems, but also possessed and constructed our linguistic understandings based on knowledge unique to each of our own backgrounds and lives.

This is our story, a compilation of one academic year’s worth of anecdotal notes from classroom events and home visits, audiotapes, writing samples, and transcriptions. It is my hope that my words convey complexity, moments of clarity and of uncertainty, and multiple instances of both connection and missed opportunities. While I found that consistencies and themes existed within this data, I have not sought to ignore the anomalies, the contradictions that were present (Heath, Street, & Mills, 2008). As Dyson and Genishi (2005) stated, “It is...the competing discourses, put into dynamic relation with one another, that allow insight into...the transformative possibilities of social spaces for teaching and learning” (p. 111). I sought to face, rather than ignore, these competing discourses, to better convey the fullness of our year together.

What This Book Will Do

You may be wondering – after Hector’s hugging party, after other students shared about instances of linguistic discrimination in their own lives, what happened? On the other side of a year’s worth of collaboration and language study, where did we end up? Were we, in fact, *fine*?

That, of course, is for you to decide. I have recorded and interpreted excerpts from one year of laughter, tears, hard work, and community building in the following pages. As the person primarily responsible for communicating our growth, I did my best to weave together participants’ words with my own interpretation of them, realizing that what emerged was but one possible angle from which to view what occurred as we learned about language. Through the lenses of Systemic Functional Linguistics and its concept of register/Context of Situation, I have analyzed our language work at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, understanding that each informed and intertwined itself with the other; the language we used, and our connections to it, were inevitably colored by these varied and influential contexts.

I have also broadly outlined, at the end of each chapter, options and ideas for classrooms interested in communal language study, so other educators can begin to consider language lessons for use within their own community. Our study of language was unique, and others would not want to replicate it as such; however, I believe educators can apply general guidelines to a variety of educational situations, which are most likely to result in context-focused, action-oriented approaches to language instruction focused on the community’s unique linguistic background and experiences.

Finally, because I strongly feel current educational policy for young children focuses on a decontextualized approach to language learning that ultimately lacks meaning and relevancy, I offer general suggestions for the reinvention of such policy. I make the case that it is impossible to remove culture and experience from language; when we pretend to do so, insisting through standardized test questions and the creation of wide scale curriculum that children speak only Standardized English in school, we simply prize one linguistic background over all others.

Upon learning about the intricacies of our classroom’s co-constructed language curriculum, considering both its strengths and weaknesses, I welcome your thoughts and feedback on the perspective I

presented here. I welcome conversation, questions, and other viewpoints from which to view this material. Most of all, I welcome the uniqueness of your own wisdom and experiences around this topic, because further accounts of the richness of this type of work could only serve to validate and drive into the public arena the responsibility of schools to not sweep under the educational rug, but to acknowledge and build upon children's diverse linguistic backgrounds.

As Maggie suggested once, dialogue in classrooms consists of not "just talking, but...learning."

So let's talk.

CHAPTER 2

OPENING OUR LANGUAGE STUDY:

INVITING STUDENTS AND TEACHERS TO CONNECT TO WORDS AND ONE ANOTHER

“We appropriate words from a shared linguistic repertoire to name and narrate our experiences. In this way, language is both a repository of cultural meanings and a medium for the production of meaning in everyday life” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 5).

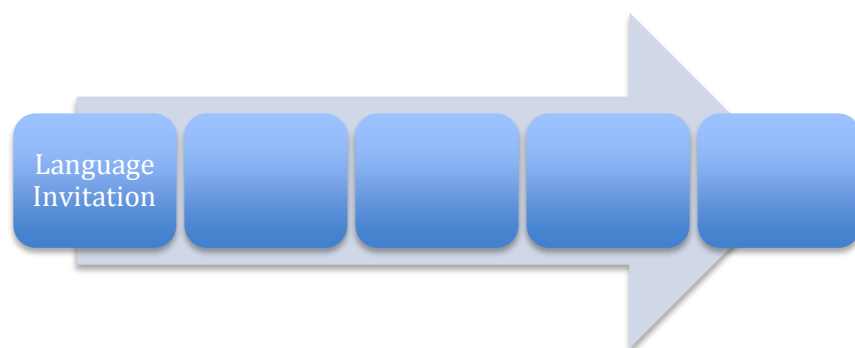


Figure 2.1: Unfolding of Language Activity #1

This chapter will highlight the opening activity in my classroom’s contextualized study of language. The language invitation, a formal call and inquiry I issued to students to consider the function of language in our lives, was part of a continuously unfolding unit. Therefore, the diagram shown above only reveals the first of five central activities; at the time of *this* event, my students and I could not envision the direction our study would later take, and attempting to do so would have been counterintuitive to the project’s student-driven nature. I approached our work as Gee (2004) might have, who described “real learning” as always being “an active and new way of experiencing the world” (p. 26). Though I wish the diagram to provide some idea as to where our study was headed, I also wish it to

convey the uncertainty I felt as we progressed. With this in mind, the activities that were part of our language study will unfold, one at a time, at the beginning of each ensuing chapter.

Here, I will discuss the events that led up to our opening language activity. I will share how these initial investigations, along with my pedagogical/theoretical beliefs and the focus of my research inquiries, combined to shape the language invitation itself, which marked the formal beginning of our study on contextualized language use.

I will then discuss the invitation in detail, sharing the personal connections students extended and exploring the intertextual themes I identified throughout the nuances of a conversation between Dr. Ruby and Mack, specifically. By acknowledging students' "repository of cultural meanings" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 5), brought to life within our language invitation, I will identify how these connections guided the formation of our unfolding study.

Shaping Our Language Study

Long before Hector's tearful sharing and Michael's realization of the link between language and power, before our hugging party and discussions about Canadian homes with attached garages, these students, their families, and I began to think about and discuss the words we chose as we moved from one social context to another. The evolution of our linguistic studies was not linear, but was often much like the roller coaster cheer that the children and I used to celebrate risk taking and personal growth during writing workshop. *Ch, ch, ch, ch, woo, woo, woo, chhhhhhh*, up and down it went, and we were along for the ride, trying to trust that we would be "fine," that we would come out safely on the other side.

Our language study, which focused on examining how we contextualized the words we used and later identified opportunities to move from *talk* to *action*, was composed of opportunities for discussion which were based on a connection or disconnection made by a classmate, family member, or teacher. Yet, from the beginning, I hoped we would grow in our understandings of language in our world, knowing that "growth must be imagined, not as movement along a linear road, but as increasingly deliberate movement among expanding social spheres" (Dyson, 2001a, p. 11). Although we were not initially aware of the path down which our study would travel, or the activities and events that would become most appropriate for

us in our exploration of language in our lives, examining words as part of a community was our best bet for developing a nuanced, socially constructed understanding of how language works.

From the beginning, openness like this was sometimes difficult, even disconcerting, as I watched colleagues and their students progressing through our state's first grade standards at a rate which would ensure they would master the academic content in Language Arts by the time the standardized tests rolled around. *Would we get there?* I wondered, remembering the calls of Delpit and hooks to teach children from diverse linguistic backgrounds the nuances of Standardized English, a powerful and necessary code for making their voices heard in larger educational and career-oriented contexts. As White & Lowenthal (2011) stated, these power codes are “seldom explicitly taught in the K-12 setting; rather, students are expected to learn [their] use through exposure or, in many cases, through coercion” (p. 3).

Therefore, I knew I must balance explicit teaching with attention to relevance, and find ways to expose my students to Standardized English by addressing it as one of many ways to use language in diverse contexts. Although I believed children best constructed their own knowledge based on background and experiences, I also knew that the district would measure my students' intelligence by comparing their test scores to others'. I felt the tug and pull between doing what I felt was best for my students, and working within pre-determined, increasingly standardized academic boundaries in order to ensure their success (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Before we began our language study, I felt the clock ticking.

I felt our roller coaster car slowing under the weight of mandates and testing pressures.

I felt the urgency of preparing my students to “succeed” in school.

But instead of fueling me, the weight and urgency angered me. I could not respond the way some others did, following the curricular maps even when inappropriate, which often led them to become frustrated with students who could not keep up with this arbitrary timeline.

While building our entire linguistic curriculum from authentic connections and meaning making was so far a rather unexplored mode of instruction, in my bones I felt it was the right way to approach this topic. In a journal entry I penned at the beginning of the school year, I wrote:

...my want to complete this project has become much deeper than simply a language study. I want to engage in this work with the families of my students, and I want to stop assuming that the resources/ideas I pull from peer-edited journals and education texts speak to the needs of these children and their families...When will I stop trying to take on the role of “expert,” and truly realize that I am not, and never will be, an expert on what my students know...It is their perspectives, their families’ perspectives, that will teach me...about ways that language has affected them (both positively and negatively)...And what might happen if/when these children and their families enter into their own dialogue about this? They will surely teach one another in much different ways than I could imagine, or even hope to interpret through the writing on a journal page or the transcription of a conversation.

In short, this was my soapbox. I agreed with Dyson and Genishi (2005), who stated that language is cultural, while culture is also reciprocally embodied in language, and through its use, people both reinforce and reinterpret the world around them. As I began to envision the beginning of our language study, I knew I wanted to explore opportunities for authentic, relevant, and student-driven discussions around the form and function of language. Language was personal, used to “name and narrate our experiences” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 5), and we needed to build our study on the meaningful contextualization of multiple forms of language. As Genishi & Dyson (2009) pointed out, “We see distressingly few classrooms and curricula that allow children either the time or space to learn about or through language in a way that they choose or that enables them to utilize what they already know” (p. 16), so I needed to balance my beliefs about how to create a meaningful linguistic curriculum with the experiences and desires of my students and their families.

Therefore, my students, their families, and I needed to co-envision and co-create our linguistic curriculum. While I suspected our work would somehow involve and build upon funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), acknowledge the differences between language spoken at home and at school (Heath, 1983/1996), and use translation charts to move from one linguistic context to another (Wheeler & Swords, 2004), I also knew a study based on family and student interests could not be fully pre-planned by me. I needed students’ and families’ input on the connections they made between and

among their use of words and the contexts in which they spoke them. As Maggie so insightfully stated, communal discussions were not frivolous activities, but chances for our community to learn through talk; so in talk we would engage.

Filling in Gaps: Events Leading Up to Our Language Invitation

Before engaging in language study, my students were already connecting classroom content to family/school partnership activities. When students brought up language in use through these pursuits, they gave me insight into their current understandings of words in their world. As Genishi & Dyson (2009) stated, “Regardless of children’s culture, ethnicity, gender, language, race, or social class, their learning is profoundly social” (p. 21). I used the social connections they made in other activities as a basis for constructing our initial language invitation activity.

Family Dialogue Journals

The connection that existed between our longtime practice of writing in our Family Dialogue Journals (FDJs) and our emerging study of language became clear from the initial journal entry of the students’ first grade year. We decided to write about our “first grade hopes and dreams,” as a way to reintroduce both our families and ourselves to the journals. We began to write on Friday afternoon. It was the end of a long week, and we were low on energy. Many of the children were either jumpy or lethargic from exhaustion at having begun the transition from a summer to school year schedule. However, even as I observed Lorena tying and retying her shoelaces, Mack spinning on his head, and Jacob eyeing and attempting to catch a fuzzball that had broken loose of someone’s clothing and was now dancing lazily through the air around the carpet, I stubbornly plowed ahead in brainstorming a letter to families. I *loved* Family Dialogue Journals, and was already looking forward to receiving responses from families and discussing them during Monday’s Morning Meeting – I could not wait another week! I hoped the students’ familiarity with this activity, brought on by weekly entries during their kindergarten year, would be enough to get them started.

After finishing our co-constructed letter, my student teacher and I handed out brand new black and white composition notebooks in which the children could create their own pages of writing to

families. I was relieved they could now engage in their own work at their own pace, and watched in anticipation as the students spread out around the room with notebooks, clipboards, and pencils.

The newness of the journals, the possibility inherent in their blank pages, seemed to refuel the children, and soon they were seated at desks, on pillows, or under tables with friends, settling in to write and guiding their pencils carefully and deliberately across the first white page.

My student teacher and I rotated, conferencing with and refocusing students as needed, pausing only to write in individual journals the question to the children's families: "What are your hopes and dreams for me this year?" I stopped to write "¿Cual es son sus sueños y esperanzas para mi?" in Naldo's journal, as his family primarily spoke Spanish and Mr. Oswaldo, a co-teacher in our classroom and invaluable partner in our language study, had already translated our focal question into this common familial home language (Mr. Oswaldo was originally from Honduras). As I did so, I glanced at Naldo's writing, which already consisted of multiple sentences.

My eyes widened when I realized he was writing his entry entirely in Spanish! He was a fearless speller, stretching out the sounds he heard and proudly displaying "keyro" as his sound-spelled version of "quiero," as he wrote that his hope for the year was to learn to drive a car.

"My mom wants me to learn Spanish and English this year. She will teach me to read in Spanish and I will teach her English, because she doesn't know much English yet and she wants me to help her learn," Naldo shared with me as I stood over him, my mouth agape and my thoughts in a whirl as I took in his bi-literate writing. As Naldo turned his face back toward his paper, already beginning to stretch out the sounds in his next sentence, I realized I was the one most surprised and impressed by his linguistic risk-taking. It must have seemed to Naldo to be a natural extension of his growing mastery of sounds. Why *wouldn't* he be writing in Spanish, since his family speaks Spanish at home, and he was going to place this journal in his book bag to share with them? Certainly, he knew his audience!

Though writing in his journal in Spanish made sense, no student had ever done this in our kindergarten Family Dialogue Journals. I wondered what inspired, or helped Naldo feel comfortable, to write this entry in Spanish? Was it Mr. Oswaldo's presence, and the conversational Spanish they engaged

in, that blended Naldo's home and school worlds? Was it our bilingual homework, and Naldo's realization that he could write academic language in Spanish? Was it the bilingual children's literature lining the shelves in our classroom and in the school library, demonstrating to our Spanish-speaking students their home language had a place in school text? Or was it, as he had mentioned, fueled by the deal his mother struck with him, promising she would help him learn to read Spanish if he did the same for her with English?

More than likely, it was a combination of these factors and many more that led Naldo to, without prompting, merge a school activity with his family's home language. We were creating a third space (Gutiérrez, 2008), in which students and teachers blurred the linguistic lines between home and school, and in which there existed "the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge" (p. 152). Where binaries often existed, we pushed against them, and worked to "value the uncertainty and reflection" (Solsken, Willett, & Wilson-Keenan, 2000, p. 179) present in opening up space for new dialogue.

The ease with which Naldo expanded this blurring to his writing helped me realize that he might be ready to explore and discuss his own language use. He was already aware of the fact that he needed to contextualize the way he used language. Naldo had never attempted to pen a paragraph to *me* in Spanish, because he knew I was not a fluent Spanish speaker; while writing to his mother, however, he found Spanish to be the most appropriate form of communication. Additionally, Naldo was able to tell me about his plans to both teach his mother English and learn from her how to write in Spanish, further illustrating his willingness to broaden his use of language (both written and spoken).

Conversations About Power

While I worked hard to open myself up to possibilities for deepening our family/school partnership through the lens of linguistic diversity, I also listened for opportunities to engage in dialogue with my students around the underlying and often hidden structures of power that create hierarchies of language within schools and communities (Fairclough, 1992a). This was a daunting prospect for me as a primary grade teacher, because I was quite aware that imposing conversations of this sort on young

children, particularly without personally relevant reasons for doing so, may quickly overwhelm and disengage them. However, I was also aware that these students' primary home languages, Spanish and African American Vernacular English, were not equal in value to Standardized English in the school setting. As Allen (2010) stated, "Home language" is a "comforting phrase,...conjuring images of families chatting around the television, dinner table, or front porch...yet too often in our country's educational history we have at best ignored home languages as a valuable linguistic resource and at worst denigrated and even prohibited its use in school" (p. 27). Mindful of this inequity, and aware of the binding power of society to insist on students' learning the language of power in order to get ahead, I believed I was doing the children a disservice by not helping them to communally identify experiences related to the inequality of language in their lives (Delpit, 1994).

Examining power in our world. As I began learning with these children and families for a second year, the work of teachers and scholars like Stephanie Jones (2006) inspired me to continue looking for opportunities to explore issues of power. Her work with young students incorporated exactly this, giving me hope that my students and I could identify meaningful ways to discuss the hold that invisible but pervasive linguistic hierarchies had over our ability to celebrate, share, and simply use our home languages outside of isolated homes or family gatherings. Jones argued that authors cannot create text, whether written or spoken, apart from their social and political ideologies; objectivity, then, becomes impossible. The social and political ideologies most often represented in the children's literature that districts sanction as part of the school curriculum are inevitably reflective of the mainstream, and many authors and publishing companies reinforce these mainstream ideologies in books' widespread distribution and consumption. As it is said, the victors write history, and they do so not only in their interpretation of facts, but also through the lens of their own language, cultural understandings, and moral and religious beliefs (Hasan, 1996).

Power is inherent in text, whether written or spoken. Jones found that recognizing it, naming it, and ultimately pushing against it with young children was best accomplished through literature, and an examination of the "3 Ps" present in texts: *perspective*, *positioning*, and *power* (Jones, 2006, p. 67). I

oftentimes considered the influence of powerful underlying ideologies within the books I presented to my students, and chose those that represented characters from diverse linguistic, familial, racial, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds as a way to wage my own personal protest against the whitewashed literature represented in Barnes & Noble.

Yet I knew this exposure would not be enough for my students and their families to engage in relevant dialogue around linguistic prejudice and favoritism towards the status quo. Topics related to power would need to come from the students and their families, rather than from me. In prior years, I had not found a way to meaningfully engage in these types of conversations with students, and I was worried that this would once again be the case.

How would we begin having the sorts of authentic discussions Jones had with her students?

Caterpillar conversations. It turned out that all we needed were a few caterpillars to make the idea of power structures begin to come alive.

During recess one afternoon, my student teacher and I noticed there were children congregating underneath the platform leading up to the slide. Those from our room snuck glances in our direction every few seconds, before the scene unfolding in front of them tugged their attention back toward the ground, its pull magnetic. Snippets of the chant, “Fight, fight, fight!” made its way to our ears. We decided someone should find out what was going on, so Ms. Callie approached the students, who scattered like startled birds when they saw her coming.

The crowd, many of whom had long been interested in WWF Monday Night Wrestling, was terrorizing a pair of caterpillars who had innocently crawled into the playground area. Children were taking turns holding them and making them “fight” in the air, and then alternately burying the caterpillars and digging them back up, only to begin the process anew. Ms. Callie shooed them away, and now stood guard to ensure the caterpillars would not continue to be harassed, to the dismay of the few children who attempted to stealthily advance on the poor creatures once again.

Crisis averted, I continued to watch the sixty or so students playing on the equipment in front of me, calling out, “Feet first, please!” or “Your class is going inside!” as necessary. Yet, I wondered if I

should seize this opportunity to have a conversation with our class about the behavior in which some of them had engaged. I knew many children, myself included, who had at one time stepped on a spider, experimented with ants and a magnifying glass on a hot day, or torn a worm into pieces just to see if it truly would become two separate worms. My friends and I had become perfectly respectable, animal loving human beings, in spite of our destructive past. However, I could not help but think of Mary Cowhey (2006), who made it her classroom practice to engage students in genuine conversation about their responsibilities to the earth and its creatures, oftentimes as an offshoot of an unplanned event such as this one.

But how was I to begin?

Unbeknownst to my students, we had extra recess time that day; I waited for inspiration to strike as the other first grade classes filed back into the school to get drinks of water, use the restroom, and clean their sweaty faces. I knew that I could give the traditional, “You need to respect the earth, and the caterpillars didn’t do anything to you” talk, and that the children would nod at me understandingly – only to turn around tomorrow, at school or at home or at their babysitter’s house, and do the same thing to another pair of unsuspecting caterpillars.

What would my angle be?

We finally lined ourselves up and shuffled inside. As the children took turns at the water fountain and then settled on the carpet, I was still torn between having this conversation (that I didn’t know how to have), and simply launching ourselves into the next planned activity.

I went with option one.

“We need to have a conversation about what happened with the caterpillars on the playground,” I said.

Immediately, the children launched into vivid descriptions of the event, unwilling to link themselves to the activity, and as a result, blaming their friends.

“People were hurting the caterpillars,” one child said.

“They were burying them in the sand,” another announced.

“Kids in the other class were being mean,” declared someone else, and his peers nodded vigorously in agreement.

I nodded, too, but veered away from the path of blame the children were so generously laying before me. We were not moving toward a change in thinking, I realized; we were simply shifting our responsibility in carrying out an act we found unacceptable in the school setting to the shoulders of others.

This was a result of our own powerful position. It was our way of absolving ourselves of blame, of convincing ourselves that the act of harming the caterpillars was someone else’s fault all along. Our victims were not going to contest this. They couldn’t! Harming them and then passing along the blame was the perfect cover, and we knew it.

This position of power contrasted the all-too-familiar feeling of *disempowerment* many of my students and their families felt on a regular basis, as a segment of society that did not speak Standardized English and who oftentimes did not have economic influence over others. In front of me was an opportunity to engage in discussion with them about the dangers of being in a powerful position, with the hope that one day we could incorporate this knowledge into conversations focused on situations in which we found *ourselves* to be powerless.

We were not the caterpillars now, but we might be later.

And so without a plan, without an online template to guide me into differentiation or a script to tell me what to say, I found my direction.

“Does anyone here know what power is?” I asked.

When the students met my eyes with blank stares and the shaking left to right of heads, I stood up, making my arms wide and trying hard to tower over them.

“When I am bigger than you, and stronger than you, and have lived through lots of experiences, I am powerful. This means that I can control what is happening in either good or bad ways,” I explained.

The children continued to stare back at me with wide eyes.

“In the situation with the caterpillars,” I began, “who was more powerful? Them, or you?”

“Us,” was the unified response. “Because we are stronger and bigger than them.”

“Yes!” I exclaimed. “You are stronger, bigger, and you will live longer.” In a more thoughtful tone, I asked, “Does that make it okay to hurt them? Just because you can, should you?”

I was at first met with silence.

Tentatively, a murmured “no” spread around the room.

Dahlia raised her hand and offered, “When we hurt them, they can’t go home to their caterpillar families.”

There was agreement, and more hands raised. The children talked in pairs about what they were thinking regarding power, and I heard a variety of responses to this inquiry.

“We should leave the caterpillars alone because it’s not their fault they are small.”


“Just because we are big doesn’t mean we should hurt things.”

“The caterpillars were just trying to go home. We should check on them tomorrow and not let other people hurt them.”

I grabbed some examples of children’s books from our classroom shelves that I felt represented people who used their power in positive ways. Given the fact that we were reading folktales, this was not difficult: John Henry and Paul Bunyan were obvious examples of big, strong characters who were kind to others, even when they had the capacity to hurt many people.

I also plucked *My Name is Yoon* (Recorvitz, 2003) from my desk, a book our class had recently read. It was about a young girl named Yoon (윤) who moved from Korea to the United States, and wanted to maintain a bit of the comforts of her homeland by continuing to write her name in Korean script. Her family, however, wanted her to speak and write only in English, and throughout the text 윤 pushed against their wishes by renaming herself each day, thus carrying out her own personal form of protest against the silencing of her Korean voice.

When I asked the children who they felt had power in this book, the resounding response was, “Yoon’s father.”

Most children thought he should have used his power to let  spell her name in Korean letters, since that is what she wanted and what made her feel more comfortable in a new, unfamiliar place. In this way, we found ourselves contemplating the importance of home language even before we began our linguistic study. Our current conversation was becoming a connective thread the children could later use to enhance their discussions regarding the relationship between language and power.

Michael, however, offered a different perspective. In regards to the father's wishes, he countered, "He wasn't trying to be mean. He was trying to help her. They were living in a new place and her dad wanted her to be able to learn English so she could understand other people and they could understand her. He wasn't trying to be mean." In a few sentences, Michael had presented us with a new perspective, a nuanced view of the situation that was sensitive to the father's point of view.

We pondered this, with me attempting to follow Michael's train of thought in a way that would be relevant to the rest of the students. I glanced up at the clock, though, and realized we were in danger of being late for music class, having spent twenty intense minutes on this topic. I rounded out the conversation by acknowledging that power is a complex idea, and that as Michael was telling us, it is sometimes difficult to decide how to use the power we have.

Our focus necessarily shifted from caterpillars to African drums as the children lined up and chattered excitedly about their next class. However, thoughts on power and our use of it remained at the forefront of many students' minds. In the weeks following, the children did, in fact, stand guard on the playground, asking others to leave caterpillars alone and even relocating displaced pill bugs from the sidewalk to a shady, grassy area away from running feet and tumbling bodies. Some of them chose to use writing workshop time to write texts detailing appropriate uses of power, categorizing "helping others" as being a *good* use of power, and "making caterpillars fight" as being a *bad* use of power. The students voted to make our use of power the topic of their next Family Dialogue Journal entry, telling their families about the caterpillar experience and asking them how they use their own power in kind ways.

Our classroom discourse also changed because of our new understanding of power and our responsibility to use it wisely. My student teacher and I reflected on these discussions, and committed to make an effort to focus behavioral conversations with children around their personal power to change their actions. “How are you using your power?” became Ms. Callie’s mantra, and it reframed the way the children evaluated their interactions with others.

Additionally, these early discussions and explorations of power, contextualized and made meaningful in the students’ personal application of a complex and abstract idea, opened up space for us to later discuss power structures in relationship to linguistic prejudice (Bloome et al., 2005). When Hector tearfully shared with us that a man on the phone told his family they did not belong in the United States because they spoke Spanish, we could talk about how this man was using the power he had to intimidate families. When students began to link language discrimination to racial prejudice, we could consider this in relation to what we already understood power to be: the chance for individuals or groups of people to use their strength (whether physical, socioeconomic, academic, religious, etc.) to positively or negatively affect others. Therefore, our early constructions and considerations of power structures were influential in our language study’s later considerations of linguistic hierarchies. These conversations provided us with a common verbiage connected to shared experiences with caterpillars, literature, and power, through which we could later contemplate increasingly abstract relationships between our own lives and the social structures inherently guiding them (Martin & Rose, 2007).

Our Contextualized Language Study Begins

Therefore, our classroom community began our language study with thoughts of caterpillars on the playground, Yoon’s father, and what we considered “good” or “bad” uses of power already present in our minds. We began with Family Dialogue Journal entries written in Spanish and English, and conversations about bilingualism present in our minds. These classroom events, along with countless others, colored the way we viewed language, its contextualized use, and its place in our lives from the moment I invited students, their families, and other teachers to enter into dialogue about linguistic

diversity. Although the language invitation activity I am going to share marked the formal beginning of our study, our prior experiences richly and uniquely informed even our opening conversations.

The Language Invitation Event

I based the construction of our invitational activity on Van Sluys' ideas in, *What If and Why? Literacy Invitations for Multilingual Classrooms* (2005). I believed that, if we were to create a dialogic unit on language that built upon the co-constructed ideas of community members, then *inviting* the children to participate, and to share personal connections and experiences within an exploratory context, was key.

I created an investigation made up of five distinct yet interconnected centers, through which the children worked with teachers/graduate students from our school and the local university to consider a critically-constructed question based on linguistic diversity, the creation of partnerships, and hierarchical power structures. Because the language invitation was a complex undertaking, I intend the following description to provide an overview of what occurred during this lesson, and will follow this description with an examination of the intertextual links students and teachers used to guide their conversations.

We met as a class to discuss what this invitation entailed, watching *Yo, Yes!* (Raschka, 1998) to begin talking about language as a tool for understanding one another. After *ooooohhhing* and *aaawwwwing* as we opened colorful gift bags full of artifacts to consider at each station, the children rotated through four centers in twenty-minute intervals (*See Table 2.1*).

<u>Station</u>	<u>Critical Question</u>	<u>Artifacts (Sampling)</u>
Photographs	Do you speak differently in certain places? Why/why not?	*Playgrounds *Churches, mosques, synagogues *Variety of homes
Children's Literature	Think about how people in books, on TV, or in songs speak. How is this language similar to/different from the language you use?	*Hip Hop Speaks to Children (Giovanni, 2008) *En Mi Familia/In My Family (Garza, 1996) *Koko's Kitten (Patterson, 1985)
Advertisements	Do you think it's important to know how to speak in a variety of ways? Why/why not?	*Newspaper Clippings *Magazine Ads
Videos	How do the people you know use language? Are these the only ways to use language?	*Yo, Yes (Raschka, 1998) *Flossie and the Fox (McKissack, 1986)

Table 2.1: Language Invitation Stations

At the photograph station, Dr. Ruby (a university-based teacher-leader) spread color and black/white pictures of schools, hospitals, playgrounds, grocery stores, cinemas, homes, and more around a table. Before the children began to explore, Ruby asked them to consider the question, “Do you speak differently in different places?” She formed many of her individual inquiries around this idea, focusing the children on photographs in which they were interested and asking them to consider how they thought people might speak in each.

Similarly, one of our student teachers displayed an assortment of children's literature in multiple languages and dialects across her table. Before the children explored these texts, she asked them to think about how people on TV, in movies, or in books spoke, and if that was similar to how they spoke to their families and friends. She then tailored personal questions to each student as they chose individual books to peruse and comment on.

The advertisement station required more guidance than the previous two, because the children were not accustomed to examining newspaper clippings and department store print outs. As the teacher-leader at this station, I reminded the students of the persuasive writing unit in which we had recently

engaged. After discussing the purpose of persuasive writing, which is to convince someone of something, we talked about the relationship between the two-for-one hot dog ads before them and letters they had previously written to woodcutters, asking them to stop chopping down so many of the rainforest's trees; in each example, authors used words to influence readers to do something. Upon helping the children to contextualize the advertisements, I asked them whether they thought it was important to be able to use language to persuade others. We also considered *when* it might be important to use words persuasively. We spent a lot of time at this station simply considering how people used language in different ways.

The video station was the least verbally interactive, which allowed the students time to process and think about what the teacher-leader at this station was presenting to them. As they arrived, Ms. Callie (a student teacher in her second semester with us) told each group that they were going to watch a video where the author of *Flossie and the Fox* (McKissack, 1986) read the text of her book aloud, while displaying its illustrations on the screen. Ms. Callie then asked each child to consider the way Flossie spoke (African American Vernacular English) and how it was both similar to and different from the way the fox spoke (Standardized English). At the conclusion of the video, during which the children simply enjoyed the story and let the words wash over them, Ms. Callie asked them to talk about these different ways of speaking, and whether one of them sounded like people they knew. If time permitted, the students and teacher talked about how their families, friends, and teachers used words. Did their family members like to talk on the phone? Did they talk to people at the grocery store? Did they sound the same on the phone talking to a friend as they did when speaking to cashiers about a sale on mangos?

The students' responses to the questions posed during our invitation were important, because they provided me with a baseline regarding their knowledge of how language changed because of their environment. Just as important was the fact that they were beginning to consider how people sometimes used language in different ways in the world. These children had always been part of many discursive communities, speaking more or less formally, in one language/dialect or another, based on whom they were talking to and where they were (Gutiérrez, 2008). However, in order for them to make sense of this and use it to their advantage when communicating in multiple contexts, we needed to begin considering

how to sort out and categorize language into co-created groupings, personal to each student yet broad enough to encompass all of our experiences. The invitation's questions pushed each child and teacher to consider how they used language in their own lives, making it more likely that they would begin to make connections between words they spoke and the context in which they spoke them.

After these rotations, we welcomed a calm conversation, as it contrasted with the cacophony of noise the children maintained while they excitedly talked about artifacts and considered critical questions, as well as their own wonderings. We settled together to summarize and learn from one another's perspectives. Finally, we used a modified KWL (Know/Want to Know/Learn) chart to record what we noticed as each child gave voice to their thoughts (*See Figure 2.2*).

LANGUAGE	
What did we notice?	What do we want to know?

Figure 2.2: Modified KWL Chart

Intertextual Connections

Nieto (2002) once stated:

Instead of treating students' cultural and linguistic conditions as deficits, we need to think of them as talents and strengths that can be used in the service of their education. This approach is based on the most fundamental assumption made by all good teachers – that we all bring important experiences and insights to the educational enterprise. (p. 167)

We worked to follow this assumption throughout the language invitation activity. The students came to the stations described above ready to engage in discussions about the way they believed people in the images spread before them were using language. They analyzed, through loud exclamations and intimate conversations with teachers, the photographs, newspaper advertisements, videos, and children's literature

from their own unique lens. Every assertion made, every declaration uttered was representative of the children's connections to other events, and they gave these events voice here because they felt them to be important in their lives.

Through these connections, students wove together a tapestry of experience, rich in its connection to the multiple linguistic worlds of which they were a part. Intertextuality was present, as it is in any exchange, since written and spoken texts are inevitably "full of snatches of other texts" (Fairclough, 1992a, p. 84). The children's thoughts and ideas were "imbued with the voices of many people and many past texts" (Bloome et al., 2005, p. 40), and in these voices there existed a unique combination of perspective, beliefs, and experiences. Therefore, it was essential for me to consider the connections students made in order to further develop our language study. Such considerations were equally essential after our study's conclusion, since identifying these connections has helped me to determine how co-constructed our curriculum truly was.

As I discuss in the next section, the intertextual links extended by the children and their families fell within two overarching categories: one related to constructing a meta language and engaging in code-switching, while the other related to the power and cultural links inherent in language use. The students made these connections to language from multiple linguistic perspectives throughout the invitation activity. As they did so, I quickly and somewhat messily wrote or recorded each link during our initial language exploration. I have tidied them up here in order to make some sense of the personal connections students were incorporating into these early linguistic discussions (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Heath, Street, & Mills; 2008).

Intertextual connections based on discourse communities and meta language. In most professions and organizations, members function within a discourse community. In this discourse community, as Gee (2011) describes it, members feel comfortable interacting linguistically because they have internalized and simultaneously helped to shape the discourse used there over time. The discourses Gee talks about represent "ways of being in the world" (p. 3), and help members feel connected to one another. For instance, educators' mentioning of IEPs, NCTE, and RTI may confuse others who are trying

to follow their line of thinking (just ask my husband, who has been present for many gatherings of teachers during which he could barely follow along), but this professional discourse community serves as a way for us to efficiently communicate with one another. We may begin to develop a common understanding of this terminology simply upon learning the definition of each, passed on to us in professional development sessions or at faculty meetings, but we strengthen our understandings through personal experiences (such as engaging in an IEP meeting) and hearing about those of others. In these ways, a more nuanced, layered conception of this discourse occurs, strengthened through the sharing and recounting of events through discussion.

Just as educators strengthen their own discourse when considering the specifics of their experiences working with children, I believed that my students would also benefit from communally developing a shared discourse around which they could begin to categorize their own language use. I wanted us to co-construct this discourse, to be native members of this community, with our shared experiences and discussions informing our use of language.

At the same time, we would be developing a meta language, or “a language for talking about language” (Schleppegrell, 2010), since our community’s focus was on our contextualized use of words. Martin (2006) likened meta language to “scaffolding that sticks around” (p. 115); when people develop a meta language based on needs and in consideration of personal experiences and prior knowledge, they create a shared ladder of familiarity that allows them to explicitly discuss relevant topics. Mary Schleppegrell’s (2010) research has supported this; she worked with primary grade teachers and their students to use Systemic Functional Linguistic’s meta language as a way to make explicit to second language learners the linguistic expectations inherent in the two written genres of *recounting* and *position support*. These students became “more conscious about features of language in the texts they read and wrote,” and they used the SFL meta language “to name the grammatical features and genre stages of...texts” (p. 30). Results like this encouraged me, because they made it more likely that my students’ would strengthen their understanding of how to use words in their world through a social and communal building of terminology having to do with language in context.

Early acknowledgement of meta language. My students seemed to agree. Through comments and connections they made throughout our language invitation activity, the children communicated that their knowledge of language in use was already benefitting considerably from communally building their own meta language. By doing so, I hoped that in later grades the students might find more relevancy in grammar study and multiple languages; if they first understood there was a *purpose* to contextualizing language in use, I believed they would be more likely to find relevancy in future activities having to do with words in their world.

At the children's literature station. One example of their understanding of context had to do with different ways of speaking to people at home and at school. As Lorena, Mack, Hector, Michael, and our newest student teacher, Ms. Hilliard, sat poring over the language used in children's literature, they discussed their word usage as they moved into and out of conversations with family, friends, and teachers. They playfully engaged in discussion; Hector asserted that he addressed his baby brother as "Man!" and when asked whether he had siblings, Mack replied, "I have 100!"

Yet, amidst their giggles and the flipping of book pages, the children connected the relatively new concept of contextualizing language use to previous experiences they had in changing their language or speaking patterns.

When our student teacher, Ms. Hilliard, asked Hector if he spoke to his family the way he spoke to his friends and teachers, he quickly answered, "No. I talk in Spanish."

Soon after, when Ms. Hilliard asked Michael if he would say, "Come here!" when calling her over, Michael exclaimed, "No!"

"If you wanted me to come over, what would you say to me?" Ms. Hilliard inquired.

"Please come over," was Michael's response.

Similarly, Mack and Michael both seemed rather offended by the idea of jumping up and down in their seats to get the attention of their teachers. "No, raise your hand!" they both asserted.

While these responses were certainly connected to the students' knowledge of classroom expectations and the language in which most people spoke in school, they also connected to and built

upon experiences the children had with their families, as I had learned upon visiting their homes earlier in the year. Mack's mother told me about the importance she and Mack placed on "focusing and paying attention" to how he constructed sentences. Natalie talked about discussions she had with Mack around the idea that, in writing, he might have to "rearrange some words" in order to clarify the point he was making. The concept of rearranging written text was similar to rearranging spoken discourse, since both examples called on Mack to consider his audience and context when communicating.

During another home visit, Maggie, Michael's mother, coached him as he created a map of the places in which he used language. As we sat at their kitchen table, light streaming in from the sunroom in front of us, she asked Michael, "Do you go places with your dad and use your language?" This led us to discuss tennis matches and trips to McDonald's that Michael took with his father, and we compared "tennis talk" to "McDonald's talk." Soon after, Maggie began to share a story about Michael's distaste for trips to the mall. Almost as soon as she began, he leaned over her, his hands on her legs and his cheek pressed to hers. "Mooommm," he begged, "Not in front of the people!" We laughed, making note of the fact that Michael was already thinking about appropriate and inappropriate stories to tell in front of his teacher; he actively participated in determining which intertexts his mother should extend in the presence of his teacher, and which he believed should not leave his home. He was contextualizing and editing the topics about which he spoke, and this experience, like Mack's experience with rearranging words, connected to and built upon the conversation Ms. Hilliard led around a table of children's books on the day of our language invitation.

At the photograph station. The students' discussion about their understanding of the appropriate ways to use language continued after they left the children's literature center. Upon rotating to the photograph station, where Dr. Ruby was waiting to discuss the language students thought people in the pictures might be using, Michael, Lorena, Hector, and Mack continued to connect prior experiences to their understanding of the language being used in each picture. Lorena and Hector believed the words players were speaking in one picture of a soccer team were most likely Spanish (*See Figure 2.3*).



Figure 2.3: Mexican Soccer Team Photograph

When asked how they came to this conclusion, Hector responded, “It’s green and black and red,” and Lorena agreed, pointing to their uniforms. To them, these colors represented the Mexican flag, a symbol studied during their kindergarten year and created/displayed on our classroom wall. Mexico represented a place in which the people spoke Spanish, which drew them to the logical conclusion that these soccer players were speaking Spanish.

Lorena and Hector’s bilingual consideration of the world, and their awareness that different places held different linguistic expectations, was familiar to us. They had already demonstrated their fluid familiarity of Spanish and English code switching earlier in the year when Ms. Callie, Mr. Oswaldo, and I visited their homes. As we stood outside, admiring Elena’s recently tilled vegetable garden next to the family’s brightly colored trailer, Hector and his siblings were eager to show us the chickens and kittens living there. Lorena and her brothers walked over from next door, equally determined to share their lives with us. The children seamlessly, and without obvious mental deliberation, moved from speaking Spanish to English as they explained whose kitten was whose, aware of the languages each of their teachers spoke and tailoring their responses accordingly.

At one point, Hector stood holding a black and white cat in front of his porch, looking from Mr. Oswaldo to me and back again as he talked. Though he was speaking to me, Mr. Oswaldo asked him a question midstream; he responded to us both, in our primary languages, without missing a beat. “I have kittens. There is a black one and a white one. Huh? No, el gato no tiene hombre.” Before Hector could

name what he was doing as such, he was a fluent code switcher. While this is the case for all children, since everyone must understand and negotiate linguistic expectations based on where they are and to whom they are speaking, Hector's ability to switch languages mid-sentence showed that he could be in one place (home), speaking to two people who held the same role in his life (teacher), and still know enough from his relationships with each of us to realize he could speak Spanish to one and English to the other.

Experiences like this inevitably informed the insights he shared regarding the language of soccer players in the photographs on our invitation day. They also communicated to me Hector's prior understanding of the contextualization of language; he was already experiencing and expertly navigating multiple linguistic worlds, and I believed he was ready to move toward the communal creation of a meta language to help us better discuss the nuances of language in use. Only then, I was beginning to realize, would he and his classmates be able to transfer these practical, real world examples of code switching to more abstract, academically-based discussions around the use of Standardized English.

Though in a different way than Hector, Michael also used background knowledge to discuss the language he believed a judge was using in one particular photograph. As he explained to Dr. Ruby while assessing a picture of a court justice, fully robed and in a courtroom clearly in session (*See Figure 2.4*), "He's tryin' to be the prosecutor. Because she didn't do it."



Figure 2.4: Courtroom Photograph

“Okay,” Dr. Ruby responded, creating space for Michael to continue.

“And he’s in the court.” Michael went on, adopting the role of the prosecutor and lowering his voice an octave. “Now, your honor! Your honor.”

Turning to Dr. Ruby, he explained, “You got to honor. The court man says that. He’s got a stick.”

According to Maggie, Michael based his linguistic connection to this photograph on experiences he had watching courtroom dramas on television. Michael had long been a fan of YouTube videos and TV programs, and Maggie laughingly told me about Michael’s ability to recall abstract bits of information from shows that interested him. “When the counselor told me that he walked into her office and said, ‘Oh, that’s a picture of Paris, that’s the Eiffel Tower,’ I was like, Zach and Cody off the Disney channel,” she told me. This penchant for remembering details served Michael well linguistically, since it allowed him to draw from a wide variety of phrases and terms while taking on the roles of others, and the court example displayed his ability to assign discursive qualities to specific people/contexts.

His ability to contextualize information and to know what was appropriate based on his environment and whom he was with was longstanding, and broadly encompassed the worlds of which he was a part. Maggie told me about the time she found out, during his Pre-School year, that Michael only sucked his thumb at home. “I said, ‘Michael, you don’t suck your fingers at school?’ And he said, ‘No, Mommy, you can’t do that at school.’ So he had control enough to not suck his fingers, but as soon as he left that classroom, and got to my classroom, where no one could see him, he put ‘em in his mouth,” she said. Michael knew, from a very young age, that he had the power to create and recreate himself in different spaces, and he acted on this understanding in surprisingly nuanced ways. As Maggie said, he had control, and he knew when and how to exercise this control. His understanding of context built a solid platform on which Michael could begin to discuss linguistic diversity in our classroom.

Summary of intertextual connections based on meta language. Although our class had rarely discussed the idea that we alter our language choices based on whom we talk to, these children were able to connect this new concept to prior experiences. The experiences came from interactions with their families, teachers, and friends, and through their recounting, the students found relevancy and meaning in the abstract

concept of code switching, as they altered the language they used based on where they were and with whom they were speaking (Rymes, 2009). They were beginning to categorize instances in which they felt it was appropriate to speak in certain ways, therefore setting the stage for future conversations specifically set up to consider ways to label the registers in which we spoke, as well as to engage in the code-switching necessary to move back and forth between these registers (Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

Yet, while they had some understanding of this fluidity, they did not yet possess the meta language necessary to name and discuss this discursive movement as a class. Hector and Lorena could identify the language of soccer players based on the country their jerseys represented, but they did not know how to share this insight with their peers using commonly understood terminology. Michael was able to act out a judicial scene and attribute his words to a judge based on the courtroom in which the judge was photographed, but like Hector and Lorena, his explanation of this connection to his peers was limited because they had not yet constructed a common language for contextualization. I began to realize one of our language study's next steps would be to develop this meta language, as a way to help our community explicitly discuss the nuances of contextualized language in our various linguistic worlds (Schleppegrell, 2010).

Intertextual connections based on the power of language. Conversations that occurred during the language invitation also made clear the children were making links between language and power. As they began to understand after their interaction with the caterpillars, and as I was sensitive to based on my role as a teacher, people in powerful positions often have the option of either hoarding this power for themselves, or using it to *empower* others with less cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2002). This negotiation is by no means static, and often changes moment by moment. It is likely that my students felt more power when they led Morning Meeting question-and-answer sessions than when they sat and quietly wrote the sounds they heard in pre-chosen words read aloud by me. Minute by minute, situation by situation, we continually negotiate the power we hold. In this way, our roles in society often determine who does and who does not hold power.

I knew the standardization of language was another tool used by powerful people to maintain their status in society, and those who speak different languages and dialects find few opportunities in

school to claim and celebrate their linguistic heritage (Christensen, 1996; Fairclough, 1992a; Hasan, 1996). Though students find power in exchanging clever banter on the playground, these grammatical choices do not usually hold the same weight in these students' writing samples or more formal classroom discussions (Delpit, 1994).

In today's current political climate, many people view Spanish as an inferior language spoken by immigrants who entered the United States illegally, a viewpoint that makes it possible for people like the man who called Hector's home to threaten those who speak Spanish (Lopez, 1999). Historically, people have misunderstood African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as being a lazy, inferior form of English, failing to take into consideration the fact that it is actually rule-governed and as structured as any other dialect (Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). This is not true only of those who do not hear AAVE in their homes, but is sometimes the viewpoint of people who are fluent in this dialect, as well. Natalie, Mack's mom, once explained to me, "It's just lazy words, it's slang...A lot of us black people, that's how we talk" (F.I. Lines 734-737). Her beliefs about the inferiority of her own home language were surely shaped by news articles, TV shows, movies, and the general public that paints AAVE in a negative light (Hudley & Mallinson, 2011).

Yet, language is part of who we are. It shapes us and comforts us, verbalizes and externalizes our cultural identity. As Anzaldúa (1999) stated, "If you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself" (p. 81). Many people intimately connect linguistic identity to ethnic and cultural identity, and a feeling of pride in one does not come without the other.

Though schools have not always valued home languages and dialects outside of Standardized English, I knew as our classroom community entered into this language study we had the opportunity to change this – at least within the walls of our own classroom community, and possibly beyond (*The Students' Right*, 1974). As Rogers stated, we might begin to use "language as a cultural tool that mediates relationships of power and privilege" (Rogers, 2004, p. 367), and employ our new contextualized understandings of language to push against these standardized boundaries. If this were going to happen,

though, we would first need to connect to our language, realize its cultural importance in our lives and feel inspired to share with others its relevance, its use, for us.

Home language is part of classroom/home connections. The language invitation activity provided students with a venue through which they could begin to express the importance of their home languages. Simply giving voice to the language close to their hearts made clear the power inherent in them, which I hoped would pave the way for future conversations.

The children quickly connected their home lives to our language invitation, thus inviting their families into our conversation by giving voice to their worlds outside of school (Medina, 2010). Our families' influence emerged almost immediately after we began. We were sitting together, talking about the invitation's process while university students sat taking notes around our circle.

"You're invited to use books to think about words and language and how people use it," I said.

Naldo's hand sprung up, and his eyes focused on something in the middle of the carpet. I had strewn books, photographs, and brightly colored gift bags around the floor as a way to engage the students in the idea of an invitational activity, so I had no idea what he might be looking toward.

"Naldo?" I asked.

"We got a book in there!" he replied simply, pointing at the co-authored family stories text we'd crafted during his kindergarten year (*See Figure 2.5*).



Figure 2.5: Family Stories Book Cover

This text, entitled *Nuestras Historias de Familia/Our Family Stories*, contained a personal narrative written by every child and family in our community. It was modeled after the mentor texts, *Cuadros de Familia/Family Pictures* (Garza, 1993) and *En Mi Familia/In My Family* (Garza, 1996). Some families wrote in Spanish and others in English, and Mr. Oswaldo had painstakingly translated all of their entries from one language to the other, so that every family could read every word. This was a powerful written example of our classroom community's longstanding commitment to home/school partnerships, and Naldo's statement, "We got a book in there," brought back memories. I thought of the months we spent on the text, the Family Writing Workshop Night we held, and the copies of the completed text our office staff had generously made so that every child and family could have their own.

"All of our families stories is in there," Daisy confirmed, and her classmates nodded.

"Family stories are an important way that we use language, and they're written in English and Spanish, so we can think about how that works with our language study," I added.

Out of all of the books, photographs, and other artifacts spread out on the carpet, many of which were familiar in some way to the students, Naldo chose to point out the book that represented our family stories. This was a testament to the powerful connection the children made between their home and school lives, and it pushed me to further consider how their desire to involve families would shift and redefine the boundaries of the language study in which we were about to engage. How would we create space for families and children to learn about language together, to empower one another in dialogue, as we had done through writing the previous year?

We learn about each other through language. The students' understanding of the power of words in our world did not only come from their references to family and home. Our language invitation also revealed their desire to discuss language as a tool through which we learn about each other. As Rymes (2009) pointed out, it is important to understand "how powerful our discourse is in creating who we are, [and] how we are understood" (p. 63). In this way, words provide us with opportunities to take ownership in shaping how we want others to see us, as well as in the ability of others to take the reins and use their words to do the shaping for us.

After the energy of the language invitation's rotations, we settled together to summarize and learn from one another, using a modified KWL chart to record each child's thoughts (*See Figure 2.6*).

LANGUAGE	
What did we notice?	What do we want to know?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We can learn Chinese from new friends - Flossie used language to trick the fox - Language is in movies and books - Newspapers tell stories - Football and soccer use <u>actions</u> to tell what's happening. - 7777 is used to show sleeping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How can we use language to learn about each other? - How and why do animals talk? - How can we learn Chinese, Irish, and Spanish? - Why do some English words sometimes sound different? - How can we use more videos to learn language?

Figure 2.6: Modified KWL Chart with Student Responses

These comments revealed that the students noticed people communicate using different languages (i.e. Chinese), different mediums (in newspapers, actions, movies, books), and for different purposes (to show someone is sleeping or to be tricky). When the children discussed what they wanted to learn next about language, they shared that they wanted to know how language could help them learn about each other. The students also wanted to learn about other languages (including “animal talk”) and dialects (i.e. “Why do some English words sometimes sound different?”). The idea of using videos to listen to different languages and dialects also interested them.

When the children indicated they wanted to include “learning from one another” in our study’s goals, they integrated family voices into our emerging language curriculum. This made their continued desire to learn from and with their family, peers, and teachers clear, as the children elaborated on this inclusion by mentioning that they wanted to use Family Dialogue Journals as one way to learn about language. Based on previous co-authorship opportunities and visits to students’ homes, I knew before our language invitation that the verbal sharing of relatives’ histories was integral to these families’ lives, and was one way in which they took pride in their personal stories. Language was one of the primary tools through which they learned about one another, as it is for many of us; stories detailing family histories,

jokes passed from one person to another, and the recounting of scary, exhilarating, or difficult events allow us a window into the lives of the people with whom we speak. Our classroom community recognized early on that families, both our friends' and ours, were sources of knowledge and information – if we were willing to attend to this knowledge and information in the home language through which they most comfortably conveyed it (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). As Mr. Oswaldo said upon visiting Hector's and Lorena's homes, "They are teaching. They are teachers here in home!"

Families were teachers in their homes, and the children made sure they were teachers in our classroom, as well.

Similar to their families' sharing of past stories, tales of morality, and lessons to learn, the students felt that using language to discover more about each other should be an important component of our work. In this way, the personal nature of language, and the students' desire to use home language to strengthen their connections to each other and to words they used in their world, became our focus. We had the opportunity to communally find power and beauty in the stories and information shared, if we believed that "learning from one another" would offer us insight into how we could best contextualize language and use words to our advantage. In acknowledging the importance of home perspectives, we opened up the possibility "for creating new learning spaces" (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999, p. 288), for unpredictable, nuanced, and intricately woven connections between families and language that would help us understand how language worked in different contexts.

Summary of intertextual connections based on the power of language. These students' families believed it was important to pass down knowledge from one generation to another through story, essentially teaching and learning life's lessons through the power of their own voices (Ada & Campoy, 2004). Our class found relevancy in this, as well, being sure to mention the importance of "learning from each other" in our language unit. This connectivity led me to realize that the connections existing within our academic and familial communities were strong, with each story shared serving to strengthen the relationship we knew existed between the two. Our language study would be no different; if we were going to realize the power inherent in our home languages and dialects, we would need to continue exploring and celebrating our

extended communal worlds. Language would become more powerful when we connected it to and built upon our family units.

As Genishi & Dyson (2009) did when they drew attention to young children's ability to control and manipulate the linguistic worlds of which they were a part, I believed my students' initial understandings of the personal relevance of language might contribute to their "sense of themselves as agents with some power in their worlds" (p. 160). Relevance, meaning, and personal connections would come first; building from these points of connection was our best hope in finding reason to push against the standardization of language as a tool to silence multiple voices, and to become agents of change in their own linguistic environments.

Summary

By the conclusion of our language invitation activity, the strength of students' ability to discuss how language shifted in different contexts was clear, whether this ability manifested itself in conversations about soccer players from Mexico, the *ssh/hing* of topics inappropriate for teachers' ears, or their capability of seamlessly switching from English to Spanish mid-sentence. The intertextual connections students made within our language invitation showed their ability to help create space to develop their own meta language around contextualized language use. This space needed to be dialogic in nature, so that we heard and considered all voices, as well as representative of the linguistic needs and experiences of all students. I contemplated this as I began to develop future activities based on how we contextualized language.

Additionally, the children began to construct an understanding of linguistic power, based on the weight they gave to the inclusion of their families' stories into our language study. The study of language had meaning for them when they considered it in light of their previous experiences, and when they felt we had created classroom space for them to discuss their families' language and stories. They found power in their own voice and the voices of family members, as they were free to weave these perspectives into each invitation station. As Deborah Hicks (1995) stated, "Classrooms are embedded communities of discourse; they can never be divorced from the community-based language practices that children bring

with them” (p. 75), and the students made this clear in the many references they made to their community’s linguistic background. I wondered how we would continue to negotiate our want to include voices from home, while growing in our understanding that powerful voices could also be raised in hurtful ways, much like our choice in determining whether to harm or help the caterpillars who had wandered into the sandy ground of our playscape.

The students and I were beginning to “name and narrate our experiences” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 5). The connections we made to contextualizing language and finding power in our words became threads of knowledge woven into the fabric of our study early on, “referring and responding to, incorporating and intermingling multiple other texts” (Solsken, Willett, & Wilson-Keenan, 2000, p. 181).

As the teacher, I had the choice to extend and reinforce these threads, or to cut them out and begin anew. I knew I wanted to collaboratively create space for students, families, and teachers to continue extending these threads of connection. Similarly, I wanted to move our language study forward by recognizing and honoring the voices of the students and their families, using their examples to explain how we contextualize language in use and waiting for their cue in determining a meaningful and relevant way to push against school’s standardization of language.

By the conclusion of our invitational activity, I was confident that the children were interested in developing a meta language to describe their use of words, as well as identifying opportunities for sharing the power of their language with others. We were ready to take the next step forward in our exploration.

Extending and Deepening Analysis of Our Language Invitation

The identification of intertextual connections helped me to learn a great deal about students’ interests as they related to the contextualization of language. However, I was also interested in applying the “fine-grained” (Butler-Kisber, 2010) analytic tools of Systemic Functional Linguistics and its concept of register, in order to more fully support my hunches that we were dialogically co-constructing our language study. In the following chapter I describe how I used a snippet of conversation between Mack and Dr. Ruby to think critically about how the power negotiations present in our classroom discourse contributed to the focus of our study’s conversations.

I have considered and applied this analysis to each focal event in this book. However, the following chapter will be the only place in which I will describe it in detail, as I have chosen instead to embed summaries (with Appendices included) of this work throughout the rest of the text.

CHAPTER 3

ENHANCING CONTEXT BY ZOOMING IN:
INCORPORATING REGISTER STUDY AND SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS INTO MY
ANALYSIS

“It should not be assumed that people are aware of the ideological dimensions of their own practice. Ideologies built into [language] conventions may be more or less naturalized and automatized, and people may find it difficult to comprehend that their normal practices could have specific ideological investments.” (Fairclough, 1992a, p. 90)

Mack: Are these people speak different than this person?

Dr. Ruby: There you go, now very good.

So like you’re saying they speak differently?

Now that’s very interesting.

Why do they speak differently?

Mack: Umm, uhuh, because they have different skin colors.

Dr. Ruby: Oh, because they have different skin colors, okay.

So what do you think they speak in this one?

Like I’m talking

Mack: Umm, like you have the, umm, you don’t have the same English as me.

But I has, uhh

I don’t have the same English as you.

Dr. Ruby: Right, yeah, very good.

Appendix A, Language Invitation Conversation between Mack & Dr. Ruby

In the midst of the noisy inquiries, the shuffling of newspaper ads and book pages that was our language invitation activity, Mack and Dr. Ruby engaged in the short conversation about the relationship between skin color and language shown above. While it was only one moment among many during which students voiced links they found between the concept of language contextualization and their previous experiences, I believe this exchange is worth closer analysis. Mack's words extended the connection he made between language and skin color, and the way this occurred, as he and Dr. Ruby negotiated their roles and power, provides insight into the types of conversations that supported our classroom's work around language and power (Bloome, et al., 2005; Fairclough, 1992a; Halliday, 1967a).

As Fairclough (1992a) found, the underlying ideologies present in the way we speak to people in certain situations and holding certain status (such as teacher/student) "may be more or less naturalized or autonamized" (p. 90), and this was certainly true as Dr. Ruby and Mack conversed with one another. Looking closely at their negotiation of these status markers and the effect of such markers on the extension of Mack's connection between language and skin color has helped me to both support and refute my hunches regarding the dialogic nature of our classroom's language study.

With this in mind, the following chapter will revolve around an analysis of the conversation (above) between Mack and Dr. Ruby. To begin, I will discuss the influence of Mack's intertextual connections on this snippet of conversation, since these connections informed the direction in which Mack and Dr. Ruby led the discussion. Additionally, because some readers may be interested in an explanation of how I analyzed the registers present in their exchange, as well as the functioning of

participants' relationships as seen through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistic's interpersonal metafunction (*See Figure 3.1*), I will provide a detailed description of this fine-grained analysis.

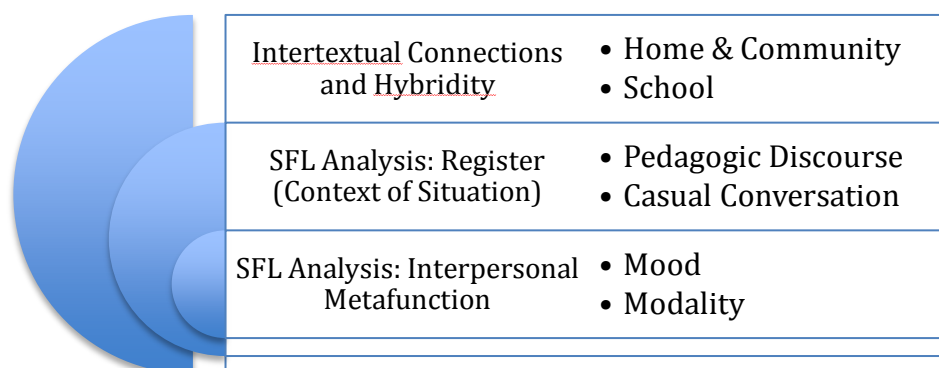


Figure 3.1: Visual of Methodology

As this visual shows, I will move from the wide lens encompassing the identification of intertextual connections into an analysis of a specific conversation from our language invitation. I will conduct an SFL analysis of register, as well as the interpersonal metafunction of mood and modality on an even smaller segment of conversation, using this fine-grained analysis to better understand the power structures inherently present in this exchange.

I will also consider the direction in which this early pursuit pointed us. Finally, I will outline options for you if you wish to conduct your own language study, based on children's personal contextualization of language use.

You can read this chapter in one of three ways:

1. If you are interested in this type of fine-grained analysis, and how I used it to clarify negotiations of power present in classroom conversations, read on.
2. If you are not sure, skim through this chapter, and stop when you see something that interests you.
3. If you think you would rather look back at this chapter as a reference tool while you read the rest of the book for clarification of concepts I discuss later or as an explanation for analysis I will mention but not fully explain, feel free to do that, as well.

No matter which option you choose, remember to check out the final section, “Possibilities for Extension,” where I summarize possible starting points for you to begin your own contextualized language study. In each of the following chapters, I will come to conclusions about our classroom conversations based on similar analysis, but my findings will be embedded within a larger event, and explained in less detail.

Analysis of **Our Language Invitation: Dr. Ruby’s Photograph Station**

Mack and Dr. Ruby, a university-based visiting teacher, engaged in conversation around language during our invitation, bringing to light intertextual connections Mack made between language and his previous experiences. Their interaction also provided an opportunity to consider the registers in which the invitation operated, as well as the way Mack and Ruby shared power through the words they chose.

Ruby led the photograph station (*See Chapter Two.*), asking the students who visited her to consider the language the people in the photographs were using. With no preconceived answers, and therefore no incorrect responses to evaluate, the students were free to verbalize their prior understandings of linguistic contexts. The photograph station was Lorena, Michael, Hector, and Mack’s final station, and they started their discussion almost two hours after the activity began. However, if they were tired they did not show it, and they began their conversations around the language used in the photographs with enthusiasm. The students offered their thoughts on Ruby’s Irish accent, and the possibility that one picture took place in “Turkey-o” because the words written on signs were unfamiliar. Michael analyzed the location of a castle depicted in one photo; although it looked like the one in Disneyworld, which he had seen on vacation, he decided it probably was not because “this doesn’t have any fun stuff like in Disneyland.”

It was at this station, surrounded by the noise of others and piggybacking off an hour’s worth of previous discussion around language, that Mack and Ruby began to speak to one another.

Mack: Are these people speak *different* than this person↑?

Ruby: The:re you go, now very *goo:d*.

So like you’re saying they speak ↑diff↓erently?

Now that's very interesting.

↑Why do they speak differently↓?

Mack: *U:mm*

u:h hh

because they have different ski:n co:lor s↑.

Ruby: Oh, because they have different ski:n colors, okay.

So ↑what do you think they speak in this one?

Like ↑I'm talking

Mack: *u:mmm*

(0.2) like ↑you have the

uumm

you don't have the same English as ↑me.

But I has

u:h

I don't have the same English as ↑you.

Ruby: Right↓.

(0.2) Yeah↓.

(0.2) Ve↑ry ↓good.

Appendix A (See Appendix B for Transcription Conventions.)

This exchange was less than 30 seconds long. Yet, although the time it took Mack and Ruby to speak these words was brief, the repercussions of this conversation have since infiltrated my own thoughts and distinctly affected how our community continued to discuss language and its place in our lives throughout our unit.

Mack was learning through his talk, and our community began to consider language in a more nuanced way because of this.

Mack's Intertextual Connections: Linguistic Differences

Embedded in this snippet of conversation were multiple references to other events and experiences in Mack's life (*To see a deconstructed analysis of the intertextual connections I identified, see Appendix A.*). He extended one such connection, heavy with and strengthened by the connections he made to it, when he asked if the people he was looking at in a photograph of children sitting together spoke differently (*See Figure 3.2*).



Figure 3.2: Children on Playground Photograph

Mack had never seen this picture before; the children in it were strangers to him. At face value, there was nothing about the children's clothing or the playground equipment on which they sat that might suggest they were living somewhere outside of the United States.

In posing this question, then, Mack invited Dr. Ruby to consider the photograph from his perspective, and from prior experiences he had in discussing different ways people spoke. As Bloome, et al. (2005) suggested, "it is through the use of language that people name, construct, contest, and negotiate social identities" (p. 103), and Mack was constructing the social identity of the children in the photograph by referencing his own background knowledge. He, as well as the rest of our class, had broadly explored how people spoke differently. Though we had not spent much focused time discussing language, the question he asked here built upon conversations he engaged in and listened to during his Kindergarten year.

For instance, Hector and his mother openly discussed, through Family Dialogue Journals and during visits to our classroom, that Elena was learning to speak English but that she was already fluent in

Spanish. Mack heard Hector read aloud a Family Dialogue Journal entry from his mother in response to the question, “Where are you from?” She wrote, “Hector, I hope that one day you will know Mexico – different houses, food, and language.” Additionally, I discussed openly the fact that I did not yet know Spanish, but was slowly picking up words and phrases from extended members of our classroom community. Finally, the creation of our family storybook made clear to Mack that the home languages of his classmates were not always the same as his. Mack knew, based on his own classroom experiences and the children with whom he was a friend, that people could play on the same equipment and wear similar clothes, while still being able to speak different languages. He built his initial conversational inquiry (“Are these people speak different from this person?”) from these memories, as well as countless others, therefore connecting what he had previously learned to a new activity.

Mack’s Intertextual Connections: Skin Color

After Dr. Ruby restated Mack’s thought, and asked him to expand on what he meant by it, he revealed an unexpected perspective on the language people were using in the photograph. “Because they have different skin colors,” he said, linking language use to the speakers’ ethnic identity, much as Anzaldúa (1999) and others had done before him. He built his response from previous classroom discussions and family dialogue journal entries; it did not come from nowhere, but from experiences and knowledge Mack had linked, with these events merging and verbalizing themselves in this particular conversation (Bloome et al., 2005; Fairclough, 1992a).

Skin color, and its way of making us uniquely beautiful, had long been part of our classroom discussions. Mack’s mother, Natalie, brought up skin color the previous year in response to our Family Dialogue Journal question, “How are families different?” This led us to pull out Julius Lester’s book, *Let’s Talk About Race* (2005), and bell hooks’ text, *Skin Again* (2004), to further explore our skin color as part of our identity.

Mack pondered this topic in the coming months. During a discussion with a university colleague later in the year, he specifically mentioned skin color in reference to Family Dialogue Journals. “Sometimes someone doesn’t like pink skin, then someone else white skin, then another one black skin,”

he said, making clear that he had been thinking about the power of skin color to affect others' perception of us. The relationship he noted between skin color and language during his conversation with Ruby was an extension of his previous discussions and wonderings. In this discussion, he capitalized on the space Ruby created for him to think aloud about a topic he had been contemplating for quite some time.

As Dr. Ruby continued to ask Mack questions about his thoughts on skin color and language, Mack revisited his first statement, connecting the idea that people speak differently to his current conversation by saying, "you don't have the same English as me," and "I don't have the same English as you" (*Appendix A, Message Units 12, 13, 14*). He acknowledged the contrasting elements of his dark brown skin against Dr. Ruby's peach tone, as well as his Southern accent against Dr. Ruby's Irish one. Mack's discussion of "different English" allowed him to construct a "positive self" (Zentella, 1997, p. 13); "different English" was not a *bad* thing, but rather, something our community needed to incorporate into our language study.

In the conversational space he and Dr. Ruby created together, Mack verbalized his emerging insights around the possible relationship between language and skin color. Because of the links Mack made to previous experiences, I wondered if other students would later make similar connections. We had spent months during their Kindergarten year reading literature, engaging in discussion, and writing/drawing about the Civil Rights Movement. During this time, Michael insightfully shared with his classmates his belief that this movement paved the way for Barack Obama to later become the President of the United States. I knew Mack was not the only child who continued to think about skin color and how it made us unique, especially considering the rainbow of hues represented by classmates' own skin tone. However, this exchange between him and Ruby caused me to wonder if anyone else would link our new linguistic study to skin color, which was a longstanding classroom topic. Would these intertextual connections be Mack's alone, or simply the first of many captured in audiotape and transcriptions?

Registers

“...contextual frames around talk render certain discourse appropriate or not. Even if the same person is the animator across situations, the language will be different in a lecture, a second-grade picture book discussion, or a first date” (Rymes, 2009, p. 214).

Mack verbalized the connections he made between the photograph and his own experiences while speaking to Dr. Ruby within the bounds of a specific register of speech. As Rymes (2009) stated, the way we construct conversations with one another is informed by what we know about how people are expected to communicate in particular social contexts, and while negotiating a particular relationship with one another; this loose yet somewhat stable construction is a *register*. The familiarity of the register in which Dr. Ruby and Mack engaged, then, helped both of them to feel comfortable as Mack brought up the often taboo topics of skin color and its relationship to different uses of language (Martin & Rose, 2007). The structure of their conversation allowed them to dialogue, and to create between the two of them a “configuration of meaning” (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 44) unique their own social processes and perspectives. As I will show through my analysis of their dialogue, I found Dr. Ruby and Mack’s discussion to hover somewhere between the formal register of *pedagogic discourse* and the informal register of *casual conversation*, both of which I describe below.

Pedagogic discourse In the pedagogic discourse register, according to Frances Christie (1995), two elements contribute to the function, purpose, and execution of the overall register: 1) a regulative register “relates to the overall goals of the activity and to the...teaching-learning behavior,” and 2) the instructional register has to do with “the field of knowledge or subject being taught” (p. 224). Although not always, in the pedagogic discourse register teachers often employ the regulative register of I-R-E, or the *Initiation, Response, Evaluation* sequence (Hicks, 1995; Wells, 1999), and it is a widespread mode of operating discursively in classrooms. In this register, a teacher initiates questions or offers knowledge, the students respond appropriately, and the teacher then evaluates the quality of this response based on her understanding of what is correct (Eggins & Slade, 2005). Textbook manufacturers structure teacher’s manuals in this way, dotting them with colorful balloons filled with questions and corresponding answers

that the teacher can choose to ask her students. Primary grade teachers are masters at asking questions we already know the answer to; think about the set-up of calendar time, where we innocently inquire, “What is today’s date?” “How many Tuesdays are in this month?” and “What season is it?” Built into these questions is the expectation that teachers will listen to and then evaluate the responses of children, therefore setting up a powerful/powerless dichotomy; the teacher holds the knowledge, and she expects her students to acquire and retain knowledge in the same way she is distributing it to them (Freire, 1972).

Though the regulative register of I-R-E is not the only mode of communication in classrooms, it is pervasive, and teachers’ widespread usage of it inevitably forces students to, at times, work within its boundaries (Hicks, 1995). Students from backgrounds similar to school often anticipate and thrive on teachers asking evaluative questions, since their families may have socialized them into this type of conversation at home. However, students who do not come from this background, whose home conversations are narrative or purpose-driven in nature, struggle when they realize educators are creating conversational structures with which they are largely unfamiliar (Heath, 1983/1996). *How does she not know what season it is*, they wonder. *She’s supposed to be the teacher!* In an environment where educators do not attempt to understand students’ multiple linguistic worlds, “students may find it impossible to display that they are competent people” (Rymes, 2009, p. 213); silence and disconnection often follows.

Casual conversation. Within the register of casual conversation, talk “is not motivated by any clear pragmatic purpose” (Eggins & Slade, 2005, p. 19). The linguistic playing field is much more even than in classroom discourse, thus creating space for multiple viewpoints and perspectives (Eggins & Slade, 2005; Schleppegrell, 2010). Additionally, in contrast to classroom discourse, participants “rarely ask questions to which they already know the answers” (Eggins & Slade, 2005, p. 45). As Rymes (2009) recognized, “Taking this tone might function...to bridge different ways of speaking and in-class and out-of-class...contexts” (p. 217). A conversational register assumes the validity of all participants’ knowledge bases, and does not insist on one speaker crafting his speech patterns or perspective to fit the mold of another person in the discussion. Suzanne Eggins (1999) stated that everyday talk, or casual conversation,

is “a process of making meanings” (p. 130), and participants negotiate together how meaning is made through language. Through the register of casual conversation, we both “enact and confirm the social world” (Eggins, 1999, p. 131), taking turns and participating in a discursive dance that we continually rework and reconfigure.

Mack and Dr. Ruby’s register usage. The exchange between Mack and Dr. Ruby was one example of a time during our language study in which the conversational and pedagogic discourse registers blended together. When this student and teacher engaged in discussion around linguistic diversity and skin color, they created space in which Mack took risks, to propose questions and offer statements based on memories from his life that influenced him in meaningful ways. As is the case with many *written* texts, they blended spoken registers so they could more powerfully and intimately communicate (Bakhtin, 1986) (*To see a deconstructed analysis of Dr. Ruby and Mack’s extension or halting of questions or statements, see Appendix A.*).

Mack initially extended a question to Ruby: “Are these people speak different than this person?” In doing so, he fulfilled the traditional role of the student, looking to an adult to provide him with answers. In a refreshing turn of the table, Ruby acknowledged his thoughts in a positive way, but instead of donning her teacher hat and deeming them correct or incorrect, she expressed her interest in why Mack wondered this. In this way, Ruby asked Mack to engage with the photograph in front of him by expanding on its personal relevance, which he had already incorporated when he initially formulated his question. Though Ruby possessed the control and authority to halt or simply reroute Mack’s response, she chose instead to learn more about his perspective when she asked, “Why do they speak differently?”

In the space Ruby created for Mack to continue, he took a risk. Although the upswing at the end of his sentence suggests he was unsure, he offered, “Because they have different skin colors?” Again, Ruby could have evaluated Mack’s response, in traditional classroom discourse form, but in her choice to repeat what he said, she was able to give value to his contribution while not evaluating it one way or another. When Ruby asked for Mack’s interpretation of the language people were speaking in another photograph, she continued to lessen the power differential between them, treating him more as an equal

than a subordinate by continuing to pose questions to which she did not have a predetermined answer. Their learning occurred in the midst of their co-constructed talk, and the education of both Mack and Ruby took place in the sharing of words (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992).

It was then that Mack took note of the “different English” he and Ruby spoke, drawing attention to the fact that he was aware people could speak the same language, but in different ways. This offering by Mack was incredibly important to the whole of our language study, since it let his teachers know he was already tuned into the subtleties of the English language, and these beginning realizations could then serve as the foundation for future discussions about contextualized language shifts. Had Ruby forcefully lead their discussion or evaluated his responses, Mack’s intrinsic understanding of code-switching may not have emerged (Bloome, et al., 2005).

Dr. Ruby knew the goals of our language study, as I originally identified them: to both partner with families around our work, and to help students find relevance in the contextualization of language in their world. She did not inquire simply to hear the students parrot back what she already knew, as teachers commonly expect in classroom discourse; however, Ruby did form her conversational structures around the overarching goals of our unit, and her discourse was not absent of “pragmatic motivations or outcomes” (Egins & Slade, 2005, p. 50). In these ways, she and Mack hovered somewhere between the register of pedagogic discourse and that of casual conversation, responding to students based on identifiable goals but willing to be led in a multitude of directions based on the responses of the children.

These goals loosely framed their conversation, without reducing Mack’s responses to “correct” or “incorrect.” When Ruby spoke to him about how children were using language in a shared photograph, she questioned him about what he noticed and what he was thinking, and her approach revealed the prior connections Mack made between language and skin color. This blended register, a linguistic combination of pedagogic discourse and casual conversation, allowed Mack and Ruby to not only open up dialogically, but also to push against the typical boundaries in the teacher/student relationship. As Ruby turned to Mack for information, allowing him the space and freedom to share his thoughts without having to fit them into a pre-determined, standards-based box, Mack’s construction of what it meant to engage in

classroom dialogue inevitably shifted slightly, as he learned through this experience that Ruby valued his perspective and wanted to learn from him. The structure of their interaction, while minute in the time it spanned, contributed to our language study's overall framework, as its social occurrence honored our ambition of using "language to achieve culturally recognized goals" (Eggins & Slade, 2005, p. 24).

Ruby and Mack hovered somewhere between the pedagogic discourse model and a form of casual conversation, in order to "use language to achieve culturally recognized goals" (Eggins & Slade, 2005, p. 24). They were members of a classroom community collectively considering the role of language in their lives, and these combined registers gave Mack the structure in which to feel comfortable offering his own thoughts, much like adopting the written genre label of "historical fiction" might allow authors the freedom to combine a narrative base with facts (Bakhtin, 1986). This resulted in Mack sharing very personal insights about language and skin color. Because "the [discourse] practices children experience at home later become a means for their participation in classroom activities" (Hicks, 1995, p. 62), it was essential that Ruby accept and acknowledge Mack's conversational way of communicating. Therefore, a conversational register, informed by hints of a pedagogic discourse model, provided Ruby and Mack with a blend of structure and open-endedness, thus complementing our similarly constructed linguistic study.

Systemic Functional Linguistics

As Mack and Ruby discussed language use and its relationship to skin color, they inherently knew the boundaries of the register in which they spoke, while at the same time they pushed against its boundaries as they re-imagined and redefined the roles of teacher and student (Bloome, et al., 2005). This negotiation took place in the format of the sentences they spoke, the strength of the words they chose, and their constantly shifting understanding of the relationship they had with one another (Christie, 2005; Halliday, 2003). In reference to casual conversation, Eggins (1999) stated, "As we take turns in any interaction we negotiate meanings about what we think is going on in the world..., how we feel about it and how we feel about the people we interact with" (p. 130). When Mack introduced personal connections from Family Dialogue Journals and conversations with friends and family, when Ruby encouraged Mack and asked him to further explain his thinking, subtle changes in sentence structure and

word choice occurred. Each linguistic decision made by these participants appeared insignificant on its own, but when combined, made a considerable impact on their conversation, and in turn, on our language study; as Rymes (2009) stated, “Together, these simple combinations can make powerful impressions” (p. 245).

Therefore, as I have attempted to better understand the discussions that occurred and the partnerships we formed during our language study, I have not simply thought about overarching connections that participants made to content, or only considered the registers in which we operated. I have also looked closely at small snippets of conversation, or micro-analyzed the data, in order to identify the nuanced turns in discussion that contributed to our discursive community, and therefore our study of language, as a whole (Gebhard & Harman, 2011; Hyon, 1996). A unique configuration, an interconnected web of personal experiences (micro-level), experiences in school and other institutions (meso-level), and our understandings of society’s expectations of us (macro-level), informed each linguistic choice we made (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

I have aimed to illuminate the “powerful impressions” (Rymes, 2009, p. 245) of these interconnected webs through the use of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which has provided me with the tools necessary to micro-analyze snippets of discourse that occurred during our language study, and to consider this discourse from a contextualized place. M.A.K. Halliday (1994), the creator of SFL, believed the context in which people utter words is as critical to understanding language as the words themselves, and I have long agreed with this. For example, although Naldo’s Spanish entry in his Family Dialogue Journal from the last chapter surprised *me*, his use of language was probably much less interesting in the context of his home, where his family commonly communicates in this language.

The interpersonal metafunction of SFL. Because of my interest in the relationships that existed within our classroom community, as well as the ways we shared knowledge and power in our conversations about language, I decided to focus on Halliday’s interpersonal metafunction, which is one of three possibilities he has identified for looking closely at “how people use language with each other in accomplishing everyday social life” (Halliday, 2003, p. 3). Through it, I considered participants’ roles and

relationships, or “the status of relationships enacted by participants...and their sense of affiliation with each other” (Eggins & Slade, 2005, p. 67), as well as the power structures inherent within these roles and relationships.

I looked closely at interactions like Mack and Ruby’s, at the words they spoke and the way they spoke them, and was able to check any hunches I had about how our community shared (or did not share) their knowledge about how language functioned in their worlds. Further, using the interpersonal metafunction to think about participants’ relationships allowed me to consider the power of the words that we used in classrooms, so that I did “not interpret words one-dimensionally, or use or hear language without recognizing its multidimensional power to control how we see ourselves and others” (Rymes, 2009, p. 32). Even the tiniest bits of encouragement, someone’s use of a question where they could have easily utilized a statement, facilitated certain conversational patterns, and these conversational patterns contributed to our larger unit by encouraging certain trains of thought and derailing others. Therefore, the interpersonal metafunction has been my chosen method of discerning how our relationships functioned to help us linguistically co-construct this language study.

Mood and modality. I could have chosen many ways to analyze conversations like Mack and Ruby’s, but I found it most helpful to consider the *mood* and *modality* present in the tiny, close-up renderings of the discourse present in our classroom. *Mood* is the identification of sentence types (i.e. statements, questions, or exclamations), looked at in the context of how each of these sentences functioned in an interaction between specific people situated in a specific space and time (Thompson, 2004). For example, “Have I ever let you down?” may *look* like a question, but it is actually functioning as a statement, in that it is not actually *asking* anything (Zhang, 2011). *Modality* has to do with word choices that suggest the extent to which speakers are absolutely sure of something, or are hedging because they are uncertain. Modality also refers to attitude towards or opinion about something (Thompson, 2004). In incorporating this analysis into my examination of our language study, I have been able to identify the intricacies of power sharing and relationship development present throughout.

Relevance and use of mood. It is not difficult to identify the correlation between *mood* and relationships between teachers and students. In the age of accountability, teachers often ask questions to which they already know the answer, and students produce statements that could be replicated in an a), b), and c) format (Hicks, 1995; Christie, 2005; Wells, 1999). If students do ask questions, they are about standards-appropriate content; if this is not the case, teachers may remind these students that they have a lot to cover, they cannot afford to get off topic, and they can ask their question again during recess (Jones, 2010). Teachers issue standards-approved answers, in the form of a statement, when students pose “appropriate” questions. This is the expected exchange; “These mood choices enact the different social rights and obligations of each role, and suggest that in our culture at least teachers have greater social power...than students” (Eggins, 1999, p. 134).

Therefore, an examination of the mood exhibited in conversations throughout our language study has had much to offer in relationship to my research questions. As I will demonstrate by analyzing Dr. Ruby and Mack’s conversation, I have been able to systematically identify instances in which speakers have both conformed to and pushed against expected teacher/student roles, because of either negotiating a less common sharing of power or simply recreating expected societal tasks. Did Dr. Ruby actually ask open-ended questions, therefore leading to Mack contributing to their discussion based on personal experiences, or did I imagine this? If she and Mack did, in fact, renegotiate her expected role as “teacher,” was this the exception or the rule across multiple language study conversations? Mood gave me a systematic way to find answers to these questions.

In their short exchange within the larger context of our language invitation, mood analysis shows that Mack and Ruby shared the roles of teacher and learner (*For a deconstructed analysis of the mood present in this exchange, see Appendix C.*). Mack opened up dialogue by extending a question to Ruby, therefore putting himself in the position of someone wanting to gain knowledge from an adult. Ruby, however, asked him a question in turn, essentially inverting the “teacher as knowledge holder” role; she positioned herself as a learner here, since her question, “Why do they speak differently?”, was quite open-ended and without a pre-conceived response. Ruby’s position as “learner,” and as someone interested in

what Mack had to say, was clear, because she continued to follow Mack's line of thinking by asking him questions to expand on what he was saying. Throughout this snippet of conversation, Ruby placed Mack in the position of teacher; she asked him questions and built her own responses from what he said (*See Table 3.1*).

Message Unit	Ruby's Words	Mood
3	So like you're saying they speak differently?	Interrogative
5	Why do they speak differently?	Interrogative
9	So what do you think they speak in this one?	Interrogative

Table 3.1: Mood Excerpt from Appendix C

In each of the above examples, Ruby's questions truly functioned as questions, rather than opportunities for her to assess Mack based on his understanding of information she already knew. While she was interested in learning about his perspective and experiences, she was not searching for pre-conceived responses to her inquiries. In this way, Mack and Ruby re-imagined the roles typically found within the relationship of teacher and learner (Christie, 2005). Mack shared knowledge with Ruby, who in turn created a conversation based on Mack's personal connections and experiences with language.

Yet, while this sharing of power and redefining of roles certainly existed, Ruby and Mack held onto a certain element of tradition, as well. Immediately following Mack's opening question ("Are these people speak different than this person?"), Ruby issued an evaluative comment. In stating, "There you go, now very good," she conveyed her approval of Mack's inquiry. Although she later maintained her evaluative distance, simply restating his thoughts rather than positively assessing them (*Appendix C, Message Unit 8*), this opening exchange may have given Mack a boost of confidence regarding the validity of his personal contributions; Ruby clearly felt Mack was on the right track, and she shared this

with Mack when she stated, “Now very good.” She did the same at the conclusion of this exchange, supporting Mack’s claim that they spoke “different English” when she responded with, “Right. Yeah. Very good” (*Appendix C, Message Unit 15*).

As the teacher, she made her goals known as she encouraged Mack to continue talking by commenting positively on his contribution; she wanted him to share his perspective on how language was contextualized in the photograph he held, as was the purpose of this opening language invitation. While Ruby’s responses were sometimes evaluative, they functioned very differently than typical evaluative phrases used in classroom discourse (Wells, 1999). Throughout Ruby’s interactions with students at the photograph station, she used this terminology; her comments served as encouragement for the children to continue expanding on their thoughts, thus leading to a more nuanced and fruitful discussion of language.

One of our goals in this invitational activity was to learn as much as possible about the children’s current understanding of how language functioned in their lives, and when Ruby encouraged students by saying “Right” or “Yeah,” the students responded by continuing to speak. Through this, we learned about Michael’s knowledge of courtroom dialogue, which stemmed from videos he had watched and led us to identify more opportunities to incorporate media into our language study. We also learned about the children’s attraction to the Chinese language, an interest that I found difficult to help them pursue because our extended classroom community did not include any Chinese speakers. It was through Ruby’s encouragement that we learned about the link Mack made between skin color and language, an interconnected thread of thought that we carried with us throughout the entirety of our language study.

Mack and Ruby’s construction of mood, through the types and function of sentences in which they engaged, pushed against the typical construct of power often found in the relationship between a child and teacher. The questions Ruby posed were open-ended; they positioned Mack as a teacher and were designed to elicit further background knowledge and connections from him, who responded to the space he was given by offering answers connected to his prior experiences with language, both in and out of the classroom. Though Ruby positively evaluated Mack’s contributions, she did so in a way that served to encourage the expansion of his ideas, rather than to assign his thoughts a label of “correct” or

“incorrect.” They shared power, doing their part to help construct a dialogic unit with the expectation that our community would consider knowledge from all participants to be valid and to richly contribute to the personal connections we made to language in our world. It was encouraging to identify this sharing of power so early in our unit, as it meant students were already offering their understandings of language in context and felt free to allow their perspectives to intermingle in conversation (Solsken, Willett, & Wilson-Keenan, 2000).

Relevance and use of modality. Analyzing modality was equally useful as I considered how students, teachers, and family members decided which extended topics they were going to discuss further, and which they would drop in favor of what they found to be more interesting or pertinent information. When I looked at the modality present in Mack and Dr. Ruby’s conversation, I was considering the certainty present in their sentences, as well as the sense of obligation or necessity they conveyed (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). As Eggins and Slade (2005) explained, “Modality covers the range of options open to interactants to temper or qualify their contributions” (p. 74).

Since modality often gauges certainty, it follows that a person responding to someone’s comment with a high degree of certainty (“That *is* a great idea!” v. “That *could be* a great idea!”) produces a greater likelihood that participants will carry through and further extend this idea into the rest of the conversation. Similarly, when a participant expresses certainty in what they are saying (“I *know* how to speak Chinese!” v. “I *might know* how to speak Chinese!”), others involved in the discussion are more likely to take the participant’s idea, connection, or thought seriously, which also increases the likelihood that they will explore it further.

Though I expected the teachers (myself included) would express certainty in our statements, given our traditionally powerful role in classroom settings, I was interested in determining the extent to which the students did the same. Expressing certainty in their statements could simply be a sign that first grade students often don’t know what they don’t know, but it could also mean, if found across conversations and over time, that the children were confident that their teachers, peers, and family members would respond positively to what they were saying, and that they believed their thoughts and

ideas to be a necessity for the group to consider (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Thompson, 2004). I was interested, therefore, in the modality that was present throughout our language study, so that I could further support any conclusions I came to regarding our community's sharing of power and negotiation of discursive relationships.

The modality both present in and absent from Ruby and Mack's interaction helped to explain the way they negotiated their relationship as teacher and learner (Hyon, 1996) (*For a deconstructed analysis of the modality present in this exchange, see Appendix C.*). As Mack extended his thoughts to Ruby, in response to her inquiries regarding why he thought people spoke differently and what he thought people said in certain pictures, he was taking a risk, as the space of school often functions as an evaluative space where students give "right" and "wrong" answers. Ruby, as the recipient of this information, could choose to build on and attempt to extend the connections Mack made to language, or she could subtly discourage them and move on to another topic, essentially communicating to Mack that she believed his connections were unnecessary in moving the conversation forward. One possible way for her to do this would have been with *modality*, or the extension of words like "might," "possibly," or "could." Gently tempering Mack's enthusiasm by qualifying her responses in this way might have led their conversation in another direction. For instance, if she had responded to his question regarding whether people speak differently from one another by saying, "Now that *could be* interesting," rather than "Now that *is* interesting," Ruby's hesitancy might have discouraged Mack from pursuing the topic.

This, however, did not happen. Ruby responded to Mack's extended connections and thoughts with certainty, never hedging or discouraging, but always pushing him forward through her firm acknowledgement of his thoughts. She echoed Mack's wonderings aloud, mirroring his words exactly; because he did not qualify his contributions in any way, neither did she. When Mack said, "These people speak different," Ruby spoke the same words in response. When Mack said, "They have different skin colors," Ruby made this statement, as well. In this echoing, Ruby validated Mack's contributions. She made clear that his ideas were worth repeating, worth exploring, and worth extending (Bloome et. al,

2005). In this way, Ruby's *lack* of modality served as an example of her willingness to share power with the young analyst seated next to her.

Summary

Our language invitation was the official kick-off of our yearlong classroom study of words in our world. It also turned out to be an incredibly rich resource from which I identified multilayered connections the students made between language and the larger context of their lives, as well as the ways students' and teachers' negotiated relationships as they discussed what they saw and heard in photographs, videos, children's literature, and advertisements. The inquiries of the children and the potency of the connections they were already making to language in their world began to lead us down a dialogic path that was uniquely ours.

In closely analyzing Ruby and Mack's intimate conversation around language and skin color, Mack connected his current wonderings to past events, both in and out of the classroom. Because he and Ruby constructed a speech register that blended pedagogic discourse with casual conversation, they were able to open up dialogic space within which new information could emerge. When Ruby shared her "teacher power" with Mack, asking him to expand on his thoughts rather than offer her own, she helped him to feel comfortable in voicing his thoughts without fear of being incorrect. In doing so, they pushed against the typical roles expected of them in classroom conversations, and uniquely contributed to the formal beginning of our language study. I knew we would have to be intentional in continuing this trend of dialogicality, or we might fall into the disconnected trap of merging into the rigid roles of "knowledge holder" (teachers) and "regurgitator" (students), rather than co-teachers and co-learners (Freire, 1972).

While I hope I have not oversimplified the complexity of the conversations that emerged through our language invitation, I have attempted here to assign "some coherency" to what was inarguably a compound, intricately woven event, situated within ever expanding and overlapping circles of personal intertexts extended by each and every child present (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). My relationship with the transcripts, photographs, journal entries, and student writing that I read and reread in attempting to identify patterns and common references among the data was a dynamic one, as it revealed new details

and intricacies each time I perused it. In many ways, the data seemed to be a living, breathing entity, and I hope that I have, and will continue to, convey some of its depth through my examination and recounting of key events in our community's linguistic work.

One thing was certain. We left our classroom on the day of the language invitation with a more shared understanding of how “to name and narrate our experiences” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 5) with language. As a teacher-researcher, I was beginning to uncover the “ideological investments” (Fairclough, 1992a, p. 90) present in our students' and teachers' use of words.

And I looked forward to the unfolding of future activities.

Possibilities for Extension

Another community in a different classroom space could not replicate the perspectives of these students, teachers, and families, as well as the unfolding of the activities described here – and would not want to do so! Your students, their families, and the educators around you are linguistically diverse, rich in experience, and full of their own thoughts. The beauty, or what some might label the difficulty, in a dialogic and personally connected language study is that it is impossible to package or assign a step-by-step directions manual. I do find, however, that certain aspects, whether they are openers to conversations, types of discussions, or the incorporation of relevant learning materials to support the study, might help you identify opportunities for uniquely creating your own community-based language exploration.

Therefore, at the conclusion of each chapter, I will share strategies and components of our study that might be applicable to your work with children. Share, reorganize, slightly alter, or completely restructure these ideas – make them relevant to *your students, their families, teachers in your community, and you*. Then, of course, do not forget to tell me all about what you did and how it went!

- *Invitations*: Check out Van Sluys (2005) book, *What if and Why? Literacy Invitations for Multilingual Classrooms*, and see where it takes you! Gather together photographs, children's books, advertisements, media clips, toys, and other artifacts that you can use to invite students to explore language and its use in their world. Separate these materials by medium, as I did, or mix everything together to create small but comprehensive resource kits. Design critically-oriented,

thought provoking, yet open-ended questions for your students to consider, but be open to the possibility that they may choose to embark on completely different discussion topics than those you pre-designed! Just as registers do in our conversations, design invitations to include enough structure to support and guide, but enough wiggle room to encourage individuality and creativity. Above all, have fun!

- *Diverse Children's Literature*: We often hear about the importance of introducing children to literature in which the characters look like them or whose home lives and upbringings are similar to theirs. However, fewer educators and researchers preach on the importance of introducing children to literature through which they can hear themselves. Brilliant authors like bell hooks, Patricia McKissack, and Carman Lomas Garza have written texts that include African American Vernacular English or Spanish, and if we are serious about incorporating linguistic diversity into our classrooms, books like these need to be crowding our shelves! The list below is a sampling of the literature I compiled for our language invitation's book exploration center, and reflects the linguistic diversity in my own classroom. Use this as a starting point for the further collection of children's books in multiple languages!
 - African American Vernacular English:
 - Giovanni, N. (2008). *Hip hop speaks to children: A celebration of poetry with a beat*. Chicago, IL: Sourcebooks.
 - Greenfield, E. (1974). *She come bringin' me that little baby girl*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
 - Greenfield, E. (1978). *Honey, I love, and other poems*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Children's Books.
 - hooks, b. (1999). *Happy to be nappy*. New York, NY: Jump at the Sun.
 - McKissack, P. (1986). *Flossie and the fox*. New York, NY: Dial Books.
 - Williams, S. A. (1997). *Working cotton*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace.

- Spanish:
 - Alarcon, F. X. (1997). *Jitomates risuenos: Y otros poemas de primavera*/Laughing tomatoes: And other spring poems. Los Angeles, CA: Children's Book Press.
 - Alarcon, F. X. (1998). *Del ombligo de la luna: Y otros poemas de verano*/From the bellybutton of the moon: And other summer poems. San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press.
 - Alarcon, F. X. (2001). *Iguanas an la nieve: Y otros poemas de invierno*/Iguanas in the snow: And other winter poems. Los Angeles, CA: Children's Book Press.
 - Alarcon, F. X. (2005). *Los angeles andan en bicicleta: Y otros poemas do otoño*: Angels ride bikes: And other fall poems. Los Angeles, CA: Children's Book Press.
 - Cisneros, S. (1997). *Hairs/pelitos: A story in English and Spanish*. New York, NY: Dragonfly Books.
 - Garza, C. L. (1993). *Cuadros de familia*/Family pictures. Los Angeles, CA: Children's Book Press.
 - Garza, C. L. (1996). *En mi familia*/In my family. Los Angeles, CA: Children's Book Press.
 - Perez, A. I. (2009). *Mi diario de aqui hasta alla*/My diary from here to there. San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press.
- Create a Dialogic Space: This one is difficult. Many of us believe we are dialogic teachers, following Freire's (1972) call to learn both from and with our students, and to blur the lines between educator and child. We all, however, come to classroom discussions with our own pre-conceived understandings of the world, our own experiences, coloring our responses to students' contributions. I have always worked very hard at being an open-minded teacher who is aware of

my own biases and pushes against them by creating classroom space where children feel free to express their thoughts and experiences without the fear of community members judging them.

However, I recognize there have been times when I pushed my agenda or beliefs to the forefront of classroom discussions or activities. When I saw children using our math materials to create guns, I quickly told them, “We don’t make guns – they are hurtful.” It was only while reading a book about Annie Oakley (*See Chapter 4*) that I later found out these students’ families hunted in order to put food on the table. Rather than shutting down a possibility for conversation, as I did when I reacted to the students’ unifix cube guns, I could have used this as an opportunity for dialogue. By simply asking, “Why are you making guns?” and allowing an authentic conversation to unfold, I could have learned more about these students’ families, while also contextualizing the reasons why we typically do not create firearms out of manipulatives. “Using guns to provide food for your family is something that I totally understand, and that a lot of people do,” I might have said. “We want everyone to know how careful we need to be around guns because they are so powerful, which you know because your family teaches you this. So, we don’t want to make them out of blocks because that might make our friends think they are toys. How else could we share this important part of your lives with friends?”

We create dialogue through a willingness to listen and being open to the possibility of changing your perspective based on what you hear (Freire, 1972). Just as I think of my students’ gun creations, I am sure you could also think of a time when you missed an opportunity for engaging in dialogue with your students. Therefore, I challenge you, as I also continue challenging myself, to question frequently and react only when necessary, to listen more and judge less. The exchange between Mack and Ruby illustrated, as did our continual recognition that our understandings of language were informed by and built upon personal connections we had to its use in our lives, that a willingness to flip the script and be the one seeking, rather than providing, answers can lead to richly rewarding and deeply connected academic experiences.

CHAPTER 4

“THAT’S NOT *MY* HOME TALK!”

STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND FAMILIIES CO-CONSTRUCT REGISTERS

“As teachers and students learn about and document the multifunctionality of language and its dependence on social contexts, they become empowered as capable interlocutors in multiple social worlds” (Rymes, 2009, p. 43).

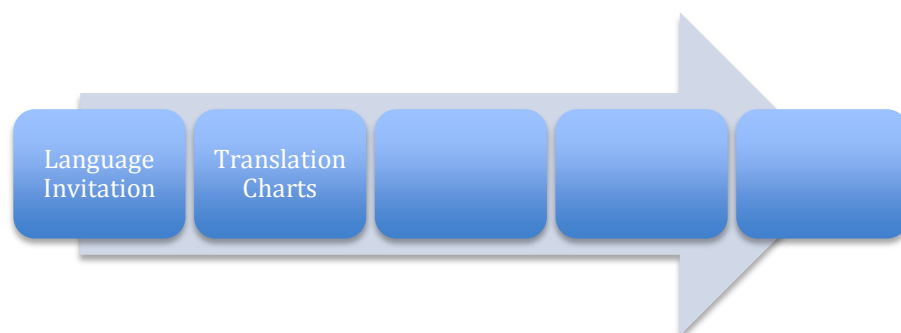


Figure 4.1: Unfolding of Language Activity #2

In contrast to our language invitation, this chapter will address a slower, evolving piece of our classroom’s study. I will continue to tell our community’s linguistic story as it unfolded from the conclusion of our language invitation, and up until our next focal event (*See Figure 4.1*). I will talk about the focal event itself, as we engaged in the creation of a language translation chart based on the beloved book, *Flossie and the Fox* (McKissack, 1986), and its usefulness in helping us to move from identifying and naming our own registers, to manipulating word choice as a reflection of the registers we created. Our categorization was unconventional, as it focused on the relationships between speakers more than the space in which they conversed (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). I will try to illuminate the intricacies of this development, as this was not a linear process, but one full of checks and balances, self-reflection, and starts and stops.

I hope it will convey our growing conception of language in use, as we connected this work to our families and larger communities, as well as our growing awareness of power in the world. Join me in thinking about how we documented “the multifunctionality of language” in use, discussing its fluid yet somewhat stable constructs, and became “empowered as capable interlocutors” in our world (Rymes, 2009, p. 43).

Shaping Our Language Study: Moving Beyond the Invitation

Sparkly bags of artifacts.

A dozen visitors taking notes on our conversations.

Cameras and videos and recorders, oh my!

The general glitz and glamour of our language invitation (*See Chapters 2 & 3*) kicked off our unit with quite a bang. For the children, it was a heady thing to be part of, with university students, co-teachers, and peer researchers joining in this opening activity. They rose to the occasion, maintaining their energy from start to finish, offering insightful comments and linking conversations about language to their own homes and communities. The roller coaster of our language study was gaining speed, fueled by the enthusiasm of this activity and the possibilities it held to sustain our momentum as we began to identify future opportunities for linguistic analysis. *Ch, ch, ch, ch...woo woo woo!*

Then, after the visitors filed out and my students and I sat facing one another, we returned to reality. Sure, our momentum was high now – but how would we keep it up? I was responsible for addressing first grade content in all subject areas, not just language arts. I felt the pressure of an inflexible curriculum map and the district-wide expectation that I spend hours gathering spreadsheet data on students’ work in pre-determined areas.

The boxes in Excel mirrored the boxes I felt unbending statewide curriculum mandates were shoving us into. Each rectangle, filled with a black-and-white learning goal created by someone who had never been in contact with my students, contrasted so sharply against our community’s intentional blurring of the lines between home and school, “correct” and “incorrect.” Our early construction of linguistic curriculum already functioned on the belief that we could not passively give or receive

knowledge, but that learning depended on each of us being open to the possibility that another person's perspective might press us to expand or change our own viewpoint (Freire, 1972; Gutiérrez, 2008). Where we had begun to blend "school practices with practices familiar from home, community, and popular media" (Solsken, Willett, & Wilson-Keenan, 2000, p. 180), other pre-determined curricular goals identified by our district and state still held large amounts of our time hostage. While I would have loved to spend as much time as we felt was necessary focusing on the contextualization of language, this proved to be impossible.

Therefore, we needed to find a way to take the vivacity and insights generated by our initial invitation activity and focus them, so that what was an energy-filled accumulation of ideas could become something sustainable, centered, and focused. If we were to eventually "become empowered as capable interlocutors in multiple social worlds" (Rymes, 2009, p. 43), I needed to move forward realistically. I understood that attempting to maintain the pomp and circumstance of our invitation would surely prove to be unsustainable in light of daily pressures.

With this in mind, we took a step back. Instead of continuing to engage in such intense linguistic work, my students and I took a breather, as I realized we could only keep up the frenzied pace of our invitation for so long. I wanted to give the students space to again share with me, through familial and experiential connections, their interests in language in the world around them. I wanted our subsequent activities to be purposeful and intentional, generating students' excitement not in their flourish, but in their real-world relevancy. As Dyson (2001b) found, "When children enter the school's atmosphere, they are often fixed within its hierarchical patterns. Words indexing texts and social constellations beyond its stratosphere are of little interest, little relevance" (p. 14). I did not want my students to view language study in this light.

Therefore, I saw our next step as being an intentional examination of the ways we used language with different people, and sharing our "assumptions about who does the talking and what forms of talk are appropriate" (Hicks, 2005, p. 71). This built upon the students' already developing understanding of linguistic contextualization, uncovered through Michael's discussion about the judge's speech, and

Lorena and Hector's assuredness that the soccer players wearing red, green, and white spoke Spanish. We needed to think about language as individuals and parts of a community, to ponder our words as they existed in a social, contextualized space (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). I also needed to remain open to student-generated possibilities for examinations of power in relationship to language use, as they had also made clear their belief in the ability of words, specifically family stories and opportunities for sharing, to bring people together. With this in mind, we learned more about one another through a continued examination of power, sliding next into an examination of words using translation charts.

Filling In Gaps: Events Leading Up to Our Use of Translation Charts

Following our invitation, discussions and activities around language and power permeated our classroom culture, proposed by both students and teachers. The children continued to stand guard around the site of their original caterpillar fighting rink, arms crossed over their chests and voices loud and clear as they squinted into the sunlight and called, "They didn't do anything to you – leave the caterpillars alone!" It was their own personal protest, and while most of the children abandoned their post after a few days, choosing instead to run and squeal freely around the playground, Mack and Michael maintained their positions, seeming not to notice the fact that others were paying them no attention.

Classmates, particularly Daisy and Lorena, accumulated hours of recess time bent over the side of our concrete walkway, intently staring at the ground and loudly exclaiming, "I found one!" each time a pill bug dared show itself. Upon gathering ten or so of the roly polly creatures, the girls would approach a teacher, telling her they were collecting the bugs to deposit them by the fence line, which they had deemed a much safer place of residence than the sidewalk. If the teacher didn't run away screaming, as a few were prone to do, Lorena would explain that they were using their power in "good" ways, by helping their multi-legged friends escape the dangers of first grade recess. Much like Mary Cowhey's (2005) second grade student, who learned about Ghandi's peaceful spirit and decided she would like to travel to Afghanistan to stop the war, these young activists had taken to heart our conversation about power. Their understanding was emergent, caught up in the binary terms "good" and "bad," but they felt strongly enough about the importance of treating caterpillars humanely that they spent their precious playtime

advocating for them. In light of their continued interest, I began to wonder how we could further incorporate conversations about power structures into our curriculum, in an attempt to deepen their conception of the term and its applicability to their lives (Freire, 1998). I hoped thinking about power in a general way would open the children's minds to eventually think about the power of words in their world.

Dichotomizing Power: Using Guns to Provide Food

Therefore, we extended the idea of "good" and "bad" power into discussions about folktales, which allowed us to communally deepen our understanding of this multifaceted concept. One afternoon, eight students and I found ourselves gathered on the checkerboard floor tiles outside of our classroom, discussing a book about Annie Oakley as the rest of the class read a version of John Henry's story with our student teacher, Ms. Callie. Annie Oakley, an incredibly skilled female shooter who lived during the 1800s and early 1900s, was part of our folktale unit in language arts. She joined Paul Bunyan and John Henry in our study of fabled American history mandated by our state's first grade standards.

Oakley's life, and the contributions she made to U.S. history as a female marksperson, fascinated the children. Even as students from other classes marched past them, my group's eyes remained glued to the pages of our book, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley* (Riley, 1994). We tried to contextualize Oakley's life in our conversation, and to somehow connect to what her upbringing was like. After addressing Jorge's question about whether there were "colors a long time ago," as he noticed the sepia tone to all of Oakley's family portraits, a picture of Oakley holding a gun as a child caught their attention.

We read together, and found out that her first experience shooting a gun was at age seven. A chorus of *ooooohhs* came from the children. I groaned inwardly. I was used to students having an interest in guns, a fascination I assumed was born out of their prevalence in video games, movies, and any number of shoot-'em-up chase sequences like Genishi & Dyson's (2009) observation of "The Pine Cone Wars" (p. 102), a game involving space castles, laser blasts, and lots of running. I did not like this preoccupation with weapons, but after eight years of teaching, I had come to expect it.

However, I was not prepared for the deeper connection to firearms my students revealed next. Many of them proudly stated that their families owned guns. I began to realize that the children's

mentioning of guns was an opportunity for me to step back from my own beliefs regarding firearms, and to use this as a chance to learn about the unique funds of knowledge present in these students' homes (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). I knew that if I were to learn from Ruby's example during our language invitation, I needed to open up the space for this discussion by asking questions and responding to the children without negatively evaluating their experiences. As hard as it would be, and as much as I wanted to launch into a speech about the danger of guns, I knew voicing my personal beliefs at this time would essentially shut down conversation (Rogers, 2003). I needed to be okay with feeling uncomfortable; if we were truly creating a third space, one in which we might formulate new understandings of the world that existed outside of notions of "official" and "unofficial" school discourse, then discomfort was a natural part of this process (Dyson, 1997; Dyson, 2001; Gutiérrez, 2008).

So, instead of launching, we read further, and found out that Annie's childhood gun use was limited to shooting rabbits to help her father provide food for their family.

Upon hearing this, the children erupted in chatter, with Joseph and Robert declaring that this was the way their families used their guns, as well.

"My dad takes care of us," Joseph stated, echoing the same sentiment he wrote again and again during writing workshop. "He sometimes shoots rabbits or squirrels or birds for us to eat."

"Yeah, my dad, too," Robert nodded, whose father was also an invaluable participant in his personal narratives and everyday life.

I felt as though I had made the right choice in staying quiet. If I had immediately declared guns to be a topic inappropriate for school, I would have inadvertently silenced these voices. Although Joseph and Robert may have brought up this topic while on the playground, my declaration would have created a divide between their school and home communities, effectively lessening the possibility they would later find commonalities between their multiple social worlds (Dyson, 2001; Genishi & Dyson, 2009). Instead, the boys shared their stories publicly, thus potentially creating "a common narrative, one that is owned, shared and elaborated by everyone" (Rymes, 2009, p. 248); this narrative, one that included the understanding that our families provide for us, was co-constructed. The voicing of these students' life

events began to complicate my own perspective regarding the discussion of guns in our classroom, and caused me to reevaluate my previous stance on its place in school (Freire, 1972).

Recognizing that other students, whose prior experiences did not include having to shoot their own dinner, were looking at Robert and Joseph with wide eyes, I decided to extend my own connective thread of familiarity into the mix. “I know people who shoot their own food,” I said, “and they also do it to feed their families and friends, just like Robert’s and Joseph’s fathers.”

At this point, I was still uncomfortable, having never negotiated a conversation about guns with students. I realized I was clenching my hand too tightly around the book I held. I took a second to loosen my fingers, to take a deep breath. And we continued to draw from classroom connections on how we used power as a way for the children to again establish common ground, and to further develop a communal narrative, a dialogic space, around this thorny and complicated topic.

“So,” I began after finishing the few pages depicting the childhood Annie, “do you think that Annie was using her power in a good or bad way when she shot the rabbit?”

“Bad,” Mack immediately chimed in, the toe of his sneaker scuffing black marks off the hard floor on which we sat.

When I asked him why, he stated that it was bad because Annie was killing a rabbit, and hurting an animal was a bad thing to do. It dawned on me that, without meaning to, our conversation regarding our power over caterpillars had oversimplified Mack’s idea of what it meant to use power in a “good” or “bad” way. In this case, he was substituting *rabbit* for *caterpillar*, recognizing they were both animals and stopping short of considering the larger context of each situation; our language had failed to communicate the complexity present in the use and distribution of power (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

My mind began to flip through a scrapbook of ideas, all organized under the title *How to Address Oversimplification in Understandable Ways* and including such topics as: 1) Where our meat comes from (*insert photograph of cow on farm*), 2) What’s in a hot dog (*no photos...too graphic*), and 3) The life of a factory farm chicken (*again, no photos*). I flipped through the pages in my head, unsure of how I would

pose questions or comments that would help the children to think critically about meat consumption, but not villainize their own families or lifestyle choices.

Before I could decide, Michael jumped in. He was sitting cross-legged, his hand raised respectfully in the air. “I have to disagree with you, Mack,” he said, his tone and overall demeanor projecting an image much older than his six years.

With his hands moving up and down in front of him, Michael continued. “Annie *had* to kill the rabbit, because she was feeding her family. If she didn’t kill the rabbit, then her family wouldn’t have had enough food, and they might have died.”

Mack and the rest of the group looked at Michael with their heads tilted to one side, taking in the complication that Michael had so simply placed before them. While none of the children verbally agreed or disagreed with Michael, they heard his words, and carefully considered them in the quiet that followed.

In this moment, I was thankful. Thankful I found the strength to refrain from evaluative comments and to pose open-ended questions. Thankful I reflected before I spoke. And most of all, thankful Michael’s words so eloquently pushed against the binary understanding of power some students had begun to develop. The more we troubled dichotomous thinking, the more we considered the complexities of broad concepts like *power*, the more we would be able to later connect these understandings to conversations around language use in our world (Schleppegrell, 2010).

Complicating Conversations about Power: Examining Transformers

In the coming week, Ms. Callie and I continued troubling this idea of “good” and “bad” power. I spent most of our conversation around this topic criss-cross on the carpet, laptop in hand, as Ms. Callie led. This gave me a unique opportunity to fully observe, rather than simultaneously participate and observe, as my teacher-researcher status often called me to do (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2001). This was a luxury, and one that I recommend any teacher-researcher take advantage of when possible; observing “classroom interaction, . . . making preliminary observations, . . . and analyzing social and interaction contexts” (Rymes, 2009, p. 74) from this very different vantage point.

As I settled myself on a carpet square behind the children, Ms. Callie began to trouble the idea that it is always easy to identify “good” and “bad” ways of using power. To add relevancy to this abstract concept, she built her lesson around Transformers, essentially guaranteeing engagement based on our students’ long-term interest in them. Whether these superheroes took the form of action figures, cartoon characters, or movie stars, exclamations about how “cool” they were, and how “awesome” they could fight often dominated snack time conversations, especially when two or more boys were sitting together.

While every student in our class was somewhat familiar with Transformers, Christopher was so interested in them that he had found a way to include them in almost every written project in which our class engaged. He once created a seasonal diagram detailing how he interacted with Transformers in every season of the year: spring (he played with them in the grass), winter (he watched their movies at home), summer (he took them to camp), and fall (he dressed up as an Autobot for Halloween). The other children regarded him “as an expert in superhero matters” (Dyson, 1997, p. 122), a veritable wealth of information for any discussion including Autobots and Decepticons. It was a good thing Christopher possessed such knowledge, since so many of the children’s conversations about superheroes revolved around the strengths and weaknesses of each Transformer.

Ms. Callie, then, knew her audience when she opened up this lesson with a video clip from the Transformers movie. In it, the “good” characters were battling the “evil” ones, and as the battle scene played out on our SmartBoard, there was silence around the carpet. On the floor of our darkened classroom, eyes wide and focused, bodies leaning in toward the focal point, hands and feet and shoelaces forgotten, we were mesmerized by what was happening onscreen.

The spell broke when the three-minute video clip ended. As the children began to shift their bodies slightly, their muscles slackening and their eyes focusing back on Ms. Callie, she simply asked them: “What kind of power do you think the Transformers were using?”

Christopher, of course, was immediately part of the conversation. His classmates looked to him for wisdom, turning their bodies in his direction and deferring to his vast knowledge of the characters that had just disappeared from the screen. “Bumblebee was helping,” Christopher began, speaking quickly and

with emotion. “The other Transformers were bad. They were using bad power – but Bumblebee killed them so they couldn’t hurt anyone else!”

Hector nodded in agreement, saying, “The good guy killed him, and he got dead.”

Michael jumped in, building off what Christopher and Hector said. “Yeah, there was a purple Transformer and he got shot off. That was good power. Bumblebee was trying to protect the people.”

Ms. Callie next asked them to talk in pairs about how the Transformers used their power in good or bad ways. As the children’s voices filled the air, she wound her way around the carpet and knelt down next to me.

“I know this was interesting to them, and they got the fact that sometimes people feel they have to use violence to keep others from being hurt,” she whispered. “But I worry that I *only* talked about violent ways to use power, and not enough about how to use the power in your words. You know, like Joseph showed us in the book he wrote during writing workshop, about how *words* have power. Do you think I could use tomorrow’s mini-lesson time to talk about this, and to think about the power of words?”

“Absolutely,” I nodded, as Ms. Callie stood up and clapped her hands in rhythm (*clap...clap...clap, clap, clap*), our signal to finish partner conversations and turn attention back toward the whole group. I was thrilled Ms. Callie was critically analyzing her own teaching practice, and thinking so quickly on her feet. I, too, had been concerned about the violent nature of this example, as well as the fact that the Transformer illustration probably did not reach those students who were not already enthralled with these superheroes. A multifaceted understanding of how power functioned in complex ways would require us to present this concept to the children in multifaceted ways, so that they would have many chances to personally connect to the topic.

Our engagement in this complex process both aided in our deepening understanding and confused us. We needed to continually rework our construction of power, as it was “spinning through social space in communicative chains, anchored only in the coordinated efforts of specific people in specific encounters before, once again, slipping away” (Dyson, 2001, p. 12). In other words, while Ms. Callie’s Transformers example had served the purpose of pushing some students to think differently about

whether good people might ever act in violent ways, as Annie Oakley had done to feed her family, its effectiveness hinged on specific students' interest in the topic. Even those who connected to her point, like Christopher, were in danger of oversimplifying it, likening their understanding of power to violence and allowing a more complex rendering of the use of power to slip away. *Maybe this was why I have never engaged in these types of discussions before*, I thought. *They are just too complicated!*

I stood up and began quietly pulling books from the shelves above my desk. The children had fanned out around the room, as Ms. Callie encouraged them to write their own narratives where characters used their power to help others. I slipped *Something Beautiful* (Wyeth, 2002), *My Brother, Martin* (Farris, 2005), and *The Sit-In* (Pinkney, 2010) from their places, each uniquely representing characters' use of power and *empowerment* through their words and non-violent actions. The main character in *Something Beautiful* used her individual power by erasing the word "die" from her front door and encouraging others to share beautiful artifacts they held dear in the midst of poverty and sadness. I chose *My Brother, Martin* and *The Sit-In* because of the book's connection to the Civil Rights Movement; our community had engaged in many discussions and activities that dealt with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s use of non-violent protests, and the power of the larger group to spread their message through words.

In a rare moment of downtime later that day, I shared these books with Ms. Callie, and she placed them in her take-home bag to read and consider as she later thought about the best way to add the power of *words* to our ongoing investigation. We both left for the evening, saying our good-byes as we waved across the parking lot, hopeful, yet nervous, for the coming conversation.

Recovering from our Conversations about Power: Owning Up to Mistakes

The next morning, Ms. Callie began her writing workshop mini-lesson in the same place she had begun the day before: perched on our white wicker "Author's Chair," with years of my past students' names etched in permanent marker on its seat and back, while the children faced her expectantly. After asking the students if they remembered what they had discussed the day before, and Christopher wildly waved his hand in the air before launching into a vividly descriptive account both of the video clip and

the way the “good” Transformers helped the world by killing the “bad” ones, Ms. Callie vulnerably opened up to the students.

“I feel like I messed up yesterday when we talked about the Transformers and power,” she said. Her mini-lesson had the students’ attention, their captivated faces due to Ms. Callie’s acknowledgement of her mistake, rather than engrossing media clips. She was opening up a “third space,” in which there existed “the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 152). No longer was Ms. Callie the primary source of information; she was beginning to share this responsibility with the students.

“There are lots of ways to use our power without hurting others,” she said. “Joseph wrote a book about how powerful words can be. Do you remember when he shared it?” The students nodded. “That made me start to think about other books where we’ve seen the power of words.”

As they discussed the powerful words and non-violent actions used in each book, Ms. Callie and the children deepened our communal understanding of the power inherently present in words and stories. The intertextual connections students made between family stories and language illuminated the power these narratives had on their own understandings of the world around them. In these conversations with Ms. Callie, then, our community more overtly verbalized the power of words to make change. In giving this idea voice, and extending it into written texts, it began to wind its way into the threads of our common classroom discourse, opening up future possibilities for us to “name, construct, contest, and negotiate” (Bloome, et al., 2005, p. 103) its relevance in our lives.

And relevant the idea of power soon became. Later that morning, Ms. Callie read *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* (Hopkinson, 1995) to introduce our family quilt project. Families had sent in photographs and artifacts for the creation of each quilt square, and the children were excited to begin. When Ms. Callie mentioned that Clara’s family constructed their quilt while enslaved, the children began to nod, referencing their knowledge about slavery from our kindergarten activities around this topic.

It was then that they began freely linking these memories to their recently more nuanced understanding of *power*, independently extending and sustaining this thread of discussion (Bloome, et al.,

2005). As Ms. Callie read and led discussion, Michael recalled *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007), a book detailing the life of a young African boy who traveled north to freedom in a postal box. Oscar, a shy child who did not often contribute to discussions, raised his hand to say Henry must have felt powerless when he could not stay with his mother. Daisy piggybacked off Oscar's mentioning of powerlessness, referencing how helpless she felt the year before when I had placed her on the "sticker side" of a simulation activity, during which she (and any other student with a sticker) were not allowed to use the drinking fountain, play with classroom toys, or speak to anyone without a sticker. I meant the activity to give the children some idea of what it felt like to live before the Civil Rights Movement, though we could not ever fully understand how people felt when the government segregated them based on skin color. It had affected Daisy in a real way, as she linked the activity months later to a feeling of powerlessness.

"So unfair," Michael said, in reference to Daisy's words. He shook his head sadly as he spoke, from left to right.

This was just the beginning of the children's references to power and the Civil Rights Movement. Sandra referenced Ruby Bridges, and the power Ruby exerted when she was brave enough to be one of the first African American children to go to a previously "all White" school. Hector brought up Rosa Parks' power, because she and many others made change by refusing to ride at the back of the bus just because they had dark skin.

Our class had begun to internalize the idea that power existed in words and non-violent actions, and had moved from a rather simplified understanding of "good" and "bad" power, as it related to physical strength, to a more nuanced, communally constructed narrative. They wove together the blanket of this narrative with threads of stories from their shared experiences, creating a unique configuration of how they understood power to function in their world (Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Rymes, 2009). This narrative thread would soon bound itself together with another seemingly unrelated set of lessons: our contextualized study of language.

Translation Charts

With these conversations still in our minds we entered into our next focused exploration of language. During our language invitation, Patricia McKissack's story, *Flossie and the Fox* (1986), had enthralled the children. McKissack's text juxtaposed the Fox's Standardized English against Flossie's African American Vernacular English (AAVE), with the storyline depicting Flossie repeatedly outwitting the fox. Many students had since highlighted the comical antics of Flossie, and her outfoxing of the fox himself. Foxes, of course, are often the most cunning characters in fairy tale literature, but he was no match for this young African American girl with a sweet smile and playful eyes.

Building on the children's interest in these characters, I chose to make their language the focus of a "translation chart" activity. I designed the activity based on the children's interest in contextualizing language, as they made known during language invitation conversations and verbal links to family stories and discussions (*See Chapter Two.*). Other researchers, teachers, and theorists also influenced the creation of this activity, hybridizing it to include voices beyond those immediately present.

The work of teachers in Heath's *Ways with Words* (1983/1996), as well as Wheeler & Swords' (2004) research, helped me to solidify the main concept of the lesson, which was to work with my students to create a "translation chart" of language they had heard or used in their home or school worlds. In her long-term ethnographic study of multiple communities of diverse language learners, Heath had observed teachers using a similar activity. Years later, Swords, a primary grade classroom teacher, worked with Wheeler to redevelop her previously decontextualized language curriculum based on the needs and perspectives of her students, similarly incorporating translation charts. After engaging in discussions about how people change their clothing based on where they are going (you would not wear the same clothing at a wedding as you might wear to play basketball, they agreed), Swords led her students in the creation of a language-focused T-chart. She labeled one side "formal" (Standardized English) and the other side "informal" (AAVE); using examples from her students' written work and contrasting it to phrases they often used when speaking, Swords and the children sorted the sentences into

two categories. Swords found that her students “were able to use their own prior knowledge to define formal and informal language” (p. 475), without relying on pulling apart decontextualized sentences.

I realized, after our language invitation discussions, that I wanted to engage in a similar activity with my students. To begin developing a meta language around how we used words in our world, we would need to engage in focused, communal thought about how we categorized words, verbalizing our code-switching in ways we had not previously done. We all manipulate our language based on whom we are talking to and where we are, but we rarely discuss the choices we make. Consider Hector switching from English to Spanish when he spoke about the cats living at his home to Mr. Oswaldo and me. He certainly did not pause between sentences, thinking about what he was going to say; instead, he seamlessly moved from one language to another, saying, “I have kittens. There is a black one and a white one. No, *el gato no tiene nombre*.” He did what any of us would if speaking to friends versus our boss, or co-workers versus a waitress at our favorite restaurant. The purpose of our conversation, intimacy of the relationship between us, and place in which we speak all factor into the words we choose. As James Gee (2008) stated, “At any moment we are using language we must say or write the right thing in the right way while playing the right social role and (appearing) to hold the right values, beliefs, and attitudes” (p. 6), and this is a tall order for children to fill!

For our community to create a meta language within which we could carefully consider how we contextualized language, we needed to verbalize decisions we were already making, but had not consciously thought about. Before we could think about the expectations of academic talk, or the lopsided worth society gave to certain languages/dialects, we had to learn to discuss how we already manipulated and found relevance in particular word choices or sentence structures (Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

Our Spin on Translation Charts

Eventually, my want to discuss with the children how they classified language, and to invite their perspectives on familial, communal, and classroom uses of language, complicated the translation chart as Heath, and later Wheeler & Swords, had described it. For our language study to be co-constructed and

unique to our classroom community, the children themselves needed to help me identify categories for language classification (Gee, 2011).

Beyond Wheeler & Swords' work, I wanted the students to broadly consider the function of language not only as it existed in academic versus non-academic contexts, or in home versus school linguistic exchanges, but in the intricacies of the relationship they held with the person to whom they were speaking. Mack knew that, even within the context of the school building, there were different expectations for how he spoke to his friends than to his teacher, as he made clear during the language invitation when he exclaimed, "You supposed to ask teachers nicely to come over," in contrast to saying, "Come here!" to his friends. I knew many teachers in our building insisted their students speak to them in Standardized English, but I was also aware that these same teachers' students flew by me on the playground, calling out to one another, "You best be runnin' faster!"

School was the *place* in which each of these exchanges took place, and yet it was the *relationship* between the speakers that most affected the words they chose.

I wrestled with this difference as we engaged in our language study, thinking about language and its relevance to our lives. I began to realize our translation chart would be most meaningful if it considered person-based, rather than place-based, language differences.

Registers as a Pedagogical Tool

This shift helped me to see the nuances present in language use even within school-based contexts. I began to realize I was interested not only in categorizing words, but in developing registers with the children, as registers are ways of speaking that vary according to the dynamic social context of the speech event (Rymes, 2009), and I heard differences in students' speech based on whom they were talking to in school. We determined language we wished to use based on our co-construction of discourse as a social process, much like Halliday's (1994) concept of the interpersonal metafunction in Systemic Functional Linguistics, as we were actively involved in the construction of text and our social link to its construction.

As Knapp & Watkins (2005) articulated, “Most forms of speech are interactions between people, in time” (p. 15), and the language our translation chart was going to contextualize came from these social interactions. The language we were going to highlight was “produced by individuals,” but “the shape and structure of the language [was] to a large extent socially determined” (Knapp & Watkins, 2005, p. 16), and we needed to primarily consider the social connection to our word choice.

Enacting Our Translation Chart Activity

It was within this register-based, socially constructed understanding of our word usage that my students and I entered into focused conversation on language using a modified translation chart. We gathered at the rug one morning, with the children criss-cross on carpet squares, two co-researchers perched on tiny seats to take notes on what the students said, and me sitting on our Author’s Chair.

I opened our activity by pulling up the T-chart we were later going to fill out (*Figure 4.2*), and asked the students if any part of the chart looked familiar.

Language:		How do I use it?
with family	with friends	with other grown-ups

Figure 4.2: Blank Translation Chart

It included an image from *Flossie and the Fox* (McKissack, 1986), and they immediately recalled the book, exclaiming that they remembered the cover from our language invitation. A chorus of *yes*’s filled the air, accompanied by the pumping of fists, when I told them we were going to read this text together,

discussing the language characters used as we read. At this point, however, I did not expand on the meaning of each column's heading.

We began reading. Although the students had already heard *Flossie and the Fox*, I read it again so we could pause to ask questions, consider comments, and learn from the perspectives of our friends. I asked the students to consider how Flossie and the Fox were using their words in different ways, and this opened up space for them to share personal connections to the characters in the text.

Intertextual Connections Related to Power: Disempowerment

Just as in our language invitation activity, our discussion led to a focus on the ability of language to empower or *disempower* us. Students threaded this focus with comments connected to the actions and feelings of family members, thus including the voices of our extended community as they “linked [their] present literacy activity to their experiences” (Dyson, 2001b, p. 9).

As we read, offering comments throughout and sharing our thoughts about characters' use of language, I paused as the fox chastised Flossie for not showing him “some measure of respect” (p. 17), as she showed a large tabby cat she came across.

““Some measure of respect,” I repeated. “Are those words you might use when you're talking to your family?” Although I had not formally introduced the register categories on the columned chart, I intentionally incorporated its language here as a way to familiarize the children with the terminology and its connection to words in their world.

The students began shaking their heads, and Naldo said, “No! Cause if you talk to them like that, they think who is that person and they might get scared!”

Naldo's friends agreed with him, and his insight immediately reminded me of a time when Mr. Oswaldo, Ms. Callie, and I sat in Elena's (Hector's mother) living room, a guest in her home as she and Rosalita (Lorena's mother) busied themselves around us preparing tortillas, meat, soup, flan, and lemonade.

We were there on a home visit, a chance for all of us to get to know one another in an informal setting. I had asked these women if I could visit them, to get to know their families and to find out what

they thought about our emerging language study. This was important to me, as I wanted to build our curriculum from the perspectives and insights of my students' families, inviting them and their unique funds of knowledge into our classroom work with words in our world (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

Once the meat was simmering and the lemonade cooling, we sat down to talk. Anthony and Silvio, Hector's and Lorena's fathers, were in and out of the conversation, having to excuse themselves to attend to other obligations, but Mr. Oswaldo, Elena, Rosalita, and I spoke together for over an hour. The women talked about how important it was for them to know their children were fluent in both English and Spanish, and that they wanted school to support bilingualism. Toward the end of our time together, I asked Elena and Rosalita how they felt when they entered our school building, in an effort to gauge whether they felt a partnership existed between us, although we lacked a common language.

Rosalita responded through Mr. Oswaldo's translation, but she looked at both of us as she spoke. "In the beginning, when I came from my country, I felt a little bit strange," Rosalita said. "When I listened, everybody was speaking English. It was hard."

Rosalita was quick to follow up with the sentiment that she now feels much more welcome, but her initial feelings brought up some powerful insights regarding the power of language to separate people from one another. When Rosalita felt she could not operate effectively in the mainstream language of our school, when she believed that not speaking English was a barrier to conversing with Lorena's teachers, she felt uncomfortable. Without being able to speak this language, she felt out of place and unable to communicate (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

As Rosalita said, this initial discomfort eventually wore off, possibly in part due to our school's bilingual signs and secretary, Mr. Oswaldo's and my interest in speaking to her in Spanish, and the presence of her friends in the building. However, her experience illustrated the power of linguistic differences to make people feel inferior and outside of the loop. Naldo's comment regarding the rather uppity language of the fox, demanding "some measure of respect," rang true; just as in Rosalita's case, the language of the fox (school) did not match the language of Naldo's family (home), and he mentioned the possibility that this disconnection might make someone think, "Who is that person?"

Who is that person, indeed? Language can make us feel as though we do not relate to the person with whom we are talking, as though we cannot find common ground due to discursive distance. Naldo gave voice to this issue, and to the power of language to separate us from one another. Before even discussing the translation chart itself, the students were already considering the power of language as they read and conversed about *Flossie and the Fox*.

Intertextual Connections Related to Power: Taking it Back

At the same time this conversation created space for us to discuss personal instances in which we felt powerless because of language, it also opened up opportunities for the children to claim linguistic power for themselves and their families. They did this by recognizing the power Flossie had over the fox simply by using words to her advantage.

After Naldo's comment about the way language differences can make us feel frightened or disconnected from one another, we finished reading *Flossie and the Fox*. As was our custom, I posed a question to the students and asked them to Think/Pair/Share. This was an opportunity for two or three class members to partner and share their thoughts on a topic. I asked the class: How do you think Flossie and the fox used their language in this book?

Sandra and Lorena were partners. After quietly contemplating this inquiry, they faced their knees toward one another to discuss how the fox and Flossie were using language. As other partnerships around the room began to speak, the noise level rose, but Lorena's own voice rose above the din.

"I think Flossie was using her words to be powerful," Lorena stated. "Talking was powerful."

In this moment, Lorena shared with Sandra a critical insight, verbalizing her ability to connect our earlier classroom conversations around power and make them relevant to words she heard. I took a moment to process Lorena's comment. In two sentences, she moved us from simply hinting at the power of words, as we had done during our invitation activity when speaking about the importance of family stories, to specifically identifying a book character that used words to her advantage to outwit a fox. In these sentences, both as Lorena spoke them here and when I later asked her to share her thoughts with the

entire class, she helped us to verbalize an intangible concept, thus “bringing curriculum closer to us rather than keeping it at an abstract and uninteresting distance” (Rymes, 2009, p. 314).

According to Lorena, power manifested itself in the words of Flossie. This connection, communally recognized when she shared it with her classmates, deepened our personal sense of awareness that people used language in powerful ways. Here it was Flossie, a young child with dark skin who spoke in a dialect outside of school’s mainstream, who had used linguistic power to her advantage. In essence, Flossie represented the power of each student in our class to use their language to give them control over the circumstances in their lives, rather than allowing the differences between their languages/dialects and the Standardized English of school and larger society to make them feel uncomfortable or inferior (Delpit, 1994).

In these sentences, Lorena’s optimism met her mother’s, Rosalita’s, perseverance. Rosalita’s perseverance made itself known in continuing to expose herself to our school and its linguistic diversity, even when she felt uncomfortable due to linguistic barriers. Connected over time and space, Rosalita’s experience in overcoming her fear of speaking Spanish in her daughter’s school informed Lorena’s belief that people who are linguistically diverse can be powerful users of their own language (Dyson, 2001a). This experience, coupled with McKissack’s portrayal of Flossie’s determination, classroom conversations about the treatment of caterpillars, students reading aloud stories that discussed different ways to use power, and student experiences hearing their families use words to share the strength of ancestors and religious figures, further constructed our shared understanding of linguistic power (Gee, 2004).

Intertextual Connections Related to Meta Language: Proper Talk and Obama

While students connected to the power of language as they listened to and discussed *Flossie and the Fox* (McKissack, 1986), they continued to discuss and more fully form the meta language with which they were conceptualizing words in use as we began to work with our translation chart.

Once our opening discussion ended, I pulled up the translation chart I had shown the children before reading. As we prepared ourselves to fill it out, we engaged in a conversation that helped students

to identify and associate specific terminology with words in their world, based on communal experiences and common understandings of vocabulary.

I began by sharing that we would be thinking about different ways the characters were speaking in the book, as well as different ways we spoke to people in our world. Knowing this was a rather abstract concept, I decided to get the students started by proposing a situation from the book and asking the children to link it to words with which they were personally familiar.

“Can you give me an example of something that you might say like the fox said it? Really proper and formal and like a ceremony?” I inquired. Michael had used the words “proper” and “like a ceremony” earlier in our conversation, and I wanted to build on his terminology. “After you tell me something like that, we are going to see if we can make it sound like Flossie said it.”

Daisy immediately raised her hand in response, and when I asked her to share, she said, “The fox is like Barack Obama when he talking.”

Obama’s speech influences our kindergarten year. Daisy’s reference to our President immediately transported my mind back to our Kindergarten year, during which our class had engaged in focused activities around Obama and his family. Our interest in President Obama began when we watched a speech he gave for schoolchildren (Obama, 2009). We gathered around the SmartBoard, staring up as his face filled the screen. Obama spent most of his time talking about effort; specifically, the effort required of teachers, principals, families, and mostly students. While much of the speech was difficult for the students to follow, and we did not have the luxury of stopping the film to ask questions or discuss what the President was saying, there was one phrase Mr. Obama used that stuck out in the minds of the children: “There’s no excuse for not trying.”

While this sentence was only one of hundreds spoken by the President, it was the one to which the students connected. It was the one they brought up when I asked what they remembered the President saying. It was the one we informally adopted as our classroom’s mantra for the year.

President Obama’s words had a powerful effect on our classroom culture.

As Mack once wrote, “Barack Obama be good. We be good.”

He earned a spot on our “Learning Wall,” a “classroom audit trail” (Vasquez, 2004) that held artifacts representing what we considered the most important things we were learning. We became interested in his daughters, and spent writing time composing letters to ask him how they were doing. We also wrote letters to the President himself, and many of the students commented on his stage presence and knack for giving speeches (*See Figure 4.3*).

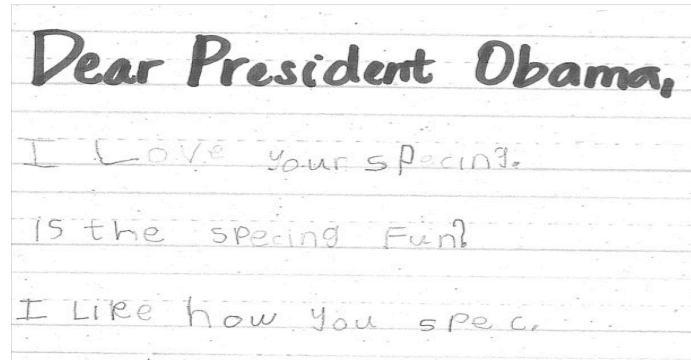


Figure 4.3: Student Letter to Barack Obama

Dear President Obama, I love your speaking. Is the speaking fun? I like how you speak.

As one student conveyed here, he enjoyed the way President Obama spoke, and when it came to the President, he was interested in this communicative register more than any other.

Students' connections to President Obama existed beyond whole class activities. Michael so internalized and contemplated Obama's presidency, often mentioning that he and the President shared a similar skin tone and "kind of sounded the same," that he linked the fact that Obama was the first African American President to our continued study of the Civil Rights movement. Sitting in a circle as our class contemplated ways to summarize what we had learned about this movement, Michael shared this insight.

"Without the work of all those people," he said, "Obama wouldn't be able to be President." He then proceeded to share his belief that people would never have elected Obama to the position of President if so many people had not worked together in non-violent ways to make change.

I am positive my mouth hung open in this moment, as I considered what to say in response to Michael's insightful statement.

He saved me by suggesting that we collect pictures and facts we had been writing about the movement, creating a book we could place in our classroom library.

“It would never have an ending, though,” he told us, “because the story isn’t finished yet.”

Obama’s speech influences our first grade language study. Michael was right. The story was *not* finished. The President’s connection to our classroom maintained its hold over time, space, and summer vacation. While it was during their Kindergarten year that Michael and his classmates began linking Barack Obama, his family, his Presidency, and their relationship to the Civil Rights Movement, these links were still present one academic year later.

There we were, sitting together as first grade students and teachers, and we still felt Obama’s influence. Now, we were transitioning our discussions about him from the power of his words and actions, to Daisy’s new focus on language: “The fox is like Barack Obama when he talking.” In this moment, an important piece of our communal history was once again visible in our classroom space. We were threading President Obama’s speech into our contextualized understanding of language.

Daisy referenced the formality of the President’s speeches, likening them to the fox’s Standardized English. She had not heard Mr. Obama speaking with anyone but the public at large, which led her to believe he usually spoke formally. Daisy was making comparisons between different speakers in diverse contexts, and these comparisons were “referring and responding to, incorporating and intermingling multiple other texts” (Solsken, Willett, & Wilson-Keenan, 2000, p. 183). In other words, her understanding of how the Fox spoke related to her conception of how President Obama spoke.

However, the mentioning of Obama’s name carried with it much more than this particular association. Inevitably, it conjured up memories of Civil Rights discussions, Family Dialogue Journal entries about elections, and our declaration to always try our best. Daisy’s singular reference to the President’s speech “became a space of intersecting spheres of action” (Dyson, 2001b, p. 20). In one sentence, Daisy had connected us to one of many prior threads of classroom learning, rich in its familial and communal offshoots (Bloome, et. al, 2005).

Differentiating registers. Focusing once again on the first grade students sitting in front of me, pulling my mind from memories of our Kindergarten year back to the present translation chart activity, I smiled. If the fox's Standardized English reminded Daisy of President Obama "when he talking," I wanted to question her more, to listen to what she meant by this.

"Do you think Barack Obama speaks the same at home with his kids and wife as he does when he is on the stage giving a speech?" I asked.

The children smiled at the thought, their grins and mine becoming larger as Dahlia offered her two cents, "He talks nicely or he might lose it! He don't use speech talk."

We laughed, considering the fact that President Obama needed to reflect on who he was talking to when moving from place to place and person to person, specifically keeping in mind how "nicely" he needed to speak to his family if he did not want to be in trouble. Apparently, Dahlia did not connect speaking "nicely" to speech talk, and she thought Obama needed to be careful not to use this more structured form of communication with his family.

It was in this way, through laughing, connecting, and "learning through talk" (Maggie), that we continued to communally construct our understanding of how we spoke in different situations. In this moment, we compared the fox's formal English to something we were calling "speech talk," and we began to associate different formalities of language with specific situations (Knapp & Watkins, 2005; Martin & Rose, 2007). Moving beyond our initial understandings of meta language, which we shared with one another during our language invitation, the students and I were beginning to shift from having a general understanding of the hybridity of speech, to naming registers based on our community's sharing of experiences from both in and out of the classroom.

Building our meta language. As this conversation built toward the creation of our first translation chart, I decided to introduce my own terminology.

After our discussion about Barack Obama's speech, I asked the class, "Do you know what we call it in college when we say we talk differently to different people?"

The children looked at me inquisitively, shaking their heads from left to right.

“It’s called code-switching,” I said. “We code-switch when we change the way we talk from place to place, or from person to person. Today, we’re going to practice code-switching.”

The children tried the words out, whispering “code-switching” around the carpet as we moved into filling out our translation chart.

Code-Switching: Person-based Registers

With this new term still floating in the air, the students and I focused once again on the translation chart. The chart categorized language in three different ways, with each register based on relationships between speakers: *with friends*, *with family*, and *with other grown-ups*.

The children demonstrated the weight they placed on relationships between speakers each time they adjusted their word choice based on what they knew about the person with whom they were communicating. The students realized they “learn words from particular people in particular interactive events” (Dyson, 2001a, p. 419), and they were likely to need to use similar words and sentence structures with similar people in future interactions. Hector knew this when he moved from English to Spanish while talking about his animals with Mr. Oswaldo and me; his relationship with each of us, and what he knew about the language we used, governed the construction of his response much more than knowing we were speaking to one another in his home. We needed to base our registers, then, on *people* and *relationships*, as much as on *places*, thus providing us with a format to discuss the “many registers” we had learned during our lives, as well as “how to shift from one register to another when the context required a shift” (Andrews, 2001, p. 113).

In this way, our class had already begun to construct registers, even before this formal translation chart activity. We used the interpersonal metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), with its focus on the relationship between speakers, as a tool that aided in our ability to discuss the contextualization of words (Gebhard & Harman, 2011). This was exciting, since it allowed me to not only consider participants’ construction of registers and the relationships within them in my analysis of classroom conversations, but also through applying these methods to lessons *with* my students. This

application enabled us to think about the real-time effect of the contextualization of language on our interactions with others.

Code-Switching: Relationships and Boundaries

The translation chart, then, was a practical, accessible way to invite register study into our first grade classroom. I believed it would offer us a visual, somewhat-structured representation of how we used words with different people (Knapp & Watkins, 2005); as the space under each category was blank, it allowed for the unique interpretations and responses of the students. Register, then, gave us a structured way to categorize and think about how we spoke with different people, but students' responses were not limited to pre-identified options labeled as "right" or "wrong." *The children* would determine the language used with friends, as well as with family and other grown-ups. *Their* examples would serve as the continuation of our communally constructed understanding of language, the creation of building blocks we shared in our identification of how we used words. As Hicks (1995) stated, "Classrooms are embedded communities of discourse; they can never be divorced from the community-based language practices that children bring with them" (p. 75). The translation chart gave these "embedded communities of discourse" a voice in our language study.

To begin our register conversation, I asked the students who, out of the characters in *Flossie and the Fox*, had spoken as they might speak to their friends. They unanimously identified Flossie's speech as being most similar to their peers. We spent the rest of our lesson, then, thinking of sentences we imagined our friends saying to us in greeting, and translating them into talk "with family" and "with other grown-ups" (Figure 4.4).

Language:		How do I use it?	
with family		with friends	with other grown-ups
"Hello." "Hola." "Whatcha doing?" "Hola. ¿Cómo estás?"		"Hey, what's up?" "Hello, friend" "Sup dude!" "Sup old man."	"Welcome to you."

Figure 4.4: Completed Translation Chart

As the figure above shows, the children identified formal talk (“Welcome to you.”) with sentiment we might share with grown-ups we did not know very well. Our links to *family talk* included phrases in both English and Spanish. The “relative constants” (Knapp & Watkins, 2005, p. 26) the children associated with their family (“Hello,” “Hola,”), were different from those associated with their friends. Their extensions of *friend talk* included “Sup dude!” and “Sup old man!”

Hector was the first to open up the use of these *friend talk* phrases by saying he would address his friends by exclaiming, “Sup dude!” Jacob then took this up a notch, telling us he would address his principal by saying, “Sup old lady!” In this moment, Schleppegrell’s (1996) belief that registers “reflect the interaction of interlocutors and the joint construction of discourse” (p. 280) became a reality, as the students had not previously referenced our principal like this while engaging in a classroom conversation.

Teacher discomfort. This statement sent Jacob’s friends into fits of giggles, and me into an uncomfortable discursive space, unsure as to what my appropriate reaction should be. I responded by sputtering something about this not being “very respectful,” and “I wouldn’t say that to someone I don’t know very well because I wouldn’t know what they would think.” I worried our principal would somehow, unluckily, choose that exact moment to pop her head into our room to say hello, and at the mere thought of this, I felt the heat of red, splotchy hives begin to crawl up my neck as I tried to steer our conversation in another direction.

For all of my talk about subversiveness, essentially I was a rule-follower.

I was a rule-follower trying to break out of the comfortable space in which I was the teacher in charge, where I could both set the goals of our lesson and evaluate the appropriateness of students’ responses to these goals (Gutiérrez, 2008). Although I wanted to value students’ contributions, no matter how far into the “unofficial” (Dyson, 2001a) realm of content they veered, I had to recognize my physical reaction to Jacob’s attempts at pushing against our neatly constructed registers. This showed me I appreciated the structure of the *I-R-E* (Initiation, Response, Evaluation) model of formal pedagogic discourse more than I wanted to admit (Hicks, 2005).

Remembering to allow space for this personal discomfort became even more important to me when I realized Jacob's pushing against the boundaries of our discursive space was necessary to help us move forward in our understandings of what society considered to be *appropriate* and *inappropriate*, "official" and "unofficial" (Dyson, 2001a). Children learn through play, after all, and playing with the boundaries of these registers helped them to open up opportunities for discussion about the societally constructed limits on language. Discussions like these, good-natured and laughter-filled, helped the children to feel secure in my claim that our language study was conversational, and that our voices were equal within it (Eggins & Slade, 2005).

Student empowerment. In Jacob's contributions, he discussed and demonstrated the power words have to make us feel connected and strong, and the ability we all have (both individually and communally) to push against societally constructed rules regarding appropriate and inappropriate language use (Delpit, 1994). Jacob's use of language deliberately, and somewhat forcefully, toppled traditional rules regulating the exchange of words between authority figures and subordinates; at the same time, he was aware of his current audience. While he probably would not have said, "Sup, ol' woman," to our principal, he knew his friends would find this use of language funny, and based on how he and I had interacted in previous situations, he must have been convinced my reaction would not result in a punishment. He was right about this; my commitment to working within our community to create a space where all voices had the right to be heard and considered, and where we all might be uncomfortable at some point, gave him just enough linguistic liberties for this to slide by without repercussions. While I turned red, sputtering a vague response, that was the extent of my reaction.

I believed Jacob knew the open, conversation-based linguistic space in which he was operating, and while he was free to push his limits within the walls of our classroom, he never applied this sort of risk-taking to interactions with our principal or other adults in the building. He and his friends were simply playing; playing with words and their power, playing with acceptable societal conventions, and playing with their ability to use language in unpredictable ways. Because we brought into our space

“official” *and* “unofficial” speech (Dyson, 2001b), we opened up future possibilities for conversation, and for identifying the nuances present in registers at work in our world (Halliday, 2003).

Nothing was off limits, it seemed, and this turned out to be a positive thing. The students began to discuss sentence structures and word choice, as well as the registers in which they used them, from this lesson onward, and into the rest of our year together. Possibly because I did not limit their experimentations with words, they allowed me to be part of these conversations as they unfolded, and as they continued to develop a shared understanding of how they could shift their language choices in order to fit particular contexts. In their communal discussions of language choices, based on the registers we developed and continued to define, they began to own the power they had to manipulate words.

One morning, I witnessed the verbal manifestation of the students’ emerging understandings regarding a meta language around registers, as well as the power they held as they chose how they worked within these registers. I sat at a table with Hector, Jorge, and Elijah during writing workshop. Elijah and Hector were writing independently, concentrating on creating informational texts about space and Pokemon, respectively. I was reading and writing with Jorge, as he composed a book about dogs. I teased him because one of his pages mirrored one I used to model informational text, but I did not insist he change it, since experimentation in a second language often necessitates the learner copy the speech patterns of others, and English was Jorge’s second language (Schleppegrell, 2010).

He giggled at me as he wrote the following: “Dog can be running.”

I repeated the words exactly as he had them written on his paper, “Dog can be running.” Without me saying anything else, Jorge looked at me contemplatively and then said back, “It should be dogs for books.”

Hector chimed in, looking up from his book, “Jorge’s book was friend talk.”

“That’s not *my* book talk,” Elijah then countered. “I would say ‘Dogs *are* running.’”

“Los perros se están ejecutando,” Hector chimed in, proudly demonstrating for us the Spanish translation of Jorge’s sentence with a big smile on his face.

Elijah grinned, without looking up from the page he was writing about the earth's atmospheric pressure, and Jorge repeated Hector with a big smile.

"That's my language," said Hector proudly.

This was Hector's language, a language in which he demonstrated considerable expertise and knowledge. It was important that we recognized his expertise as such, because as Rymes (2009) stated, Without being recognized as competent speakers of the language they learned before school, students may not be able to make connections between the depth of their childhood language socialization and the new language they are learning in the classroom. Drawing connections between the two provides openings for deeper learning in the classroom. (p. 41)

As Elijah, Jorge, and he discussed the words they were using in their informational texts, adding the category "book talk" to our growing conceptions of register, they uniquely blended their personal linguistic experiences with our communally constructed meta language. They empowered one another as they listened to each voice and accepted it for its richly diverse contribution to their growing knowledge of language in use (Gutiérrez, 2008; Solsken, Willett, & Wilson-Keenan, 2000). I anticipated our development of these concepts over time, as we continued our contextualized language study.

Summary

In the construction of our translation chart, we treated each register as a continually negotiated social *process*, rather than as a finished *product* (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). We began to see *family talk*, *friend talk*, and *other grown-up talk* as "frames that structured what kind of language was heard and used" (Rymes, 2009, p. 335) as we negotiated our use of words from one context to another, discussing how these frames shifted and changed. We began to form *communicative competence*, which involved "learning how our words index differently in different contexts," as well as "knowing how our ways of speaking indicate different things to different people" (Rymes, 2009, p. 223), which at once allowed us to function more effectively when speaking to others, and to knowledgeably begin pushing against socially-constructed conversational boundaries.

Our contextualization of language depended on our ability to see spoken discourse as based in relationships, and as being socially constructed. As Knapp & Watkins (2005) stated, “While language is produced by individuals, the shape and structure of the language is to a large degree socially determined” (p. 16), with these social determinations forming the registers we work within. In an effort to move away from a rule-governed, decontextualized study of words, one structured around pages of sentence diagrams and “right” or “wrong” ways of speaking and writing, we needed to move into a more fluid construction of how words worked in our world. “Language moves into new registers, new spheres of activity, opening up and expanding its meaning potential along the way” (Halliday, 2003, p. 408); register study led us away from prescriptive lessons, toward attention to the purpose and function of our words. My students and I needed to think about how our use of language was situated in particular contexts and loosely structured within each register, but with the understanding that these “relative constants” were “always in engagement with the potential for variation and change” (Knapp & Watkins, 2005, p. 26).

Merging Concepts of Meta Language and Power

After engaging in our translation chart activity and further developing our communal constructions of linguistic power and meta languages, I realized Rymes (2009) was right. These students and I were beginning to “learn about and document the multifunctionality of language and its dependence on social contexts,” and because of the charts we created to do this, we were becoming “empowered as capable interlocutors in multiple social worlds” (p. 43). In other words, as we played with the categorization of words, we began to connect certain ways of speaking with certain groups of people: *friends*, *family*, and *other grown-ups*. We also knew what it meant when someone said they were *code-switching*, and we could draw on both shared and individual experiences to meaningfully connect to this concept, whether we did this through references to Obama’s need to speak differently to his family than when he gave a speech, or through our ability to laughingly comment on multiple ways to say “hello.”

Our translation chart activity led to Naldo’s statement about the power of language to keep us distant from one another, and we could connect Rosalita’s experience of feeling uncomfortable in our school to Naldo’s thoughts. Yet, just as the children knew we could use our power to treat caterpillars in

harmful or helpful ways, they were also beginning to realize people could use language to make others feel at ease or awkward, to make themselves feel in charge or controlled by others. Lorena's overt reference to the power of Flossie's words showed this, as did Jacob's boldness in pushing the traditional limits of addressing school administration by suggesting we greet our principal by saying, "Sup, ol' woman." Each time a child extended their personal connections to the power of language, or took a risk in their own linguistic choices, they demonstrated their growing understanding of the multiple social worlds in which they used their words, and the ability of both themselves and others to manipulate these words to their benefit or detriment (Freire, 1972; Gebhard, Harman, & Seger, 2007).

Possibilities for Extension

At this point, after finishing our invitational activity and our first translation chart creation, our community was beginning to engage in focused conversations regarding our use of words in different contexts. While much of what occurred to get us to this point was unique to the experiences and backgrounds of these students and families in this time and space, I offer here concrete suggestions that might assist you in moving your own linguistic study forward, beyond initial inferences to language and into more intentional examinations of words in use.

- *Translation Chart*: Read up on Heath's (1983/1996) and Wheeler & Swords' (2004) experiences in both observing and implementing versions of "translation chart" activities. Consider the fact that your classroom's register-based categories will be uniquely yours, but that there may be some overlap between what others have done and what will be most appropriate for your students' growth in loosely classifying the way they use language in their world (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). Then, help the children begin to weave their chosen meta language (*friend talk*, *family talk*, etc.) into the fabric of your classroom conversations, so that they can apply this terminology concretely to their everyday linguistic lives.

CHAPTER 5

WHEN TALK BECAME ACTION:

USING OUR WORDS TO MAKE CHANGE

“Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge” (Freire, 1972, p. 81).

Jen: Daisy, what’s your idea?

Daisy: That all these Spanish people can be like
 They can write their own book right here
 So like
 All the Spanish people in the class can write a book
 And then all the English people in the class can write their book.
 And then Ms.
 Ms. Candace and Ms. Alexandra
 And they can write a book
 And then all the [kids] that wanna do sign language
 Can write the sign language book.

Jen: So split ourselves up and write different books
 Instead of all writing the same book in different languages?
 Oh, alright.
 Interesting.

Creative Problem-Solving Lesson

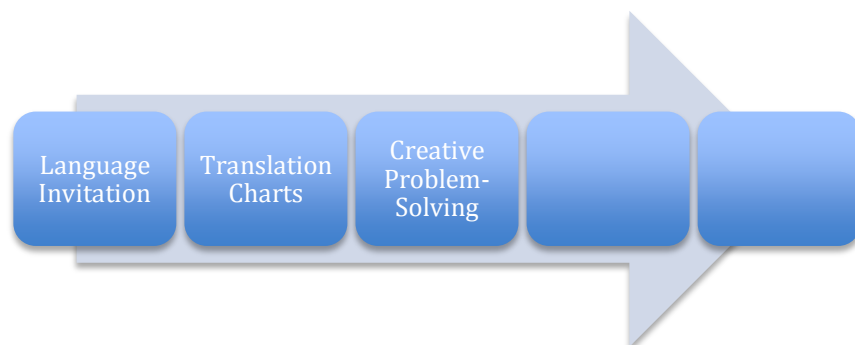


Figure 5.1: Unfolding of Language Activity #3

This chapter will focus on how our class moved from discussions around language in use to identifying a linguistic problem they were interested in addressing (*See Figure 5.1*). I will describe the language lessons and conversations following our translation chart activity, as these events were integral to our unit's transition from discussion to action. I will then describe a Creative Problem-Solving activity in which my students, co-teachers, and I considered meta language and linguistic power in an applied way.

As I describe the Creative Problem-Solving event in detail, I will discuss intertextual connections the children made, and specific examples of the influence of their prior experiences and background knowledge. Embedded within this description, I will closely examine a conversational segment, sharing my analysis of the intertextual connections children made that were both extended and ignored, and using this as an opportunity to systematically consider if/how I made space for the students' ideas to be carried through our conversation and into future activities. By applying the interpersonal metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to this same segment, I will also consider how the relationship between myself and my students was negotiated throughout our conversation.

Finally, I will identify concrete possibilities for you, the readers, to apply similar pedagogical practices to your own learning spaces, keeping in mind the uniqueness of your own community and the likelihood that you will need to adjust these ideas to fit your own classroom's needs.

Shaping Our Unit: Moving Beyond Translation Charts

Upon finishing our translation chart activity, my students, their families, and I began to more formally shape our language unit around a shared meta language and an increasingly nuanced understanding of the power of words. We discussed the language we believed was most fitting for different situations, analyzing whether “She sure do!” was a sentence most likely heard in conversation with *friends* or *other adults*. We used what we were learning about contextualizing language when we wrote narratives and informational text, considering in small groups whether the speech we gave to characters or narrators should mirror that of Flossie or the Fox. All of this focused on the *register* of our speech/writing, rather than specific grammatical rules meant to govern dialect choices, so that we could

continue recognizing our ability to at once function within a pre-determined framework, and manipulate our word choice in creative ways within this framework (Gebhard, Harman, & Seger, 2007; Rymes, 2009).

Yet, we were almost halfway through our academic year. While I enjoyed our discussions and believed they helped the children consider the function *and* form of language in different contexts, I felt their excitement (and mine) was waning. There was a lot going on in the lives of these students and their families, and carving out space for this study during both home and school time was challenging. Maggie, recently married, was busy helping Michael adjust to having a stepfather. Elena and Anthony had a beautiful baby boy, and found themselves reimagining their lives with a young child diagnosed with Down's syndrome. Natalie and Mack were preparing for Mack's upcoming leg surgery, after which he would return to school on crutches. Due to the day-to-day responsibilities of life, Rosalita and I had not spoken much about Lorena's school progress, let alone her use of words. On top of all this, the thrill associated with our language invitation activity had long since passed, and while the slow pace of the translation chart was a welcome change at first, we needed a *reason* to continue our exploration of words.

We needed a common purpose.

We needed sustained and eager focus.

We needed to feel “increasingly challenged and obliged to respond” (Freire, 1972, p. 81) to a linguistic problem we had yet to identify. Communally identifying this project was a challenge. While I was willing to share the roles of both “teacher” and “student” with my young learners, their limited experience in posing and responding to problems put us in a situation where I needed to guide them (Freire, 1972). Yet, continued balance of our shared learning space was necessary, so that I could best capitalize on the interests and ideas the children *did* have. As Genishi & Dyson (2009) stated:

While it is important that teachers model and guide children's engagement..., it is also important to provide child-controlled time and space in which they may reveal semiotic resources, supportive relationships, and unanticipated communicative practices. (p. 122)

As Maggie once said, “some people...have the gift of gab,” and I did not always have to focus or direct this gab. I needed to model and guide, but also provide space for students to explore and share their linguistic perspectives.

Filling in Gaps: Events Leading Up to the Creative Problem-Solving Activity

Therefore, with my ears and mind as open as they could be, we continued our contextualized study of language. Following our translation chart activity, my students, their families, and I found curriculum into which we could plug linguistic explorations, infusing our study with the voices of family members and juxtaposing these voices next to language we heard in other contexts. I worked to hear “more dimensions of children’s language learning – its interactional intricacy, its functional possibilities, and situational variation” (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 32). I believed that hearing these multidimensional aspects of children’s language use would help us to co-identify our next problem-based linguistic exploration; by learning about what the children both enjoyed and disliked, which activities spurred further conversation or resulted in silence, I would be better able to guide them.

Language Detective Notebooks

At the conclusion of our translation chart activity (*See Chapter Four*), I introduced Language Detective Notebooks, a learning tool first documented by Heath (1983/1996), to Mack, Lorena, Hector, and Michael. I hoped it would encourage them to make our identified registers real to them, part of the way they used words daily.

“Does anyone know what a *detective* is?” I asked, leaning forward and lowering my voice.

“It’s someone who finds out stuff other people can’t!” Mack offered.

“What a great way to say that!” The rest of the class was leaning toward me, as well, wondering where I was headed with this line of thinking. “I just handed four friends a Language Detective Notebook. They are going to fill it with words they hear people saying at home or in their community. They are going to listen for words other people don’t even think about! And, they can ask their families to help them write down what they hear, or to get ideas.”

I opened Hector's notebook to the first page (See Figure 5.2), revealing an image with which the children were already familiar.

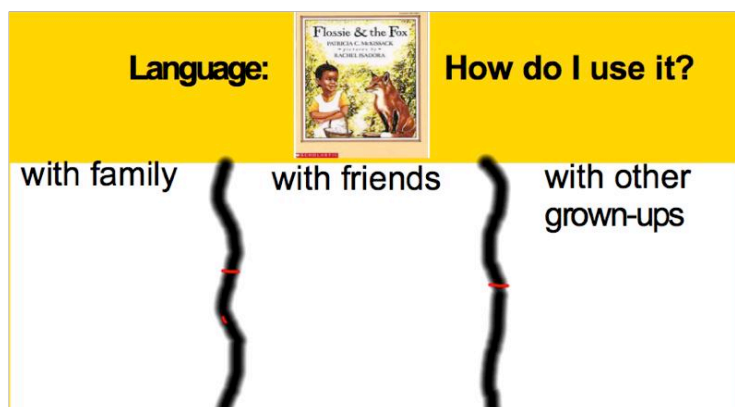


Figure 5.2: Blank Language Detective Notebook Page

“See this?” I asked. “It’s a paper that looks just like the translation chart we filled out. It says *friend talk*, *family talk*, and *other grown-up talk* at the top. So when our friends write down the language they hear, they can put it in one of these categories. And if it doesn’t fit, what can they do?”

“Write it in between!” Michael called out.

“Great idea! You can write anything that doesn’t fit in between the columns, and we can figure out where to put it later.”

Not wanting to disappoint the other students, and noticing they were eyeing the notebooks clutched in their friends’ hands, I said, “Don’t worry if you don’t have a notebook today. We will take turns taking them home, and asking our families to help us listen for interesting examples of language.”

I smiled in anticipation as Lorena, Michael, Hector, and Mack placed the notebooks in their book bags. I was anxious for the children to return carrying pages of writing that we could discuss, together building a more nuanced understanding of the contextualization of language. I hoped the journals would help us think about how our person-based registers worked in our everyday lives, as well as give children the opportunity to identify gaps in the categories we had constructed (Jones, 2007).

A few days after introducing the notebooks, we gathered as a class to talk about the language students had heard in their homes and communities. Mack was the only student who had brought back his notebook with a response from his family, so I planned to focus on what they had written together.

“Mack,” I began, “I am excited to share with your friends the Language Detective Notebook entry you brought in yesterday. Listen to this, class!”

My voice was animated as I relayed what Mack and his mother had written (*See Figure 5.3*).

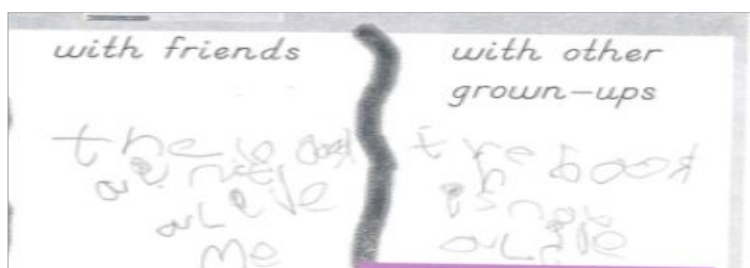


Figure 5.3: Mack’s Language Detective Notebook Page

In the *friend talk* column, Mack had written, *The book aint alive – me*. Next to this, under *other grown-ups*, he wrote, *The book is not alive – Alex*. These words referred back to a conversation he and Ms. Alexandra had on the day we passed out the notebooks. Mack said aloud, “Hey! This book aint alive!” He quickly followed this statement with, “That’s not how you would say it, though.” Then, he and Ms. Alexandra spent time writing what he thought *she* would have said, instead. Mack had shown these words, his reference to register, to his mother when he brought his notebook home.

Mack’s grasp of this nuanced linguistic idea, that people accepted the word “aint” only in certain conversational situations, amazed me. I smiled over at him as I talked about how carefully he had thought about language in our world.

I expected the children to share my level of excitement, as they had done during our language invitation and translation chart activities. I noticed, though, that they were unenthusiastically looking back at me. Robert leaned against a pillow and stared into space. Lorena sat on her knees, rocking back and forth, and fiddled with her flowered headband. Michael batted around a piece of cotton that was floating

through the air in front of him. Various other children were glassy eyed, and their brains seemed to be in some far-off place, a place that had captivated their attention much more effectively than I had.

After attempting to bring them back to the conversation by asking what they thought about Mack's discovery, and knowing children sometimes *look* as though they are disengaged when they are listening intently, I realized that it was not the best day for an in-depth conversation about the contextualization of "aint." Some days were like that, and I knew responding to the children rather than pushing my own agenda always resulted in a more productive day than if I were to insist we continue this conversation (Cowhey, 2006). At this point, I assumed the students were not disengaged with the Language Detective Journals, but that they were in need of more hands-on lessons this particular day.

However, my assumption was almost immediately challenged when I said we were going to stretch our bodies, and that we would look at Mack's journal another day. As Mack went to put the journal in his book bag, ready to record more instances of interesting language use as they emerged at home, I heard him sigh loudly. I craned my neck around the students' desks and toward the coat racks, wondering what he was doing, and noticed Mack seated amidst a pile of papers and books from his backpack; as was his practice, he had dumped everything *out* in order to put the journal *in*.

"Finally," he said to himself. "Maybe after I do this one more time, I can give it to someone else!"

I was rather stunned, since I was under the impression that the journals interested the students. After all, they incorporated family language, gave them space in which to share their findings with peers during Morning Meeting, and represented a classroom job I believed students coveted for its newness.

In my stunned state, I found myself laughing. While my student teachers looked at me in surprise, I realized I could not stop. As is sometimes the case with children, an activity can have bells and whistles and any number of exciting links to curriculum and families, and still not pique their interest or make them want to continue. In this moment, Mack's honesty struck me, and I was grateful I did not have to guess his level of engagement; he certainly put it all out there for me to see and hear.

Mack was not the only student feeling disconnected. Michael, Lorena, and Hector also said, in later conversations, they would prefer not to be asked to lug the journals around. In fact, the journals had never even left their book bags, as I found out when they marched across the room to retrieve them from each pack's deep pockets. When I asked if anyone else would like to be a Language Detective, I was met with a circle of students looking down at the carpet.

No hands raised.

We did not continue our Language Detective Journals. No one asked for them in the days and weeks to come. Instead, I buried them under curriculum maps, student writing samples, and district testing calendars. They emerged only on the rare day that I cleaned off my desk, and each time this happened I would offer them to the students.

And each time, no one took me up on my offer.

Our Language Detective Journals represented to me the fact that my students, their families, and I were still identifying meaningful activities and projects that would promote linguistic engagement “in the world and with the world” (Freire, 1972, p. 81). We were still searching for language-related projects that would hold our interest over time, projects that would serve as opportunities to continue deepening our knowledge of how to use words to our advantage. I suspected the journals were unsuccessful in part because the children and their families were already responsible for completing Family Dialogue Journals and weekly homework assignments, and this new addition was quite similar to what they were already doing together.

While I was disappointed, I did not force the issue, believing the co-constructed nature of our language study would be the most effective way to examine words with the children and their families (Allen, 2007; Allen, 2010; Compton-Lilly, 2011). Otherwise, this exploration would be no different from the prescriptive grammar studies and worksheets so often purchased by school districts.

The roller coaster of our language study had hit a snag. We were currently in the *ch, ch, ch, ch* stage, unable to yet see the top of the hill we were climbing, unsure of where we would find our momentum. I was “restless, impatient” as I looked to identify a “hopeful inquiry,” *our* inquiry, to “pursue

in the world” (Freire, 1972, p. 72). I anticipated the relief of this identification, of reaching the peak of this hill, the rush of wind on my face and the butterflies I hoped to feel in my stomach, as we went *woo, woo, woo, woo, woo*, our momentum fueled by the recognition of our next relevant project.

Where, though, would we find our relevance?

Context Dress-Up Activity and Continued Conversations

After our less-than-inspiring Language Detective Journal sharing, my students and I pushed forward. I found myself looking for opportunities to take a child’s linguistic wondering, a real world problem they posed, and pick it up, flush it out, and turn it into a communally constructed response to a relevant issue (Zentella, 1997).

Context activity. My co-teachers and I found ourselves in amusing positions, as we tried to rustle up excitement from the students regarding our language study. One day, in an effort to deepen their understandings of how we change what we say based on whom we are talking to, we wore robes, winter outerwear, and a feather boa, respectively, into the classroom. This led to a discussion about how appropriate each outfit would be in a variety of places (Wheeler & Swords, 2004).

“Would you wear this winter coat to the beach?” we asked the children. “No!” they responded emphatically. “Would you wear this bathrobe to a party?” we went on. “No way!” they yelled, giggling. “How about the feather boa – have you ever seen anyone wear that to the grocery store?” we continued. At this point, we hardly heard a child’s response, because they were rolling on the floor in laughter, grabbing their sides and guffawing in exaggerated response to their teachers’ over the top outfits.

“You should be dressed like *us!*” Lorena proclaimed, amidst her friends’ laughter.

Daisy, pointing to the feather boa, said, “She should be at a college football game!” I thought about the dresses and heels female students often wore to sporting events around our Southern town.

Michael, in an effort to maintain his composure, said, “I can’t believe I’m about to say this, Mrs. McCreight, but can we get back to *learning* here?”

Statements like Michael’s, coupled with the sheer delight of the children at seeing their teachers wearing such outlandish clothing, told us that they did not see this part of our language study as drudgery,

in the same way they had internalized the Language Detective Notebooks as being a chore. This was encouraging, as one of my goals was to make our language study *enjoyable* again; as Genishi and Dyson (2009) recognized, my job was to help the children find “manageable and relevant (not to mention fun)” ways to explore words. Without the students feeling enjoyment, without them feeling excited to discuss words in their world, we would surely not identify an issue about which we would want to work toward a solution (Wheeler & Swords, 2004).

We used this opening to lead into a conversation that compared the categorization of these outfits to our knowledge of how certain words or phrases were most appropriate for discussions with certain people. Using photographs that exposed different sections of a large ship, in front of which two men stood talking, we guessed what they were saying to one another based on the context in which we thought they were speaking. When we could only see a wall behind them, we decided they were co-workers on a construction site, and tailored their speech accordingly (*See Figure 5.4*)



Figure 5.4: Contextualized Language Photograph Close Up

When one man asked, “How will we fix this *building*?” the other responded, “With bricks or cement.”

Later, when the children realized the men were next to a boat, they realized we had accurately identified their relationship (colleagues), but that they were probably speaking together about setting off for a new destination on the ship (*See Figure 5.5*).

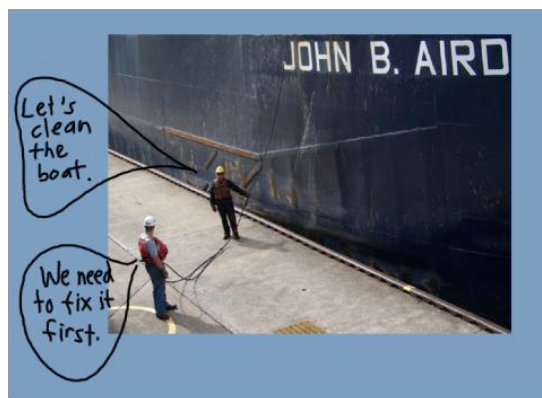


Figure 5.5: Contextualized Language Photograph From Farther Away

Here, one man suggested, “Let’s clean the boat.” The other countered, saying, “We need to fix it first.” The topic of their conversation, then, changed based on the space in which their discussion operated, which is one of the components of the contextualization of language present in SFL’s concept of register.

In this way, the children, their co-teachers, and I worked together to identify the relevancy of contextualizing language. Because this activity involved us all, it served as a jumping off point for future conversations about linguistic contextualization. We had begun to build a repertoire of linguistic activities (our language invitation, translation charts, and this one), and were increasingly able to reference communally constructed knowledge about language. Just as students began to do with discussions about Jorge’s *friend talk* as he wrote his narrative about dogs, changing “Dog can be running” to “Dog~~s~~ can be running,” we were now able to expand and extend our meta language to include references to this conversation about the outlandish clothing and pictures of a boat (Bloome, et al., 2005; Gutiérrez, 2008).

Conversations with families. Family survey responses and discussions during family/school conferences deepened my conviction that studying students’ hybrid use of language was appropriate. When I asked families what they hoped their children would learn in first grade, responses consistently had to do with the importance of the students learning English and Spanish, and knowing the best places to use either language. As Daisy’s father said in a family survey, the children needed to know how to code-switch “to make communication easy for whom [they were] speaking to.”

This sentiment was widespread, including families whose home languages were both Spanish and English, as our school was sharing its commitment to bilingual education with the larger community. Christopher's father said that, while his friends and other family members spoke only English at home, he did not want that to happen in his house. He believed it would be useful for Christopher to speak both languages in the future, and he wanted to continue effectively communicating with his two sons. This challenge, one that families face as their children learn how to juggle two linguistic worlds, is widespread, as many Spanish speaking families struggle between their desire for assimilation, which oftentimes represents success in the United States, and maintaining a close connection to their home country and culture (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Legislation in states such as Arizona insists children speak only English in order to be successful in school, shutting out children's home speak and using their power to pit students' emerging understanding of English against their families' language (Unz, 2000).

Conversations with students. The excitement that stemmed from our dress-up activity and discussions drove students to engage in their own analysis of words in their world. We seemed to be back on track, not yet having identified a long-term project, but still interested in our ability to use language in different ways.

Mack and his guided reading book. Mack personally engaged this idea, as he read a short text during Guided Reading about maps and streets, which was part of our social studies focus on our place on the earth. Mack and I read one-on-one, as this allowed me to assess his progress as a reader, and to identify next steps in his quest for fluency. However, Mack brought more to our reading session than an increase in his sight word or decoding abilities; he also brought a nuanced understanding of how our work with language corresponded with the reading of this text.

We sat at a kidney table, with Mack across from me. I held a notebook and pencil, and made marks on a page every time he read a word. Each mark corresponded to his correct reading, miscue, or skip. Mack's long finger followed each word he read across the small, black and white pages of his book, stopping frequently to study the picture on each page and to use them to assist in his reading.

“I made street,” he slowly read aloud. Although he carefully checked his vocal representation of the text with the letters on its page, his finger skipped past the word “a” as he read. I stopped making marks, ready to provide assistance since I noticed Mack left out this word.

He stopped, as well, his finger halting and his head tilting to one side. His brown eyes moved from the page to my face, and he simply said, “That’s not right. It needs an ‘a’ for book talk!”

Mack read the page again, this time saying, “I made a street,” his finger once again tracing the words as he more quickly read, demonstrating fluency in this repetition.

Here, the intertextual threads of Mack’s increasing awareness of language connected to his emerging fluency as a reader. He knew his words did not sound right. Since our study focused on how words sounded in context, he paused, comparing what he knew about how this sentence *should* sound against how it *did* sound. Mack’s developing meta language around words in use allowed him to share his insight with me, using terminology our class had co-constructed; the register of *book talk*, in which he knew he was operating as a reader, did not match what he had verbalized (Knapp & Watkins, 2005; Schleppegrell, 2010). Therefore, Mack’s knowledge of context allowed him to stop, reevaluate, and state how his words were at odds with what he knew about how books sounded.

This knowledge, as it overlapped and connected with his ability to read, helped him independently navigate the words on the page. By incorporating his knowledge of words to his reading, Mack self-corrected, then identified the terminology with which he could share his thoughts. Our study of the contextualization of language, then, was useful to us as speakers, as well as readers (Schleppegrell, 2010). Thoughts of words in our world permeated multiple subject areas, which deepened our knowledge of language and literacy as interconnected ways of reading the world. As Freire (1987) stated, “Reading the world always precedes reading the word” (p. 23), and Mack demonstrated this as he read this book.

Daisy and Lorena’s idea. As Mack extended the contextualization of language into his reading, Daisy and Lorena contemplated another extension while digging through stacks of books. The girls wanted to write their own book on the power of words, and to identify our library’s mentor texts as support; therefore, they were looking for books by other authors who had used their words in powerful

ways. Daisy was also intrigued by the possibility of writing books in Spanish, English, French, and Korean, knowing people from our extended classroom community who spoke each of these languages. She wanted to co-author a text that highlighted multiple languages. Because of these interests, we were sitting on the floor, surrounded by piles of books and exclaiming when we came across a useful text.

As we hunted for the right books, my hand found *Powerful Words: More Than 200 Years of Extraordinary Writing by African Americans* (Hudson, 2004). “That’s just like when we talked about the caterpillars!” Lorena exclaimed. The girls’ breath caught when they realized Martin Luther King, Jr. was on the cover, and they began asking whose faces were pictured around his.

We spent twenty minutes clustered around the pages of the book. As we explored the pages of *Powerful Words*, Daisy said thoughtfully, “Michael would like this book. He loves Martin Luther King.” Soon after, as she perused books written mostly in English and a few in Spanish, Daisy murmured, “It’s not fair we only have books in one or two languages. We should have more!”

Lorena and Daisy’s desire to write powerful books in multiple languages, and their realization that this connected to previous conversations (about caterpillars) and other classmates (Michael), gave me an idea. Could the co-construction of this book, one that highlighted the power of linguistic diversity and the richness of words used by our classroom community, be a project in which we could *a//*engage?

My mind pictured the book *The Storyteller’s Candle* (Belpre, 2008), on loan from a colleague and sitting on my desk waiting to be read. It told the story of a librarian who brought books and speakers in multiple languages to the public library, to reach out to the community at large. It reminded me that, while the population of Spanish speakers in our town was growing, only a few children’s books written in Spanish dotted the shelves of our local library.

Furthermore, many other students in our school and local community spoke African American Vernacular English at home, and the books in our public library did not often represent the home language of these children and families. Scholars such as Lisa Delpit (1995) and Violet Harris (1993) have long argued the importance of children seeing themselves represented in literature. I believe this need to see ourselves and our cultures represented extends into our linguistic backgrounds, since our

language is so integral to who we are as cultural and social beings (Green, 2002). Anzaldúa (1999) verbalized this necessity upon saying, “When I saw poetry written in Tex-Mex for the first time, a feeling of pure joy flashed through me. I felt like we really existed as a people” (p. 82).

I wanted this “feeling of pure joy” to exist for my students and others. I wanted them to know they “existed,” that their language was important, and it should be heard and celebrated by others. I wanted these children to understand that there was a time and place for adhering to previously structured linguistic contextualization, and a time and place for pushing against these barriers.

Spanish and African American Vernacular English were not languages/dialects widely represented in children’s literature in our town, but maybe they could be.

Lorena, Daisy, and I left the library weighed down with books. The girls chattered excitedly about what they wanted to write while I trailed behind them, wondering what a co-authorship book project might look like. Would the students be interested in something like this? Would families want to be involved, as they had been when we created our bilingual book of family stories? Would colleagues, student teachers, and volunteers be interested in helping us carry out a project of this magnitude?

I had no idea, but I wondered whether the acknowledgment of a lack of multilingual books might be the communal challenge to which we would feel “obliged to respond” (Freire, 1972, p. 81).

Creative Problem-Solving

I could not get Lorena and Daisy’s idea out of my mind. So, my student teachers and I decided to collaborate with our school’s enrichment teacher, who was committed to bringing problem-based teaching to all children she taught, to determine the best way of assessing students’ interest in creating multilingual books. She often led groups and coached other teachers, helping us to identify opportunities for intense, focused study with children based on topics that interested them; helping us determine students’ interest in this project seemed right up her alley. Ms. Black’s advice to us was to verbalize the problem Daisy and Lorena had already identified (i.e. the proclamation that there were not enough books in multiple languages), ask the children if they were interested in helping the girls solve this problem, and if so, how they wanted to go about doing so. She called this process Creative Problem-Solving (Renzulli

& Reis, 1985). If we found the children were interested in writing these multilingual texts, Ms. Black said she would join our classroom for one hour a week, co-teaching and assisting in any way she could.

Her willingness to help, to make our project her project, lifted a huge weight off my shoulders. Even before knowing if we were going to take on this work, I had been feeling overwhelmed at the mere thought of squeezing another learning focus into our day. I pictured we would have to regulate our book writing to the few minutes between each pull-out or push-in teacher coming in to our room for support. Ms. Black's offer to help us, though, helped calm my fears. Her commitment, and the time she was willing to give us, allowed us the freedom to work toward a focused and sustained co-authorship project.

We prepared for our first session. According to the problem-posing model, it was the teacher's job to pose the problem, and it would be up to the students to decide whether they felt the need to respond to Daisy and Lorena's issue. In the days leading up to the activity, I was nervous. Writing notes about the weight I gave to our upcoming discussion, I penned,

This is it. This is feeling like the turning point in our research about language use, where we either let the topic at hand fizzle away, or we take our newfound understanding to the next level by doing something about what we know.

With these hopes, challenges, and fears in mind, I now share with you what happened during our Creative Problem-Solving activity. Since my embedding of analysis into the event's description is quite different from my approach to the writing of previous chapters, it deserves an explanation here.

I will describe our first Creative Problem-Solving event in detail. The event was divided into three distinct components, all of which I will discuss (*See Figure 5.6*).

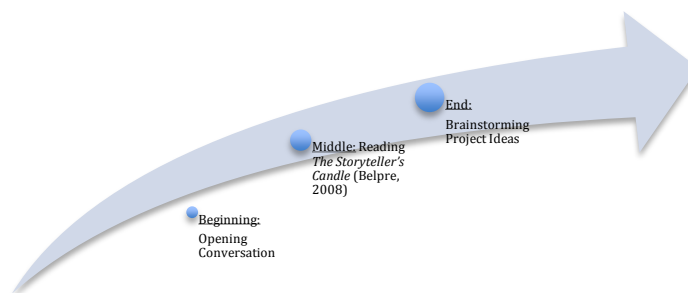


Figure 5.6: Creative Problem-Solving Event

However, I will focus most of my analytic attention on the event's opening conversation, during which the children and I negotiated the possibility of this long-term project.

Woven into the fabric of the event, I will discuss connections the children made to past curriculum and family perspectives, knowing this shaped and formed their responses. Further, I will look critically at my own role in the process of determining whether we would create these multilingual books. I will carefully analyze myself through a look at our construction of register, and by further using Systemic Functional Linguistics to examine how we negotiated our relationships with one another. As Fairclough (1992b) stated, "Closer attention to texts sometimes helps to give firmer grounding to the conclusions arrived at without it, sometimes suggests how they might be elaborated or modified, and occasionally suggests that they are misguided" (p. 194). By looking closely at this event, I believe I will better understand how our study continued to unfold.

Creative Problem-Solving Lesson: Opening Conversation

The children, Ms. Black, our student teachers, and I perched on the floor or the edges of child-sized chairs. My heart beating fast, I began by asking if the children remembered the problem Daisy and Lorena had mentioned the week prior. While their initial response was positive, we did not yet know if it was fleeting; finding this out was one important component of this activity.

Our plan was to discuss what the class remembered from this earlier discussion, and then move into reading *The Storyteller's Candle* (Belpre, 2008) as a way to give the children time to think about and shape options for our own unique response to the problem Daisy and Lorena had identified. I knew this conversation would be my first opportunity to determine the students' genuine interest; if they were unable to remember or uninterested in our prior discussion, I needed to be ready to move our discussion in a different direction.

"Um, that we can, if there's just only English books," Naldo answered, "we can do the same of that with Spanish books."

In this sentence, Naldo both recognized the problem of having books only in English, and proposed we could solve this problem by translating these books into Spanish. He went on to suggest we

use music language in our text, as well, something the children had become interested in when their music teacher told them that composers wrote music with notes, which were like another language.

I began to see the rest of the class perk up, their interest piqued by Naldo's suggestions. Sandra suggested we translate books we already owned into different languages, and Jorge shared that his sister showed him how to use Google translator to write words in Chinese. The children erupted in excited chatter at this, as they had long been fascinated by the figures representing this language.

We were off and running.

Early on in this conversation, the children seamlessly wove familial and communal threads into the construction of a school-based project. Jorge and Joseph mentioned their siblings' ability to help us with Google translator, and other students suggested we ask a classroom volunteer to help us write a book in French. Their words told me the inclusion of these voices would increase the relevance students found in this project. They continued these references throughout the activity, the interconnected strands of experience becoming inseparable from the project itself, and increasing the strength and power of our newly identified project (Dyson, 1997; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999).

Including home languages had been important to these children for a long time. From our kindergarten year onward, we co-authored books with families in English and Spanish, wrote Family Dialogue Journal entries in whatever home dialect or language was most comfortable, and provided homework options in Spanish and English. The children expected we would include their families in writing projects, and that we would work to understand one another's home languages through student or teacher translation of texts.

This expectation reminded me of a conversation I once had with Rosalita and Elena. The women were concerned their children were not speaking in multiple languages enough in school, because Lorena and Hector were sometimes confused as to the order of words in Spanish sentences. They demonstrated the children's difficulty for me, saying, "En Español, es familia grande. En Inglés, es grande familia!" They teased me about my language being backwards, saying the English way of ordering our sentences was substandard in comparison to their Spanish sentences.

Elena and Rosalita preferred the children speak Spanish and English in school, as did Christopher's, Naldo's, and Mack's families. When the children wished for family members to help us write books in multiple languages, home voices entered into our classroom discussion. The children were interested in capitalizing on the funds of knowledge present in their communities, as they worked to make visible their languages within our school space (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

Creative Problem-Solving Lesson: Focal Segment of the Opening Conversation

With our families' voices and the voices of the larger classroom community intermingling with our own, we continued the opening conversation of our Creative Problem-Solving activity. The children's ideas for tackling the problem of having too few multilingual books popped from their mouths like popcorn, sometimes overlapping in their excitement. During this conversation, negotiation of ideas became key, as each of us felt strongly about our contributions.

Intertextual connections, SFL, and register. As my students and I discussed possibilities for solving their problem, they made connections to their homes and families, and as the lead teacher, I had the power to either acknowledge and extend these ideas, or to drop them in favor of other students' or teachers' thoughts (Bloome, et al., 2005). I felt incredibly invested in whether or not the children chose to follow through on Daisy and Lorena's idea to co-author multilingual books, since the students' lack of interest might have resulted in the fizzling out of our contextualized study of language.

I did not want this to happen!

My fear of the study ending made it entirely possible I would steer the students' conversation in specific ways, ensuring that we would write these books even without their excitement or interest. I would not have done this intentionally, but I felt it was worthwhile to look closely at the register in which we were operating as the children connected their home lives to this possible project, and my response to these extensions. Did I equally honor the children's ideas, as is typical in casual conversation or informal pedagogic discourse, or did I prize certain thoughts over others in order to further my own hopes for the project (Eggins & Slade, 2005)? In the brief conversation we held before reading *The Storyteller's*

Candle, was there an element of *Initiation-Response-Evaluation* (I-R-E); in other words, did I evaluate some students' ideas as "correct," and others as "incorrect" (Hicks, 2005)?

By examining a snippet of discussion within the context of our entire study, I will be able to work beyond hunches, my *assumption* or *hope* that we were co-constructing our unit, by systematically looking at the threads of connection as they wove themselves around and through our classroom's conversation regarding possibilities for the creation of multilingual books.

Extending students' connection to families. Let's move back into the conversation described above, as I identify threads of connection the children made to their home lives and communities (*For a deconstructed analysis of these intertextual connections and their extensions, see Appendix D*).

As we continued to discuss project possibilities, Joseph waved his hand wildly in the air.

"My brother, a little bit," Joseph said, "he speaks Chinese!"

"Really? Your brother can speak a little Chinese?" I asked him. "Maybe we could get your brother to help. One thing I thought we might want to do, after we're done with the book, is send it home to our families, to see if they can check it for us."

"Like last time!" Sandra offered.

One connection that students extended immediately, and which different children reconfigured throughout this discussion, had to do with the involvement of families in our work. Right away, it was evident Joseph was interested in involving his brother in our writing. I was interested in this, too, so I wove my own ideas regarding this involvement into the conversation, in a way that extended what Joseph was already saying, and with consideration for the wishes and preferences of family members to have the option of participating from home. Although he also brought up the Chinese language, I carefully sidestepped his reference, acknowledging what he said with a question ("Your brother can speak a little Chinese?" *Message Unit 3*), but then dropping this particular reference (*See Appendix E, which focuses on an interpersonal analysis of mood and modality*). My question served as a sort of peace offering, allowing me to follow up Joseph's comment in respectful way, while still dropping the thread of his offering that involved Chinese, in favor of his extension of a family partnership.

Using words like “maybe” and “might,” I was able to focus on involving our families, while still presenting my ideas as *options* (Martin & Rose, 2007) (Modality: *See Appendix E, Message Unit 5, 6, & 10*). Joseph and I negotiated the focus of the discussion, which was familiar for us (Kamberelis & Bovino, 1999). Our conversations had long included these sorts of negotiations, whether during language activities or the creation of our “Dialogue I-Chart” (a chart we posted in our classroom and filled with students’ and teachers’ ideas regarding what *dialogue* looked and sounded like) (Boushey & Moser, 2006).

When Sandra weighed in by saying, “Like last time,” she extended our connections to family, reminding us of our previous co-authorship with families. Later, she brought this up again, saying, “It’s like last year, when we...made a book and we...all sent one to our families and they can have it.” She was intent on reminding us of this. Family involvement was important to her, as she continued to link our current discussion to memories of our Family Stories book from Kindergarten, where we offered families options to talk about and record their favorite tales.

Dropping students’ Chinese connection. Yet, while I found myself encouraging and building upon students’ ideas to make family members editors or to create space to write together again, I did not always do this when the skills or ideas extended did *not* support my individual goals.

After Joseph, Sandra, and I talked about ways to work with our families to write multilingual books, Mack raised his hand.

“What are you thinkin’, Mack?” I asked him

“I can talk a little Chinese,” he offered. Trying once again to pick up the thread of conversation Joseph began, and which I dropped, about the Chinese language, Mac referenced his own limited knowledge of its words (Modality: *See Appendix E, Message Unit 12*).

The children had long been interested in the Chinese language, and anyone whom they met that might speak it. Mack’s reference, his attempt to make this language a focus in our classroom conversations, brought a myriad of students’ prior connections to the surface of my mind. I recalled, somewhat in embarrassment, the arrival of a visitor from Korea to our classroom a few months earlier. Robert had boldly met her at the door, taking one look at her and asking, “Do you speak China?” This led

to an apology to our visitor from me, as well as an explanation to her that we were studying words and that the children seemed particularly interested in Chinese, which led to their preoccupation with it and its speakers.

Robert's interest, in particular, traced back to Kindergarten conversations we had around the diversity of skin color and cultural backgrounds. As we began to earnestly discuss the various ways people lived within the world, China always seemed to be the students' go-to country when they felt the need to identify a group of people who was different from them. The children believed boys and girls all over the world played a variety of games, but that children in China played the games *most* different from their own. This sentiment, expressed by Robert and supported by the nodding of many students' heads, led to us asking families, through our FDJs, how they thought people were different around the world.

A few days after the first journals returned, and we had been engaged in these conversations around familial diversity in the world, we pulled out bell hooks' (2004) text, *Skin Again*. I borrowed the book from a colleague, believing it might be useful as the students continually referenced the fact that people around the globe had different skin colors. During this reading, Robert's deep seeded preoccupation with China and the people who lived there rose to the surface of our dialogue.

The children's wide eyes focused on the cover of our book, which featured two children. One had dark skin, while the other had light skin. Already, these simple drawings seemed to have captured the attention of the students.

"You know," I began, "I thought today about reading this book because your families have been talking in your Family Dialogue Journals about skin color, and how that's one way families around the world are different from each other."

Nodding, they remarked on the different skin tones of the people drawn on the book's cover.

"What do your skin tones say about you?" I inquired, wondering if they would note the diversity or spout school's typical party line, that it was more important who you are on the inside. While I, too, believed that our skin color did not determine whether we were kind, smart, or easygoing, I did not want to reduce our discussion to a mentality of color blindness, essentially supporting the belief that race has

nothing to do with the breaks you are afforded or how you are seen by others. By staying silent regarding the uniqueness of family history represented by our individual hues, I knew we would be supporting the status quo, so I wanted to encourage the children to think beyond this (Delpit, 1995).

“Not much,” Mack began.

Before he could continue, Michael jumped in. “Yes, you can!” he exclaimed. “You can tell where they are from!”

“What do you mean?” I asked him.

He explained he was referring back to an earlier conversation, where I had mentioned that many people with very dark skin had an ancestor who came from Africa.

Immediately, Robert demanded to know where *he* was from. The children guessed from his caramel hues his family was from somewhere in or near Mexico. I made clear we could not know where someone was from *just* by looking at their skin; we would have to get to know his family to be sure.

We began reading *Skin Again*, stopping often to discuss what we heard or saw on its pages. At one point, we stopped to dialogue about whether skin color could tell us what a person would act like. Could it reveal someone’s personality?

Robert’s hand shot in the air. His knees remained planted on the ground, but his body rose up in anticipation, his eagerness to answer this question evident as those seated behind him craned their necks to the left or right to see the rest of the class. This level of engagement in conversation was atypical for Robert, who participated much more readily in small group or individual discussions, preferring to lead topics in his own direction and finding he could do this more easily with fewer contributors.

I called on him, and he said, “Some people don’t like other people because they are a different skin color. Like Chinese people are different and some people don’t like them because they have a different skin color.”

“Do you think this is true?” I asked Robert. “That people can be bad or good based on their skin color, and that we should dislike or like them because of it?”

He thought about this quietly for a moment, as did the rest of the class. They settled on the communal answer that no, we should not judge someone based on this. However, I was left wondering how much of our conversation we kept at a surface level, and how much depth regarding their negative sentiment about people from China was being left unexplored. Certainly, Robert's ideas sprung from somewhere, as any text he referenced was "full of snatches of other texts" (Fairclough, 1992). One moment spent questioning these ideas would not forever alter them in his mind.

This was one of many of Robert's references to people from China, and others echoed his response. Somehow, based on prior experiences and media representations, coupled with not knowing anyone from China, the children had labeled people from this country as "different." I took partial responsibility for this, realizing that I read many books with Latin@, African American, or European American characters, but in my quest for the children to see themselves represented in literature, I had not read many texts highlighting characters from other cultural backgrounds (Wong, 1993).

Based on their apparent interest, as well as my responsibility to share with them literature focused on Chinese or Chinese American characters because of this interest, I decided to create more classroom space for these texts. As I wrote in a personal journal after this discussion, *I want them to know that there is humanity in others – there is just as much danger in under-representing characters from other cultures as there ever was [when I taught] a less diverse class, and I want to be sure not to limit the cultural groups that I am representing (11.6.09).*

Yet, even though I made a commitment to better engage the children and myself with this Chinese literature, we did little, if any, of this work in the days and weeks to come. I felt there was no time to explore the children's interest in this topic. The research I needed to put into identifying literature that most accurately portrayed Chinese and Chinese Americans, the work required for me to knowledgably discuss the events in a text of this nature, overwhelmed me, causing me to put it off. Though the students continued to bring up China, I found myself brushing aside their references, feeling I did not have the time or the resources to adequately and accurately discuss the lives of people from that particular cultural background. The pattern was as follows:

1. Students extended a reference to China or Chinese people.
2. I replied with some rendition of, “That’s interesting. Can we talk about that another time?”
3. We moved on in our conversation or lesson, and did not pick up this extended thread again.
4. Repeat the steps above.

On we went, pursuing other topics of the children’s interest but never this one. To some extent, they must have begun to assume I would not attempt to incorporate the Chinese language or people from China into our curriculum. This was one hill I did not even attempt to climb.

So with this classroom history in mind, I wonder if Mack felt my immediate resistance during our Creative Problem-Solving lesson’s opening conversation, the tensing of my body language, when he said, “I can talk a little Chinese.”

Again, just as I did with Joseph, I acknowledged Mack’s contribution, saying, “Really? That’s awesome.” I did not speak negatively or ignore Mack’s comment, but I also did not offer an opportunity for him to extend his knowledge into our multilingual authorship project.

Mack forged ahead, confidence growing as he modeled what he knew. “Like this. Si how.” Gone was any reference to his “little bit” of knowledge; he demonstrated twice more the words he knew in Chinese. “Si how. Si how new ha,” he continued.

“Oh,” I answered, my want to drop this thread of conversation becoming obvious.

Not, “Oh, that’s interesting. Maybe we could check out some books in Chinese from the library, since you all really like this language!”

Just, “Oh.”

Then, I moved on to other students who had their hands raised. In the brevity of this response, I made my lack of interest in extending Mack’s reference to the Chinese language clear.

I did not want to go there.

I did not have the knowledge, the time, the researcher support, or the energy to move so far outside of my comfort zone. I knew we could write books in Spanish, multidialectal books in English, and French books with the support of colleagues. Chinese, however, felt like too much of an unknown.

Because of my lack of assuredness that we could create a text in Chinese, I cut Mack off, as I had a history of doing when the children referenced the possibility of exploring this language and culture.

In this moment, my contributions to this conversation diverted sharply from an effort to co-construct our project, which allowed us to share power and responsibility (Eggins & Slade, 2005; Martin & Rose, 2007), and instead became directive in nature. As the teacher of record, I seized my power by essentially shutting down Mack's voice.

Joseph and Mack tried valiantly to push their interest in the Chinese language into our classroom space, but I pushed it outside of our focus again and again. There was little negotiation of power when they brought up this topic; I flexed my educator muscles each time, a sort of arm wrestling match between us that I always won. Throughout this conversation, I responded to familial and communal references with gusto, extending students' community connections with ideas of my own, often offering options such as, "We can get help from the Spanish teachers" (*See Appendix E, Message Unit 51*), or, "Maybe when we get our book together, we can invite [friends from the university] back" (*See Appendix E, Message Unit 61*). Though I did not force these ideas on the students, as is evidenced by my use of "maybe" and my tendency to repeat the ideas of the students themselves, I made choices as to which student ideas we would extend, and which we would drop (modality).

As much as I strove to be dialogic, excerpts like this make clear that my reactions to students' extended connections did not always align with this wish. In the words of JoBeth Allen (2007), "As hard as we work at establishing two-way communication, we sometimes fail" (p. 74), and this was one such instance of failure. When I felt I had to do so, I stepped outside of the register of casual conversation, and into the role of teacher-as-evaluator within the pedagogic discourse model. I struggled to find a balance as we operated between these registers, understanding that my voice was important and that I held knowledge the students did not, while not wanting this knowledge to become my excuse for blindly exercising my teacher privilege (Solsken, Willett, & Wilson-Keenan, 2000).

In reflection, I do not believe we could have written a book in Chinese, and attempting this would not have helped us reach our goal to concretely involve families in classroom projects. My students' and I

shared an interest in involving families, as the conversation above shows, and I was fully invested in increasing the relevance of our language study by incorporating family and community perspectives on words (Anzaldúa, 1999; Heath, 1983/1996; Zentella, 1997). I knew a focus on the Chinese language would be interesting, but that it would not go very far in our continued quest to deepen our nuanced understandings of how language worked in *our* world.

I could not see how it would have helped us move from our conversations about power over caterpillars, to focused discussions about how people can use language to make us feel big or small.

I could not see how it would have deepened our family/school partnership, our commitment to extending our classroom community outside of the walls of our school and into our homes.

The literature I had long surrounded myself with, the theorists and theories I studied, provided the lenses with which I determined which threads of intertextuality to extend, and which to ignore. My frame of reference was one in which I focused on developing family/school partnerships, rather than following a child's line of thinking simply because they found a topic to be interesting, as I might have done if I had spent more of my scholarly life reading about the Reggio-Emilia (Malaguzzi, 1993) or Creative Problem-Solving (Renzulli & Reis, 1985) interest-driven models for education. Just as the students' experiences colored their responses, mine did, as well.

However, rather than simply dropping students' references, I could have honored their contribution. I could have acknowledged how interesting it would be to learn more about this language, and then explained *why* I thought such an exploration was not an option for us. This would have allowed for a continued sharing of power, since the children would have been privy to more information and able to see the difficulties of writing texts in the Chinese language. In not explaining my thoughts, I limited our opportunity to explore words in our world. In the brevity of my response to Mack, "Oh," and my hastiness in moving on to the next students' comments, I created a façade of dialogic exchanges (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Creative Problem-Solving Lesson: Finishing Our Opening Conversation

After this initial discussion around connections to family and diverse languages, I called on other students to continue our conversation regarding possibilities for our multilingual book project. We continued to brainstorm, to identify a way to address a linguistic issue the students believed was relevant to their lives, and worth their time and attention (Freire, 1972).

Daisy brought our Spanish teachers into the conversation, capitalizing on a fund of knowledge present in our school as she suggested they could help us write the Spanish book.

Then Hector chimed in, saying, “I got a friend. He’s from Taiwan.”

Surprised, I repeated, “He’s from Taiwan?”

Hector went on to describe “that time” when all of the people “who was in college came in the school,” telling me that someone he spoke to at that time was “from Taiwan.”

I realized he was referencing our language invitation activity, and after I reminded the rest of the class about the connection Hector was making, I said, “Maybe when we get our book together we can invite them back!”

I looked around the carpet, calculating students’ raised hands against the amount of time left to read and discuss *The Storyteller’s Candle* (Belpre, 2008). “I love how excited you are,” I said. “How about this? I’m going to give you a partner, and I want you to tell your partner what you’re thinking, and then we’ll start the book. Okay?”

The children nodded, as they knew from previous conversations each member of our class was equally important, and that they did not need to always share their ideas with the whole group or with me.

As Ms. Black, my student teachers, and I partnered students in Think/Pair/Share and listened to them discuss their ideas for creating these books, I sat back and took a breath, allowing the events of the last twenty minutes to wash over me. This opening conversation allowed us to brainstorm, to identify possibilities for solving the issue Daisy and Lorena brought forth. Even before reading *The Storyteller’s Candle*, the children had demonstrated an interest in pursuing a solution to their problem, stating in multiple ways that they wanted to create their own books in multiple languages to counteract the issue of

having too few. They excitedly offered their ideas regarding people who might want to help us, as well as options for the languages in which we would write our texts. Already, we were interested in asking our families, our Spanish teacher, and university friends from Taiwan to assist us.

I knew, though, I needed to be careful as we began reading *The Storyteller's Candle*, to fully recognize the ideas and perspectives of the students. *Balance* was my mantra, and I found myself considering the presence of balance as we moved forward.

Creative Problem-Solving Lesson: Reading *The Storyteller's Candle*

As students' voices faded away, their Think/Pair/Share time ending and my fingers counting backward as they focused themselves once again toward the front of the room, I held up our book. I was excited to share the story of Hildamar and Santiago with them, young children who had moved to New York City from Puerto Rico, who now lived in an unfamiliar and linguistically isolating space, and whose job it became to share with their families the power of the community's librarian to bring people together.

"Let's see if this book can help us think about how we can solve our problem," I began by saying.

And with that, we read.

The book began by describing the newness Hildamar and Santiago found in their New York neighborhood, having never experienced such a cold winter in Puerto Rico as they were in the city. I smiled as children from Spanish speaking families exclaimed over words in the text that they heard at home. When Hector heard me say *Navidad*, he called out, "That's a Spanish word!"

They were even more surprised when the book referenced *Three Kings Day*, realizing that they had celebrated this holiday only the day before.

The plot revealed that families felt uncomfortable going to the library because they thought people there only spoke English. Mack and others proclaimed it was "not fair that they can't go in."

The children then negotiated solutions to the problem in the book, much as they had begun to do in reference to the problem of having so few texts in multiple languages in their *OWN* communities.

"Why can't they just put a Spanish and a English library?" Sandra wondered aloud. "And if you don't know where the other Spanish library is, you can put a Spanish teacher in the English library!"

I restated Sandra's solution to the problem. "So, maybe you don't have to have two separate places, Sandra said. Maybe they could put somebody who speaks Spanish working inside of the library that's already there."

A flurry of discussion ensued, with Hector, Lorena, and other children from their neighborhood informing the class that there was a library similar to this near their homes. People who spoke Spanish and English staffed this space, and everyone in their community could go there to learn together. Lorena's and Hector's families once shared that this library was an important place to all the people in their community. The children went there for socialization and help with homework, while the adults often went there to learn English from volunteers. Here, the children identified familial threads, personal relevance, far more than I had anticipated; in doing so, they connected their homes to our conversation (Allen, 2010; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

Daisy, whose family primarily spoke English, raised her hand to offer a different perspective. Sitting tall, turning her head to acknowledge her friends while she spoke, she said, "In my library, where I live, they have a room for kids and they have a room for adults. When the adults go, they have Spanish classes, and there's an English teacher and a Spanish teacher."

"Really? Wow!" I said in response. I was impressed with our town's attention to the multiple languages represented in our community. Realizing many children from a variety of linguistic backgrounds were connecting meaningfully to the idea of having multilingual representation in our libraries, I offered a project idea that built off what they were saying, while still filling a community void.

"So it sounds like our libraries are taking care of [staffing themselves with bilingual people]. Do you think they would like to have books in English and Spanish, French and sign language and music, from us? I wonder if maybe that would be a place we could give a book to, to these libraries we're talking about." Not wanting to push this idea onto the students, I quickly followed with, "Let's keep thinking."

We learned that the children, their families, and the librarians came together as a community by the end of *The Storyteller's Candle*. I worked to balance the weight of my ideas by posing them in passing, rather than as something to which the students needed to immediately respond. I took to heart

Freire's assertion that students who were posed with "problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world," would "feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond" (Freire, 1972, p. 81).

When Sandra noticed I was reading words in Spanish, I said, "Yeah, they put some Spanish in the English part of the book. Maybe that's something we could do."

When Esperanza noticed, "The baby is crawling," we discussed how the library was becoming a place for the entire family. I thought aloud, "You know, this is making me wonder...I'm getting some ideas for our book."

When Mack observed that the book was "learning everybody Spanish," I responded by saying, "This book *is* teaching everyone Spanish! Yeah, Mack! I wonder if our book can do that, too! Let's see."

And when Naldo suggested we turn our work into a play starring our principal and us, I expanded on his idea. "So, we could take a book that we made, and turn it into a play. Or we could make our book a play and put it in different languages. That's somethin' to think about!"

In these ways, I tried to provide the students with just enough support that they could co-construct a long-term project, while at the same time ensuring that it would maintain their interest and be a possibility for us to actually carry out.

Creative Problem-Solving Lesson: Brainstorming Project Ideas

I continued to offer project suggestions to the children, and by the time the book's characters took bows after their own performance, these extended topics existed as options for further exploration.

Spontaneous applause broke out around the carpet as I closed the book. I smiled, and asked the children to consider the problem Daisy and Lorena had presented to them, as well as the problem present in *The Storyteller's Candle*.

"I want you to close your eyes," I murmured. Their wiggling and chattering ceased as they followed my direction, a sense of calm and focus seeming to direct their excitement inward. "How could we solve the problem Daisy and Lorena shared with us? We don't have books in all the languages we want them to be...How could we solve our problem?"

The children began to Think/Pair/Share. As certain voices rose above others, I was able to pick up snatches of conversations. From this, I could tell they were interested in helping one another to learn Spanish, and creating books in lots of languages.

Drawing their focus back to the room's center, Ms. Black explained that they were going to use large post-it notes to record their ideas for solving the problem that there were too few books written in multiple languages. She reminded them they could build on the characters' solution in the book, which was to create a multilingual play, or on an offering made by their friends or themselves.

As each child took a Post-it and wound around to their seats, I stood in anticipation. My heart beat fast as I recalled my belief that their engagement in this project, or lack thereof, represented a "turning point in our research about language use, where we either let the topic at hand fizzle away, or we take our newfound understanding to the next level by *doing* something about what we know" (Anecdotal notes, 1.5.11).

Was this the end, or the beginning?

I spotted Mack, his long fingers gripping a pencil and his tongue pressed between his teeth in concentration.

"Mack, what are you going to say could solve our problem?" I asked him.

He looked up at me. "I gonna draw a library with people in it, and I'm gonna make a sign that some English people can come in with Spanish people."

"Okay!" I replied, pleased he was internalizing the book's focus on the importance of people from multiple linguistic backgrounds learning together.

His focused response encouraged me as I moved around the table to talk to Michael. When I asked him what he was drawing, he told me he wanted to solve our problem by telling everyone they were free to go to the library, "because they'd have the same language" as the books within its walls.

"Mmm, okay," I replied. "So what languages could we put in our books?"

"French," he began, naming the home language of a classroom volunteer from Haiti. "And Philadelphia English, and then British," he continued. I was interested he mentioned different ways to

speak English, as I was hopeful we would move toward contextualizing characters' use of words even within the English language. This would allow us to examine registers based on relationships and the formality of character's situations, which we could then apply to our *own* linguistic lives (Gee, 2011).

Michael looked down again, focusing on his post-it note, which was my cue to move on. "Alright, Lorena," I said as I walked up behind her. "What are you gonna say to solve your problem?"

"Mmm..." she said as she colored, "We could make a book, and then put it on the announcements." Lorena had recently been part of a group of students who shared what they knew about manners by creating a video and running it over the morning announcements. The success of this experience had apparently encouraged Lorena to suggest we do the same with our own project, whatever it might become. I found myself wondering how we might decide to share our project with others.

I moved on to Hector, who was drawing a picture of children on his post-it note. When I asked him what he thought we might do to solve the problem of having too few books in multiple languages, he paused. "Uuumm," he finally offered, "I forgot."

This was the first hint I received from a student that they were confused about the purpose of this activity, which made me wonder about Hector's level of personal investment. "Okay," I said, deciding to help him recall the problem and moving on from there. "In the book it talked about having books in different languages."

I noticed Hector perk up, seeming as though he was waiting for his turn to speak.

"And what were you going to say?" I encouraged him.

Pointing to his post-it note, he said, "He's trying to go sit and read in the school."

Hector's answer was vague, and in my desire to help him connect, I created his perspective *for* him. "So, we could help each other write the book in different languages?" I asked.

"Mmhhmmm..." was Hector's response.

I continued, "So we could talk to each other about how to write the book in different languages? What a great idea!"

In retrospect, it is clear to me that Hector did not say any of this. He could have agreed to my assumptions about his work because he was actually trying to say what I put into words; however, it is equally possible he was simply agreeing with me because he was unsure of the purpose of the activity itself. As I had done before and would surely do again, I heard what I wanted to hear from Hector.

Daisy, however, not only understood the purpose of the activity, but also verbalized my own thoughts regarding how we might carry out our construction of multilingual texts. When I asked her to explain her post-it note, she offered up a paper divided into four equal sections. She had written her ideas for different books in each one, and described them to me in detail.

“All these Spanish people can be like, they can write their own book right here. So like, all the Spanish people in the class can write a book, and then all the English people in the class can write their book. And then other teachers can write a book in French, and then all the people that wanna do sign language can write the sign language book.” The words flowed from her, a waterfall of possibilities; she had planned our entire unit, solving our problem by dividing up tasks and writing multiple books in familiar languages.

I tried not to jump up and down out of sheer excitement at her focus and determination (but it was hard). Instead of cheering aloud, I said, “So, split ourselves up and write different books, instead of all writing the same book in different languages? Interesting.”

“And have teachers that can speak the languages in each group. Mr. Oswaldo can be right here, or the Spanish teachers. And you can be here, and Ms. Candace and Ms. Hanover can write the French book.”

Daisy had figured everything out. She took her original problem, combined it with what she knew about the children and teachers in our class, taken notes from the characters’ actions in our book, and run with them all. The result was a plan that just might work.

As our time ran out, the children placed their post-it notes on a large piece of chart paper, and we shared each one aloud (*See Figure 5.7 for a representation of the images after Ms. Black and I sorted them.*).

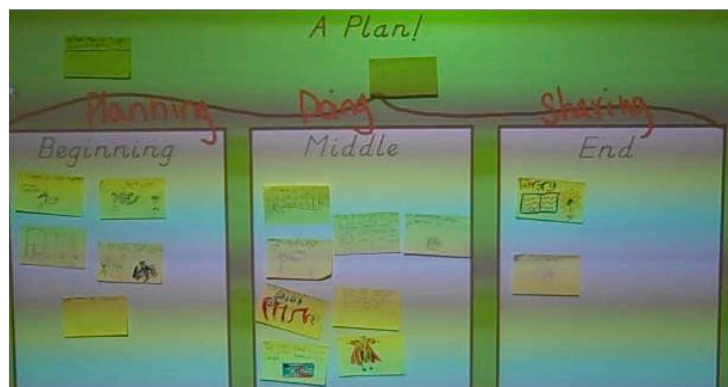


Figure 5.7: Planning/Doing/Sharing Photograph

Everyone wanted to create books in multiple languages, but the notes also contained ideas for the involvement of families and teachers, as well as language celebrations where we would invite community members to hear us read our books aloud or perform them as plays. The children had co-constructed their project to include a natural and organic beginning, middle, and end.

By this point, I noticed the children looked rather dazed, tired after our long Creative Problem-Solving activity. I was tired, too, realizing just how much energy I had invested in thinking about and hoping for the success of this activity. Daisy and Lorena had posed a problem, and their classmates had responded in turn. They certainly felt “obliged to respond,” and I began to wonder how our response would unfold.

Summary

Our Creative Problem-Solving activity focused mostly on our class’s attention to the power of language, and our ability as multilingual speakers to actively push for the representation of a variety of languages in our communities. This reminded me of Bloome et. al’s (2005) words, when they said:

Together, teachers and students address the circumstances in which they find themselves, and together they construct their classroom worlds. They often do so with creativity, adapting the cultural practices and social structures thrust on them in ways that may undercut or eschew the ideological agenda of the broader social institutions within which classrooms are embedded. (p.

2)

Yet, though our communal decision to create books in many languages was a way to push against the fact we found mostly monolingual texts in libraries, I recognized the possibilities for contextualized language study inherent in the creation of these texts. My students and I found ourselves creatively incorporating into our curriculum the institutional ideology that presented itself through the absence of multilingual books, by discussing and acting on ways to expand this ideology to include the linguistic backgrounds of more children and families. What better way to discuss how relationships often governed our word choice, than through our use of dialogue between characters (Gebhard & Harman, 2011)? More than spoken text, written words offered us the opportunity to slowly and methodically arm our characters with speech. Written words gave us the power to edit, to reflect and change our text, before others saw it.

Additionally, the process of communally writing these words promised us the time and space to relate our characters' language to our own lives and the relationships we held within them (Gebhard & Harman, 2011). By creating books that carefully considered the relationships between characters, we would co-construct and fine-tune our understanding of how people in particular relationship-based conversations spoke to one another. If two friends were speaking, we would have the chance to discuss the words we might use in our *own* lives as a measure for authenticity. Similarly, we could draw on experience speaking to adults we did not know well, in developing a conversation between two characters who were not friends or close family.

I also found myself considering my own role in the creation of this project, continuing to negotiate my own beliefs regarding what I found to be *too much* or *too little*. As my close analysis of our opening conversation showed, I came into this discussion with an agenda, a goal for our work based on my intersecting experiences with literature, colleagues, family members, and students. I believed family partnerships needed to be our focus, if we were to gain a deeper understanding of how we contextualized words as we moved within and among our multiple linguistic relationships. In our case, these personal relationships included variations of Spanish, English, and even French. They did not, however, include Chinese, as interesting as this language was to the students. While our reading of *The Storyteller's Candle* (Belpre, 2008) and the discussions that followed strengthened my belief that family partnerships were a

key component of this work, I also knew that I should have explained why we could not explore the Chinese language. Rather than ignoring or shutting down students' interest, I should have shared with them my concerns regarding our community's lack of support and expertise. While an examination of this activity revealed that the students and I were mutually engaged in work involving families, it also revealed my tendency to allow my personal goals to overshadow the interests of our community. I would need to consider this in the days and weeks to come, using SFL to continue to "problem-solve" myself.

Feeling rejuvenated by the students' renewed excitement in our study, I was ready to face the challenges associated with balancing my own goals and perspectives, with those of my students and their families. I looked forward to the unfolding of our project, to this turning point in our linguistic work.

"Like last time," as Sandra said, we would involve our homes and cultural backgrounds, of which language was an integral part.

Possibilities for Extension

Rather than trying to replicate the Creative Problem-Solving work of my students, their families, our co-teachers, and I, you might restructure, reorganize, or re-envision parts and pieces of what we did here to fit your specific classroom's needs.

- *Creative Problem-Solving Lessons (Renzulli & Reis, 1985)*: As Freire (1972) encouraged educators to do, and as he practiced in his own teaching, work toward a *problem-posing*, rather than a *banking model*, of education. In other words, build your curriculum around real-world problems you and your students co-identify, rather than around pre-determined foci of study. As adults, we know that when we are not interested in something, or when we do not find relevance in a topic, we tune out, or simply learn the information someone is presenting to us at the most surface of levels. We take this irrelevant information in, regurgitate it as necessary, and soon allow it to leave our memories from lack of use. How many times, after all, have you heard someone say they have never used algebra since the day they passed their final in twelfth grade? Though math is everywhere, present in all of our lives, if we do not recognize it as such during our studies, we do not retain useful information.

The same is true of language. Grammar rules and worksheets do little to convince us of the relevance of learning about contextualized language, as these concepts seem to exist only for the purposes of grading and place-holding, keeping most people who come in without fluency in Standardized English from ever attaining it. Therefore, I challenge you, an educator with the opportunity to change this, to help the children you teach find *relevance* in language. I believe there is no better way to achieve this than through communal recognition that knowledge of multiple languages, dialects, and formalities can help solve problems in their world.

To this end, you cannot force problem-posing education that leads to students engaging in work with complex issues. It is your job to listen. To draw students' attention to possible problems to explore, while being careful not to make your cause their cause. Trust me, I have tried this – it does not work. It will only frustrate you, and bore them.

Take a risk. Think outside the box. Work with your students to identify a worthy cause around language use in their world, and identify a support system of colleagues who can best help you and the children reach your co-constructed goals.

And do not be surprised when you find yourself and your students trying to find relevance in *all* of your lessons. This is the mark of a truly engaged classroom space.

Find those linguistic problems, and work to solve them.

CHAPTER 6
A MOMENT OF DISCONNECT:
OUR MULTILINGUAL BOOK PROJECT LEADS ME TO RECONSIDER OUR PROCESS

“Literacy becomes a meaningful construct to the degree that it is viewed as a set of practices that functions to either empower or disempower people...to reproduce existing social formations or serve as a set of cultural practices that promotes democratic and emancipatory change.” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p.

141)

Michael: Like, maybe we could write about Martin Luther King,

Mary Frances Early,

And like Ghandi,

And we could write about Ruby Bridges

And Jackie Robinson

And Rosa Parks.

Maybe we could write about them, like, if the world changed.

Me: Well, Michael has an idea of writing a world changers books.

Lorena, Hector, Daisy, Mack, & Jorge: Yes!

Me: You like it?

Mack: Mmm hhmhhh!

Daisy: Cause that's important!

Me: That *is* important, isn't it?

World changers.

Do you wanna write a book in English about world changers?

Daisy & Michael: Yeah.

Excerpt from First Book Project Conversation with Focal Group

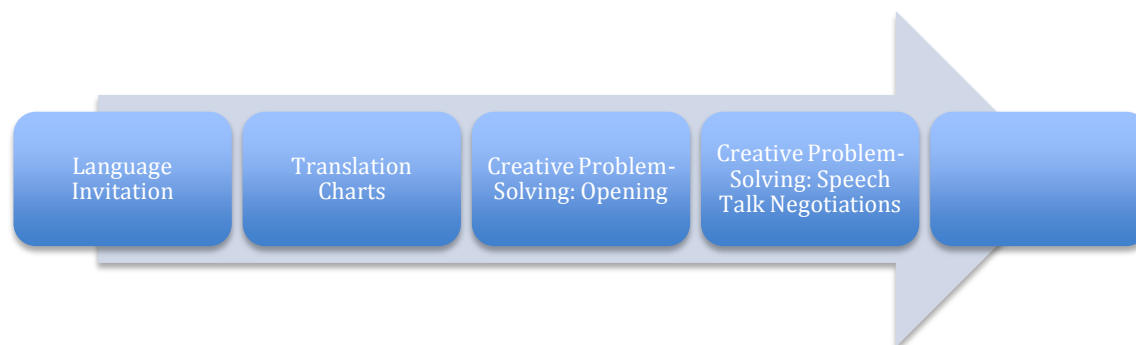


Figure 6.1: Unfolding of Language Activity #4

In this chapter, I will share some key events from our multilingual book project that followed our initial Creative Problem-Solving activity, during which we began to outline possibilities for an action-oriented project focused on linguistic contextualization (*See Figure 6.1*). I will then discuss moments in the project that pointed to the children's continually nuanced understandings of language use in speech and books, as we wrestled with identifying the particular words characters would use in one of our multilingual texts. To do this, I will describe part of a discussion during which my group and I were writing our book, and will discuss the language the children felt was appropriate within the pages of the book. From this description, I will identify intertextual connections the children made to prior experiences at home and school, in order to convey the interconnected threads of understanding that informed their reactions to certain linguistic decisions they made. Additionally, I will analyze a small snippet of conversation as the children and I negotiated the placement of words in our text, in order to identify the *register* and *relationship negotiation* (through an interpersonal SFL analysis) in which we engaged as we co-constructed the text. Through this investigation, I will discuss our negotiation of power, as *teacher* and *student*, in the creation of our book's language.

This close analysis of one conversation will lead into my discussion of a more perplexing one, during which the students resisted the inclusion of multiple dialects in an exchange between Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., world changers they knew were acquaintances and who came across one

another in our book. I will share my theory regarding the reasoning behind this resistance, and how it informed my understanding of the children's internalization of our discussions around registers and words in our world. Finally, after summarizing what these events revealed regarding the children's emerging application of linguistic contextualization, I will describe elements of our work that I believe other educators can modify and incorporate into their own classroom studies of language.

Shaping Our Unit: Moving Beyond Our Initial Idea

As my students and I pictured the possibilities inherent in our multilingual book project, we renewed our engagement in the contextualized study of language. Our exploration of words in our world was once again purposeful, as we identified an opportunity to create texts featuring many languages and dialects. This opportunity also brought with it an underlying focus on the effect relationships had on the language characters were using, as the writing of narratives implied a focus on the entanglement of characters' lives and their association with one another. As Rymes (2009) shared, "Narratives are, in classroom and in conversation, a way of knowing ourselves and others and a way of knowing the world" (p. 253), and we were eager to engage in just such a process. Our commitment to author books in multiple languages offered us the chance to both share what we believed to be true about how people use language, as well as to push against these constructs by reimagining and reinventing conversational possibilities.

The opportunity to use this project to learn about the function of language, particularly relationship-based register usage, was there (Lobeck, 2005). The opportunity to empower the children to share the beauty and relevance of languages and dialects not always positively acknowledged in schools or communities was in front of us (Anzaldúa, 1999; Nieto, 2002; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). We just needed to seize it, to put into practice what we had only begun to imagine.

As Lisa Delpit (1994) asserted, "racism and oppression must be fought on as many fronts and in as many voices as we can muster" (p. 301) My students, their families, and I were going to find those voices and lift them up in narrative text.

Filling in Gaps: Events Leading Up to Our Speech Talk Negotiations

Focusing our energy on a new opportunity for linguistic study allowed us to reach the peak of a hill I thought we might never climb. Not only did our excitement over the thought of creating multilingual books increase the *ch, ch, ch, ch* of our progress, but it also seemed to send us rocketing over the hill's other side. *Woo, woo, woo* we went, the wind in our hair and smiles on our faces, as we began to plan an opportunity for study that was, at this point, a general idea for creating multilingual books together.

This project excited me for more reasons than simply the fact that the children were once again engaged in discussions around language in use. It was also a way for us to bring together the two major linguistic themes that were emerging: our ability to create a meta language useful in helping us discuss words in our world, and the power of these words to empower or disempower people. The fact that I envisioned it as an opportunity for us to both continually refine our nuanced understandings of how/when we use words, as well as take the initiative to push against societal limits by bringing diverse uses of language to the forefront of classroom work, increased my investment in the project. I was hopeful that the project's focus on language and literacy development would help us create a "meaningful construct" for our study, pushing us to face the fact that words can either "empower or disempower people," working toward the goal of promoting "democratic and emancipatory change" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 141) throughout our classroom community.

The following moments, couched within larger lessons around the contextualization of language, occurred following our realization that we wanted to write multilingual texts. Focusing on our continual development of meta language and our acknowledgement of linguistic power, these moments both led us to in-depth discussions about words in our co-authored texts, which I will later discuss and analyze.

Subject/Verb Agreement Morning Message

Up until this point in our language study, the texts that we discussed and the examples from which we pulled directly related to our own lives and experiences. Michael knew the formality of language that judges needed to use when they spoke in a courtroom, and he taught this to his group during our language invitation. Hector spoke the familiar greeting, "Hola, como estas?" as an example of *family*

talk. Daisy laughed when she considered what it would sound like if she wrote a book using language she believed to be better suited for a conversation with friends. The children were internalizing our co-identified registers, applying them to their own linguistic repertoires, their “local discourse practices” (Rymes, 2009, p. 7), in real and meaningful ways.

Yet, I knew the personal application of local discourses might not translate into a deeper understanding of how to navigate linguistically when the words spoken or expected were *not* based on their own experiences or backgrounds. Whether I believed it was fair or not, my students would need to be fluent in the language of power to the point that they could recognize when it was *not* there, and change either their speech or their writing to represent it when necessary (Delpit, 1994; Gee, 1989).

With this in mind, I created a Morning Message chart that moved us toward a more abstract examination of words, while still using the children’s familiar registers (*See Figure 6.2*).

Language:		How do I use it?
with family	with friends	with other grown-ups
"Ms. Viola's chickens <u>be</u> so scared!" said Flossie.		"Ms. Viola's chickens <u>are</u> so scared."

Figure 6.2: Flossie and the Fox *Translation Chart*

I took a sentence spoken by Flossie from the familiar book *Flossie and the Fox* (McKissack, 1986), and placed it in the *family talk* column of the translation chart we had used during our early Translation Chart activity. I chose the *family talk* column because the children had expressed that Flossie spoke like their family or friends, while the Fox represented what they expected to hear from other grown-ups.

“*Ms. Viola’s chickens be so scared!*” said Flossie. This single sentence was visible on our activity chart, as the children and I finished greeting one another and settled in for our opening activity.

I was nervous, my palms sweaty as I held a SmartBoard marker in my hand, twirling it between my fingers while the students finished our high-five greeting, laughing as they collapsed onto their carpet squares after smacking the palms of at least three friends. I was unsure about how much of our contextualized study of language the students would be able to convert into a conversation removed from directly applicable stories about families and friends. After all, *relevance* was thus far our study's foundational building block, and by removing our personal voices from this lesson, I feared the students' ability to code-switch between registers would lessen.

As was their practice, many of them began reading the sentence aloud to themselves as soon as they sat down, and a murmur of voices rose as they stretched out the sounds in the words they saw. When the sound faded away, I said, "Do y'all remember the book *Flossie and the Fox*?"

The children nodded, and I went on. "Okay. In this book, who do you remember Flossie sounding most like?"

Hands raised, a few voices called out without prompting, "Like family!"

Encouraged, I smiled. "That's what I remember, too!" I exclaimed. "Now, the sentence on the board is straight from the book. Flossie said it, and I thought it sounded like *family talk*. Do you think you could change one word in that sentence, and make it sound more like talk we would use with *other grown-ups*?"

There was no hesitation. The children's responses were quick and decisive, some whispering to one another, "Change *be*!"

I asked Lorena to tell us what she was thinking. "Change *be*, and make it say *are*. Ms. Viola's chickens *are* so scared."

The rest of the class dropped their hands heavily in their laps, apparently agreeing with Lorena and disappointed I did not call on them to offer their own thoughts. I wrote the sentence with this change in the *other grown-up* column, drawing boxes around "be" and "are," respectively.

When I described this moment in my teaching journal later in the day, I wrote,

I have to admit that I was surprised at the way they were able to so quickly translate the thought from one form of speech into another, and that they did so without any giggling over the first representation of the sentence. We seem to have cultivated an environment in which a variety of language uses are valued, and [students] don't react negatively to words they may not initially associate with school or book talk. (1.18.11)

This experience made clear to me the students' ability to broadly apply what they were learning through personal links and connections to their linguistic lives. They were taking ownership of the registers they had co-constructed, their usage of them becoming less of a chance to reminisce and more an opportunity to analyze and compare the multiple registers of which they were a part (Gebhard & Harman, 2011; Knapp & Watkins, 2005). Our meta language was proving itself useful in allowing us to communally discuss the way words worked in our world, and promised to continue to do so as we created our multilingual texts.

Additionally, the children were beginning to firmly associate our *other grown ups* register with the Standardized English most commonly heard in schools and found in literature. Delpit (1998) wrote about the tendency of fourth graders to reject Standardized English, the language of school, choosing to align their speech with the language of their families and friends, to which they feel more connected. By the time these children were in the fourth grade, I hoped they would identify multiple codes as purposeful and relevant to their lives, as they were beginning to do here.

Michael's Correlation between MLK & Linguistic Prejudice

A few days after our translation-based Morning Message, Ms. Black met with us to continue our authorship preparation. "She's going to help us write books in different languages," Daisy reminded everyone, and the excitement in the air was palpable as everyone took their seats.

We told the class that the focus of our work for the day was to explore literature in order to identify the languages in which we wished to write our book(s). Ms. Black and I had identified texts we thought would represent interesting examples of language use, and formats for displaying multiple forms

of speaking. Some authors wrote bilingual books (Garza, 1993; Garza, 1996) with more than one language represented on each page/opposing pages, while other authors (McKissack, 1986; Giovanni, 2008) wrote books in a combination of languages/dialects.

We reviewed the ideas the children had recorded during our first Creative Problem-Solving activity (*See last chapter.*). Ms. Black and I had transferred the children's writing to an electronic file, and had divided students' activity suggestions/project ideas into a simplified project timeline: what we thought we would do at the beginning, middle, and end of our work (*See Figure 6.3*).

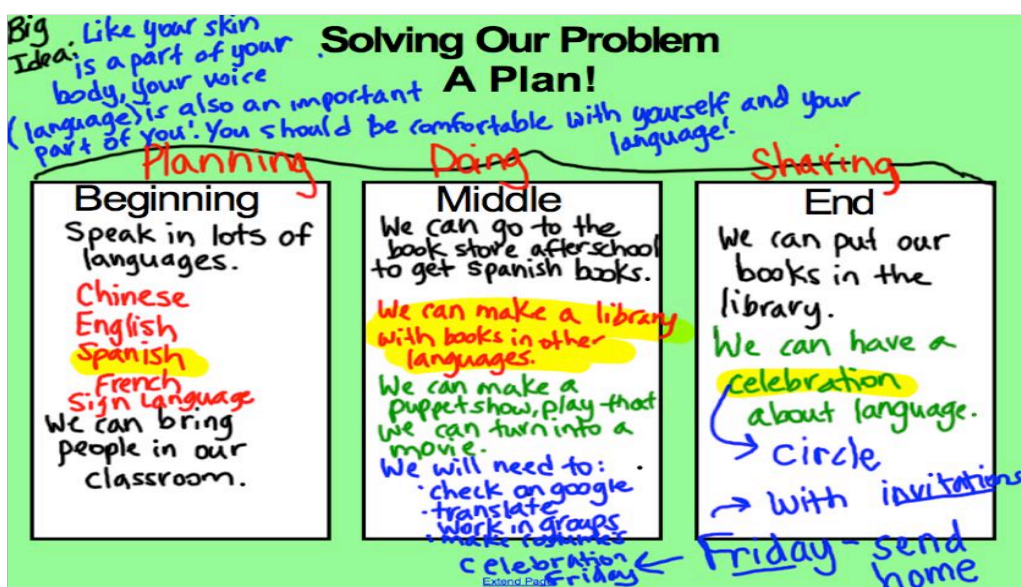


Figure 6.3: Solving Our Problem Chart

We called the beginning section “Planning,” the middle “Doing,” and the end “Sharing,” and we represented every child’s idea on the chart. It was evident the children wanted to *plan* for their multilingual book project by choosing languages to write in, and then inviting people to help us write these books (they discussed family and teachers as options for these partnerships). They had many thoughts on how to actually accomplish these tasks, as they made clear in the *doing* section; the students wanted to work in groups to make a book, puppet show, or play, and they recognized how helpful it would be to call on mentor texts or Google translator for assistance. Finally, they wanted to *share* their final products with families and community members, as they would both “send home” invitations for a

language celebration, and make plans to put their books in the school or community libraries. Each suggestion was action-oriented, representing a way for us to spread our understanding of the validity of different languages into the wider community.

After the children, Ms. Black, and I reviewed these ideas, noting that we were close to having a detailed plan that we could soon implement, Michael raised his hand.

“I think language is a lot like skin color,” he said.

“What do you mean, Michael?” I asked him. I recalled our many discussions about this topic, those revolving around our own classroom community and the injustice addressed by the Civil Rights Movement, spanning across our kindergarten and first grade years.

“When Martin Luther King, Jr. was alive,” he began, “People were treated differently because of their skin color, and people with dark skin weren’t allowed to do as much as people with light skin. It wasn’t fair.”

“That’s true, Michael,” I encouraged him. “We have talked a lot about that in our class.”

Michael nodded emphatically before continuing. “That’s just like language. It’s not fair that only some people’s language is in books. All people should have books that they can read. Language makes you important and special, and that’s just like skin color.”

I was reminded of Lisa Delpit’s (1994) powerful words, “Does it not smack of racism or classism to demand that students put aside the language of their homes and communities to adopt a discourse that is not only alien but has often been instrumental in furthering their oppression?” (p. 297). Ms. Black and I just sat there, awestruck, unsure of what to say as a follow-up. *Most adults don’t recognize this correlation*, I wrote later that day in my teaching journal. *And if I’m being honest with myself, I’m not sure I did, either, before this moment (at least not so poignantly and directly)!*

Michael recognized an opportunity to discuss the power of words to “either empower or disempower people,” and pushed against the “existing social formations” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 141) that led to the underrepresentation of multilingual texts in communities. In naming the prejudice he was beginning to see in the world, Michael asked us all to consider an underlying ideology most powerful

in its ability to remain just below the surface of our consciousness. As Apol (1998) stated, “Ideology is most powerful when it is least visible – when it appears as what is taken for granted and considered ‘the way things are’” (p. 35), and Michael did not allow this to happen here. In helping us to realize the inherent bias in surrounding ourselves mostly with texts representing one linguistic background, Michael created in us both a desire to and a feeling of urgency in writing, multilingual texts. By connecting the dots as Michael did here, dots that were elusive and fleeting at best and virtually invisible at worst, a picture of a world that not only allowed but also supported linguistic diversity began to emerge.

Hector’s Event

Michael’s acknowledgement of the need for people to see their language represented in literature, just as they should see their skin color depicted in a text’s illustrations, came just days before Hector’s tearful recollection of the phone conversation he overheard, during which the “bad man” said his family should not be in the United states because they did not “speak good English” (*See Chapter 1*). My assertion that Hector’s home was in our community, the reference Michael made to the relationship between language and skin color, Christopher’s tears spilled and the hug he gave to Hector as he declared, “I don’t want him to move!”; these moments were a hybrid representation of our communal understandings of language, its personal influence on us, and our belief that we should honor diversity (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999; Gutiérrez, 2008).

We felt helpless to comfort Hector. Someone we loved was hurting, and we did not know how to make him feel better. It was crucial that we had already identified a project meant to reconceptualize our larger communities’ understanding of what it meant to honor diverse linguistic backgrounds. The creation of our multilingual books, though early in their development, “raised the possibility of resisting those unpleasant conditions that often seem to control us” (Rymes, 2009, p. 150). We would include more books in a variety of languages in our libraries, and in doing so, we would include Hector.

This thread of empowerment proved to be an important one for Hector, and for other Spanish-speaking students. While brainstorming our Family Dialogue Journal topic later this same morning, Naldo said he wanted to write about why there were so many English than Spanish texts in our libraries. Hector

and Christopher were interested in this, as well. I wondered if it might be helpful for them to discuss this with their families, as they began to work through the deeply troubling thought that there were people in their larger community who did not want them to live there because of their language. Therefore, instead of choosing only one topic, the children chose from *two* topics. Hector, Christopher, and Naldo wrote about the lack of Spanish texts in their libraries, while the rest of the students wrote about the endlessly interesting hermit crab our student teacher had just purchased for them.

The three boys quickly walked, family dialogue journals and pencils clutched in their hands, to claim a table located in our classroom library, a fitting writing space. They quickly began writing, and Hector had soon filled up a page with text (*See Figure 6.4*).

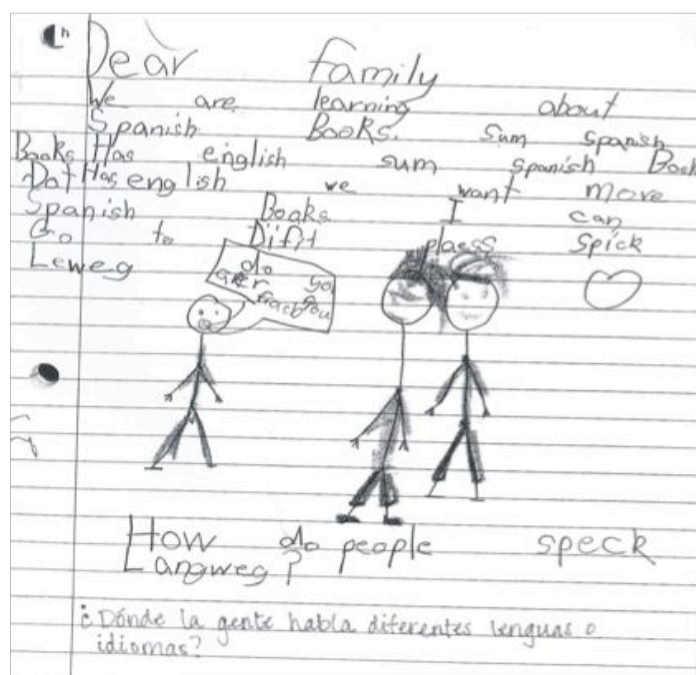


Figure 6.4: Hector's Journal about Language

Dear family, We are learning about Spanish books. Some Spanish books has English. Some Spanish book don't has English. We want more Spanish books. I can go to different places speak language. How do people speak language?

As I mentioned in Chapter One, it was apparent from his entry that Hector felt empowered to privilege his home language, Spanish, in this letter to his family. By saying he was learning about *Spanish* books, and that “sum *spanish* books has English” and “sum *spanish* books dot [don’t] has english,” he focused on his family’s primary language. From his vantage point, we should examine texts from the perspective of whether or not the author wrote them in Spanish. As he simply and effectively stated, “We want more Spanish books.” Hector, Naldo, and Christopher were writing separate journal entries, but Hector’s use of “we” clearly showed that he envisioned them as a team, working toward the same goal of diversifying our libraries. Hector opened up a third space of learning, within which I recognized the way he conceived and took in information, while Hector also recognized and acknowledged classroom connections between home and school he had not previously considered. We were part of “a transformative space where the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge are heightened” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 152), and we were seizing this opportunity to learn together.

At the conclusion of the journal, Hector posed his own question, which was followed by the question agreed upon by the team. Since he wrote his question, “How do people speck [speak] langweg [language]?” in English, with which his mother was largely unfamiliar, the next week Hector carried into our classroom Elena’s response to the boys’ communal question.

They asked, “¿Dónde la gente habla diferentes lenguas o idiomas?”, which means, “Where do people speak different languages?” Elena said she knew people in the United States came from many different countries representing many different languages. Therefore, she thought it was rather common to hear people speaking in a variety of languages.

Although this did not directly address the students’ original question as to why there were so few Spanish books in the library, it did make known that the linguistic world Elena inhabited included people with diverse home languages. Broadly, this supported the students’ desire to create books in multiple languages for our community’s libraries and classrooms, as Elena’s perspective shared that she expected people in the United States to speak many languages. Given the demographics of our country, why *wouldn’t* literature support these diverse linguistic backgrounds? Elena’s outlook sustained our belief that

the problem we had identified was a real world issue we needed to address. As Mr. Oswaldo once proclaimed regarding students' families, "They are teachers in their homes," and by sharing her viewpoint with the entire class, Elena became a teacher in our classroom, as well.

Planning Begins in Earnest

In the days following Michael's connection between linguistic and racial prejudice, Hector's sharing about the man who had called his home, and our community's discussion-based and written responses to this, we continued to more firmly structure our multilingual book project. I noticed a renewed commitment to our contextualized study of language, as the children asked almost hourly when we would next work on our books. Mack, with a level of excitement and almost reckless abandonment typical of him when he became fully invested in a project, wanted to skip from planning and move straight into the production of a play for families and friends. "We still have to write the book!" I would say, and each time, he would nod his head and do his best to focus. His mother's laughter rang in my ear at these times, reminding me, "That's just Mack. He always wants to be talkin' in front of people!"

Our exploration of books in different languages, complete with maps to show where the authors wrote each text, had revealed that the children were interested in pursuing a variety of languages. They exclaimed equally loudly over books from Mexico as they did when they saw Japanese or Chinese script written. When we created a summarizing chart at the conclusion of this exploration, we had the conversation I had long ignored regarding the inherent difficulty in writing books in languages whose letters were unlike our alphabet. Learning from past mistakes, I faced the topic in a more dialogic way, acknowledging and inviting the "counter script," the "under life" of our classroom to meet and enhance my "formal script" for instruction (Gutiérrez, 2008).

The children and I discussed how difficult it was to decipher the sounds represented by Chinese script, whereas languages that had the same letters as ours gave us at least a starting point for figuring out words. As Lorena said, "I didn't know how to say these words," pointing to a book in Chinese, "but I could figure out the letters in this one." Hector agreed, reminding us, "I tried to read the German book, but I can't even *try* to read *that* book!"

We were able to compromise, realizing together that writing books in Chinese might not be the best option for us. My previous actions of overriding, rather than incorporating, students' perspectives of Chinese made this discussion particularly important, as the students' recognition of differences in the Chinese alphabet and my willingness to respond in dialogue to this recognition represented a shift in the way we responded to discrepancies in focus. As Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda (1999) found, "Some learning communities try to ignore, resist, and suppress these changes, whereas others recognize these points of disruption as the building blocks for potential learning" (p. 287). While I may have previously been ignoring students' extensions, this conversation allowed me the space to turn the children's interest in Chinese into a learning moment, and the opening of this space ensured I would be less likely to resist these conversations again.

This discussion also allowed my students and me to move forward in planning our multilingual books. We voted to write our books in English (paying particular attention to the register used between characters with different relationships), French, and Spanish. Their choices interested me for two reasons. First, they represented both of their primary home languages, English and Spanish, which reinforced my belief that the children were interested in involving their families and home cultures in our schoolwork, as research supports (Ada & Campoy, 2004; Compton-Lilly, 2011; Henderson, Johnson, Mapp, & Davies, 2007). Second, two of our classroom volunteers and Ms. Black had expertise in French. The children realistically choose their focal languages, perhaps because of our conversation regarding the difficulty of writing a book in Mandarin or Japanese.

We were ready to move forward, and divided ourselves into three groups. Ms. Black led the French group with the help of Ms. Hanover, Ms. Lester led the Spanish group, and I was happy to lead the English group. This would give the children the opportunity to transfer what we had been learning about registers (*family talk*, *friend talk*, and *other grown-up talk*) into the creation of this text.

Next the children wrote down their top two language choices, and as they passed in their papers, I said, "Now you will get *one* of those choices, but remember, they are both choices you should like!" Sorted through the papers, my heart was beating fast. I wanted my focal students Hector, Lorena,

Michael, and Mack to be in my group so I could gather information about the ways they contextualized language, writing the English text in which we would be focusing on the registers we had created. If they did not choose English, I was not sure what I would do. As *teacher* first and *researcher* second, I wanted each child to feel excited and engaged in this project, and if that meant they were in another group, I would have to figure out a way to continue gathering data. I imagined buying more audio recorders, setting them up at each book group, and transcribing the interactions occurring as students created *every* text. I was exhausted just thinking about it. This was the first time since the beginning of my teacher/researcher balancing act that I felt the push-and-pull often cited as a downside to wearing both hats simultaneously (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2001).

I unfolded Mack's, and read "English" in his large script. Michael's paper said the same, as did Hector's and Lorena's. *This was going to work!* I added Jorge and Daisy to our group, as they had also chosen "English," and was then able to give the other children their choice of either "Spanish" or "French."

I pictured the students and teachers dialoguing, thoughtfully considering the influence of relationships on the speech chosen. I believed we were on the road to merging two topics we had explored since the beginning of our study of words in our world: the power of language to make us feel big or small, and the power of a communally constructed meta language to assist us in negotiating our use of language in ways that promoted "democratic and emancipatory change" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 141).

Choosing Our Book's Topic

With this aspect of our planning behind us, Daisy, Jorge, Mack, Lorena, Michael, and Hector gathered with me to create an overarching plot for our English book. Though every student had written "English" as one of their choices, and most of the children looked excited to begin our work together, I noticed Michael dragged his feet, his head down, as he made his way to our table.

"I thought I was goin' to the French group," he said hesitantly, after I asked him what was wrong. Michael's other choice had been French, which did not surprise me, considering both his mother and our school's guidance counselor told me he knew all about the Eiffel Tower. "It's probably from Zach and

Cody,” Maggie laughed, mentioning a show Michael loved to watch and which he referenced often, an intertext he enjoyed weaving into his daily life (Dyson, 2001a).

“Well,” I began, “You put on your paper English and French. And we said you would get one of those choices.”

“But I wa-.” Michael stopped himself, shaking his head. “Never mind, it’s okay.”

Touched at his concession, I smiled, placing a hand on his arm as I said, “Thanks, Michael. We’re gonna have fun, don’t worry. And we could even put *bonjour* in our book, if you wanted to!”

This coaxed a grin out of Michael, and we turned back to the whole group, the negotiation process regarding the topic of our book stretching before us. I hoped Michael’s interest in our book would increase as we discussed its focus, that he would feel invested in the story we were going to tell.

We began to brainstorm the logistics of our text, with Daisy suggesting that our entire book be in “home talk,” like we spoke with our friends. The other students laughed at this possibility, having not read many books like this outside of *Flossie and the Fox* (McKissack, 1986). Inside, I beamed, not wanting to drive the direction of our conversation, but thrilled that Daisy’s connection to the registers we had co-created were finding their way into our book.

Mack followed this with, “I want snoooooow!”

As the others giggled and nodded, I said, “You want snow in the book? Okay. Lemme write down some of these ideas.”

We were off. Book topics and character suggestions poured from the children’s mouths, and my marker struggled to keep up with them. We talked about including people and animals. Daisy and Hector wanted “all of us” in the book, too.

“And then we could show it to the whole school!” Mack exclaimed.

Speaking for the first time, Michael said, “Maybe...we could put this in the garden, and maybe we could plant seeds.” I heard in this suggestion references to books we had read about the Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Matthai, who had planted trees with women all around Kenya, and our watermelon seed spitting contest from kindergarten that had actually resulted in fall watermelons.

In this shift of conversation, Hector did something that caused us all to pause. While Michael was talking, Hector stood and began walking, winding through the other book groups before stopping in front of our social studies timeline. We had labeled this timeline “World Changers in History,” and it included historical figures from our state’s social studies standards (George Washington and Lewis & Clark), figures our class had deemed particularly important to us (Mary Frances Early and Cesar Chavez), and photographs of ourselves – after all, we saw ourselves as world changers!

“Hector, what are you tryin’ to show us?” I asked.

Hector pointed toward Mary Frances Early, a woman we had declared a world changer because she was the first African American student to graduate from the predominantly White college in our town.

“Do you want Mary Frances Early in the book?” I asked. When he nodded, I followed with, “Oohh, interesting!”

Michael’s body language visibly shifted and his deep brown eyes lit up as he smiled brightly. He nodded multiple times, declaring, “I’m in!”

“You’re in? Are you excited now?” I asked.

Michael nodded, repeating, “I’m in!” Where only minutes before he had reluctantly participated in our discussions of our English book, Michael was now an active member, invested and engaged in the possibilities. I could almost see the images of other world changers that fascinated Michael, such as Jackie Robinson and Mama Miti, drawing him in. More than any child I knew, Michael showed an interest in fairness and justice, both in regards to ways he could contribute to this, and what he could learn from past social movements and those active within them. When we were focusing on shape poems, and other students described their homes or Takis, a favorite snack, Michael wrote a poem about slavery. His lyrical, intimate tone caused his writing to make clear “the close relationship between language and identity, ...and the intimate connection between *what* is said and *how* it is said” (Meier, 1998, p. 97). The poem, entitled *Slavery*, read: *Bad, mean, crazy. They work in the fields. It really wasn’t necessary. Abraham Lincoln changed it all. Maybe we talkin’ about you one day. That’s what people say. 1863 they had slavery. They worked for them. They were so lazy. The end* (See Figure 6.5).

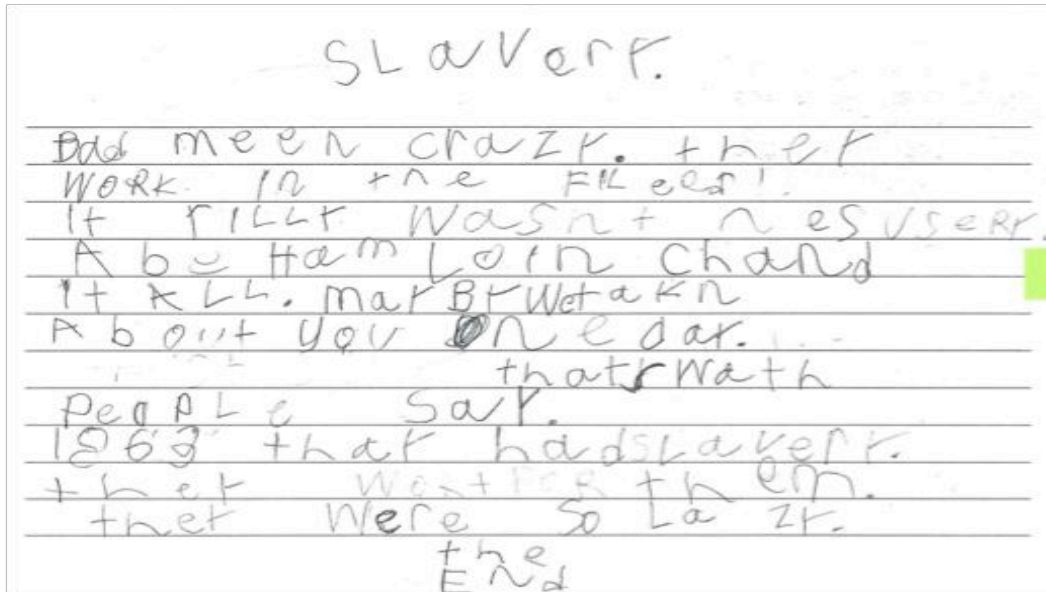


Figure 6.5: Michael's Slavery Poem

Michael's poem separated himself and his audience from the act of slavery (using words like “they” and “them” to represent slave owners). It became a call for action when he challenged his readers to consider they may one day do work like Abraham Lincoln (“Maybe we talkin’ about you one day.”) Michael’s interest in social justice inspired his peers and teachers, and he once again demonstrated his commitment as he latched onto Hector’s idea to write a book in English about world changers.

I silently thanked Hector, who could not have known his suggestion would inspire such interest in Michael, but who had used our brainstorming session to build upon a curricular context that was important to many of us. As Solsken, Willett, and Wilson-Keenan (2000) said, hybrid connections are “an inherent feature of language, with texts always referring and responding to, incorporating and intermingling multiple other texts” (p. 183), and Hector started this process. The other children piggybacked off his idea, rushing to the timeline and pointing to their *own* character suggestions. Soon, our list included Martin Luther King, Jr., Ghandi, Ruby Bridges, Jackie Robinson, Rosa Parks, and the Obama family; as Daisy summarized, they wanted to include “all the timeline people.”

When Michael took Hector's idea to include world changers as characters one step further, suggesting we write an entire book about the impact of these people, I asked the group if they liked this idea. A chorus of "yes!" was followed by Daisy's justification: "It's important!"

However, the children found coming to consensus around a specific storyline more difficult, as Mack wanted to focus on developing our plot in the setting of a ship. When his friends looked at him quizzically, Mack explained, "We can make a part when they have to get together on a ship."

Wanting to include Mack's idea in our book's evolving storyline, I suggested, "What if we made up a book where all the characters, all these world changers, were on a ship together."

"Okay," Daisy said, her tone rising in encouragement.

"And," I continued, "They were all talking to each other about the stuff they did to change the world." There was a pause. "What do you think?" I inquired. I did not want Mack to become dejected, as his creative ideas sometimes felt a little too "out there" for other students.

"Yeah!" Michael and Daisy said together, and Mack beamed.

We moved forward in the co-construction of our book's plot, its interconnectedness becoming richer, deeper, and more complex as we made suggestions for our outline. Not only did we weave together our own ideas, we also wove together written genres our class had studied throughout the children's kindergarten and first grade years. We realized that if these world changers from different points in history met on a ship to talk about how they had changed the world, we would be creating a text that was, as Daisy put it, "information and imagination stuck together!" I began to realize that a book consisting of co-constructed plotlines, born from the merging of informational and narrative genres, was a natural place in which to also play with the inclusion of multiple registers. We were pushing against the typical boundaries our grade level standards associated with authorship (i.e. children write individually, and should be able to identify single genre texts through the specific characteristics associated with each), so why not push with equal enthusiasm against linguistic boundaries?

By the end of our session, Jorge, Lorena, Daisy, Michael, Mack, Hector, and I had decided to write a multi-register, multi-genre book about world changers who met a time traveling wizard on a ship.

The wizard granted each of them one visit to meet another world changer; when these people met, they were able to talk about their unique contributions in the promotion of fairness and justice for all, during whatever point in history each had lived. We wanted to focus our book on these interactions, which I hoped would also lead us to discussions regarding how their relationship, whether it was based on deep friendship or a new acquaintance, affected the words they used as they spoke (Fairclough, 1992a; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Because the children had settled on a book topic that focused on justice-oriented characters, and since their purpose in writing the book was to promote similar appreciation for linguistic diversity in their readers, the two main themes in our contextualized language study merged into one project.

Our work was becoming critical. As Vazquez (2004) explained, “Critical literacy...means looking at an issue or topic in different ways, analyzing it, and hopefully being able to suggest possibilities for change or improvement” (p. 30). My students’ and my analysis revealed the necessity of increasing the languages represented in our community, and we were using what we knew about the effect of relationships on language to address this issue by writing our multi-register books.

As I rang our classroom’s wind chimes, the signal for conversations to fade and eyes to look at me, I surveyed the animated discussions taking place in the French and Spanish book groups, the laughter and debate that had ensued after each lead teacher posed the question, “What do you want to write about?” I realized the power present in our classroom to spread this message to others.

Creative Problem Solving: Negotiating Register Usage

In the weeks to come, we held weekly hour-long meetings in our language specific book groups. The children and their teacher leaders co-constructed narrative storylines and developed characters. The French and Spanish groups originally wrote their texts in English, having previously decided they would later work with a fluent French or Spanish speaker to translate the text. Daisy, Lorena, Jorge, Mack, Hector, Michael, and I worked hard to create our English book, developing a plot line that was complex in its inclusion of world changers throughout history.

While our core beliefs regarding the importance of working with family and community were the same, our methods for achieving these overarching goals were sometimes at odds. This, then, was where our conversational negotiations began. As we moved beyond constructing the outline of our text and began representing our characters through dialogue, this creative tension became clear. I believe it is important to consider how we negotiated our contributions as co-authors. Therefore, I have closely analyzed a conversation during which the children incorporated language they had come to call “book talk” into our text, in order to see how we shared our ideas and came to create our text. After identifying the registers present, I used the interpersonal metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics to determine how relationships and power structures affected the connections and conversational ideas we extended or dropped. This helped me to paint a more complete picture of how the children and I negotiated which language was appropriate for our text and which was not.

This will lead in to a discussion the children and I had a few weeks after this, as we considered how Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks might have spoken to one another based on the relationship they had from working together against segregation in the United States. I will convey my personal understanding of the reasons for students’ responses to the usage of different registers, and how this shaped the further construction of our English text about world changers. Since I was working to share classroom space, rather than taking control of topics as I had done when the children mentioned Chinese, this analysis was particularly important to me.

“He Came Victorious!”

During our second English book brainstorming session, the children and I drafted the content of our text, leaving the final weeks to think carefully about the relationships between characters, and the language they might have used to dialogue. After a few one-hour writing sessions, as we negotiated the characters we wanted to include and the storylines we wanted to pursue, we had completed a story map.

The children filled it with characters’ names (Rosa Parks, Mary Frances Early, George Washington Carver, Abraham Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln’s friend, Ruby Bridges, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Wizard), and a rough outline of the text’s beginning, middle, and end. At our story’s beginning,

Rosa Parks was on a ship when she met a “wizard for world changers,” who built her a time machine in which she could travel to meet other world changers throughout history. Students’ colorful drawings depicted the book’s middle consisting of each character, representing a world changing contribution, meeting another character. The picture showed them sharing with their new friend what they did to influence the world. The children envisioned the end of the book depicting a reunion on the ship where Rosa and the Wizard originally met, setting the stage for them to summarize the unique role each character played in the interwoven tapestry of world changing.

For historical accuracy, the children and I combed through colorful picture books and searched on Google to find key dates and events. Pointing to the world changers timeline that had inspired Hector, Michael told us we needed to know when each person lived, so when they interacted in the book, we could determine which characters would know about one another and which lived prior to their new acquaintance’s world-changing contributions. I vividly recall Daisy sitting with a book about Abraham Lincoln in her lap, calling out to Lorena, “He lived from 1809 to 1865!” Lorena then nodded seriously, carefully penning “1809-1865” on the story map in her emerging script.

The interconnected nature of history reminded me of Michael’s kindergarten realization that Barack Obama would not have been able to become the President of the United States without the previous work of everyone involved in the Civil Rights Movement. As they had begun to do then and were continuing to do here, the students made clear they recognized the necessity of community support and collaboration both in the text itself, and in their co-construction of it.

After creating our story map, the children and I began to use it as a guide in the creation of the book, diving headfirst into creating something tangible from Denim and Lorena’s original idea. The first paragraphs of our text seemed to almost write themselves, with me typing the students’ ideas and projecting them on the SmartBoard, while the children ran between the outline written on their large story map and the words written on the screen. In twenty minutes, we had completed the following:

Once upon a time, Rosa Parks met a time-traveling wizard on a ship. She told him how she changed the world.

Rosa said, "People were separating us on the bus. I stopped this and black people and white people can sit together. Lots of people boycotted the buses with me.

The wizard said, "What is your wish?"

"Can you build a time machine so I can meet other world changers? I don't know about all world changers, only some of them," said Rosa.

The wizard said, "Yes. I am a wizard for world changers."

Rosa spun a magic globe. The wizard pulled her in to Washington, D.C.

"Good luck," said the wizard to Rosa. "It's dangerous out there."

Rosa traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1967.

Where have you been?" said Martin. "I have a speech to give, and I want you there so everything can be right."

Martin gives his "I have a dream" speech, and Rosa watches it.

The students decided they wanted Rosa and Martin to meet in the story, although they knew they were familiar with one another because of their collaboration in helping institute the Montgomery Bus Boycott (*Studio Melizo*, 2012). We had never juxtaposed the two of them as co-contributors in the Civil Rights Movement, as we had only studied them as separate, influential entities. This juxtaposition gave them a chance to play a little bit, to imagine what a conversation between Rosa and Martin might have sounded like, and to envision a familiarity existing between the two of them.

Focal excerpt and linguistic negotiation. After the children imagined this playful exchange between Rosa and Martin, Michael engaged us all in a discussion focused on "book talk." Although we were still working to commit our early ideas to paper, Michael reminded us that we were already adopting certain voices as we constructed our rough draft. Our word choice was responsible for linking our characters together, for representing them in certain ways, and although we were not overtly discussing this, our understanding of what books often sound like influenced the linguistic decisions we made.

After our initial discussion about Parks' and King's conversation, Michael excitedly rose to his knees, opening his brown eyes wide as his brain worked to connect to two of his heroes, to think beyond

the influence they had on the Civil Rights Movement and toward the effects of their work still unfolding in his lifetime. His physical movement had captivated the attention of his peers and teacher, and we were all looking his way as he began to speak.

“And then it say, after fifty years later, Martin and Rosa came victorious,” Michael declared (*For a deconstructed analysis of these intertextual connections and their extensions, see Appendix F*). His classmates did not giggle at his use of formal language, his incorporation of words like “victorious” that we had never heard Michael use. I recalled Maggie’s voice as she talked about her belief that children’s literature helps students realize, as they immerse themselves in the pages of various texts, that “this is how writing sounds.” Her son was certainly making this connection as he seamlessly switched into “book talk,” the language of texts (Gee, 1989b).

“Aawww!” I breathed in, beginning to type as I repeated Michael’s sentence aloud. “Because of their work...” I considered the connection Michael verbalized between Martin and Rosa; according to him, not only were Martin and Rosa part of the same movement, but they were *victorious* in the achievement of their goals within this movement. I typed his words onto the computer, mesmerizing the children as they saw each letter appear on the SmartBoard screen. Michael’s insight became part of the fabric of our group’s conversation and book creation. I had not asked Michael a question with a pre-determined answer and then evaluated his response, as is common in formal pedagogic discourse (Hicks, 1995); by acknowledging and extending his idea for our book’s next sentence, I gave the power of evaluation to the children, since they could now determine whether they wanted to include Michael’s words. Though at the “surface-level” of our discussion / was typing and asking the questions, at the “underlying-level,” we were negotiating the words we included and their placement in the text (Bloome, et al., 2005, p. 92).

Michael continued as I typed, speaking mostly to himself in a hushed tone, “Victorious means they won. They were, like, very smart.” His declarations were self-assured (mood), and he found no reason to hedge his statements with such phrases as *I think* or *maybe* (modality) (*See Appendix G for a detailed analysis of the mood and modality present in this conversational excerpt.*).

At this point, Daisy looked at Michael. Her head cocked to one side, she simply asked, “What’s victorious?” Like many of us, myself included, she had not heard Michael’s earlier definitions.

“What’s victorious?” I repeated, looking at Michael. In questioning him, Daisy and I validated Michael’s use of a new vocabulary word (mood). We did not call for something we, and our readers, might more immediately understand. Instead, we followed Michael’s train of thought and encouraged him to explain what he meant. As Vazquez (2004) stated, “Knowledge is never neutral; everything we know is socially constructed” (p. 96), and my students and I acknowledged this in our interactions.

“Um,” Michael began, thinking before saying, “like you win.” With more confidence, his head nodding up and down and certainty present in his words (modality), he repeated, “Like you win.”

Hearing this, I again began typing exactly what Michael said, saying aloud as I pecked at the keys, “This...means...they...won.” Interested in Michael’s unique understanding of what it meant for Martin and Rosa to be “victorious,” I inquired (mood), “What did they win?”

This question threw him for a loop. “The um, the um...like, the um, skin color thing?” His voice rose at the end of this sentence, making it into a question he posed as he looked across the carpet at me. Here, Michael referenced a slew of prior experiences and connections, from the Civil Rights Movement posters, letters, and timelines we created in Kindergarten, to books we had read focusing on the beauty inherent in skin’s wide variety of hues (hooks, 2004; Lester, 2005).

Knowing these were big topics for a person of any age to wrestle with, and balancing my want for Michael to verbalize the meaning of his words with the fact that he may not be able to do so, I helped him out, saying, “Okay. This means they helped people be kind? Because of skin color?” I blended Michael’s contribution with what I hoped was an accurate representation of the intent behind his words, not wanting to put phrases in his mouth but committed to supporting him in verbalizing his complex ideas (mood) (Bloome, et al., 2005). Kindness had long been important to Michael, I knew, as I thought about his trip to our guidance counselor’s office to inquire about creating a puppet show focused on compassion, remembering the hand he laid on a friend’s shoulder when he was crying, and recalling his outrage upon learning Hector’s family might move because of the limited mindset of others.

He nodded, saying, “Uh huh.” This opportunity for acknowledgement, the chance Michael had here to either confirm or deny the accuracy of my connection, represented the equal conversational footing on which the two of us found ourselves (Eggins & Slade, 2005). Rather than simply push forward without giving Michael a chance to respond, as I had done with Mack when he attempted to continue a thread of conversation focused on the Chinese language, this moment represented a more equal conversational positioning between *student* and *teacher*. There was a give and take to our discussion, as we alternately offered our own thoughts and questioned one another regarding the accuracy of our interpretations and ideas (Eggins, 1999).

“Okay,” I said, and I began typing again, slightly changing my previous statement to reflect a more cohesive sentence structure. “They helped people be kind to others with different...”

As I typed, the students finished my sentence for me. “Skin colors,” they said in chorus, effectively inviting the connection Michael made between Martin, Rosa, and their influence on the Civil Rights Movement into their classroom’s narrative. By accepting and extending his idea into their text, they placed the importance of accepting others with different skin colors at the heart of our evolving storyline (Bloome, et al., 2005). At the same time, they accepted Michael’s use of a new phrase, *they came victorious*, and welcomed it into their book’s language.

Throughout this exchange, my speech seemed to have two functions: 1) to ask Michael to clarify his thoughts by asking questions, and 2) to restate what Michael had already said. While I helped him verbalize his thoughts on what it meant for Martin and Rosa to become *victorious*, in response to his uncertainty, I did so in the form of a question, giving Michael the opportunity to tell me if my hunch as to what he meant was correct. This sat in sharp contrast to my *lack* of acknowledgement of students’ extended connections and thoughts regarding the Chinese language, and was evidence that the register in which we were operating was shifting toward a conversational structure (Eggins & Slade, 2005).

Nodding once again, Michael happily took in the words now present on the SmartBoard, a reflection of his thoughts regarding the connection between Martin, Rosa, and the overall success of the Civil Rights Movement. From his perspective, issues between people who had dark and light skin were

largely a problem of the past, and he credited these heroic figures, along with those marching, boycotting, and nonviolently protesting with them, with this success. While this was a simplified understanding of a complex and ever-evolving racial negotiation between people across the country, from Michael's viewpoint, it was a problem about which he did not have to think. He sat in a classroom of peers with different skin colors, all of whom were able to laugh, learn, play, and grow together. He saw teachers with black, brown, and white skin conversing in hallways and eating together in classrooms. The children were certainly fascinated with differences in skin color, bringing it up when they noticed various hues in friends' and book characters' tones. As was evident in our exploration of the books *Skin Again* (hooks, 2004) and *Let's Talk About Race* (Lester, 2005), this was not a taboo topic in our classroom, and we turned students' observations into opportunities for discussion.

The students did not recognize racial prejudice as a problem on which they needed to reflect. Michael's beautifully stated message, that Martin and Rosa *came victorious* in their pursuit of racial equality, made this clear, as did his group members' acceptance and extension of this statement. This sense of assuredness sharply contrasted with the cause they *had* chosen to pursue, which was the fact that members of their community, such as the man who phoned Hector's family to tell them they needed to move to a place where everyone spoke Spanish, did not view all linguistic backgrounds as equal. In regards to language discrimination, they agreed with Alim (2005), who found,

...there is a need for critical language awareness programs in the United States...not only to take the students' language into account but also to account for the interconnectedness of language with the larger sociopolitical and sociohistorical phenomena that help to maintain unequal power relations in a still-segregated society. (p. 24)

Though the children's school environment gave them no reason to believe people were still racially prejudiced, their personal connections to linguistic discrimination forced them to realize their freedom to speak in multiple languages/dialects was limited by the beliefs of people who disparaged many of their home languages. Together, we had chosen our cause, and we needed to complete our texts and share the beauty of linguistic diversity with others.

Register lesson. The children's acceptance of unfamiliar language and the increasingly conversational tone of our lessons, made me confident we were ready to enter into focused discussion regarding the inclusion of *friend talk* in dialogue between characters. As we continued to construct our story over the next two Creative Problem-Solving lessons, side by side with our friends who were writing books they would soon translate into French and Spanish, I thought about the best spot in our narrative to first consider the effect of a close relationship on language spoken between two characters.

I continued to ponder this as Martin Luther King, Jr. met Abraham Lincoln, Lincoln met Ruby Bridges, Bridges met George Washington Carver, and all of the world changers gathered with the Wizard on a ship one year after our story began. I thought about it as the children suggested we write, "I don't want no more," as part of Ruby Bridges' response to Carver when he cautioned her against eating too much of his most famous invention, peanut butter. I considered our options as our group gathered around classroom computers to look up excerpts of each world changer giving speeches and engaging in interviews, watching as the children giggled at the roughly recorded audio of George Washington Carver's high-pitched voice and became silent listening to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s (1963) *I have a dream* speech. We had recently finished our rough draft, and did this to gain a better understanding of the words each person might have used, to get an overall feel for their tone and level of formality in an effort to somehow translate this into our own book's written word (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007).

After this computerized study of our world changers' speech, we gathered in a circle to discuss our notes, as we had all written what we noticed about the words our heroes used and the formality of their language. We had gathered quotations from Abraham Lincoln. We had recorded notes about George Washington Carver's "careful" use of words as he gave a speech. And now, we were ready to talk.

"I don't think Ruby Bridges spoke as carefully as George Washington Carver," Lorena spoke up, and Jorge nodded his head in agreement.

"Why not?" I asked them, interested in both their interpretation of "carefully" and their comparison of these two leaders who lived in very different periods in history.

“She was sad,” Jorge stated. “She probably didn’t want to talk about what happened to her when she was a kid.” He was referring to a video he and Lorena had watched, where a reporter interviewed Ruby Bridges and asked her to tell what she remembered about her six-year-old self being one of the first African American children to attend a previously segregated school in the South. I thought about the sadness Jorge spoke about earlier in the week, as he asked Hector if he felt sad about the “bad man” who had called his home to tell him he needed to move. Our classroom community was certainly no stranger to discussions about feelings of unhappiness, and since we had just spoken about Hector’s situation, I was not surprised to hear Jorge reference melancholy in his prediction about why Bridges was not as “careful,” as formal, in her speech as George Washington Carver.

Because our plan was to focus on relationships between our characters, rather than become overwhelmed by the inexhaustible comparisons between the words spoken from different time periods, we did not address this as a possible reason for the difference. I did, however, offer up one question for the children to ponder, saying, “I wonder if George Washington Carver talked more carefully because he was giving a speech to lots of people when we heard him, and Ruby Bridges was just having a conversation with one person?” We took this no further, but I wanted to help the students begin to consider the effect a speaker’s relationship with his audience might have on the words he chose. It was entirely possible that Carver was more “careful” because he was aware of the expectations inherent in giving a speech; generally, this is a formal language venue, in which the speaker has only indirect contact with his audience (Gebhard, Hafner, Harman, Shin, Seger, & Willett, 2007). Bridges and her interviewer, however, were engaged with one another in a more intimate way, their register less concerned with formality and more with the interviewer asking Bridges questions that would provoke in-depth responses from her regarding her experience desegregating a school.

As we went on, with Daisy and Michael sharing that they noticed Martin Luther King, Jr. was “loud” and his voice was “strong” when they heard an audiotape of his speeches, I realized a shift had taken place regarding my own goals for our contextualized study of language. Originally, I was interested in working with the children to identify and use Standardized English as a jumping off point for them

finding success in school-based writing and speaking activities, and as a way for them to recognize the inherent lack of equality in a school environment that prized one linguistic variety over another. However, we were engaging in an exploration of the more fluid registers present in language, which allowed us the freedom to identify a variety of ways of speaking, as well as to personally identify with these ways of speaking (Kamberelis & Bovino, 1999). In my teaching journal later that day, I wrote,

We weren't noticing the intricacies of African American Vernacular English or Standard English in their talking, and we could only identify the language being used as "friend," "family," or "other adult" talk. Past that, the children and I couldn't say, "well, we noticed that MLK used this verb here, etc." And, I don't think I expected that. It hasn't actually been our goal throughout this process...The children and I have been mostly focusing on language use as a form of communication in a general way, and not in the tiny minutiae of what is being said. They can recognize the use of...friend or other adult talk, and they know when it is most appropriate to use it. They identify in our test preparation the examples that use each type of speech, and consistently choose the option that reveals the more formal "other adult" talk as the best answer for the test...We are getting the idea that language is a tool for communication. And while we are using translation charts with books like Flossie and the Fox, and changing language from one dialect to another, we are validating all of these forms of speaking and writing.

It was in this fluid acknowledgement of the various ways we use language, and in the children's ability to recognize when to write in Spanish vs. English or when to use words like *came victorious* vs. *they won*, that we were strengthening our understanding of how we contextualize words in our world. In our growing knowledge of how to use words as a tool for communication, we were also better able to connect our personal lives to our work in school, and to validate all these forms of speaking and writing. As Rymes (2009) might say, we brought the "underlife," those threads of knowledge and interest children bring with them from *outside* school, into the classroom. We knew, as well, when the language most personal to us was not validated or recognized in literature or in our community, and were using this

realization as an opportunity to push against the societally-constructed limits placed on *when*, *where*, or *how* “family,” “friend,” or “other adult” talk is acceptable (Freire, 1972).

I was impressed with the children’s ability to notice and comment on the “careful” nature of their world changers’ audiotaped voices, and with their growing understanding of how their self-identified registers helped to contextualize language. This made me confident we were ready to engage in a discussion around the effect of relationships on the speech used between two of our characters, and I had finally settled on the characters for this group analysis. Only two characters, after all, even had a relationship with one another before their interactions in our book, since we intentionally built the plot around the concept of world changers meeting one another for the first time. Because our conversation about relationships affecting talk needed to focus on characters who *did* know one another, so we could use their relationship as the reason for their use of *friend talk*, I was fortunate we had decided Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks would interact; they collaborated during the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

As we wrapped up our discussion regarding what we had noticed about the world changers’ audio taped speech, I brought up the possibility of introducing *friend talk* to the exchange between Martin and Rosa. Since our group had been willing to accept Michael’s use of the phrase *came victorious*, and because they did not make a peep when we incorporated the sentence “I don’t want no more” into Ruby Bridges’ dialogue, I believed we would be able to converse seriously and purposefully.

“Those are all very interesting noticings you had about how these world changers spoke,” I told the group. “I think we are ready to think about how we can change how our characters are speaking in our book, since we know more about how they actually talked!”

I quickly scrolled to the section of our text where Rosa and Martin were speaking to each other, and highlighted a sentence. “Where have you been?” was now illuminated a bright yellow, larger than life on the SmartBoard screen and impossible to miss.

“I was thinking,” I began. “I bet Martin and Rosa kinda knew each other when Rosa refused to leave her seat on the bus, right?”

The students nodded, agreeing with me.

“Maybe,” I ventured, “Maybe we could try to use friend talk between them, to make it more like real life? I wonder how Martin might have said this sentence to Rosa, if he knew her well, and was maybe a little frustrated she just got there?”

They met my question with silence, and I did my best to wait it out, knowing that oftentimes children need more time than teachers give them to think through responses in a conversational classroom situation (Cazden, 2001).

A few seconds passed, and then a few more. The students began to fidget, and I worried I would lose their attention entirely if I waited much longer for an answer. So, I offered my own.

“Hhhmmm...How about he says to her, ‘Where you been?’” I extended this option as a way to get the conversation started.

I knew Martin probably would not have said this to Rosa. I was simply pulling a phrase I had heard Mack speak to Michael when he arrived late to school, something I heard Daisy shout across the playground to her older sister when she noticed she emerged later than her classmates. I thought it might spark other thoughts from the students, that it would help them begin to brainstorm.

But instead of more ideas, I heard laughter. Contagious, loud, roll-on-the-floor, can’t-catch-your-breath kind of laughter bubbled up from within the bodies of these children and burst forth, unable to be contained. My mouth dropped open. I stared at them, watching as their six small bodies filled the expanse of our classroom’s gathering area, their bellies expanding and tears spilling from their eyes. All I heard, above their gasps and hiccups, was the occasional uttering of my original sentence.

“Where you been?” Daisy repeated, and just as they were calming down, this inspired a whole new fit of giggles.

I began to notice children in the other groups staring at us, their teachers coaxing them back to the conversation at hand as they attempted painstakingly to translate their rough drafts, phrases and sentences into Spanish and French. I snapped out of my shocked state, *sshhh*ing the rolling, laughing children in my own group and reminding them in a loud whisper that others were trying to work.

We had to abandon this topic for the day, and possibly for good, considering the children's reaction and the few minutes we had left before lunch. I was not upset, although I admit to feeling confused and a bit flabbergasted at their response. Hadn't they very recently accepted Ruby Bridges' *friend talk* into their text? She and George Washington Carver had not even previously known each other, and while I knew they may not have consciously thought about the words they chose for Bridges in the moment we wrote them, I could not figure out what made this instance so different from that one. *What happened here?* I wondered, as we began cleaning up the carpet before lining up.

Recognizing limitations. In the following days, I pondered this event I viewed as peculiar, eventually coming to realize it was not peculiar at all. From our kindergarten year onward, these students and I had listened to speeches given by President Barack Obama and Martin Luther King, Jr. with rapt attention, committing to memorize certain phrases and plastering them to our classroom learning wall. When we had listened to King's voice through a computer's speakers a few days earlier, he was giving a speech. The day he interacted with Rosa in our text, he was getting ready to give a speech. Outside of our reading of his sister's book, *My Brother Martin* (Farris, 2005), about their childhood antics, formal speeches were the only register in which we had ever heard Martin Luther King, Jr. speak.

From the beginning of our contextualized language study, I had emphasized the importance of building our understanding of words in use from personal experiences, and from our interconnected encounters with the speech of others (Gutiérrez, 2008). The only experiences with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s use of words the students could draw from, then, came from the words he used in *speeches*. While I was asking the children to consider how King's relationship with Parks might have influenced the register in which he operated, their experiences with his use of words limited their ability to do so. As Maggie told me when I asked her why she thought the children, specifically Michael, reacted this way, she said, "He just want to know if it's true or not," supporting my hunch that the students were having difficulty fictionalizing Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech if the words they used did not sound like his formal speeches.

So far, we had been able to create comparison charts and have conversations around our co-created registers, using examples from our own lives, coupled with the experiences and backgrounds of our families and peers. We knew some families spoke to one another in English and others in Spanish, and that Flossie reminded us of *friend talk* and the Fox reminded us of *other adult talk*. We even connected to our self-identified world changers in different ways, and these connections made it more or less likely that we would categorize their conversations in the book as examples of *friend*, *family*, or *other adult* talk. On some level, the children might have connected to Ruby Bridges as a peer, a child whose presence in literature made her seem forever their age, making her mark on the world by learning in a school previously attended only by European Americans. This connection, this familiarity, could have contributed to their willingness to apply *friend talk* to her dialogue in our book. On the other hand, the children had frozen Martin Luther King, Jr. in time as an adult, someone they looked up to but had primarily encountered in speeches, making the possibility of him entering the “interactional context” (Rymes, 2009) of *friend talk* much less likely. As Natalie said, “They may have thought that it was incorrect,” something permissible for Ruby Bridges but *not* for Martin Luther King, Jr.

Learning from limitations. This incident, while perplexing at first, gave me insight into the power of personal connections in building our understandings of how we contextualize language. I wondered what the students’ families might think about the words we used in the book. Would those who primarily spoke English find it acceptable that Ruby said, “I don’t want no more,” or would they rather it said, “I don’t want *any* more,” therefore more accurately reflecting the language often found in books?

I thought about Natalie, Mack’s mother, and a conversation we had earlier in the year regarding her want for Mack to “talk right.” Natalie said she often listened carefully to how Mack talked at home; if she heard him using words she felt were incorrect, she would “try to correct him and tell him, you know, that’s not how you say it.” She even linked Mack’s frequent speaking of African American Vernacular English, which she referred to as “ebonics,” to the fact that she was not working at a doctor’s office while he was learning to speak, as she had been when her older son was the same age. Natalie believed her use of Standardized English, made frequent by the expectations of her boss, contributed to her older son’s

early command of this dialect, because “when he was a baby, he heard how I talked, and he talked proper.” For Natalie, at least, speaking “proper” was important, and she believed her job as a parent was to expose her children to Standardized English so that they would not “be out in public” and “say something...that nobody understands.” Natalie’s perspective mirrored that of the African American families Lisa Delpit (1995) spoke to, who said they wanted their children to become fluent in the language of power so they would be on equal educational footing with peers already speaking this dialect.

With these questions and prior experiences in mind, I asked the children if they would like to involve their families in our project by asking them to become editors of our books. After we finished our most complete copies, I told them, we could send home paper copies, complete with highlighters and markers for editing ease, and they could work with their families to discuss changes they might make to the words or construct of our text. Families who primarily spoke Spanish would receive copies of our Spanish group’s book, families who primarily spoke English would receive our English group’s book, and two teachers in our building who spoke French would receive our French group’s book.

The children responded with excitement, their fists pumping in the air as they said, “Yes!” They seemed most excited about the highlighters, while I was thrilled with this editing option because it allowed families to meaningfully participate on their own time and at their own pace, in an activity *with* their children. As Green and Long (2011) emphasized, “Schools must change, especially their tendency to isolate both teachers and students from the wealth of knowledge in local communities. And this will mean...expanding a curriculum that bridges the school and community” (p. 25). For our class, familiar with bridging school and community learning through Family Dialogue Journals and Writing Workshop Nights, editing our multilingual books with families was another chance for us to expand our curriculum.

The thought of editing books in our homes became an incentive to finish them quickly. The end of the year was approaching, and if we wanted to have our books edited, illustrate each page, and plan/carry out a celebration where we invited our families and members of the community to read our multilingual texts (all of which was part of our original overarching plan), we needed to plow ahead.

Summary

We were making progress, using our multilingual books to move toward “democratic and emancipatory change” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p.141). Since our community’s decision to respond to the lack of multilingual books in our extended neighborhoods by writing our own, we had not only been able to plan and co-author a rough draft of books in English, French, and Spanish, but we had also determined a concrete way for our families to co-participate in the writing of these books. As my group created our English text, we used our increasingly nuanced understanding of how to contextualize language (as was evident through our translation of *Flossie and the Fox*) to integrate dialogue and narrative appropriate for particular conversations between and among particular characters. Michael bolstered our commitment to the completion of these books when he verbalized the connection he made between racial and linguistic prejudice, thus connecting our work to a topic in which we had long been interested. Hector’s experience with the man on the phone unfortunately crystallized and clarified this concept, as Michael’s original comment became a reality in the life of our classroom community when one of our members experienced this linguistic persecution.

I also experienced a great deal of personal growth. Learning from my prior hesitancy to negotiate focal points for our language study *with* the children, I opened myself up to the power of questioning more and making decisions on my own less. I recognized I had valid reasons for not bringing the Chinese language into our study, but I also made it a point to remember I should always share my reasons with the children, rather than not including their ideas in our work without explanation. This realization was present in my mind when Michael and I negotiated the inclusion of his connection between Martin, Rosa, and a sense of victory into our book; I was careful to use *his* words, to ask *him* questions, and to interweave my own perspective and thoughts as a way to build off his ideas for our book.

Further, the children helped me to relearn a lesson I had always thought *I* was teaching *them*. All along, I had emphasized the importance of relevance in our contextualized study of language. We listened to friends, teachers, family members, restaurant employees, and school administration, categorizing phrases based on our co-constructed registers of *friend*, *family*, and *other adult* talk. We wove our

families' beliefs about language use into our curriculum, looking to them for their perspectives regarding how and why people spoke certain ways in our homes and communities. Our multilingual book project began because Daisy and Lorena saw a gap in the languages represented in our community's books, and we acted on this insight. With personal events and experiences making up the fabric of our study's history, it should not have been a surprise to me when the children reacted to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s use of *friend talk* as if I was adding silk threading to a quilt made of burlap; although it may have added depth and texture, to them, it just did not *fit*. Their reaction helped me to realize we could have done more to study MLK in multiple areas of his life, listening to him speak to his family, friends, and colleagues with the same intentness as when we listened to him "turn the world upside down" (Farris, 2005) during his speeches. If I wanted the children to imagine Martin in conversation with Rosa, they needed to envision him as not only an orator, but also as part of a family and community. It was appropriate that we recognize his heroism, but also that we see bits of ourselves, of everyday life, in him.

In these ways, our continued exploration of language, of our use of it, and our creation of multilingual picture books, deepened our sense of its intricacies. Our long-term focus on registers, constructed as part of a co-created meta language built from the experiences and suggestions of students and teachers, proved relevant to our authorship, as we wrestled with and negotiated the language used within the pages of our text. Whether in dialogue or narration, the words we chose were important; they told our story and represented our characters in specific ways, and our co-constructed meta language for registers allowed us to converse about the most fitting phrases or sentences to include. At the same time, our registers gave us freedom to either agree or disagree with one another, making negotiation a necessary part of our book's authorship. As Robert once said, "That's not *my* friend talk," and the children echoed this sentiment in regards to Martin Luther King, Jr., when I attempted to include *friend talk* in his spoken dialogue. This negotiation, and the breaking down of standard power structures between *teacher* and *student*, was key to our book's creation, as it opened up space for multiple voices and perspectives to emerge, making our emerging text richer, more interconnected to each of us as I typed the children's suggestions on our SmartBoard screen (Gutiérrez, 2008).

Possibilities for Extension

Whew! A lot happened in this chapter, as I am sure you noticed. You may find yourself wondering, *Yeah, this was great for Jen and her students. But we can't possibly get that many volunteers into our classroom! And not to mention the multiple teachers and student teachers who serendipitously appeared to help make this project happen??*

Please know, I hear you – don't close the book just yet! Outside of this experience, I also taught for many years in a school where we did not have a university presence close by, and where student and support teachers were few and far between. I recognize those challenges, and do not want the story of my classroom community to cause you to feel as though only teachers in buildings with extensive extra assistance can engage in contextualized language studies and projects.

Your unit will probably look quite different from mine, and you will probably utilize resources I did not, but I believe this is what makes co-designed projects like this one so exciting and engaging for students! While it may seem serendipitous that the children wanted to focus on books in French, Spanish, and English, and we happened to have fluent speakers of each of these languages willing and able to help us write our books, our framing of this project leaned in the direction of multilingual books *because* we had these resources available. If we had not, we would have needed to engage other options. We might have employed the assistance of Google translator. Maybe we could have persuaded a high school French or Spanish - or Mandarin - teacher, in exchange for a coffee or two, to check our amateur translations for accuracy.

My point is, these were the options that presented themselves to me. As you and your students plan for your contextualized language project, whatever it may be, other options will present themselves to you. González, Moll, & Amanti (2005) summed it up by saying, "Since I am looking for resources, I am finding resources" (p. 103). It is also important to remember, though, that if support for a project is not available, no matter how many people you contact or how creatively you envision help, then it might be time to sit down with your students and *talk* about other options for sharing what they have learned.

As always, please keep me informed about how you have overcome obstacles as you and your students engage in focused, purposeful work around language in our world!

- *Register Translation Mini-Lessons*: Just as my students and I did when we translated Flossie's *friend talk* into *other adult talk* during Morning Message, find time to focus on similar translations of language with your students. Maybe you fit it in right before lunch, in that five-minute span of time you are always trying to fill with something meaningful. Maybe you finagle a way to incorporate it into your Writing Workshop Mini-Lesson, discussing how attention to the words our characters use influences how readers conceptualize them. Use characters from a beloved story as a jumping off point, as we did, or simply begin with a phrase you hear students often say to their friends on the playground. Whatever you do, open space for conversation around word usage within each register, using references made and experiences noted by the children to deepen their understanding of how to contextualize language.
- *Construct a Framework, Not a Worksheet*: After we identified our focal project, which was to write multilingual books to share with our community, and after the students excitedly brainstormed their ideas regarding how to make this project a reality, my co-teachers and I supported the children by focusing and organizing these ideas. While your language project will be quite different from ours, it is my hunch that your students will need similar organizational support. Creating charts or dividing children into partners prior to Creative Problem-Solving time will free you and your students to attend to the meat of your project during precious group time. Although this is a collaborative endeavor, not every decision made needs to happen as a group; I say this from experience, as I found myself continually negotiating which decisions we needed to make together, and which I could make on my own. Let your teaching skill and experience guide you!
- *Strengthen Language Study with Family Connections/Partnerships*: No matter what direction your language study takes you in, look for ways to incorporate the voices of students' families into your work. Your students' language came from the people in their homes, who cooed at,

laughed and conversed with, and questioned them from the time they were born. Whether through family dialogue journals, family surveys, home visits and conversations, or family language nights, learning from and with the support systems of your students is incredibly important. It will enrich and deepen your language study, and help children to connect meaningfully to the content – what more could you want?

CHAPTER 7

TAKING OUR LANGUAGE STUDY HOME: STUDENTS AND FAMILIES SHARE THOUGHTS ON WORDS THROUGH FAMILY DIALOGUE JOURNALS

“There are – or should be – opportunities for dialogue about student learning throughout the year” (Allen, 2007, p. 101).

Me: Y'all, what do you want to make your question?

What do you wanna ask your families?

Excerpt from Transcript of Language-Focused Family Dialogue Journal

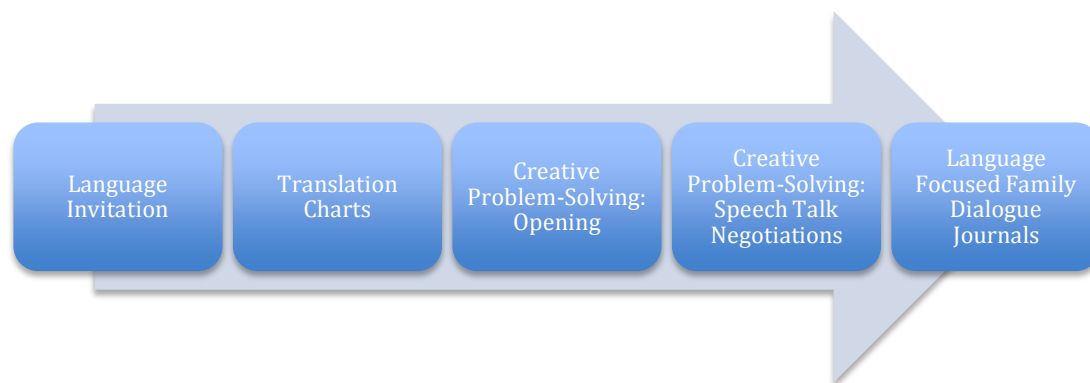


Figure 7.1: Unfolding of Language Activity #5

In this chapter, I will describe an instance when our work contextualizing language and our weekly Family Dialogue Journals intersected (*See Figure 7.1*). After focusing so closely on the creation of our multilingual books, I include this event to display the interconnectedness of our language study to students’ home lives and our larger classroom curriculum. I will describe this lesson in detail, coaxing out the familial and classroom-based intertextual connections I believe the children and I referenced as we decided to write home about our study of words in the world. Because I found it to be a particularly

interesting representation of the conversations my students and I had come to have with one another, I will zoom in on a discussion within this event regarding the creation of our journal's question for families around the topic of language. Looking closely at this excerpt, I will examine the registers we were operating within, and will apply an interpersonal analysis (based in Systemic Functional Linguistics) as a way to concretely identify my students' and my negotiation of power as we co-constructed our journal question. After this detailed look at our Family Dialogue Journals, I will share how this lesson reminded me of the cyclical nature of our year, as we had begun with a focus on family/school partnerships and were once again ramping up to make this happen. Finally, I will provide some suggestions for incorporating pieces of what my students and I did into other classrooms also focused on linguistic analysis and family partnerships, knowing that with different children and families, such activities will evolve very differently.

Shaping Our Unit: Renewing Our Commitment to Family/School Partnerships

It might seem as though our classroom community's focus on our multilingual books was leading us away from our intentional incorporation of families' perspectives and experiences into our curriculum. While this was not entirely the case, as we continued each week to communicate through Family Dialogue Journals, I admit to feeling similarly by this point in our year together. We were moving full steam ahead in the creation of our texts, and at this point, we had created our rough drafts and were moving into editing and illustrating our books.

We were busy! Daisy and Lorena had posed a problem, and our entire class was committed to addressing it with a tunnel vision-like focus I had not often seen in first graders. Each time we broke into our book groups, a cacophony of noise filled the air, with students' voices rising above the din to share last-minute suggestions for textual changes with their peers. Having done much of the hard labor at this point, I allowed myself to feel a sense of accomplishment, to close my eyes and feel the wind in my hair as the roller coaster of our language study careened from the top of a large hill representing our work up until this point. *Whooooooooo*, I went, knowing we were not finished, but feeling relieved we had created most of the text we planned to share with family and community members.

However, although we were planning to ask our families to be editors of each book, this opportunity to slow down produced in me a nagging feeling that our families had more to offer us, more to offer this study, than their editing skills. I agreed with Allen (2010), who said, “I worry that we get so caught up in school language and literacies that we may not take the time to learn those of families” (p. 28). Although my students and I were making it our goal to share with others the beauty of our families’ home languages, I feared we were not *listening* to their voices, that we were not *hearing* their thoughts on language use in the world.

As is always the case in teaching, our unit was a balancing act of sorts, requiring me to remain constantly attuned to the teeter-totter of our focus. *Are we asking our families to connect to our school content enough?* I would wonder one week. The next, I found myself thinking, *Are we able to apply what we are learning about language to situations outside of our immediate home and school contexts?* Each time I had these thoughts, I responded by incorporating a language lesson I thought would balance out the unevenness, stacking a translation chart activity on one side of our seesaw only to realize we needed to add a family-based language inquiry to the other side before the unit toppled over from top heaviness.

When I began to realize the danger my students and I were in of superficially engaging with their families around language use in the world, I went on the lookout for opportunities to ask about and listen to the voices and ideas of those most important to us. As Allen (2007) reminded me, “Building relationships with families means respecting them – their language, values, struggles, insights, culture, and family structure” (p. 94), and such superficiality was anything but respectful. I did not want to contribute to a commonly “unexamined assumption that parental involvement is a shared, equal task between parents and teachers” (Reay, 1998, p. 10); instead, I wanted to continue pushing against the boundaries of what we considered “partnership,” and such pushing needed to include more options for recursive, dialogic communication between school and home. Our multilingual books were important, a display of our willingness to identify, engage with, and work to address a problem we found relevant to our linguistic worlds, but we needed to reconnect with our study on a more personal level. Thankfully, my students made this easy.

Language-Focused Family Dialogue Journals: Intersecting Our Study and Family/School Partnerships

The week my students rolled on the floor, clutching their sides as they laughed uncontrollably at the thought of Martin Luther King, Jr. speaking to Rosa Parks as they might speak to their friends, we found ourselves sitting in the same space while considering topics for our Family Dialogue Journals. By this point in the year, the children had become writers who were independent enough to write journal entries on their own or in small groups. Because of this, we decided to break into groups to write to our families about *different* topics we had learned throughout our week together. The students and I agreed this would help them remain motivated to write home, since they would almost certainly be interested in at least one of the topics extended on any given week.

Often, as was the case on this day, there were enough support teachers present for the children to choose and write about three separate journal topics. After brainstorming possibilities, the class voted to split into groups focused on writing about 1) mammals, our science topic for the week, 2) Alma Flor Ada, an author we had developed a great interest in, and 3) *our language study*.

This final suggestion came from Sandra, who raised her hand during our conversation to say, “Can we write about language?” Her suggestion was broad, opening up a myriad of possible directions in which she and any others interested could spin the topic as they wrote to their families. I tried to hide my excitement, eager to know whether others shared Sandra’s preference *without* my partiality toward it influencing them. Regardless, I smiled as I turned to record this idea for consideration.

Sharing Each Child’s Focus

After voting on the children’s three favorite journal topics, a small but excited group of students joined me, journals in hand, to write about language. The beauty of a group of three was that they would all have the chance to weigh in on our discussions, and I would be able to help each of them think through individual ideas regarding what they wanted to say to their families about this wide-open topic of *language*. We had a greater chance of engaging in “critical and liberating dialogue” (Freire, 1972, p. 52), both with one another and with families, if we could hear and respond to all voices.

As the other children gathered around Ms. Lester and Ms. Hanover, the student teachers leading the groups focused on mammals and Alma Flor Ada, Christopher, Michael, and Sandra followed me to a kidney shaped table toward the back of the classroom. After we had settled into our seats, chairs pushed up to the table and pencils in hand, we began.

“Okay, y’all,” I said. “So, if we’re going to be writing about language in our home journals this week, what are some things that you might want to write about?” As was our custom during Family Dialogue Journals, the children were writing about a common topic, but could connect what they had learned about this topic in any way they wanted. The threads of their experience, those aspects of our unit that most closely resonated with them, inevitably guided their choices, as we began brainstorming specific ideas for the aspects of our contextualized language study each child wished to include.

Language, literature, and family connections. Sandra began, saying she wanted to write about the time when “we had made our friend come, and she brung books in English and Spanish.” Sandra, who spoke English at home, was referencing Ms. JoBeth, a university professor who visited regularly and often brought multilingual books for us to borrow. The children greatly anticipated her visits, asking, as they carefully combed through books she had already lugged into the room in a cardboard box, when she would be back again. They treated these texts carefully, reaching for the corners with the tips of their fingers to turn the pages gingerly, gazing at the illustrations in books like *We Are the Ship* (Nelson, 2008) and *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* (Hopkinson, 1995) for minutes at a time. As the world went on around them, with friends having to step over their sprawled frames and conversations related to other activities taking place inches from their noses, the children visiting this cardboard box of literary treasures were never disappointed, always finding something they connected with, or that piqued their interest. In many ways, “We sought out children’s literature as a trusted medium to investigate our own lives as well as the lives of those different from ourselves” (Thiel, McCreight, & Coombs, 2012, *in press*).

Nodding, I realized I had not considered this particular part of our classroom life when I thought about what the students might want to share with families, but it made sense, connecting to multiple classroom events and activities. Not only were we currently writing our own texts in Spanish, English,

and French, but we had co-authored with families a bilingual text of family stories during the students' kindergarten year. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, while describing our Language Invitation activity, the children continued to reference the creation of this text from so many months ago, thus demonstrating its "clear echoes of intertextual links" (Kamberelis & Bovino, 1999, p. 153), the obvious relevance they found in the construction and recollection of these co-constructed narratives.

I, too, remembered the creation of this text, an authorship process rich in its community involvement. While our creation of the bilingual book took over two months from start to finish, with the children using school time to individually write family stories, our Writing Workshop Night was a critical and an anticipated part of this process. I believe this night, during which children, families, community members, and teachers collaboratively created many of the stories that filled our book, brought our co-authorship project to life, and caused it to continue occupying space in our minds. This experience was not unique to us; writing family stories has resonated with classroom communities around the country (Ada & Campoy, 2004), sometimes resulting in "the biggest storytelling event of the year" (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 112), just as it did in our case.

The week before the event, these kindergarten-aged children had written and illustrated family invitations, asking them to attend a two-hour story writing session in the evening. We encouraged adults to bring younger siblings or extended family, and set up stations with blocks, books, and puppets to capture their interest. We hoped many families would be able to participate, knowing work/home conflicts might prevent some of them from attending; we were also clear that families who could *not* attend could write their story at home and later send it in to school for inclusion in our final text. Versatility, becoming attuned to the varying needs of students and their families, was crucial to the success of this project (Henderson, Johnson, Mapp, & Davies, 2007).

Around 5:00, families began to trickle in. Naldo first burst through the door, with a baseball hat crookedly perched on his head and a shy grin on his face, followed closely behind by Julissa. Their families came together, and Naldo's mother and brother, along with Julissa's mother, soon peeked their

head around the door. Mr. Oswaldo, Ms. JoBeth, and I had been setting sandwiches, brownies, and fruit on trays, and paused to hug and greet the families, encouraging them to grab a plate of food and settle in.

Naldo and Julissa, however, were not yet interested in the food. Instead, they dragged their mothers by the hand to their Writing Workshop folders, from which they pulled the drafts of their previously written family stories. They began reading enthusiastically in English, as we had constructed all of our school writing up until this point in this common school language.

I smiled, and it took Mr. Oswaldo's whispered voice for me to realize the discomfort Naldo and Julissa's mothers might have felt as their children read aloud to them in English. "Their moms can't understand what their stories are about if they read them in English," he simply stated, and I realized this was the case whenever *any* of their children's work was returned to them from school. Proud as they surely were of Julissa and Naldo, I wondered how it felt for them to fix their faces into excited features, smiling and nodding at what they hoped were the right times, all the while not knowing the words their children were speaking (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Mr. Oswaldo's intention to translate each classroom-constructed family story into Spanish held even more weight than it previously had, as I realized the language in which the children wrote these narratives might be keeping their most personal audience at a linguistic distance.

I also wondered how the rest of the evening would pan out. *Will the Spanish-speaking children write their words in English with their families present, or will they venture into the largely unexplored land of biliteracy? Will they intuitively construct pages in both English and Spanish?* I realized I needed to trust the families to figure out the best way to construct their page. We had left the structure of the book open-ended, planning to share the mentor texts that had inspired the students to write a family stories book, *En Mi Familia/In My Family* (Garza, 1996) and *Cuadros de Familia/Family Pictures* (Garza, 1993) as a loose guide, but encouraging them to deviate from this model as they felt was appropriate.

More families began to arrive and the hectic pace of our evening together began. The excitement in the air was palpable, the children each entering our classroom with both exhilaration and apprehension, feeling slightly out of sorts as they arrived with wet hair from afternoon baths, full stomachs from early

dinners, and the distinct sense that the darkness descending outside was different than the darkness in which they entered our classroom each morning. Mack soon bounded in, a huge smile on his face reflecting that of his mother, who followed her son down the hallway at a slightly slower pace.

“It gettin’ dark out!” Mack said with wonder, as he walked over to our Writing Workshop folder box to pull out his previous writing to share with Natalie. She listened attentively as he slowly and purposefully read his words to her. When she realized his family story was about a time when they had worked on the computer at home, she exclaimed, “Mack, you remember that? Wow.”

He smiled proudly and nodded, the two of them engaging in a distinctly different linguistic experience than Naldo, Julissa, and their families. Because Mack and Natalie’s home language was similar to the English we spoke in school, Mack’s reading aloud served as both evidence of his continued growth as a reader, and as a communication tool between him and his mother.

Soon, Aaron, Michael, and each of their mothers walked in together. We repeated our ritual of hugs, greetings, and the children reading from their writing folders, before everyone helped themselves to snacks and settled in at the children’s desks. Mr. Oswaldo and I stood to welcome the families. He helpfully translated my English explanations to Spanish, so all families had access to the plan for the evening. I began to share with them the family storybooks that had inspired us to create our *OWN* co-authored text.

Naldo raised his hand, rising from his seat and walking confidently to the front of the classroom. “See,” he said to the families, taking the book from my hands, “they are written in Spanish and English.”

Mack followed his friend’s lead, standing and saying to the families present, “If you put these together, it’s like a family, even though the letters are not the same.” When asked what he meant, Mack told us he liked how the author wrote the books in two different languages.

The children were on a roll, sharing what they were learning about bilingual books. Julissa was next, saying, “Ms. McCreight reads this book in English and Mr. Oswaldo reads it in Spanish.”

Finally, Michael took the texts from my hands to say, in a clear, somber voice, “If you put these together, it’s like a family, because they are the same.” He was drawing attention to the similarities

between the two books' illustrations and set up, as Garza had chosen to write each in Spanish and English, with a corresponding picture drawn on the page directly opposite each narrative.

These kindergarten students took ownership of our Writing Workshop Night. Their juxtaposition between English and Spanish, the referencing of our classroom's commitment to sharing stories in our two home languages, conveyed the power the children found in sharing family stories using the language of their homes and communities.

The personal nature of our book's stories required an equally personal voice with which to tell it. Mr. Oswaldo and I stated that the important part was they enjoy their time writing and reminiscing together. As a result, each family approached the writing process differently. Mack and Natalie wrote about a trip to Six Flags over Georgia. She was consistently amazed at the details of their visit that Mack remembered, saying again and again, "You remember that? Wow." The two of them worked together intently, with Natalie listening to Mack tell the story as she wrote his rendition of events. The final product was truly co-constructed, consisting of her penmanship and Mack's illustrations. It read:

Mack and his family outing

Written by: Mack and Mommy

Story told by: Mack

We went to Six Flags for a family picnic. We rode on the Scream Machine. Mack was very scared, but his Mommy held him tight so he would not fall. We did all sorts of things there like basketball, and my Dad did the Super Dunk! My Dad won my brother and I a Super Cane. It was so much fun.

(See Figure 7.2).

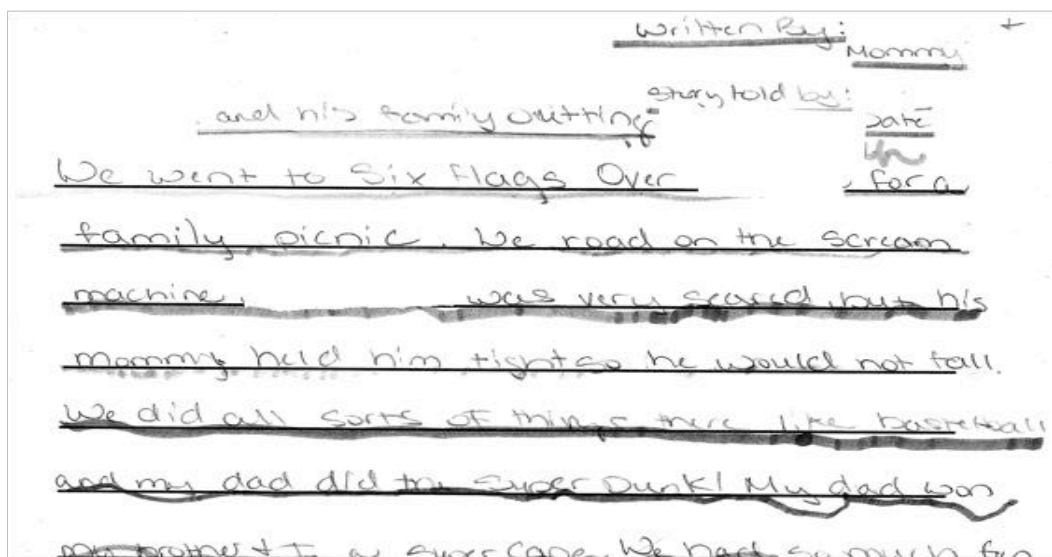


Figure 7.2: Mack and Natalie's Family Story

Natalie and Mack incorporated inclusive wording such as “we” throughout the text, making clear the fact that they were not only writing together, but were writing about an event in their family’s history that merited mentioning of all participants.

Each of the Spanish-speaking families took a similar approach to the creation of their text. After discussing the story they would tell together, Aaron’s, Julissa’s, and Naldo’s mothers all wrote the words in Spanish, while their children drew the illustrations. By the end of the evening, we could read about a Day of the Dead celebration, a superhero-themed birthday party, and a trip to the park that resulted in a family spotting a rabbit they mistook for a dog. As I listened to families quietly discuss in Spanish the contents of their pages, it struck me once again that the language in which they shared their stories influenced their collaboration. Common stories required a common language through which to discuss their written construction.

Only Maggie and Michael chose to have the younger member of their partnership write the story’s words. I heard the influence of Maggie’s profession, teaching, in her interactions with her son. They wrote about a time when they had eaten at the restaurant Red Lobster, a favorite family activity. Michael wanted to write about the cheesy rolls, and about the fun they had together. As he did so, Maggie

would say, “What sounds do you hear in that word? Stretch it out. Write everything you hear.” And Michael would, focusing with an intensity I had never witnessed during school hours. Writing was difficult for Michael, as he often told me, and he preferred reading books to writing them. However, as he sat with his mother, he carefully scripted each and every letter, his tongue between his teeth and his pencil pressed hard to the paper. In the end, Maggie took her turn at writing, as well, giving Michael a break so he could focus on illustrating their co-authored piece. It read:

Me and my family likes to go out to eat. We have fun. We see the lobster. I like to eat the cheese biscuits. Michael likes to go out to dinner with just his papa. Their favorite place to go is Ryan's.
(See Figure 7.3)

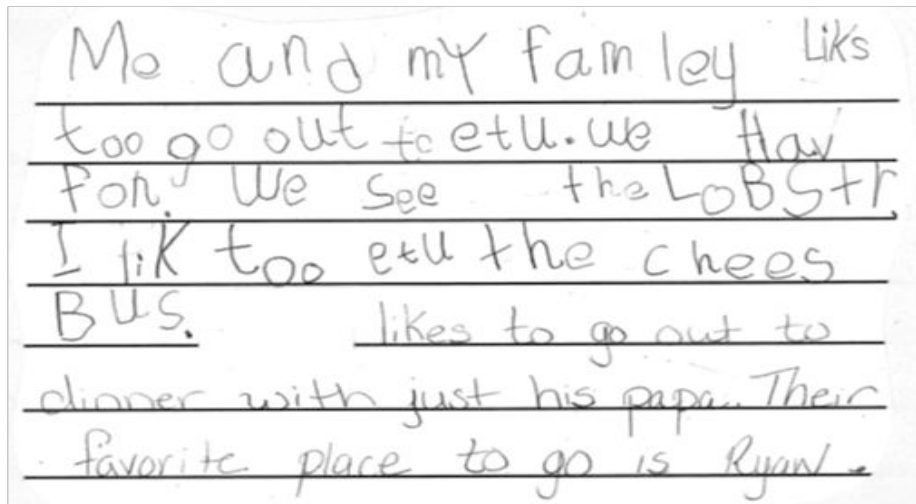


Figure 7.3: Michael and Maggie's Family Story

Interestingly, Michael's recollection of his family's time at Red Lobster included the use of "we," much like Mack's, showing his acknowledgement of the co-construction of the text and the event itself. However, Maggie shifted the focus to Michael and his papa (grandpa) when she picked up the pen to write, using words like "their" instead of "our," and taking herself out of the experience about which she was writing.

By the conclusion of our evening together, each family had finished writing and illustrating their story, with the children proudly handing them to me before we all exchanged hugs, passed out extra food,

and said good-bye for the evening. I collapsed in a chair after the last child waved goodnight, exhausted, but struck by the power of inviting families to share their stories. The presence of families spurred in the children an intensity to write, a purpose for penning these personal narratives that surpassed most of our Writing Workshop sessions. As González, Moll, & Amanti (2005) once said,

The purpose of drawing on student experience with household knowledge is not to merely reproduce household knowledge in the classroom... Instead, by drawing on household knowledge, student experience is legitimated as valid, and classroom practice can build on the familiar knowledge bases that students can manipulate to enhance learning. (p. 43)

By incorporating home narratives into a school project, then, we had legitimated the students' experiences as valid, worthy of attention and the permanence associated with putting pencil to paper.

Further, families were now more aware of the structure and set-up of our Writing Workshop, which made them more familiar with the learning occurring in school. Such a connection between home and school, focused around an age-appropriate topic that merged backgrounds and experiences with classroom goals, was critical in lessening the divide between these two spaces (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005). As Ada and Campoy (2005) found, "When you invite parents to become authors and to share their voices with your class, you are opening a door that parents never thought existed" (p. 67). Even at this early point in our two years together, I hoped that on the other side of this door were more conversations, future projects, and an increased tendency for families and teachers to see themselves as critically valuable assets.

In addition to lessening the physical and content-based divide between school and home, our Family Writing Workshop Night also went a long way in lessening the *linguistic* divide. Nieto (2002) said, "Because language and culture are intimately connected, and because both bilingual and multicultural approaches seek to involve and empower the most vulnerable students in our schools, it is essential that their natural links be fostered" (p. 84), and we found this natural link to be involving families in active, tangible ways. This night reminded me that many of my students lived and breathed in two distinctly separate linguistic worlds, while also showing me these two worlds did not *have* to be so

separate. As Nieto (2002) went on to assert, “Writing may pose an especially difficult challenge for some...students because of the fact that their home culture are neither represented nor affirmed in school curricula” (p. 164), which made this activity particularly crucial in developing family/school partnerships that might result in children feeling connected to and achieving in school. Our classroom community could go further in welcoming multiple languages and dialects than simply reading multilingual and multidialectal books; we could also increase our concept of authors in the classroom to include our families as mentors (Ada & Campoy, 2005).

The next day, I invited students who had not been able to attend to take home paper, pencils, and crayons, and sit down with a family member to write their *OWN* stories. We talked about the fact that our evening session may not have been convenient for all families, and they could engage in home writing sessions and still contribute to our book. Our family stories trickled in, with each child presenting stories in Spanish or English they wrote with mothers, fathers, siblings, or even extended families.

Soon, *every child and family* had contributed to our book.

One-hundred percent participation is rare in teaching. In my experience, families receive so much information from school, much of it they need to respond to, that they do not always complete every assignment their child carries through the door. After all, our agenda is not always their agenda, and our priorities do not always coincide with their schedules or time constraints (Allen, 2007). However, the personal nature of this particular assignment, coupled with the fact that the children themselves were excited to complete it, elevated it on families’ list of priorities.

Not only were families able to get a glimpse into the writing abilities of their kindergarten-aged children, we had also invited them to share their experiences in ways uncommon in grammar notebooks or fill-in-the-blank vocabulary sheets. Writing their family stories did not require that anyone learn a second language, find reliable transportation, or carve out a specified hour of their day. While school events and activities sometimes cannot avoid these constraints, this one could; and it paid off, in the form of our co-authored picture book (Allen, 2007; Henderson, Johnson, Mapp, & Davies, 2007).

Each child continues to share. Back in our first grade classroom, Sandra had a specific interest in discussing the English and Spanish books Ms. JoBeth brought for us, demonstrating the connections she made between activities across time, and linking this desire to both our Family Writing Workshop Night and our current Family Dialogue Journal activity. Christopher and Michael also came to our language-focused group with specific thoughts regarding what they wanted to write about their study of words in the world.

“Christopher,” I asked him, after Sandra finished talking, “why did you choose this group? What did you want to write about?”

“Mmmm,” Christopher began, “language with Ms. Black.” Christopher was referencing the French book he was writing, with Ms. Black as his group’s teacher-leader. With a variety of other options open to him, such as writing about Alma Flor Ada or mammals, I took this as a testament to the enjoyment he found in telling a tale in French.

“Okay,” I affirmed, “so you want to write about working with Ms. Black, and what you’ve done?” When Christopher nodded his agreement, I moved on. “Michael, what did you want to write about? Why did you choose this group?”

Michael replied rather broadly at first, saying, “I chose this group because I wanted to talk about language.”

“Okay,” I said, “so what did you wanna say about it? What do you think is important about it?”

Just a few days after he and his peers laughed uncontrollably as they considered Martin Luther King, Jr. using any other register besides “speech talk,” Michael returned to this topic, therefore referencing discussions about MLK, Jr. and our current President, Barack Obama (Solsken, Willett, & Wilson-Keenan, 2000). “I learned about what you say in public places,” he specified, “and what you say when you havin’ a speech.”

Language and family learning connections. Once the students all shared their Family Dialogue Journal ideas, and after we had fleshed them out together, they were ready to begin writing. They

concentrated, eyebrows furrowed and pencils moving slowly across papers. “Dear Mom” and “Dear family” soon appeared at the top of each fresh piece of notebook paper.

The children then presented the content they had mentioned in our initial discussion. It was at this point that Sandra, primarily an English speaker, brought up a disconnect she felt between her use of Spanish in school, and what she interpreted as her brother’s lack of appreciation for multiple languages.

After telling me her mother did not want her brother to speak Spanish at home, leading to me ask her why, Sandra replied, “Because he don’t learn Spanish that much.”

Initially wondering if her family would rather we only write and speak in English at school, I continued to question her. I knew that making assumptions about a family’s beliefs, intentions, or lifestyle could squash any budding relationship before it had the chance to begin. “Oh,” I hesitantly began, “Like, he doesn’t know your words? That you’re using?”

Sandra expanded on her original statement. “My mom said that he couldn’t say words in that language, and that she didn’t know if they were cuss words or not.”

“Ooohhh,” I said, suddenly understanding. I was reminded of Lorena’s sly use of Spanish curse words right under my nose her kindergarten year, until another Spanish-speaking classmate told me about her infraction. *What a powerful way to use language*, I remembered thinking, *however misguided or tricky*. In an academic world where adults sometimes do not know the language of children’s homes, where students are often asked to learn without explanation a language with which they are largely unfamiliar, I could see a child’s motivation in taking back some power over the words in her world.

In the case of Sandra’s brother, this was not what was happening. However, I thought about his mischievous nature, how he loved to play tricks on teachers by tapping their shoulders and running away before they saw him, and that playing with words seemed right up his alley. Sandra confirmed her brother was using Spanish curse words in front of his parents.

“And that’s why he can’t say ‘em,” Sandra continued.

I desired to take this moment of disconnect between Sandra’s and her brother’s experiences with language and turn it into an opportunity to learn together, a chance for Sandra to share what she knew

about Spanish and its personal connection to many of her classmates. Sandra was drawing attention to the difficulty often inherent in recognizing and embracing multilingualism, therefore capturing “the struggle of translation and difference in contexts where cultural and linguistic practices, histories, and epistemologies collide” (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999). I wanted to make the transition less complicated for her, suggesting a space within which she and her brother could discuss how she felt.

“You know what?” I said. “It would be really great if you’d share our Spanish book with your brother, wouldn’t it? To show how you can say nice things in other languages, too.”

“Can he come to our language celebration?” Sandra asked, referring to the post-authorship bash we had listed on our language study chart as our preference for a culminating activity.

“Maybe we can do that,” I agreed.

Sandra’s desire to share, beyond our Family Dialogue Journals, what we were learning with our families and friends had become a common practice for us. This was evident when Mack told me, during a visit I made to his home, that he loved to talk to his family about what he was learning in school “cause [home is] an important place to talk to people.” It was evident when the children thoughtfully considered one another’s participation in classroom events, such as when Daisy reminded me on a day Jorge was absent that I could not forget to add his character to the rough draft of our English text about world-changers. It was evident when I focused the children on one another rather than always on *me*, saying, “I’m not the most important person in this classroom! Share with your friends what you just learned,” encouraging them to Think/Pair/Share their ideas as peers.

Michael’s focus. As Christopher, Sandra, and Michael continued to write, I helped to stretch out the sounds in words or questioned them regarding ways they could expand what they wrote.

“Language,” Michael said aloud as he wrote, “is good, or bad, or different.” Soon after he began, he had paused in pursuing his idea of writing about the language associated with giving speeches, and focused instead on the power of words to make people feel “good” or “bad.”

As I realized what he was doing, it was difficult for me to refrain from sweeping him into a hug. I was thrilled he was independently referencing our discussions on the power of language, a classroom

topic that began with our conversation about the power we have over caterpillars on the playground that had continued to influence our daily interactions. Even in a Family Dialogue Journal focused on our contextualized study of language, Michael chose to tell his family about the influence words have on others, a concept he played with while teasing out the particularities of his hunch that linguistic discrimination was comparable to racial prejudice.

Even more thrilling was his addition of the word “different,” since it conveyed his nuanced understanding that the intricacies of language use could not be conveyed in binary terms, and that language was infinitely more complex than the words “good” and “bad” could express. Instead, for Michael, language was also “different,” a testament to his growing realization that the registers into which we had been categorizing language represented not *inferior* and *superior* ways of speaking, but *different* options for sharing with others (Lobeck, 2005). In this moment, all of our lessons about the complexity of power, Ms. Callie’s effort to show our students the multiple perspectives we need to consider when thinking about having authority over others, my attempts to embed conversations about the power of language into texts such as *My Name is Yoon* (Recorvitz, 2003) – they were all worth it.

Nieto (2002) stated, “Curriculum and pedagogy can either reproduce the inequality with which students are confronted every day, or they can have transformative power for both individuals and institutions” (p. 172). Here, Michael communicated that our language study, coupled with his continued exposure to the languages and dialects his friends, family, and community spoke, had deepened his understanding of the fact that language is sometimes simply *different*. In his simply constructed sentence, Michael pushed against the belief that Standardized English is superior, stating his own view of language and sharing it with members of his home community.

Sandra’s focus. As Michael stretched out the word *language*, exclaiming, “I got the *g*! I got the *g*!” after writing l-a-n-g on this paper, Sandra handed me what she had so far.

I read her work aloud. “We have Spanish and English books.”

Noticing she had forgotten punctuation, Sandra said, “Mmm, I forgot the period.”

“Alright, so now what?” I nudged her, knowing writing was not Sandra’s favorite subject, that she struggled with hearing sounds and forming the letters that represented them, and that she often needed prompting to push herself beyond the self-constructed boundaries of her learning.

Sandra thought for a moment before saying, “Oh, we can bring the book home! The ones with English and Spanish.”

“Great!” I encouraged her. “We can bring a book home with English and Spanish words, yeah!”

Though Sandra was referring to an opportunity to bring home the multilingual books she and her classmates were currently writing, she likely derived this suggestion from the distribution of our Family Stories book the previous year. Here, she was referencing the final piece of our project, the opportunity to share our book with one another, and the way we all gained access to the deeply personal narratives written in our home languages and the home languages of our friends.

My mind wandered back to our kindergarten year as I recalled how we had managed for every family to have a copy of our bilingual text, traveling down the thread of a memory Sandra had extended. After our Family Writing Workshop Night concluded, and upon receiving other families’ stories, Mr. Oswaldo and I spent evenings putting it all together. Mr. Oswaldo translated every story, and I organized, glued, hole-punched, and strung together the individual writing that made up the book in its entirety.

We spent two weeks on this work, compiling the brightly colored text just in time to enter it in a young authors competition at our local university. Other young writers judged the competition, and they honored our book with the title “Most Creative Picture Book.” The judges gave us feedback, saying they crowned us “Most Creative” because of our incorporation of English and Spanish into the same text. The students beamed when I told them this, each one touching the gold embossed sticker now gracing our book’s cover. Having these young authors name us “Most Creative” was not only pleasing to our egos; it also justified our hunch, extending from our kindergarten year into our contextualized language study in first grade, that multilingual books written with families were the exception rather than the rule in classrooms. By the time Daisy and Lorena, as first graders, posed to us the problem that we did not have

enough multilingual books in our libraries and communities, we had experiences like this and others from which to draw.

Riding on a cloud of exuberance, thrilled others had read our book and deemed it worthy of an award, and buoyed by the realization that it had been elevated by our families' contributions, we carried our Family Stories book to a place of honor on our open-faced display shelves. There it sat, with children reading it daily, laughing at the tales their friends and families told and stretching out sounds in Spanish and English words. They were thrilled to be reading words so personal to them on both a linguistic and narrative level.

However, somewhere along the way, our exuberance died down, and we began to focus on other ideas and projects, standards-based lessons and collaborative projects taking up space in our minds. This gradual fading inspired in me a lack of direction, a nagging feeling that we had lost our critical focus and were drifting; somehow, I felt our project was not yet finished. As I wrote in my teaching journal, *I miss the time we took each day to focus on [the book], and the excitement and energy that went into creating the pages of something the children truly believed in.*

This feeling that the children no longer had time to focus on this carefully crafted project led me to consider a way for it to live on in their homes and communities. *Our next step*, I wrote, *is figuring out how to get all of our families copies of the text in its entirety... We will have to see how this unfolds, I suppose; and now that I think about it, this project is not yet as finished as I'd imagined it to be ☺.*

I began collecting price quotes from local printing businesses, and happened to mention our new focus to my Assistant Principal one morning.

"Bring me the book," she said. "That's a school project, and you're right, families should have a copy of it. Bring it to me, and we'll make sure it gets printed."

She did make sure, her interest in our book creating an opportunity for partnership between families, students, teachers, and administration (Henderson, Johnson, Mapp, & Davies, 2007). Within a week, a district employee delivered eighteen freshly bound black-and-white copies of our Family Stories

book directly to my classroom door. I worked to conceal my excitement from the children, who were intently working in their morning journals.

Later in the day, I called the children to the carpet. Once they had settled in, I said, “Do you remember when we talked about how we could continue to share our family stories?”

Many of them nodded, while others remained fixated on the box.

“Well,” I began, “our assistant principal helped us make sure we could share our book with people all throughout our community. You’re going to do that by taking a copy home with you!” My announcement was met with cheers and clapping, as the children sat up on their knees, trying to get a glimpse of the books in the box.

“They are not in color,” I told them, “but that just means you can add the colors yourselves! Then, you can take them home with you today.”

I passed a copy to each child, encouraging them to find a place in the classroom to read, color, and share their favorite pieces with friends. They happily obliged, and soon there were clusters of children fanning out in flower-shaped groups on the floor, their heads meeting in the middle and their legs extended behind them. Many of them found their own stories first, rereading what they wrote and carefully adding bright colors to their illustrations, thrilled to find their own words and drawings copied in the books of others. They read, colored, and shared for a full thirty minutes, stopping only to collect their backpacks and folders before heading for home.

We experienced the effect of this kindergarten extension into each child’s family and community for months to come. I caught a glimpse of the text on a desk when I visited Lorena’s home during her first grade year. Naldo mentioned the book during our Language Invitation activity at the beginning of our study of language. Similar to Gutiérrez’s (1999) experience in a classroom she once observed, “Talk, interaction, reading, writing, and sharing in a variety of codes and registers here were considered the means to productive learning” (p. 291), and the tangibility of extending books to communities ensured this project had staying power.

And now, here was Sandra, referencing the event once again as she shared with her family what she had learned about words in the world during our language study. She found value in this activity, as was evidenced by her remembrance and mentioning it from almost a year prior.

Christopher's focus. Next to Sandra and Michael, Christopher found his own approach to sharing with his family what he was learning during our language study.

I read from his journal, saying, “We are making a book. English and French. It’s about a girl. She is eight years old.” Christopher was telling his family about the text he was writing with his peers and Ms. Black, sharing about a language with which he and his family had little experience. Unlike many of his Spanish-speaking peers, Christopher had chosen to write a book in a language unfamiliar to him; he was fluent in both English and Spanish, yet he was interested in expanding his knowledge of words to include French, as well. This interest connected to our classroom experiences with visiting teachers who spoke French, Ms. Candace’s presentation on her home in Haiti and the earthquake that forever changed her community, and our French-speaking pen-pals from Ms. Candace’s mother’s school. For Christopher, French represented more than simply another language, as it reminded him of important people and the events in their lives that had resonated with him over the course of our language study.

Christopher made this connection clear when he drew a picture in his journal, detailing a room in which a TV sat, while the newscaster on the screen spoke about the earthquake that had ravaged Haiti. The French language represented for Christopher this tragic event and the people who experienced it. As it true with most linguistic connections, he associated French not only with words on a page, the sound they made and the letters constructing them, but also with the people who used it to tell the stories of *their* lives. It was not enough for Christopher to “stand on the opposite riverbank, shouting questions” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 100) to Haitians about the French language they fluently spoke; instead, he wanted to learn about and share in their experiences.

Constructing our Focal Question

As the children completed their journal entries, I realized we had not yet written the question we wanted to ask our families regarding words in the world. I wanted to scaffold the children toward writing

their own questions, and considering the communal nature of our contextualized language study, I believed a journal entry on this topic lent itself well to attempting this. As I have shown in previous chapters, we were becoming more likely to conversationally move away from pedagogic discourse focused on I-R-E (*Initiation-Response-Evaluation*) sequences of talk, and toward more dialogic, conversational registers (Eggins & Slade, 2005; Hicks, 1995; Wells, 1999). Though I struggled to let go of “teacher control,” I had recognized and begun to work against this tendency.

Therefore, I was interested in finding out whether I maintained this move toward dialogue, toward the co-construction rather than regurgitation of ideas, during our Family Dialogue Journal entry around language. Since writing open-ended questions, leading families to respond in creative ways, had been a challenge for my students since their kindergarten year, I knew I needed to support them in this process. It was my goal that my voice would be one of many, equal in weight, just as willing to concede to a students’ thought as to push for the inclusion of my own (Rymes, 2009).

The next section of this chapter is both a description of our discussion around creating a common question for our journals, and an analysis of how we negotiated registers and shared power with one another during this process.

Our conversation. Asking the children to put their journals aside, we settled in to talk about our options (*For a deconstructed analysis of our conversational acknowledgements and extensions, see Appendix H.*).

“Y’all,” I began, “what do you want to make your question? What do you wanna ask your families?” I opened our conversation with a question to which I had no pre-determined answer, one that created space for negotiation and was reminiscent of a conversational register (Eggins, 1999). While I wanted to focus us on the purpose of our conversation, I did not want to overly guide the construction of our question. By posing an open-ended question, using the mood of my sentence to set up a space for dialogue, I invited the children to freely share their ideas (*See Appendix I, which focuses on an interpersonal analysis of mood and modality.*).

Sandra began, keeping up the enthusiasm she had displayed throughout our writing session.

“What do you know about books, about English and Spanish?”

At the same time Sandra extended this option, Michael offered his own. “Ooohh, oohh! What do you know about language?” Michael’s confidence in his suggestion made it more likely I would hear him over Sandra, his exclamatory tone ringing above all other voices around him (mood).

“Okay,” I said, acknowledging both contributions. The questions were similar, both having to do with multiple languages and asking families what they knew about them. I was pleased that, so early in our conversation, the children were suggesting questions families could not answer in a “yes/no” manner.

Wanting to honor both Sandra and Michael’s contributions, I put my own spin on what they had said. “We can kinda put those together and say, ‘What do you know about English, French, and Spanish books?’ Or, ‘What do you know about the *language* in English, French, and Spanish books?’” I maintained my question-oriented tone, offering this up to the group as an option, rather than as a definitive decision; by using words like “kinda,” I kept the tone light, hedging to commit to my idea over others (modality).

Christopher noticed this, recognizing my idea did not have to be our question and offering his own. “Or, or language,” he said, leading us away from Michael and Sandra’s initial thoughts.

We followed him, willing to switch tracks, into a new line of thinking. I built off his suggestion, saying, “Or what languages do you know?”

Michael loved this idea, saying, “Ooh, ooh, I’m goin’ with that one. What language do you know.” In this moment, he embodied dialogue, as he demonstrated his willingness to accept an idea from a classmate that he believed was better for our journal’s question than his own (Freire, 1972).

I realized that the question they were settling on would lead them to a dead-end of family responses. They could not answer “yes” or “no,” but the responder could surely offer a one-word reply. Although the first questions Sandra and Michael had extended would have led to more in-depth answers from families, I found my initial joy at their nuanced, deepening understanding of question asking to be premature. I adjusted my role, moving into a more active position as I offered my perspective.

“Now, I wanna prepare you,” I warned, “if your family says ‘English,’ and that’s it... They could do that, it’s kinda like a yes or no question.” While my contribution conveyed the limitations inherent in their proposed question, it did not shut down conversation by evaluating it as being “correct” or “incorrect.” By using the phrasing, “I wanna prepare you,” I maintained a conversational focus, offering my thoughts without insisting they govern the outcome of our question’s construction. However, the discussion took on a hint of traditional classroom discourse at this point, as I led the children down a path to fine-tune their original idea, recognizing their question in its current state might lead to disappointing results, therefore following one of this register’s “tacit rules” (White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 33).

Further, by using the word “kinda,” I gently compared their offering to a “yes/no” question, and this approach lessened the likelihood that Christopher and Michael would feel as though I had shut down their idea. In some cases, comparisons like this are “made hierarchically in reference to something that has been established as the norm” (Scott, 1992, p. 216), and it was just such a binary comparison from which I was trying to move. Instead, it left their question open for discussion, for negotiation; by incorporating modality that made this outcome *possible* rather than *certain*, I also left open a conversational door (Harman, 2009).

“Or they might just say ‘Spanish,’ and then that’s all we have to talk about at the carpet,” I continued, expanding on the possibility that we might receive limited responses from families and linking the effects of this to our daily sharing circle. The carpet, our space for sharing family responses and (dis)connections to our perspectives on the world, was where our journals came alive. It was where we realized our similarities were much more common than our differences, and that when differences did arise, we could learn from the experiences of others. As Dyson & Genishi (1996) reminded us, “We all have a basic need for story, for organizing our experiences into tales of important happenings” (p. 2), and the sharing circle was where this happened for us. There was a finality in my phrasing (modality), “that’s all,” conveying my intuitive belief that a question like this one would severely limit our whole-class conversations about words in the world, thus severely limiting the sharing of our stories.

Wanting to invite the students back into this negotiation, and recognizing they might interpret my statements as the end of their contributions, I went on. “How could we make that question, so that they have a lot more to say? How could we change it?” Pointedly, I asked, “Christopher, can we change it a little bit?” Since we were deconstructing his question, I wanted him to be actively involved in its reconstruction. I wanted to invite him, and the rest of the children, back into negotiation.

Christopher continued trying to open up his question, next saying, “Which...language can you talk?” His voice swung up at the end of his sentence, conveying his hesitancy and lack of confidence in creating an open-ended question. He needed support in constructing a question that would lead to rich responses from families, and I knew we had to do so together – regardless of my intent for the children to come up with their *own* question. I recalled Vivian Vasquez’s (2004) perspective on teacher/child input in classrooms, when she said,

One of the concerns I had regarding child-centered pedagogies was the attitude embedded in commonly heard statements such as “I had nothing to do with it” (curriculum), or “It was all their idea,” as though the teachers ideologies or beliefs never played a part in what came to be curriculum. (p. 36-37)

I *did* have a hand in assisting children as they learned to construct questions that would open up written conversation with their families, and I acknowledged and worked with that here.

“Okay,” I said. “They could still just say English or Spanish.” While I still was not evaluating Christopher’s response as ‘right’ or ‘wrong,’ I felt it necessary to share with him the likelihood of a limited response from families. By using the word “still,” I conveyed that his alterations had not yet solved our problem (modality). Balance, I was realizing, was key in the pedagogic register, as I hovered somewhere in the middle of evaluative responses and purely conversational replies. We all needed to provide input into our question’s construction, but as the teacher, I wanted us to create a question that would elicit rich responses, rather than creating a question simply for the sake of doing so.

Michael offered his idea next. “What do you know about a different language?” In many ways, this question was an extension of Christopher’s original idea (“What language do you know?”), a reinterpretation of his friend’s idea that he suggested to ensure a comprehensive response from families.

“What do you think about that?” While I was excited we were once again thinking in the realm of open-ended questions, as we had begun to do with Sandra’s question, I did not want to color the children’s thoughts on this new question by completely giving away my own. So, I continued to negotiate with the children, asking them what they thought (mood).

“Yes,” Christopher said simply, nodding.

I opened up a bit more, offering my own perspective by saying, “That would get some more responses, wouldn’t it?”

Christopher quickly jumped back into the conversation, for which I was grateful. I had worried that the multiple adjustments we made to his question might silence him, might make him feel as though he had little to contribute (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Rymes, 2009).

“Like, I know about...English, and I talk in English!” Christopher exclaimed, offering us a possible response families might have to Michael’s suggested question. His exclamatory nature conveyed his excitement, his belief that this inquiry would lead families to respond in interesting ways (mood).

“Yeah!” I encouraged him. “And your family could say that, couldn’t they? They could say, I know about this language, and this is when I use it.” I wanted to restate and build upon Christopher’s contribution, to validate what he had said. Pedagogic discourse and casual conversation continued to intertwine, as my affirmation of Christopher’s statement served as an evaluation, while at the same time acknowledged the co-construction of our journal question (Eggins & Slade, 2005; Hicks, 1995).

“My uncle,” Christopher began again, apparently wishing to share something about his family in the context of the creation of our journal question. Before he could finish, however, I cut him off, continuing the conversation by excitedly offering my own idea for a question. Although I know this occurs in classrooms, and I do not recall even hearing Christopher begin to speak, I am regretful I did not

hear what he wished to share. As he attempted to extend another connection to our current topic, I unknowingly stopped him, moving full-speed-ahead into the continued negotiation of our question.

However, although I disappointedly missed Christopher's extension here, I demonstrated my respect for the students' work in my next breath.

"Ooh, what about this? When do we learn about *different* languages? Or when do you *use* different languages?" I extended my own questions here, building off the children's original thoughts. The exclamatory nature of these sentences, coupled with my role as *teacher*, made it likely the children would go along with my contribution (Rymes, 2009). I had the opportunity to tweak their question slightly, to stamp it with my own voice, and it is likely no one would have questioned this.

Yet, I stopped myself. "No!" I exclaimed, realizing they had constructed a more nuanced question than I was currently posing. "I like your question better. Can we stick with Michael's question?"

Just as Michael had done earlier, when he realized he preferred Christopher's question to his own, I allowed myself to realize the question needed no alterations. I was learning from and with my students, negotiating with them, offering my thoughts when I felt a draft of their question might lead to a conversational dead-end, and later prizing a more nuanced draft of that same question above my own.

I did not evaluate each student's question as "right" or "wrong," as something we should drop if it did not emerge from their mouths as a perfectly constructed, open-ended option for our journals. Instead, the questions I asked the children, and the modality present in the feedback I gave them, demonstrated I saw each question posed as one step closer to a fully-flushed out, discussion-inducing inquiry.

"What do you know about other languages?" We had our question, the sentence we wished to use to enhance our opportunity to learn from and with families regarding the use of words in our world. It had the potential to spark a variety of responses in the minds of those we loved, which could lead to not only interesting discussions at home, but discussions at school as we shared family responses from multiple families.

Similarly, since I responded to the students' suggestions with either my own questions or statements, where the modality present allowed for continued negotiation, we kept ourselves from falling

into the all-too-familiar pattern of Initiation (“What do you wanna ask your families?”), Response (“What languages do you know?”), Evaluation (“No, because families could write one-word responses. Next?”). We maintained elements of a pedagogic discourse register, since I offered my expertise in what constituted an open-ended question, and a casual conversation register, because we massaged the question *together* until it resulted in an unrestricted inquiry.

The children spent the last few minutes of our Family Dialogue Journal session writing the question at the bottom of their own entries, which were as unique in their construction as the question was consistent. Each connected differently to our language study, writing about the Family Stories book we had authored during kindergarten, the creation of our multilingual texts, the power of language, and Barack Obama’s expertise at giving speeches. Yet, we worked together and shared conversational power in order to reach our goal of co-constructing an identical question that represented and built upon each of their entries. Not only did we all agree in the end, we took one another’s feedback and were willing to acknowledge when we believed someone else had created a question better suited to the task than ours.

Our classroom was a dialogic space, a space in which the children felt free to offer their ideas and to actively participate in continuing to adjust them, if necessary. It was a space in which I had begun to allow myself to meaningfully contribute to our discussions, realizing my voice needed to blend with the voices of the children if we were to learn from and with one another. This conversation revealed that we had come a long way from my silencing students’ extended topics for discussion, as I had done when they tirelessly referred to the Chinese language as a possible focus for our multilingual books. In this case, I had become more willing to negotiate during conversations, to say, “I wanna prepare you,” rather than shutting down a topic altogether. The result of this negotiation was a discussion within which Sandra, Michael, Christopher, and I co-constructed a relevant question to place at the bottom of their journal pages. While this was by no means a linear process, and we would surely move back and forth between these registers during future lessons, I was more aware of my role as “teacher,” and what this meant in verbal interactions with my students.

Unexpected outcomes. I looked forward to receiving family responses to the journal entries Michael, Sandra, and Christopher constructed. I anticipated reading them on my own, sucking in air as I read a particularly interesting part of a family's paragraph. I envisioned our group members reading their words and the words of their families aloud, as their classmates listened and then offered connections, disconnections, or asked questions for clarification.

None of this, however, actually happened.

As is often the case in schools, my students and I lost momentum during the coming week, forgetting our prior academic commitments in the face of an unanticipated interruption. This interruption, unfortunately, did not come in the form of a field trip, school play, or mandatory candy sale.

No. Our interruption, the topic that kept us from engaging in discussion around our families' responses to Family Dialogue Journals, was a conversation about deportation.

Over two months after Hector's tearful declaration that someone had insisted they move back to Mexico, Jorge and Naldo approached me. With wide eyes, they relayed separate accounts of a "bad man" calling their homes, mirroring Hector's words from what seemed like so long ago.

"He's calling the homes of all people who speak Spanish and who are from Mexico," Jorge asserted, "and telling them they have to move back unless they have their papers. My family already has a big ol' bag."

"Can I tell my friends during Morning Meeting?" Naldo asked, and I nodded yes, staying silent as if to push away the gravity of what they were telling me.

If I did not say it aloud, maybe it was not true.

We had responded to Hector's original story with bravado, our hugging party being just the beginning of our attempt to take back our feelings of safety and community from the man on the phone. After Mr. Oswaldo and I contacted Hector's family, finding out they had no intention of moving, and as the children wrote multilingual books and focused on the beauty of linguistic diversity, the man's voice had faded from our minds until we could almost not hear it at all.

But here he was again, shouting in our ear twofold, a reminder that our community was not immune to the anti-immigration politics present in our country.

After each boy told their friends in the Morning Meeting circle about these events, I began to see Spanish-speaking students making the “connections” sign around the carpet, their thumb and pinky extended in a show of solidarity. As child after child began to share their own family’s experiences with immigration services, telling tales of border crossings, and tallying how many of their parents had citizenship, our state’s pending immigration legislation became very, very real.

I felt numb, shut down, yet angry and fired up all at once. I wanted to scream through the halls, shouting that I would be focusing our classroom curriculum on social/emotional learning and suspending any mention of our state’s standards. As Oscar reminded us, “We are a classroom family,” and as part of this family I felt compelled, obligated, to respond to the immediate needs of my students.

I did not scream, though. I simply continued to listen. As the children told their stories, those with similar experiences connecting and those without similar experiences trying to understand, I had a thought which I later wrote in my teaching journal; *I don’t think it’s too much of a stretch to think that this conversation was an acceptable one in our classroom at least in part because of our language conversations, and acceptance of people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.* The children knew, based on previous conversations and extended classroom topics, their teachers and peers would give them space to discuss a painful topic. They could be confident, from our consistent desire to learn from families, read literature representing diverse children, and our sustained focus on the creation of multilingual books, that we would listen to their story without passing negative judgment.

I offered few words, providing support with a simple smile or hug as I continued to wrestle with my own feelings of disempowerment, the realization that as interconnected as we were to one another, we were also inextricably held to the institutional and societal ties that bound us.

Thankfully, though, Michael wrapped up our comments, connections, and tears with a revelation, centering us back on the focus of our yearlong dialogue around contextualized language use. He had grown tired of holding his hand in the air, since so many children wanted to share, and I almost did not

call on him. I noticed his stricken face, though, when I said “and last one” to another child, his look pleading with me to give him a chance to comment.

When I nodded, he sat up from his spot against the wall and brought his knees down from against his chest until he was sitting in a criss-cross position.

“I wish,” he began, “that people with different skin color and different ways of talking could still be together.” I wondered in this moment if he felt an unfortunate kinship to his African American heroes, those like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks who had fought tirelessly to end racial discrimination; here he was, after all, facing discrimination of a different sort, a discrimination that affected his close friends and threatened to turn his classroom world upside down.

I was struck in this moment by Michael’s sincerity, his seriousness, and as I watched him speak, an image of Martin Luther King, Jr. as a child popped into my mind.

“You know, boys and girls,” I said, “all of the world-changers we’ve ever talked about started their lives as children.”

They nodded; we had talked about this before.

“*You*, Michael, and everyone else in here could work to make this change happen,” I encouraged them. “Now, you can’t do it alone – just look at all the help MLK and Rosa Parks needed! But you could do it.”

Again, there were knowing nods around the circle.

Michael leaned back with a slight smile on his face, and he nodded at me almost imperceptibly.

“Don’t ever forget that,” I added, for their benefit and for mine.

And I hope we never do.

Summary

This conversation was perhaps the most significant intertextual connection our class had made to date. The freedom multiple children felt in expressing very personal family events with their entire class, and the willingness of their classmates to respond to these stories with care and love, was the result of a myriad of intertwined communal activities and conversations from our two years of learning together.

This freedom and care was fostered by the creation of our Family Stories book, open discussions about parents' gun use, and the diverse literature brought to us by university friends.

It was fostered by Family Dialogue Journals, the two-year communication tool that allowed us into peers' homes on a weekly basis. Even though we were unable to share our most recent language journals because of this spontaneous conversation, their creation was important in continuing to build the thick threads of connection we had begun constructing almost two years before we wrestled with deportation issues. The remerging of our language study with our commitment to learning with and from families reminded us to remember and celebrate the language of our homes, our families. It gave Christopher, Michael, and Sandra another chance to connect their in- and out-of-school lives, blurring the lines between them.

Without knowing this would happen, the reconnection of our family partnership and language study recreated space for discussions around linguistic struggles from students' homes. It reminded us that we were a community of learners, that we could handle discussions around difficult topics in compassionate, dialogic ways, and that the personal struggles families faced had a place in our room.

While this conversation was painful, leaving me with an out-of-control feeling that angered me to my core, I was grateful the children had shared. The openness the students displayed in sharing personal trials was a testament to the space we had successfully created for "unofficial" spheres of learning and experience to permeate "official" school space (Dyson, 2001b). Whether our class discussed fear of deportation or not, this fear would have still been present in the minds of many Spanish-speaking students, and at least in sharing their fears they found solid support in the form of peers and teachers.

These discussions drove us forward to our Language Study Celebration, which represented our only tangible chance to fight back, to share the beauty of linguistic diversity with others. In the coming weeks, we put all our energy into this project.

If the children were to truly make change happen, this was where they would begin.

Possibilities for Extension

My students and I shaped so much of our language study through our willingness or *unwillingness* to listen to one another's perspectives and ideas. I have focused a lot on my less-than-perfect record in this area, acknowledging my tendency to travel the paved road, rather than the one with a few more potholes that might cause some bumps or scrapes, but also lead to a greater feeling of collaborative accomplishment in the end.

The moments when I smothered the students' ideas with my own went by in the blink of an eye, and without listening to and talking about our interactions, I would not have noticed the inequity in our contributions. Without taping and referring back to discussions that focused on Chinese, I might have forgotten the children's sustained interest, and continued to see our study through rose colored glasses – learning little but feeling darn proud of myself.

So, as we come to the last chapter of our language study, I challenge you to do what I had to push myself to do. Tape-record yourself and your students during a conversation you hope will be a negotiation of ideas. When you play it back later, listen for one or more of the following:

- ...when you acknowledged a child's line of thinking. What did you say? What did the child say in return?
- ...when you halted a child's line of thinking. What did you say? How did the conversation make a turn? Why do you think you responded this way?
- ...when a child contributed significantly *more* or *less* than others. What might have been the reasons for this engagement/disengagement? Is this a pattern for the child? What can you do to encourage dialogue in which *all* participants listen and are listened to?

It can be painful, no doubt, but pay attention to your struggles. Identify concrete suggestions for you to improve in weak areas. Then, tape another conversation and do this all over again, checking for improvement or (yikes!) more pitfalls. Reflecting on your practice can help you make great strides toward a dialogic classroom space.

CHAPTER 8

HOW IT ENDED AND WHAT WE LEARNED:

REFLECTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON A YEAR SPENT CONTEXTUALIZING
LANGUAGE

“Of all the many elaborate ways we as educators have devised to ‘get parents involved,’ we may have overlooked one of the most important: sitting down together and sharing our stories” (Allen, 2007, p. 22).

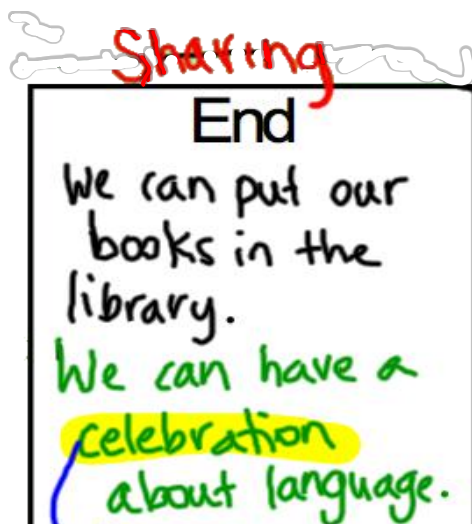


Figure 8.1: Ideas for Sharing Language

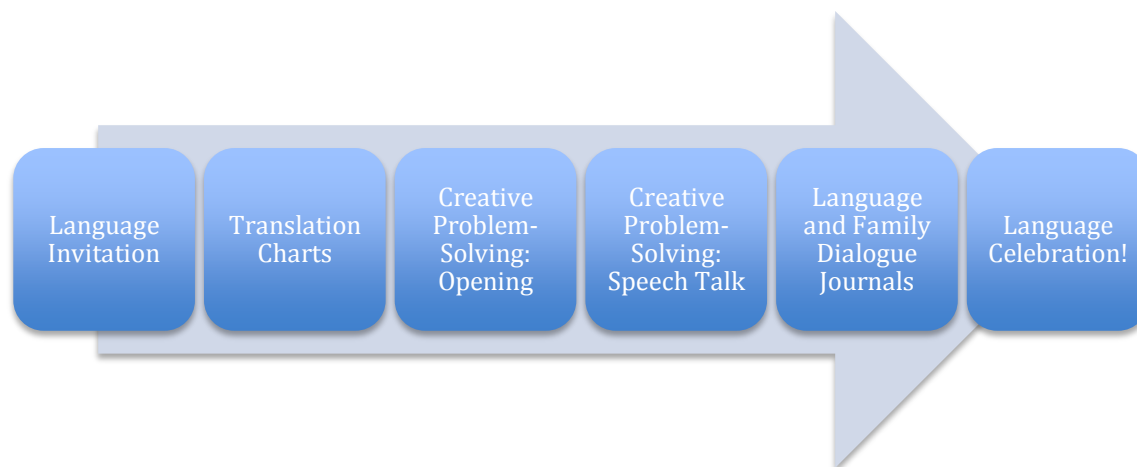


Figure 8.2: Unfolding of Language Activity #6

Concluding Our Unit: Conflicting Emotions

After a year of contextualized language study, of twists and turns and bumps along the way, my students, their families, and I faced the end of a second academic year together (*See Figure 8.2*). I wish I could say that our roller coaster slid smoothly to a stop at its final terminal, and we emerged in tact, smiling, hair blown backward but, for all intents and purposes, “fine.” However, the conclusion of our year together, of our community-driven study of words in the world, was not so simple.

I suppose we approached the conclusion of our study similarly to the way some people see the end of a coaster ride. In some ways we were exhilarated, fueled by the strength we found in community and in the beauty we saw in linguistic diversity. For this, I dreaded getting off for fear of losing our elation to the mundane nature of upcoming standardized tests and a summer without one another. Yet, our conversations about the man calling Spanish-speaking families to tell them to leave the United States left a nauseous feeling in our stomachs, leading us to anticipate the end of the ride, wanting to get off, to get away from a prejudicial experience we felt relatively powerless to address. As I wrote in my teaching journal, *Our language books and critical discussions seem to be such small contributions in the face of such a big fear*, and because of this feeling, I knew I could not completely enjoy myself.

We entered into the final weeks of our first grade year with mixed emotions. In the following pages, I will share what happened between the deportation conversations of the last chapter and our language celebration, a family- and community-oriented event meant to highlight the multilingual books we wrote. As Allen (2007) predicted, “sitting down together and sharing our stories” (p. 22) proved to be a powerful event in the life of our classroom community. Then, I will discuss my thoughts regarding the outcomes of our register-based language study, the types of conversations we engaged in during this study, and how we learned to negotiate power. I will weave into this discussion text from end-of-year interviews I held with Michael, Lorena, Mack, and Hector, and their families, as a way to support the conclusions I come to around these topics. Throughout, I will think critically about the work we engaged in, identifying what I believe led the students to a more nuanced understanding of words in use, as well as those times when I believe we fell short. Based on these findings, I will finish with recommendations for teachers and policy-makers.

Filling in Gaps: Events Leading Up to Our Language Celebration

After spending a significant amount of time and energy attempting to come to terms with Hector, Naldo, and Jorge’s fear of deportation, my students and I threw ourselves into finalizing and illustrating the content of our multilingual books, writing our final Family Dialogue Journal entries, and preparing for our upcoming celebration. We faced these activities, and our conflicting feelings of sadness and excitement, as members of an “intercultural exchange in which difference was celebrated without being romanticized” (Appiah, 2006, p. 149); though we found beauty in the words of our friends and families, we were becoming increasingly aware that not everyone shared this sentiment.

Michael’s Community Connection

As was often the case, Michael was the one to pull us out of the funk that inevitably clung to our classroom after engaging in multiple deportation conversations. After Jorge, Naldo, and many others shared with us the elaborate plans their family had constructed so they could reunite if they ever found themselves separated, the severity of their situation and the seriousness with which their families approached the impending immigration legislation floored me. Their descriptions of “reunion plans,”

ending in places as far away as Canada, poignantly reminded me of the fire drill evacuation plans my family and I had created when my brother and I were children. Our plan consisted of an agreement that we meet beneath a certain tree at the far end of our one-acre lot if we ever had to evacuate our house due to a fire. It struck me that new laws calling for my students' families to present papers if police officers ever pulled them over, the promise inherent in this that one slip-up might send them back to their home countries of Mexico or Guatemala, was their fire; Canada, then, was the tree in their backyard.

It was within this uncertain environment, a classroom in which at least one child a day approached me in the morning to tell me their own family's worries about deportation, or to burst into tears before exclaiming, "I don't want my friends to leave!" that Michael reminded us of the power of our community. He did so during one of our final Creative Problem-Solving activities, during which all three of our book groups were working on illustrations for their texts.

As Michael's peers sat comfortably sprawled on the floor with crayons or at tables with paints, carefully constructing detailed illustrations to enhance the words on each page of their books, he approached me.

"Excuse me, Ms. McCreight?" he politely inquired.

"Yes, Michael?" I asked, looking up from a picture of a time-traveling wizard I was watching Daisy color.

"I know why we're doing this," he said confidently.

"Why we're drawing these pictures?" I probed him.

"No, why we are doing *this*," he explained again, now pointing at the books around him. "Why we're making these *books*."

"Why, Michael?" I asked, as his expression took on a distant quality I sometimes noticed during journals or Morning Meeting.

"It's for community," he began, "to build a community, and do something to help the community."

“What are we doing for the community here, Michael?” I inquired, wanting him to tell me even more, sensing that we were on the cusp of verbalizing the sense of purpose we intuitively felt throughout the creation of our books.

“When people read our books,” he went on, “they can see that language can be different, and we can still like people who speak different.”

There it was. The connection I was wondering if he would come to, a realization that these books might help our larger community find the same beauty in linguistic diversity that we had acknowledged since the beginning of our kindergarten year together, when we began reading and speaking in Spanish, African American Vernacular English, and Standardized English. We had long taken the approach that encounters “with persons, one by one, rather than categories and generalities, [were] still the best way to cross lines of strangeness” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 29), and in the process of getting to know one another, we had become familiar with these linguistic varieties. Our work in register usage, in contextualizing the words we used based on our relationship with the person to whom we were speaking, had only drawn more attention to the beauty of words, to their power to make us feel big or small, comfortable or uncomfortable.

And here was Michael, realizing that exposure to multiple languages through reading our books might help others to do the same.

“You know what some people call that, Michael?” I asked him. “It’s called social justice, or social action, when you do something to help people see that the world could be different than it is.”

He nodded, taking in the term, trying it out on his tongue. “Social justice,” he whispered to himself.

After we neatly stacked our crayon boxes and squeezed water from paintbrushes, we all gathered at the carpet to share the progress we had made on our illustrations. Here, Michael and I restated his insight to the entire class.

He explained social justice and community work as, “When you’re helping people start doing things, and you get people doing things.” As he already knew, making change in the world involved

action. It required insightful people, like himself and his classmates, to recognize a problem in their community and to work, both physically and mentally, to change the status quo so that mainstream society acknowledges the lives of those different from them not as inferior but simply different, and always worthy of respect (Freire, 1972).

In light of the deportation and moving fears many students faced, and the dread their peers felt in the possibility of losing them, I knew our contribution to the community was small. We would share our books with our families, friends, and local libraries, and while it might help someone to see the linguistic world differently, it would do little to change the bleak forecast Spanish-speaking families were facing.

However, it was *something*, our best effort to “get people doing things.” I was, and remain, certain that there was a “world changer” or two in our classroom, and I hoped that the action we took, the conversations we had, and the opening of ourselves to new and different perspectives will one day lead to a movement that is bigger than all of us. When that happens, I will be there to support these world changers as they work toward linguistic equality, just as my students and I often discussed the fact that many unnamed people supported Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement.

While I did not want Michael’s connection between our multilingual books and their possible effect on the larger community to put a neat bow on a project we were coming to realize contained layers of messy inquiry, I *did* want to acknowledge the change he and his peers were interested in making. Change has to begin somewhere, and I was hopeful we had sown the seeds of it throughout our two years of critical conversations, projects, literature, and relationship building (Vazquez, 2004).

Family/School Editing Partnership

The same day Michael introduced his friends to the concept of social action, we finalized our plan for asking our families to edit our English and Spanish texts, with French-speaking community members editing our French story. We agreed that the children would carry a copy of one of our books home with them, the language of that book corresponding to the language their family spoke at home, complete with a pen and highlighter with which their families could write suggestions or edit content and wording. We

also sent home a letter explaining the task, in the language corresponding to that which was in the book each family received.

The sight of clear plastic baggies filled with these goodies was almost too much for the children, and they *ooohhed* and *aaawwed* before loudly proclaiming, “I want a yellow highlighter!” or “I want the orange one!” I had already modeled for them what it meant to edit a text, thinking aloud as I considered which words sounded best to me in a sentence I wrote on the SmartBoard; I believed our focus on registers, on the differences between *family talk*, *friend talk*, *other adult talk*, and even *book talk* would assist them in this task. We had discussed the importance of completing this task *with* families, as it represented an opportunity for them to converse about the language most fitting for different sections of each text. We even discussed proper use of highlighters, so that they did not, in their enthusiasm over the brightly colored markers, color in every bit of text just to see it pop on the page.

When Monday morning arrived, eight excited children ran across the classroom to present me with their edited books, all telling me they actually sat down with their families to talk about what they could change. Naldo’s and Christopher’s families wrote the most throughout, telling our Spanish book group exactly what we needed to alter for our text to read more smoothly.

Brian’s family also provided detailed information, telling our English book group to watch verb tenses and check certain sentence construction. Interestingly, they changed the only sentence in the text that we wrote in *friend talk*, where Ruby Bridges commented to George Washington Carver that she “don’t want no more” of his peanut butter, Brian’s father suggested we change the text to read, “Yeah...I think I better stop, because it will make me sick.” Later, when I proposed this change to the children in my group, they liked the way it sounded, telling me it still “sounded like friend talk” since it had the word “yeah” embedded within. I took this as evidence that the children saw our co-created registers as loosely configured boundaries for language use, constantly in flux and open for interpretation, and that they were comfortable considering a variety of possibilities for their characters’ speech because of this bent toward open interpretation (Kamberelis & Bovino, 1999; Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

Hector and Christopher continued their edits of the Spanish text even after entering the classroom. They knelt on the floor, highlighters in hand, to check on one sentence Hector said “sounded funny.” I read it aloud to him, as he highlighted it; after hearing the sentence in its entirety, he shook his head left to right, saying, “Oh, yeah! That sounds right!” He then wrote *Makes sense* underneath his newly highlighted Spanish words, before turning to hand his packet to me.

By our next Creative Problem-Solving lesson, over half of the children had returned edited texts, full of highlights and pen marks, and sometimes decorated with crinkles in the paper or food stains that made the pages sticky. Each book group had a conversation about families’ suggested changes, knowing it was ultimately their choice whether they accept the edits, but that they should take each idea seriously, as someone’s mother, father, sister, brother, or teacher had taken the time to make it.

In the end, the students accepted some edits and left out others. As they had grown accustomed to doing over the course of our language study, they considered the relationships between characters and the voice portrayed in each sentence as they negotiated whether they believed families’ suggestions would strengthen their books. This process brought us one step closer to the completion of each text, which would be complete after we glued the edited versions of our writing to the pictures we had already drawn and painted. In addition to finalizing our writing, the editing process also reestablished our long held belief that our family members were excellent co-authors. Our inclusion of their carefully made suggestions for edits built upon our previously recognized writing partnership, a partnership that began in Kindergarten with the creation of our Family Stories book (Ada & Campoy, 2004) (*To read our multilingual books in their entirety, refer to Appendices J, K, & L*).

Final Family Dialogue Journals

As we were closing in on the completion of our multilingual books, our class also faced writing our final Family Dialogue Journal. I had settled on what I believed was a fitting final entry topic.

“Okay, y’all,” I said, my eyes wide and hands clasped in my lap as I leaned forward to reveal something I was not sure they had considered. “Today is actually our *last* home journal, since it’s almost the end of the school year!”

I was prepared to hear a few “Yes!”s. After all, we had been working hard, and I was sure they were looking forward to summer break, their chance to run, play, and sleep the days away. But instead of relief at my announcement, I felt the air go still.

“Aawww...” Mack breathed in a low, quiet voice. Others simply stared at me.

“Tell me what you think about this, though,” I said. “I thought we could write about our favorite parts of kindergarten and first grade, and then ask our families to tell us what *they* liked the most about your time in school.”

“Yes!” Daisy spoke first, her infectious nature and natural leadership resulting in other students quickly agreeing with her. I saw more nods around the circle, and no one suggested an alternative or voiced their displeasure at the idea.

So, we moved forward, brainstorming possibilities regarding particular events or activities about which each child might want to write. This exercise brought back so many memories, tugging recollections of classroom events from underneath a myriad of experiences we had engaged in since then, activities that might have remained buried in our minds if we had not dug them up one last time. We laughed as we thought back to the “dirt pudding” we made out of Oreo crumbles and gummy worms to show layers of soil. A chorus of “Oh, yeah!”s rose when someone mentioned our Google Earth discovery that the gingerbread baby lived in Hawaii (It’s true - look it up!). We talked about making vegetable soup to learn the parts of a plant, and persuading our principal and assistant principal to let us plant peach trees behind the school in honor of Mama Miti.

I was grateful when several students mentioned our language study, focusing on our realization that books in community libraries did not recognize all friends’ languages. I was glad that our focus on words in our world and our authorship of multilingual books made this study even more memorable. We had engaged in “co-intentional” education, meaning we were intent on recreating knowledge in a way that honored multiple perspectives (Freire, 1972, p. 56). The words in our books served as tangible evidence of the beauty we found in linguistic diversity, and the students’ mentioning of it here validated this process.

The children focused on writing their final entries in a way that was atypical of the concluding weeks of a school year, with heads bent over their papers and the hum of voices stretching out sounds and reading sentences aloud buzzing around the room. Hector, Oscar, Joseph, and Robert huddled around the Author's Table at the back of our classroom, spreading out their pencils, crayons, and markers to share as they settled in to this area laden with their own child-authored books. It was in this space that the children displayed books they wrote and about which they were particularly proud, and classmates often scanned the shelves to pluck books from it to read in the morning or during literacy centers.

Hector's writing may have been inspired by this environment, as much of what he wrote to his mother had to do with a book he inscribed earlier in the year, later placing it on the shelves next to which he was now penning his letter (*See Figure 8.3*).

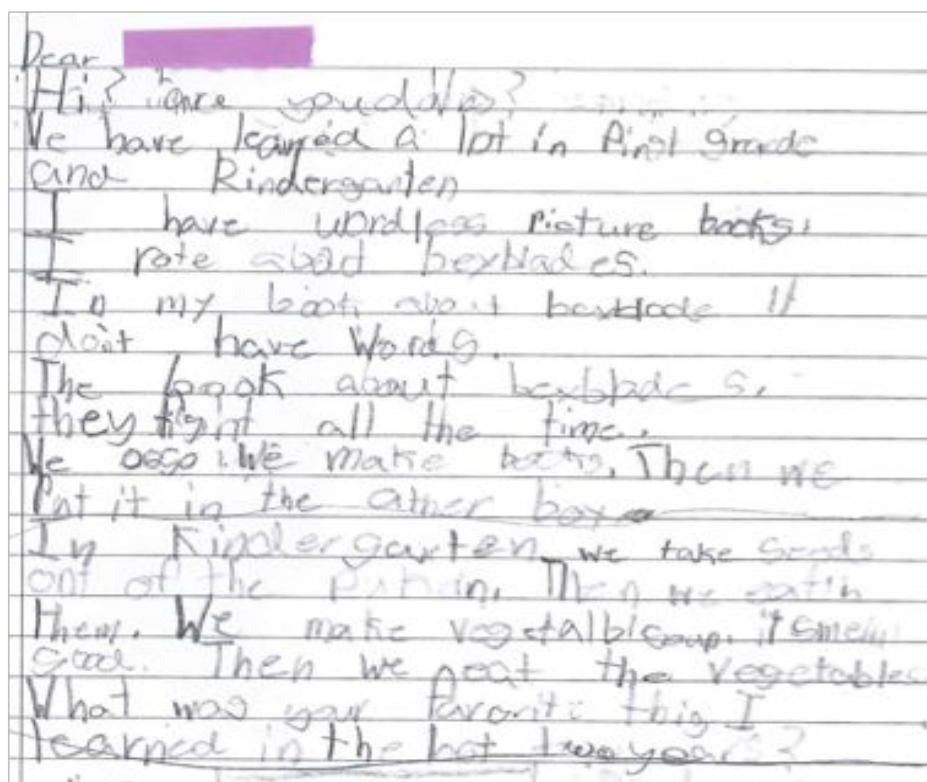


Figure 8.3: Hector's Final Family Dialogue Journal

It read: *Dear Mom, Hi! How are you doing? We have learned a lot in first grade and kindergarten. I have wordless picture books. I wrote about beyblades. In my book about beyblades it don't have words. The book about beyblades they fight all the time. We also make books. Then we put it in the author box. In kindergarten we take seeds out of the pumpkin. Then we eat them. We make vegetable soup. It smells good. Then we eat the vegetables. What was your favorite thing I learned in the last two years?*

In this letter, Hector combined narratives from home and school, focusing not only on his authorship, but also on the Beyblades, spinning tops the children played with both at home and at recess. Hector conveyed the intertwining of his home and school lives; he was writing to his mother about a school literacy activity involving toys from home. To borrow Dyson's (2001b) words, by including Beyblades he was drawing "deeply upon non-academic social worlds to negotiate his entry into school literacy" (p. 8), and was now sharing this meshing of social and school worlds with his mother. After this, he focused on food related lessons from kindergarten, writing about carving a pumpkin, eating the seeds, and making vegetable soup. Hector's sense of community comes across strongly in this journal entry, referring to each activity as something "we," or he and his classmates, did, rather than an activity in which Hector alone engaged. At the end of his letter, he wrote in English, *What was your favorite thing I learned in the last two years?*

I had wondered if Hector would write in Spanish, showcasing his ability to communicate in two languages (Anzaldúa, 1999). He did not. I was unsure what to make of this, knowing we had not discussed the possibility of him writing in Spanish, but we had been immersed in discussing linguistic diversity and contextualizing communication based on who you are talking to. I found myself wishing we had more time. There was always more to do, more to talk about. I believed that if we did have more time, our next goal would be to incorporate what we were learning about contextualizing language into our everyday lives. Family Dialogue Journals would have been a good place to begin.

Nevertheless, Hector wrote an entire page about what he had learned during our two years together. I pictured Hector's mother reading and responding one last time. As she once told me was her

practice, she would wait until everyone else was asleep to write her response to our inquiry, relishing this time to share her background and experiences with us.

Hector presented his journal to me on Monday morning, nodding when I asked him if his mother had written in it. Reading the journal later that day, after Mr. Oswaldo graciously translated it, Elena's response was as touching as anything I had ever read, highlighting much of what I, too, held dear about our classroom community. Elena's favorite part of Hector's experience was Family Dialogue Journals. She loved writing about environmental issues, the earth's relationships between humans, animals, and plants. Elena saw her role in the journal process exactly as I had hoped she would; she liked "sharing what I wrote for students to learn something new every week," making clear she saw herself as a teacher, her knowledge brought into the classroom through the papers on which she wrote. Additionally, she reciprocated the closeness I felt to her and her family by saying she liked to "share these two years with Mrs. McCreight and Mr. Oswaldo." She was thankful for our willingness to read her words, just as we were thankful each week she wrote them.

In Elena's response, I felt the culmination of every family/school partnership activity, coming together, as she validated our attempts to become both *teacher* and *learner* in our interactions (Freire, 1972). Her feelings supported the research of such scholars as Allen (2007; 2010), Compton-Lilly (2011), and Solsken, Willett, and Wilson-Keenan (2000), who have written about the importance of reciprocal education, that which flows between home and school. Though not all families responded so positively or faithfully as Elena to activities like our Family Dialogue Journals, knowing this communication tool had opened up a communicative door for at least some of our community validated the work time, translations, weekly responses, and dedicated sharing time (Ada & Campoy, 2005).

As other children returned family responses throughout the week, we spent time sharing each student and family entry during Morning Meeting. It was a cherished time of reminiscing, of walking down a two-year-long memory lane, a lane which we had all traversed, but had experienced differently based on our prior experiences and the connections we made through them. We read in Spanish and in English, remembering activities related to our language study, science units, and literacy-learning. Our

Family Dialogue Journals honored the home languages of our families as they wrote each entry in the language with which they were most familiar. By honoring these linguistic backgrounds, we honored one another's cultures and experiences (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

We honored one another's lives.

Our Language Celebration

Our language celebration day was finally here. The students and I had already spent an afternoon creating invitations, writing letters in Spanish and English to our families that Christopher identified as persuasive because of our focus on *persuading* loved ones to attend this event. After much discussion, we had settled on a daytime celebration, held on both Thursday and Friday at different times. The children added persuasive text on the back.

Mack wrote a great deal, his long fingers moving carefully across the page as he explained his part in the book ("I'm the wizard!"), as well as the parts of his friends. Our English book group had recently decided there was just no time to turn our book into a play, given that the year was ending whether we wanted it to or not, but Mack clearly still viewed certain characters as belonging to specific group members.

In addition to inviting our families, I also sent an online invitation to twenty more community members: those teachers, administrators, volunteers, and friends who had made our year of dialogic learning about contextualized language possible. We planned to eat cookies, drink punch, and invite attendees to read our multilingual books as the authors themselves stood nearby to explain the text and how they had come to write it. Wanting to make the room as inviting as possible, I displayed other examples of children's literature written in French, Spanish, and English, placing them strategically on the kidney table by the door. I wrote "Bienvenidos! Bienvenue! Welcome!" on a white board set up on the same table. I set out questionnaires, full of inquiries for visitors to ask the students in case stage fright overcame them and they forgot what to say about their books. The children and I practiced answering these questions in groups before each day's celebration, and the buzz around the room as we did so rose from a conversational tone to a fevered pitch.

Thursday morning, a palpable buzz hummed throughout the room as soon as the children walked in the door. “My mama is comin’!” Mack informed me the second his feet hit the doorway. “She comin’ after work! So’s my sister!” He was beaming, bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet as he spoke. He tried to hang his backpack on a hook, and in his desire to share, he completely missed, his bag hitting the floor with a thud.

Mack’s classmates were right behind him in energy level, and each time someone mentioned our language celebration, an eruption of voices broke the otherwise quiet of the room. I thought about responding with a stern glance, but chosen instead to mirror their energy with my own smile and giggle in anticipation of the event to come. Finally, it was time.

“Okay, let’s sit down at the carpet and get ready for our families!” I called out. Most of them ignored me in their excitement, while a few made their way to the floor.

Once we sat down, having loosened up our shoulders and taken deep breaths, eighteen pairs of eyes eagerly stared in my direction. I spoke to everyone quietly, reminding them to remain at their book’s station to answer questions from guests. Then, we fanned out, standing in front of freshly laminated books written in English, French, and Spanish, ready to receive our families and friends.

We went through this opening routine on both Thursday and Friday, and before we knew it, we were greeting our visitors. On Thursday, we enjoyed time with Sandra’s mother, father, and cousin; Naldo’s mother and brother; Jorge’s mother; Mack’s mother, father, brother, and sister; Michael’s mother; ½ of our third grade book buddies class; Ms. Callie; Ms. Hanover; Mr. Oswaldo; Ms. JoBeth and her husband; and my husband, Chris. On Friday, our guests consisted of Sandra’s father and brother, back for a second time; Brian’s mother and brother; Julissa’s mother; Daisy’s father; Robert’s mother; the other ½ of our third grade book buddies; three of our school’s ESOL teachers; our school principal; and four employees from district offices. Elena and Rosalita, Hector’s and Lorena’s mothers, wrote notes of apology saying they could not attend, but that they would love to see the books during our grade level’s end-of-the-year picnic.

In all, we welcomed 46 members of our extended classroom community, all to experience our solution to a linguistic problem we had identified in the world. This translated to 46 pairs of eyes and ears learning about the reason behind our books, 46 hearts and minds possibly feeling moved by the work of these children – and 46 opportunities for our message about the beauty in language diversity to spread to our larger community. We hoped we would “get people doing things,” to borrow Michael’s words, and the effort made by so many family members and friends to learn about our books gave us hope.

We felt blown away each day, as more and more people arrived to speak to the children. The students stood tall and proud by their books, nearly tripping over one another to answer guests’ questions. They discussed details about how they constructed each book, and the reasons behind our want to create the texts at all. As each person arrived, a swell of voices emerged from the already boisterous space, announcing with excitement another anticipated guest. Children ran to greet family members, pulling them by the hand to their book’s table. Other guests received star treatment, as well, as multiple children, vying for the attention of a beloved classroom community member, veritably mobbed them.

There was Naldo’s mother, who captivated me as she read the entire Spanish text to an audience of both English and Spanish speaking students. This group of seven children fanned around her, Naldo in his mother’s lap and the rest of the students touching some part of her arm, shoulder, or hand, as she quietly breathed life into the words on every page of their text. The intimacy of this interaction struck me as I watched them share the home language of many of our students through this co-authored text.

Robert, Oscar, Michael, Mack, Lorena, and Hector told guests, each at separate times, that they were going to take all of their books to the library to put a barcode on them so others could check them out. Each child also communicated that it was important for us to create these books because we noticed that some libraries do not have many books in languages other than English.

Soon after, tears pricked the backs of my eyelids as I observed Michael shyly smiling up at his mom, nodding as she said, “Michael, you came up with the idea that the way people are treated badly because they don’t speak English is like how African Americans were treated badly because of skin

color? You need to tell everyone about that!” Michael stood in the glow of his mother’s praise, as she realized he was a leader in inspiring our class to work for change, learning from events in history to do so.

In each of these moments, something special happened. Through the sharing of our multilingual books, students and families learned more about one another. The children moved from discussing the beauty of the Spanish language to hearing it spoken aloud by Naldo’s mother. The children shifted from affecting change in their classroom to spreading news of this change to other adults they knew. Maggie and Michael shared a moment of realization that Michael’s connections between linguistic and racial prejudice were not only uncommon for a child, but if shared, had the potential to invite others in the world to see multiple languages, and the people speaking them, differently. We entered into a Third Space of learning, which Gutiérrez (2008) said,

...has always been more than a celebration of the local literacies of students from nondominant groups; and certainly more than what students can do with assistance or scaffolding...Instead, it is a transformative space where the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge are heightened. (p. 152)

In the moments described above, students, families, and friends were certainly celebrating local literacies and sharing writing they had accomplished together, but our celebration was more than that. As Gutiérrez described, it was a space within which students taught their families more than they could imagine, where parents breathed new life into words the children had taken for granted. We opened ourselves up to an “expanded form of learning,” to “the development of new knowledge,” and in this space, we found we had transformed into learners with expanded perspectives and experiences.

The children ended each afternoon jittery from exhaustion, chattering about our visitors as they gathered their backpacks and prepared to travel home. Though our year was ending, I felt the staying power of our words, now written in three languages, to push others toward thinking more openly about the beauty inherent in multiple languages. I was confident in the students’ ability to verbalize their conviction that people should respect all ways of speaking, and that no one should feel inferior because their families were not fluent in Standardized English. Further, I felt buoyed by the sense of purpose our

families and friends inspired in us, convincing these students in their reactions to the multilingual texts that the books, and message behind them, were worth sharing.

What We Learned

The question I asked myself throughout our entire language study, which I continue to ask myself now, is, *So what?* If one of my goals was for students to gain a nuanced understanding of language in use, of the different ways they experienced and contextualized words when speaking to a variety of people, did this occur? Along the way, did our conversations support or hinder us in developing this sense of linguistic diversity and its role in our lives, and in what ways did this occur? Did we share and negotiate power throughout our discussions, giving us all voice in the process of naming our registers and using them to categorize language?

While the previous chapters have begun to answer these questions, I will use the following sections to summarize both the growing linguistic awareness I observed in my students, and what I believe happened to get us to this point. The voices of families and friends, never separate from the voices of the students themselves, will be interwoven, so as not to forget their immense influence on our study.

Final Student Interviews

After our language celebration concluded, and as the excitement from our final Family Dialogue Journal entry was fading, I pulled aside Hector, Lorena, Mack, and Michael individually to ask them a few questions about their understandings of language and its use. I based the opening questions/extensions off a key event in our study of words: the translation chart we created based on *Flossie and the Fox* (McKissack, 1986). I then asked each child to translate phrases I had heard them saying to friends on the playground or in the classroom, into phrases they might say to other adults, as I was interested in their code-switching development based on their co-created registers. Finally, I asked these students how they thought / felt that they could speak multiple languages/dialects, attempting to uncover whether they believed I had, in fact, shared linguistic power with them, or if I had simply continued to prize my own home language over theirs. Their responses to these inquiries represented a

snapshot summary of their growth as code-switchers, their meta language around registers, and the many discussions they had engaged in with family, peers, and teachers informing their responses.

Translation chart with Flossie and the fox. After reviewing our translation chart activity, showing each child images and summarizing our work in categorizing both the registers of our own sentences and those we found in the book *Flossie and the Fox*, they told me what they remembered most from these lessons. Hector, for instance, associated *hola* with *family talk*, elaborating on this by saying he spoke Spanish at home because “they know,” and he spoke English at school “cause everyone speaks English.” Lorena responded similarly, saying, “With Hector’s family and mine, we speak Spanish,” while at school she spoke mostly in English because the people around her did not all speak Spanish. These two Spanish speakers, then, made clear they understood the function of changing their language based on whom they were speaking with, because they wanted people to understand them (Wheeler & Swords, 2004).

Mack wanted to talk about the phrase, “Sup, dude,” from the translation chart, saying, “You don’t usually say these to people,” except “when you play,” thus differentiating between the relationships he held with people and the phrases he chose to speak to them (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Michael, however, said his *friend* and *family talk* were similar, “because your friends...that’s part of your family.” Therefore, he maintained the same way of speaking in both groups.

I then showed each child an image of our translation chart that focused on switching Flossie’s sentences from *family/friend talk* to *other adult talk*. Hector mentioned the Fox spoke as characters usually do in books, while Flossie sounded more like friends or family might speak. Lorena, in our individual conversation, agreed with Hector, saying Flossie’s statement, “Ms. Viola’s chickens be so scared,” sounded to her like *family talk*. We needed to change “be” to “are,” she told me, because the first sentence “looks like grown ups might not understand, they might not think you said it right.” Mack felt similarly, pointing to the sentence with “be” embedded in it and saying, “That doesn’t make sense. Like every time when you see this, that means it’s messed up.”

Although we had never referred to Flossie's *friend/family talk* as not making sense or being "messed up," Lorena and Mack believed her use of it would limit other adults' understanding of her message. I thought back to my discussion with Natalie, Mack's mother, when she told me she believed African American Vernacular English (AAVE) to be "lazy" English, "slang" that her family and others used to communicate, rather than recognizing it for the rule-governed, highly structured dialect of English it was (Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). This was not simply her view, or the view Mack alluded to when he said a sentence that used "be" instead of "are" was "messed up." It represented a widespread societal perspective made pervasive by punitive grammar programs, standardized tests, and statewide performance standards prizing the language of power, as well as people having conversations insisting African Americans who speak AAVE just learn to speak "right" (Cazden, 1972; Delpit, 1995; Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). As Hudley and Mallinson (2011) stated, "African American English is subject to caricature and misrepresentation in the public arena. The traditional view is that this form of English is the result of the personal deficiencies of the speakers: that they are the products of laziness, carelessness, and ignorance" (p. xiv). Natalie, and now Mack, were continuing this representation of their own home language, using their words to unknowingly perpetuate stereotypes long held in society.

As we concluded our language study, I yearned for more time, for future conversations to question a view that was penetrating the walls of linguistic acceptance and multilingual/multidialectal equality we had been pushing for through authoring and sharing our books. While I knew families wished for their children to learn Standardized English because of societal expectations, I wanted to delve deeper into why they had internalized the inferiority of their home dialect themselves. If the idea that AAVE was "messed up" was still seeping into the minds of the children and their families, convincing them Flossie's *friend/family talk* was not simply different than *other adult talk* but also inferior, what would happen when our language study came to an end?

Translating friend talk to other adult talk. Our next step in each conversation was to take another of Flossie's sentences and translate it from *friend* to *other adult talk*. I had chosen her words, "How do a fox look?"

Hector and Lorena both quickly changed the word “do” to “does,” producing the end result of, “How does a fox look?” Mack, in his characteristically individual style, altered the construction of the sentence a bit more, settling on, “What does a fox look like?” Michael struggled with this exercise, saying the only difference between the way he would speak to *friends/family* and *other adults* would be in how loud he spoke or how shy he felt. He suggested we talk about whom he spoke to while at a wedding with his family. He told me he kept asking his family, “When it gonna be over?” I used this opening, then, asking him if he might change his sentence if he was talking to other adults he did not know as well as his family. Michael, however, insisted he did not talk to anyone at the wedding outside of his family, and that he could not answer my question because of this. Overall, he had a difficult time recognizing differences in his own speech. When I later asked Maggie about this, she said she was not surprised, telling me it was true that he did not speak differently in any situation he found himself, maintaining the same register throughout conversations he had with others.

Lorena, Mack, and Hector, however, responded quite differently. Using sentences I had heard the children speak with their friends, I asked each one how they might change each one to *other adult talk*. When I said to Lorena, “We isn’t going outside,” she quickly changed it to, “We aren’t going outside.” I asked her why she did that, and she again mentioned that other adults might not think the first sentence made as much sense as her friends would. Mack changed, “It be so hot outside,” to “It will be so sunny outside,” a sentence he believed belonged in the *other adults* register. When I asked Hector to translate, “We is going outside” from *friend talk* to *other adult talk*, he grabbed the whiteboard marker and eraser, erased “is,” and replaced it with “are.” These children, then, had come to associate Standardized English with their co-created register, *other adult talk*.

Students’ impressions of my feelings. After contextualizing language together, thinking about its function in our lives and how we use it with different people, I asked a question meant to gauge students’ thoughts about whether they believed I honored and celebrated the language they spoke with their families. I not only wanted to know if they could code-switch based on their registers; I was also

interested in the confidence they felt in expressing themselves in different ways within the school environment. I hoped my students saw my approach as similar to Nieto's (2002), who said,

Instead of treating students' cultural and linguistic conditions as deficits, we need to think of them as talents and strengths that can be used in the service of their education. This approach is based on the most fundamental assumption made by all good teachers – that we bring important experiences and insights to the educational enterprise. (p. 167)

I needed to know if my students saw me as a similarly “good teacher.”

When I asked Hector how he believed I viewed his ability to speak Spanish, he said he thought I liked that he was bilingual. “Sometimes you speak Spanish,” he said. “You want to learn from people. People...show you how to speak Spanish.” Lorena said she knew I liked Spanish, because when “Hector reads Spanish, you come and say...great.” She also mentioned she knew I viewed Spanish positively “cause you wanna learn.” Our conversation reminded me of Hector's father, when he told me it was good that I was trying to speak Spanish, because in that moment, I became “a student.” In both cases, these Spanish-speaking students mentioned not only that they picked up on my positive associations with Spanish, but also that they noticed I was interested in *learning* Spanish, which was perhaps the most telling sign I found value in it. We were truly teacher-learners and learner-teachers in our classroom space (Freire, 1972)..

Michael was less sure that I appreciated the way he spoke at home, saying he thought I felt “alright” about it, his voice moving up in pitch as he said the word. It is possible this was because he saw no difference between the way he spoke with adults at school and the way he spoke to his family at home, which he made clear throughout our conversation.

Mack, however, quickly answered he thought it made me “happy” to hear him speak to his family. When I asked him why, he said, “Because I learn,” telling me he noticed my joy in his learning. He was right, as nothing gave me more joy than seeing the children learn – especially *with* their families, and *without* fear of others judging them for speaking in the language of their homes.

Other insights shared. As each child and I talked about our language study, Hector, Lorena, Mack, and Michael all added individual insights. This resulted in an enriched snapshot of what they had learned and taken away from our look at words in the world.

For instance, when I asked Hector if he remembered how he learned two languages, he told me about going to the library with his father. “We went to the library, and my dad went in the class,” he said. “And my dad told me it was someone to help me speak English.” Hector linked his Spanish-speaking home community to his ability to learn English. By speaking to them in his first language, Spanish, *they* taught him the basics of English, supporting him to learn the language he would soon speak in school. Additionally, his father believed it was important to learn English, as was evidenced by Hector mentioning his participation in the language class, helping me to realize Hector’s predisposition for learning in multiple languages began in his home.

Lorena mentioned her family, as well, and their tendency to teach one another the intricacies of language. She went into detail about how she spoke Spanish with her mom and dad, but with her sister and brothers, she chose to speak English. In fact, she and her cousin were teaching her “baby sister” words in English, now that she was attending preschool and needed to know more about the language in which her teachers were speaking. “We try to teach her and now...she said [the word] fly!” Lorena also talked about how she switched between Spanish and English even in school, using Spanish on the playground and mostly English in our classroom. As she said this, my confidence in deciding with the students to focus our translation chart on *person*-based registers, rather than *place*-based, grew. According to Lorena, relationships governed her use of language more than the place in which she spoke her words.

What Was Happening

As I reflect back on our classroom community’s yearlong language study, from our language invitation to end-of-year student and family conversations, I am struck by the intimate nature of our interactions with one another, the intricate details of our particular study. These interactions led to our creation of multilingual picture books and a co-created set of registers in which we operated and categorized words in our world. This study was uniquely ours, an exploration of language based on the

context in which we were living, buoying our ideas for the categorization of words by linking them to experiences in our backgrounds. While we certainly struggled with situations out of our control, our end-of-year student interviews, coupled with the story of our year, make clear the impact of the study on our classroom community.

While this is simply my perspective, it comes from transcribing and then combing through twenty hours of recorded lessons, creating charts depicting students' intertextual connections to content, and constructing tables to analyze snippets of conversation based on the interpersonal metafunction in SFL (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2001). My conclusions come from countless conversations with families and children, as well as with colleagues and friends who either spent time with or simply listened to me recount students' and families' responses to our language study. I have referred to hundreds of pages of researcher notes, painstakingly written a few times a week when I shut my classroom door at the end of the day, describing every lesson, every reference students made to words in their world. I also devoured the work of language contextualization scholars like Shirley Brice Heath (1983/1996), Lisa Delpit (1995), and Solsken, Willett, and Wilson-Keenan (2000). Just as my students' responses during our language study were full of intertexts, of talk and experience from other events in their lives, my conclusions are inextricably intertwined with every source mentioned throughout this text and more.

So, what happened? How did students get to the point where they were able to connect linguistic prejudice to the Civil Rights Movement, and to use what they knew to work against such discrimination? How did our co-creation of person-based registers lead to students being able to code-switch between *family talk*, *friend talk*, and *other adult talk*?

Constant Reflection and Balancing

Throughout our language study, it was my practice to reflect on our lessons, activities, and projects (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Heath, Street, & Mills, 2008). I did this through a written journal, typing the daily events, evaluating what went well and what we might have done differently. Sometimes, colleagues reviewed and commented on my entries, asking me questions to push my thinking or giving

me their own interpretation of an event. This reflection allowed me to constantly engage with my data, with the intricacies of our classroom's culture and the integration of this culture into our language study.

My journal reflections had a direct and immediate impact on my classroom practice. They led me to realize our work needed to incorporate family perspectives on words in the world, that I needed to acknowledge and discuss cultural groups outside of those represented in our classroom, and that my students were able to independently translate their co-created registers before I thought this might occur. Additionally, although I did not always make the best decisions regarding making space for my students', their families', and teachers' voices, examining my practice helped me to determine when I was heavily leaning on one set of experiences or another, pushing me to then balance the perspectives we heard during Morning Meeting, Family Dialogue Journal sharing, and in literature. Through this reflection and the sharing of it with colleagues, I believe I was better attuned to the needs and interests of my students (Dyson, 2001a; 2001b).

Combining Speech/Discourse Communities and Meta Language

Our language study combined the concept of James Gee's speech/discourse communities, within which participants' words are tied to that particular community and consequential for membership and identity (Gee, 1989b), and the construction of meta language for registers, which is talk about language (Dare, 2010). As Gee and Green (1998) asserted, "the situated nature of meaning and the constructed nature of cultural knowledge" (p. 125) make it necessary to consider discourse from a contextualized lens, and the same is true of the creation of meta language around registers; we needed to consider and create it from a contextualized space. Because the children and I considered our own experiences, our most common uses of words in our world, we were able to co-construct a meta language for the registers we spoke within. *Friend talk*, *family talk*, and *other adult talk* became the terms we used to categorize sentences and phrases, and as we did so, we deepened our communally understood construction of registers, building an intricate web of references to each register as children, teachers, and families gave their own examples and perspectives. Since this meta language was ours, I believe the children more easily connected to it and applied it to their own lives.

They took ownership over our registers, as Brian made clear when he told our small group once, “That’s not *my* family talk.” That was the beauty of our self-constructed categories; they related to us and our experiences, and diversified from our own knowledge and backgrounds. As Dyson and Smitherman (2009) asserted, “Children’s language use is indeed guided by a sense of what sounds right, but that sense does not come from a grammar textbook...It comes from their sensitivity to how voices should sound in varied kinds of communicative situations with different purposes and participants” (p. 978). Our co-constructed registers opened up space for this personal sensitivity to language.

Relationships and Context Were Key

Personal relevance was not just important as we created our registers. Rather, relationships and context were key throughout our study of language. As Andrews (2001) stated, “language choices...reflect...social and professional, formal and informal settings” (p. 112), and because we shared this outlook, my students and I were able to loosely construct our registers around their vast and varied relationships. By using registers based on the *people* with whom we spoke, we opened up possibilities for categorization that did not exist when considering *home* and *school* language. Though I believe categorizing words based on the place where we communicate helps students to begin to see the diverse linguistic demands of specific spaces, it does not always hold up to their actual conversations. My students did not often speak Standardized English on the playground or in the lunchroom, which would have made it confusing for me to explain *school* language as the language of the Fox, and *home* language as that of Flossie. By considering *person*-based registers, based on relationships rather than setting, the children and I created a more nuanced system. As Dyson and Smitherman (2009) found, “There is evidence that children who speak nondominant vernaculars...become bidialectal (or bilingual) through interacting in diverse social situations with others who control varied ways with words, and through opportunities to exercise agency over language choices” (p. 979). By examining language based on relationships, we engaged in these types of linguistic opportunities. Our end-of-the-year interviews made clear Hector, Lorena, Michael, and Mack were able to use their linguistic knowledge to navigate different person-based registers.

In addition, because we made relationships a key component of our classroom community through Family Dialogue Journals, home visits, and inviting families, teachers, and volunteers into our classroom, we opened up a space for Daisy and Lorena to identify a linguistic issue affecting our extended community. Their assertion that we did not have enough community books in multiple languages must have partly stemmed from their understanding that people they knew spoke differently than the characters in books. Because relationships were crucial to the functioning of our classroom community, they were also crucial to our identification of a problem worth addressing (Freire, 1972).

Similarly, relationships and context merged in our language study when we found ourselves considering opportunities for social justice, which we based on Daisy and Lorena's identified problem. As Hector, Jorge, Naldo, and other Spanish-speaking students shared their fear of moving because of their linguistic backgrounds, we felt so strongly for them because of our close communal bonds. It simply made sense that our language study and desire to help our friends would intertwine, resulting in the multilingual book project linked to our state's threatening immigration legislation. In this way, we allowed context, relationships, and a developing study of language to become even more relevant and purposeful within our lives, therefore increasing our desire to see our multilingual book project through until the end.

Logical Progression from Concrete to Abstract

As my students and I progressed through our language study, we did not begin with the abstract diagramming of sentences. Instead, we began by discussing and categorizing sentences students had already spoken or heard with their friends, families, and other adults, adding an element of relevancy and familiarity to this process. Then, we moved on to translating sentences from a familiar book, *Flossie and the Fox* (McKissack, 1986). Finally, we categorized sentences I presented to the children, first asking them to tell me the sentence's register, and then asking them to translate it into another register. James Gee (1989b) similarly supported language instruction focused on students' prior knowledge, saying,

There is evidence that focusing learners on the right input at the right time, namely, when they are ready for it and they have practiced in natural settings, is a form of [linguistic] teaching that can succeed. It may be the only kind of overt teaching that can. (p. 139)

We scaffolded our learning, and I believe the success of the students was a testament to this move from concrete to more abstract language study.

Casual Conversation and Pedagogic Discourse Registers Merged

As my analysis of small snippets of conversation in previous chapters showed, our classroom community learned about language while moving within and between the registers of casual conversation and classroom discourse. While there were negative instances, such as silencing students' voices when they brought up the Chinese language, we mostly called on the pedagogic discourse register as a guide to the expectations of any particular conversation (Hicks, 1999). Although I wanted the children to feel free to lead our discussions about language in directions they felt were most appropriate, we also needed to maintain our focus, whether it was on spoken registers or the construction of multilingual books.

However, students' freedom to move in diverse conversational directions *within* these themes was reminiscent of casual conversation (Eggin & Slade, 2005). Making it my practice to ask open-ended questions, rather than *I-R-E* sequences, and to then follow and offer my own thoughts on the children's responses regarding words in their world, created a space in which we valued all voices and considered all perspectives. As I believed it was important to work against commonly used and prescriptive grammar programs, revolving our study around children and families' personal experiences with language was critical, because it gave me insight into the direction in which we should next focus our study.

Power Was Shared

One of my primary goals in entering into language study with my students and their families was that I would become more aware of the power I wielded as a teacher, and use this awareness to create spaces in which we heard and incorporated into our exploration the voices of all members of our community. I agreed with Carrie Secret (1998), who said, "I am there because an adult has to be with the

children, but I try not to have a hierarchy. There needs to be a mutual respect between the teacher and students” (p. 86).

Beyond asking questions to which I did not have a pre-conceived answer, the content within my intertextual connections charts (based on Bloome, et al., 2005) conveyed my commitment to this task. These charts, created for each snippet of conversation I analyzed and now residing in the Appendices of this text, revealed my tendency to not only ask open-ended questions, but to then acknowledge and extend most of my students’ responses into the fabric of our larger conversation. When Michael wanted to include the sentence, “Michael and Rosa came victorious,” in our English book, I typed it into the text while asking the other students what they thought of this idea. When Daisy asked what “victorious” meant, I relayed her question to Michael, making *him* the expert on the vocabulary word he suggested we use. Even the idea for our multilingual books came from the students themselves, emerging during a trip to the library and extending into our classroom language study for the rest of the students to consider.

Families, too, shared in this power. The schedules of families informed the times and dates of our language celebration. We incorporated and celebrated their home languages into our curriculum, encouraging them to communicate with us in their most comfortable language, as well. We listened to and honored their desire that their children learn to speak in multiple codes, echoing Dyson and Smitherman’s (2009) assertion that “Today’s and tomorrow’s students not only need to have skills in communications involving English varieties other than their own, but they also need to have knowledge and command of languages others than English. Instead of ‘English Only,’ they need ‘English Plus’” (p. 993). Families edited our multilingual books, and we incorporated these edits into the final products. Their wants and desires for their children, conveyed to me during family/school conferences, informed my commitment to increasing the incorporation of bilingual materials into our daily classroom routines.

In these ways, my students, their families, and I shared power. We acknowledged the beauty in one another’s backgrounds and knowledge bases, committing ourselves to dialoguing together to learn *from* and *with* one another (Freire, 1972).

Families and Students Have the Final Word

As the roller coaster of our classroom year coasted into its terminal, our hair wrapped around our faces and clothing rumpled from the intensity of our trip, I breathed a sigh. Not really a sigh of relief, but rather, a sigh of resignation that our work together, whether finished or not, was concluding. There was so much more I wanted to discuss, to explore, to research with them all. A study of language was not something we could declare “over,” deciding we had attained “mastery,” as our report cards called us to do for all the first grade standards.

Were we “fine,” as I had hoped we would be by the end of this inquiry? I still was not sure. Language is ever evolving, changing, simultaneously responding to and shaping the world around us, and I knew a new year with this classroom community would have revealed new linguistic topics for us to explore, nuances in registers to discover, and discriminatory practices to confront. New challenges and opportunities for action around our state’s immigration legislation would have surely colored our community’s atmosphere, leading our conversations and study in particular directions, while at the same time allowing us the opportunity to shape the dialogue around this issue through our own unique responses to it. This year, it was our multilingual books. What would it have been in the year to come? How would we have continued to respond to our community’s needs, if the “bad man” or others continued to infiltrate our minds?

Although I cannot be sure of this, I have imagined the intertextual threads of acknowledgement, respect, and fondness for linguistic diversity present in the minds and experiences of the children, families, and teachers from our community, continuing to weave themselves into conversations in new communities of learners. I have imagined them passing on a philosophy of linguistic *difference*, rather than linguistic *inferiority* or *superiority*. I envision our co-teachers considering the implementation of a register-based study of language, blending explorations of words in the world with children and families’ personal experiences and backgrounds. And I see these students and teachers influencing others to believe they can pose and address problems they identify in their communities, leading to a “What if we...” mentality that has the ability to spread well beyond the walls of my initial classroom.

However, this is enough from me. I have spent the majority of this book describing my interpretation of our language study, of its successes and struggles, weaving in the perspectives of students, families, and other teachers, but still primarily providing my own take on what happened. I will conclude, then, with the words of students and their families, sentences they spoke in the final days of our language study pertaining to their perspective on it. After all, the words of the participants themselves reflect the true impact of any educational study, and with this in mind, I give them the final word (*See Figure 8.4*).

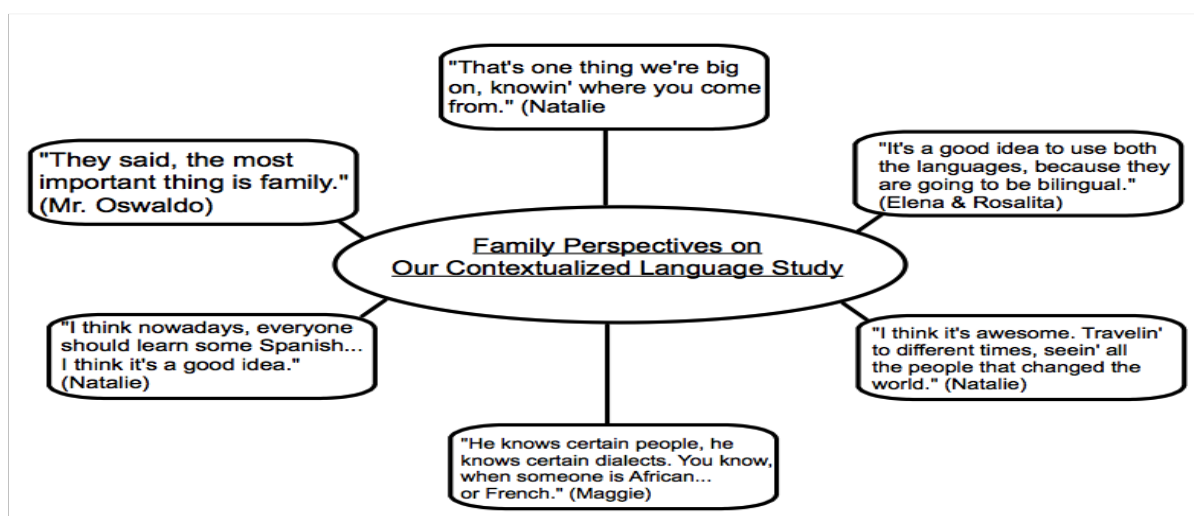


Figure 8.4: Family Perspectives on Our Contextualized Language Study

Policy Recommendations

I have concluded each previous chapter with my thoughts on teachers' abilities to co-construct language studies with the students and families in their community. I have felt hopeful at the thought that others might identify their own unique combinations of contextualization lessons, children's literature, and other activities born from listening and responding to students, with which to create their own exploration of words in the world. Yet, in doing so, I have also realized individual teachers working for change in the implementation of language instruction, those working to see linguistic diversity as positive and the languages/dialects present in their classroom as enriching, will inevitably face resistance in the form of district policies and standardized test content. While specific teachers, possibly grade levels or

even schools, might choose to adopt an open-ended form of language instruction, building from students' home languages and prior experiences, children will surely hit a point when they come across teachers, buildings, or tests that do not take into account their understanding of contextualized language, seeing only Standardized English as acceptable or appropriate.

While I do not doubt even one year of study in which children positively conceptualized linguistic diversity, their experiences with words leading them to realize languages and dialects can be *different* but not *inferior*, will lead them to question educational formats that call for a one-size-fits-all mentality, how long can this conceivably last without school support? How long can I expect Michael to share his beliefs regarding language discrimination, if someone along the way does not support these beliefs? How can I expect any of these children to continually link *family talk*, *friend talk*, or *other adult talk* to their writing and speaking, if a classroom does not work with registers, but with workbook-style grammar study?

I now realize our educational system needs to move toward policy change, toward a reconstruction of language study at the district, state, and national levels, if students are to develop a nuanced, long-term ability to navigate effectively between the multiple codes that are part of their daily lives. As Freire (1972) said, "Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account...the men-in-a-situation to whom their program was ostensibly directed" (p. 83). I believe this is often the case with language study, as those creating workbooks and test questions often represent the voices of those already in powerful positions, unaware of the implications inherent in underrepresenting the multiple codes children employ every day in speaking to others. Regardless of policy makers' and curriculum/test creators' intention in doing so, we must "think deeply and thoughtfully about the ways in which our use of theory will affect read students in real classrooms..., [or] we are neglecting our ultimate responsibility" (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 39-40). With this in mind, I have outlined suggestions I believe would allow for multiple voices and perspectives to co-create school's linguistic curriculums.

- *Consistent, long-term contextualized language study:* Districts could save millions of dollars by choosing to build linguistic curriculum on students' and families' experiences, rather than buying into prescriptive grammar studies. And as my interviews with Hector, Lorena, and Mack showed, students would still be able to differentiate between more and less formal language. While feeder schools, districts, or even states would have to consider identifying consistent registers for students to work within across grade levels, taking away somewhat from the relevance inherent in co-constructing these registers as a class, each register could be conceived based on feedback from students, families, and teachers. This would make the categorization of language more applicable to children's everyday lives than disconnected Standardized English worksheets.
- *English/Language Arts test questions should be altered:* Taking this one step further, the standardized tests children take, at any grade level, would also need to be changed based on the registers used to categorize words in the world. While I would just as soon see all standardized tests tossed out the window, in favor of more personally responsive, developmentally appropriate assessments, I cannot address that issue here. Standardized exams are, at this point, part of our schools; I do believe, however, that test-makers could write the questions in ways that allow students from diverse linguistic backgrounds more equitable access to the tests themselves. For instance, rather than setting up questions to read, "Which word *best* completes this sentence?", as the district test I mentioned earlier overwhelmingly read, it might say, "Which word *is a better choice in a formal conversation?*" With just a simple rewrite of the question, students would be able to think carefully and meaningfully about the words in front of them, not having to simply concede that the Standardized English version of a particular sentence is, without question, the "best." Working within registers allows them more choice, and I would argue, it sets students up for success, since school is no longer asking them to give up the language of their family in favor of a new way of speaking (Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 2002). Instead, this sort of question sets up *formal* language, an example of a register districts might consider constructing, as simply being one way of speaking – not superior, not better, just different. How many more students would find

meaning in language study if schools did not force them to leave behind their linguistic identity in favor of someone else's?

- *Extend invitations to families:* Finally, no matter what English/Language Arts policies districts and states decide to uphold, denounce, or edit, they need to intentionally and vigorously invite families from diverse linguistic backgrounds to participate in the decision-making. Those of us from Standardized English speaking backgrounds cannot purport to understand the perspectives and academic hopes of families whose language background is in another language or dialect, and if we are to truly create space in which all students can learn and thrive, we need to blend the expectations of families with those currently upheld in schools and the larger society. If families like Hector's and Christopher's want their children to learn both English and Spanish in school, why might this be so? If parents like Natalie view their own home language as and inferior to Standardized English, why is this so? What can we learn from one another, if we truly enter into dialogue, and how much better off will the children in our care be for it?

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Appendix A

Language Invitation Lesson: Examination of Intertextuality

Lines 1536-1555

Mack and Ruby Conversation

(Adapted from Bloome et al., 2005)

Line #	Speaker	Message Unit	Proposed Intertext?	Acknowledged Intertext?	Recognized/ Extended Intertext?	Specific Intertextual Connection	Social Significance	Commentary/ Comments
1536	Mack	1.Are these people speak *different* than this person↑?	X (m.u.1)	X (m.u.1)	X (m.u.1)	<i>Wondering if people speak differently – Ruby picks this up and questions Mack about it (therefore, she’s not only acknowledging, but also extending what he said/his question). Connected to earlier conversations: ~11.9.09 ~2.16.09</i>	<i>Mack is questioning here, which is a traditional student role b/c the teacher “holds all info” – however, there is no “answer” given to him by Ruby – Ruby asks Mack to evaluate the situation himself,</i>	<i>Related to larger ethnographic context: 1)Co-construction of curriculum is evident through the fact that Mack and Ruby invited back into this new topic (a language study) prior topics extended by other students/</i>
	Ruby	2.The:re you go, now <u>very</u> *goo:d*.						
		3.So like you’re saying they speak ↑diff↓erently?						
		4.Now that’s very interesting.						
		5.↑Why do they speak						

	Mack	<p>differently↓?</p> <p>6.*U:mm*</p> <p>*u:hhh*</p> <p>7.because they have different ski:n co:lor↑.</p> <p>8.Oh, because they have different <u>ski:n</u> colors, okay.</p> <p>9.So ↑what do you think they speak in this one?</p> <p>10.<u>Like</u> ↑I'm talking</p> <p>11.*u:mmm*</p> <p>(0.2) like ↑you have the uumm</p> <p>12.you don't have the same English as ↑me.</p> <p>13.But I has</p>	X(m.u.7)	X(m.u.7)	<p>X (m.u.1)</p> <p>X (m.u.1)</p>	<p><i>FDJs:</i> ~~~10.5.09</p> <p><i>Mack tries to link the different ways people speak to skin color. Connected to earlier conversations: 11.16.09* 1.19.10** 2.2.10*** 3.22.10**** Later connected to FDJs: 1.11*****</i></p> <p><i>Mack is encouraged by Ruby to revisit the first connection he</i></p>	<p><i>drawing on background knowledge and experiences to do so.</i></p> <p><i>This entire exchange pushes against the I-R-E model</i></p>	<p><i>families. 2)See larger transcript (whole language invitation conversation) for evidence that Mack and Michael generally feel their opinions and thoughts are valuable/ validated – Mack (Lines 1345-1350), Michael (Lines 1846 and 1936-1937). This feeling of validation and importance is supported by JM when I remind them that sharing with friends is just as important as sharing with me (Lines 1952, 1990-1996, 2226-2228, 2280,</i></p>
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	Ruby							
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~11.9.09 (K): Hector discussed with the class the fact that his mom knew Spanish, but was learning English. JM said she was learning Spanish, and already knew English. This conversation occurred as the class added pictures of Hector's mom's visit to the class to talk about her life in Michoacan, Mexico, to the "Whole Wide World Wall" (a version of Vivian Vasquez's learning wall/audit trail idea).

~2.16.10 (K): Construction of family stories in English and Spanish, at our "Family Writing Workshop Night," which led to the creation of a bilingual text that we shared with others at the Georgia Children's Literature Conference.

~10.5.09 (K): In Hector's "Where are you from?" FDJ entry, his mother wrote, "Hector, I hope that one day you will know Mexico – different houses, food, and language." This message was read aloud to the whole class during our Morning Meeting share time.

*11.16.09 (K): Mack's mom brought up skin color in an FDJ ("How are families different?"), and this led us to pull out Julius Lester's book, *Let's Talk About Race* and bell hooks' book, *Skin Again*.

**1.19.10 (K): During an interview with JB: JB said, "Tell me about family journals." Mack responded, "sometimes someone doesn't like pink skin, then someone else white skin, then another one black skin." JB mentioned it was difficult for her to understand Mack, but this was part of what he discussed (and the connection to journals and discussing skin color is there).

***2.2.10 (K): During an interview with JB: Another student said, when asked about how families are, "People are black skin and white skin."

***3.22.10 (K): JM is sharing JB's books. *We are the Ship*, by Kadir Nelson, is brought up. JM says, "This is about when you couldn't be on a baseball team if you had dark skin. Mack responds, "I got dark skin." JM continues, "So Black players made their *own* baseball league." Mack then tells a story about how his dad played on a baseball team. Michael pushes us to think a little more critically, by saying, "But what if the light skin people got their bats and destroyed their stuff, and when MLK was alive that's how he felt."

*****1.11, FDJ (1st grade, after the language lesson where he had the conversation above with Ruby): Mack wrote, "Skin color is different. I have skin color. Everybide has skin color. MLK hav."

Micro-Level Intertextual Connections:

Because all of the connections the children are making are in reference to their own experience and lives, and they are bringing up certain topics/ideas based on what they've already seen/heard, their connections took place at the micro-level.

Meso-Level Intertextual Connections:

The GPS that have to do with language – at the institutional level of school, it's important to consider the expectations that the institution has on the children's construction of language, and its influence on why this particular topic was the focal point of our family/school partnership activities.

Our school's model of instruction – Creative Problem Solving was encouraged in our particular school, as a charter that had a Renzulli Model (gifted education) and bilingual education approach to learning. Contrasting this, and the grant money that was being given to us to hire co-teachers in the area of Spanish instruction for SS and Science (along with the publicity we were receiving for doing this), with statewide practices around ELL instruction.

HB 87 – GA’s HB 87 “illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act of 2011. Again, at the state institutional level of government, a conversation was beginning to gain speed regarding the obligations of employers to verify employee status as legal residents of the U.S., as well as the obligation of residents to be able to provide legal proof of identification if asked to do so by a law enforcement officer. At this level, language and skin color were certainly being considered – most of the people being questioned/pulled over to have their identifications checked had two things in common: their skin color, and their home language.

Macro-Level Intertextual Connections:

Standardization of education: NCLB, Race to the Top, AYP, teaching to the test, accountability era, new systems of accountability/evaluation of teachers being created during this time, etc. All of this was combining to make for a more stressful teaching environment, in which the passing/mastery of standards (as least so much as could be measured by a standardized exam) was paramount to all other types of learning.

Balancing these expectations (and my want to make sure my students were prepared with whatever skills they needed to be successful in subsequent year – not wanting to fall into the “well-intentioned liberal educator” trap), with the desire to bring in home language/knowledge to the classroom, was a key component to our year.

Nation-wide crackdown on illegal immigration, and the lessening of bilingual education programs (I need to look this up): All while states like Arizona were pulling all ELL students from classrooms to be taught separately and only in English (immersion-only models of instruction).

Overarching Speech Genre Thoughts:

- Conversational? Ruby privileges Mack’s ideas and doesn’t really offer her own throughout this text.

- I-R-E is not present, in that there is not a preconceived idea of what Ruby expects Mack to say when she extends a question to him.

Therefore, she builds off of whatever it is that he says in response. However, there is still some encouragement and evaluation going on when Ruby positively responds to Mack's offerings ("Yeah," etc.).

Appendix B

Transcript Conventions

Conventions used in this transcript (Cameron, 2001; Rymes, 2009):

Pauses:

No	one	thou	sand	one	one	one	thou	sand	two
0.2	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.10	1.2	1.4	1.6	1.8	2.0

Slowing down: * *

Emphasis: _____ (underlined text)

Lowered pitch ↓

Raised pitch ↑

Elongated vowels: Su:rely

Appendix C

Language Invitation Lesson: Mood and Modality

Message Unit	Mood/ <i>Modality</i> /Polarity
1. Are these people speak *different* than this person↑?	1. Mood: Interrogative
2. <u>The</u> re you go,	2. Mood: Declarative
now <u>very</u> *goo:d*.	3. Mood: Declarative
3. So like you're saying	4-5. Mood: Interrogative
they speak ↑diff↓erently?	
4. Now that's very interesting.	6. Mood: Declarative
5. ↑Why do they speak differently↓?	7. Mood: Interrogative
6. *U:mm*	8. Mood: Declarative (with a question at the end of the sentence...)
*u:h*hh*	
7. because they have different ski:n co:lors↑.	
8. Oh, because they have different <u>ski:n</u> colors, okay.	9. Mood: Declarative
9. So ↑what do you think	10-11. Mood: Interrogative
they speak in this one?	
10. <u>Like</u> ↑I'm talking	12-14. Mood: Declarative (with a question at the end of the sentence...)
11. *u:mmm*	
(0.2) like ↑you have the uumm	
12. you don't have the same English as ↑me.	
13. But I has	15-16. Mood: Declarative (with a question at the end of the sentence...)
u:h	
14. I don't have the same English as ↑ <u>you</u> .	

15. <u>Right</u> ↓.	17. Mood: Declarative
(0.2) <u>Yeah</u> ↓.	18. Mood: Declarative
(0.2) <u>Ve</u> ↑ry ↓good.	19. Mood: Declarative

Mack's words are written in RED.

Ruby's words are written in BLUE.

*In Message Unit 5, Message Unit 7, and Message Unit 11, Ruby takes up the position of *learner* when she asks Mack to clarify what he is saying. There is no evidence that she is simply leading him to a pre-determined answer; she is genuinely asking.

*In Message Units 8 & 12-16, Mack takes up the position of power in the conversation, being that he holds the knowledge Ruby is interested in acquiring. As Mack shares his thoughts, though, he hedges a little bit in Message Unit 8; although his sentence is declarative, it has a definitive upswing in tone at its conclusion, making it sound in practice more like an interrogative sentence. As has been evidenced in Kindergarten transcripts of Mack (see “*Transcript I Play in the Sand Final*,” from *Critical Discourse Analysis, Spring 2010*), this is a pattern of his; when he shares information, he begins by sounding like he is unsure. Then, as the conversation continues, he gains more confidence, and his declarative statements take on a more assured tone. This is Mack's first conversation with Ruby, which may account for the fact that he continued to speak with the upswing at the end of his declarative sentences. As his mother stated in my first interview with her (September, 2010), Mack often speaks with people he feels comfortable with in a self-assured way, even when she doesn't think he actually knows what he is talking about ☺ (i.e. during our Family Writing Workshop Night, or in Bible Camp).

*There is not any modality here – the participants are talking in absolutes, and don't ever say it “may” be different, or it “might” happen. The modality is certain all the way through. This could be because Mack is certain of his responses, although he is looking for affirmation through the use of the upswing at the end of his sentences.

*Interesting – when I take Ruby’s declarative sentences and separate them out, they are overwhelmingly positive, and encourage Mack in his current line of thinking. She asks him questions, but she precedes these questions by positively evaluating (and engagement with his text, making it heteroglossic) Mack’s own declarative statements.

2. The:re you go,
3. now very *goo:d*.
6. Now that’s very interesting.
9. Oh, because they have different ski:n
colors, okay.
17. Right↓.
18. (0.2) Yeah↓.
19. (0.2) Ve↑ry ↓good.

Appendix D

Choosing Project Topic: Examination of Intertextuality

Examination of Intertextuality

(Adapted from Bloome et al., 2005)

**This excerpt is very much related to FAMILIES – there is a strong representation of children and JM’s dedication and want to involve families in both discussion-oriented and activity-oriented ways.*

Line #	Speaker	Message Unit	Proposed Intertext?	Acknowledged Intertext?	Recognized/ Extended Intertext?	Specific Intertextual Connection	Social Significance	Commentary/ Comments
	Joseph	1. My brother a little bit [↑]	X (m.u. 1)			<i>Family as editors/ redefining family relationships and partnerships</i>		<i>Key word here is brother – rather than Chinese – in JM picking up the connection. This will be important to consider later, as Mack offers up his interpretation of the Chinese language.</i>
	JM	He speak Chinese [↓]						
		2. Your		X (m.u. 1)				
		Really?						
		3. You’re brother can speak a little Chinese?						
		4. Maybe we could get your brother to <u>help</u> [↑]			X (m.u. 1)			
		5. One thing I thought we <u>might</u> want to do [↓]						

		<p>After we're <u>done</u> with our book↓</p> <p>6.Is send it <u>*ho:me*</u></p> <p>To our families”</p> <p>To see if <u>they</u> can</p> <p>Check it for us.↓</p> <p>7.Like last time.</p> <p>8.To see if they like it.↓</p> <p>9.Like last time!</p> <p>10.Or maybe we could even <u>invite</u> our families to school</p> <p>To have them come in</p> <p>And <u>talk</u> to us about the book</p> <p>And see what <u>they</u> would do.↓</p> <p>11. What are you thinkin’ Mack?</p>	X (m.u. 7)					
	Sandra JM			X (m.u. 7)	X (m.u. 7)	<p><i>Family writing workshop night/writing family stories together</i></p> <p><i>Also, family as editors</i></p>		<p><i>Student bringing up family connection – JM extends these connections into classroom partnership ideas.</i></p>
	Mack	<p>12.Um, that I can</p> <p>That I can talk a little</p>	X (m.u. 12)			<p><i>References to Chinese in</i></p>		<p><i>Chinese again! But</i></p>

		Chinese.				<i>our classroom</i>		<i>with no connection to family, just restating bits of the language, this connection is dropped by JM (see m.u. 20-21)</i>
	JM	13. Really?		X (m.u. 12)				
		14. That's awesome.						
		15. Like this.						
	Mack	16. Si how. ↓			X (m.u. 12)		<i>Extends his own intertextual connection, although not asked by JM to do so.</i>	
		17. Yeah!						
	JM	18. And that's what			X (m.u. 12)		<i>although not asked by JM to do so.</i>	
		19. Si how new ha.						
	Mack	20. Oh.			X (m.u. 12)		<i>Mack interrupts JM to extend</i>	
	JM	21. Sandra and Naldo, last						
		And Daisy, last three. ↓						
		22. Hector,						
		You had a chance a second ago	X (m.u. 22)			<i>Social learning community – dialogue – learning from one another</i>		
		Is it okay if we give these three friends a chance to talk?						
		23. I forgot but I				<i>Also, “power” extends to kids</i>		
	Hector	Now got it.		X (m.u. 22)			<i>Hector makes his case, and</i>	

	JM	24.Okay, four. <u>Last four</u> ↓, And then we'll start the book.		X (m.u. 22)				<i>JM accepts his attempts to again enter conversation – he is welcomed back in</i>	
	Sandra	25.Go ahead, Sandra. 26.Um It's like Um It's like last year, When we When we made a book And we And we all sent one to our families And they can have it.	X (m.u. 26)				<i>Family stories, and redefining families as partners</i>	<i>Again, student brings up family – JM extends attempted intertextual connection</i>	
	JM	27.That's right, It's a connection to last year's <u>family</u> book, Isn't it? 28.Cool.		X (m.u. 26)					<i>Reference to family stories is not extended here, just acknow-</i>

	Naldo	<p>29.Naldo.</p> <p>30.Um, that, um,</p> <p>I</p> <p>I got a movie↑</p> <p>31.And I um</p> <p>I just keep it all of it↓</p> <p>32.Cuz I wanna</p> <p>Cuz I wanna um</p> <p>Show you the movie↑</p> <p>33.It</p> <p>It</p> <p>It has Chine:se and um</p> <p>And</p> <p>And</p> <p>And Spa:nish and you can learn</p> <p>34.And um</p> <p>And um</p>	X (m.u. 33)			<p><i>Social learning/ power connection – “You can learn...” – JM is recognized as a learner in this classroom (evidenced in Hector & Lorena’s</i></p>	<p><i>ledged and JM moves on</i></p>
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		And there's another one of		X (m.u. 33)		<i>May interviews)</i>		
		There's a um						
		Thing that you can um						
		Do *animal* la:nguage.↓						
		<u>35.A:nimal</u> language!						
		That's <u>another</u> one.						
	JM	36.I can bring it.		X (m.u. 33)				
		37.Mooooooooo!						
	Naldo				X (m.u. 33)			
	Student in Background	38.*So* it			X (m.u. 33)			
		So, Landon						
	JM	39.Moo. <i>Laughing.</i>						
		40.What you can do						
		Is bring that in			X (m.u. 33)			
		And show us and we can look at that, too.			X (m.u. 33)			
		41.That's <u>another</u> part						
		That we can use					<i>JM didn't "correct" child or admonish him/her for mooing – acknowledged this before</i>	<i>Welcoming new source of information/ new language to explore (animal language)</i>

		To help us solve our problem.					<i>moving on</i>	
	Naldo	42.You'll have to go to my home.			X (m.u. 33)	<i>New language books</i>		
		43.Oh.	X (m.u. 42)			<i>Home visits!</i>		
	JM	44.It's not a movie,						
	Naldo	It's a movie in						
		In the um						
		45.TV.						
		46.TV, yeah.						
	Robert	47.*Oh*...Oh...						
	Naldo	48.We'll talk more about that later then, okay?		X (m.u. 42)				
	JM							
		49.Daisy and Hector, last two.			X (m.u. 42)	<i>Power – is able to redirect conversation with power as a teacher</i>		<i>JM is thinking that this visit may not be able to happen – constant struggle throughout study to be focusing on/ visiting focal students' home – but</i>
		Go ahead, Daisy.						
		50.And we can get the Spanish teacher.						
	Daisy	51.Oh my gosh!	X (m.u. 50)			<i>Social learning community</i>	<i>VERY OFTEN multiple</i>	
		52.We can get the help from the <u>Spanish</u>						

	JM	teachers, That's a <u>great</u> idea! 53.Hector. 54.Um I got a friend who He's He's from He's from um Taiwan. 55.He's from <u>Taiwan</u> ↑? 56.Whe:n, whe:n that, JM Whe:n like the tea:ms Hector That Who was in <u>co:llge</u> And they came in the <u>school</u> And she And um she was from Taiwa:n. 57.You remembered that from that <u>long</u> time ago.	X (m.u. 50)				<i>teachers in the room</i>	not everyone's <i>homes – as their classroom teacher.</i>
	Hector		X (m.u. 54)				<i>Language invitation activity – social learning community with many teachers/ helpers in the room</i>	<i>Amazing he remembers this so clearly!</i>

		When				<i>are written</i>		
	Hector	63.I lo:ve how excited you are.	X (m.u. 62)					
	JM	64.How about this.						
		I'm going to give you a partner,		X (m.u. 63)				
		I want you to tell your partner			X (m.u. 62)			
		What you're thinking,						
		And then we'll start the book, okay?						
		65.So Robert tell Dahlia						
		What you're thinking about right now, sweetie.						
						<i>Social learning – JM knows not everyone has time to talk & still get to books “I'm not the most important person in the room” Power – classroom power is being shared</i>		

For ease of analysis, I will segment this chunk of discourse into message units, or bits of conversation that are separated by such markers as participants taking a breath, finishing a thought, pausing, or having an emotional reaction (Bloome et al., 2005), while maintaining the transcription conventions I originally applied.

The social significance of the connections being made will draw attention to the conversational roles being performed by participants, in that it will push me to recognize the proposed and intended social goal of the activity, and whether or not participants used their words to adhere to or push against this goal.

As I listen again to the audiotapes with this new table/analysis in mind, I will be able to consider such questions as:

- a) What texts did participants extend?
- b) What texts did participants pick up/not pick up?
- c) Are the origins of these connections from the micro-, meso- (institutional), or macro- (societal) levels?

Overarching Speech Genre Thoughts:

- I-R-X – Initiate, Response, *Extension*! A dialogic co-construction of knowledge is occurring here. JM’s ideas are not privileged, and power is shared. JM puts forth a common idea/question to discuss, student responds, and JM “evaluates” the response by extending the idea of the student.
- Interesting piece of this excerpt is that there is an example here of how I sometimes cut off a child’s thoughts, or didn’t follow their idea through/extend their thoughts. This happens more than once with this classroom interest in the Chinese language! I-R-E is present in m.u. 11-20, and JM eventually drops Mack’s extended topic (how he can speak Chinese). She moves on to the next student contributor.

Appendix E

Choosing Project Topic: Mood and Modality

Speaker	Message Unit	Mood	Modality
Joseph	1. My brother a little bit↑ He speak Chinese↓	Declarative	little bit↑ He speak Chinese↓
JM	2. Your Really?	Interrogative	
	3. You're brother can speak a little Chinese?	Interrogative, <i>no preconceived answer here – she is honestly wondering.</i>	little Chinese?
	4. Maybe we could get		Maybe
	your brother to help↑	Declarative, <i>building this sentence and the next off of the idea of involving families.</i>	
	5. One thing I thought		
	we <u>might</u> want to do↓		<u>might</u> want
	After we're <u>done</u> with our book↓		
	6. Is send it * <u>ho:me</u> * To our families		
	To see		
	if <u>they</u> can Check it for us.↓	Declarative	if <u>they</u> can, <i>again, not showing certainty – there is an element of leaving this open as a possibility, especially since the families haven't agreed to this yet.</i>
Sandra	7. Like last time.	Declarative	<i>No modality here – Sandra is certain this experience with families is like the last!</i>
JM	8. To see		
	if they like it	Declarative	
	9. Like last time!	Exclamatory	

	10. Or maybe we could even <u>invite</u> our families to school		maybe, in lots of JM's Message Units (so far, in Message Unit 4, 7, and 16) where she extends opportunities for connections with families, she says "maybe," or "we might." The final decision is always left up to the students. They decide what ends up happening. In the case of families here, they were both invited to be the book's editors, and invited to the school for a language book celebration.
	To have them come in		
	And <u>talk</u> to us about the book		
	And see		
	what <u>they</u> would do.↓	Declarative	
	11. What are you thinkin' Mack?	Interrogative, <i>asking Mack what he is thinking, without a preconceived notion of what she wants to/might hear.</i>	
Mack	12. Um, that I can That I can talk a little Chine:se.	Declarative	I can talk a little Chine:se. "A little Chinese" – realistic modality here 😊.
JM	13. Really?	Interrogative	
	14. That's awesome.	Declarative	
Mack	15. Like this.	Declarative	
	16. Si how.↓	Declarative	
JM	17. Yeah!	Exclamatory	
	18. And that's what		
Mack	19. Si how new ha.	Declarative	
JM	20. Oh.		
	21. Sandra and Naldo, last And Daisy, last three.↓	Declarative, <i>This shows her authority in deciding turn-taking, and who gets to talk.</i>	<i>In these "turn-taking" exchanges, where JM decides who goes next, there is never any modality.</i>
4 min 17 sec	22. Hector, You had a chance a second ago		

	Is it okay		
	if we give		
	these three friends a chance to talk?	Interrogative, <i>However, she gives the power right back to the students here, when she explains her reasoning for not calling on Hector and asks him if it's okay that the other students get a turn.</i>	
Hector	23. I forgot		
	but I now got it.	Declarative	
JM	24. Okay, four.	Declarative, <i>and then he persuades her, so she gives him the turn back!</i>	
	<u>Last</u> four↓,		
	and then we'll start the book.	Declarative	
	25. Go ahead, Sandra.	Declarative, <i>Definitely leading the conversation, and these declarative sentences show that.</i>	
Sandra	26. Um It's like		
	Um It's like last year,		<i>Again, no modality for Sandra, and in Message Unit 47, JM continues this line of thinking – the intertextual connection is made and extended.</i>
	When we When we made a book		
	And we And we all sent one to our families		
	And they can have it.	Declarative, <i>Sure about the relevancy between this activity and another family/school partnership activity.</i>	
JM	27. That's right,		
	It's a connection to last year's <u>family</u> book,		
	Isn't it?	Interrogative, <i>again, bringing the source of</i>	

		<i>information back to Sandra, by acknowledging through this question that Sandra is the one who made the connection.</i>	
	28. Cool.	Declarative	
	29. Naldo.	Declarative	
Naldo	30. Um, that, um, I I got a movie↑		
	31. And I um I just keep it all of it↓		
	32. Cuz I wanna		
	Cuz I wanna um		
	Show you the movie↑	<i>Declarative, with an upswing in tone at the end of the sentence, making it sound like a question</i>	
	33. It It It has Chine:se		
	and um And And And Spa:nish	Declarative	
	and you can learn	Declarative	
	34. And um And um And there's another one of		
	There's a um		
	Thing that you can um Do *animal* la:nguage.↓	Declarative	
JM	35. <u>A:nimal</u> language!	Exclamatory, <i>excited about Naldo's idea.</i>	
	That's <u>another</u> one.	<i>Declarative, affirming the validity of Naldo's idea of listening to animal language.</i>	
Naldo	36. I can bring it.	Declarative	<i>I can, not as strong as "I will," or "I am going to." Sort of asking if that's</i>

			<i>alright to do. JM continues this extended opportunity in Message Unit 70, validating Naldo's idea to bring in the movie.</i>
Student in Background	37. Mooooooooo!	Exclamatory	
JM	38. *So* it		
	So, Naldo		
	39. Moo. <i>Laughing.</i>		
	40. What you can do		
	Is bring that in		
	And show us		
	and we can look at that, too.	Declarative, <i>using her authority to extend this invitation in a way that gives Naldo the power – Naldo is bringing it in, and he is showing the class, so everyone can see the video.</i>	
	41. That's <u>another</u> part		
	That we can use		can use, <i>again, not as strong</i> – not saying “we will use,” but leaving the option open to use it or not.
	To help us		
	solve our problem.	Declarative, <i>stating the relevancy of the video, and linking it in an assured way to its being able to help “solve our problem.”</i>	
Naldo	42. You'll have to go to my home.	Declarative, <i>Going to a child's home in this classroom was a regular occurrence – this could be why Naldo used a statement here, rather than asking if JM would be able to come to his home.</i>	You'll have, <i>no modality here – for this to happen, JM will HAVE to go to Naldo's home.</i>
JM	43. Oh.		
Naldo	44. It's not a movie,	Declarative	
	It's a movie in In the um		
Robert	45. TV	Declarative	
Naldo	46. TV, yeah	Declarative	

JM	47. *Oh*...Oh...		
	48. We'll talk more about that later then, okay?	Interrogative, <i>Not abandoning the topic, just asking if it's okay to postpone it for awhile.</i>	We'll talk, <i>no modality—this is a certainty. JM will talk to Naldo more about this later.</i>
	49. Daisy and Hector, last two.	Declarative	
5 min 45 sec	Go ahead, Daisy.	Declarative, <i>Again, the only time JM is using her "teacher power" in this excerpt is when she is deciding whose turn it is to talk.</i>	
Daisy	50. And we can get the Spa:nish teacher.	Declarative, <i>this is a statement, rather than a question, possibly b/c Daisy is accustomed to having adults and other teachers visit the classroom, and this would be something likely to happen for her.</i>	can get, <i>again, not as strong as "will get."</i> There is an element of understanding here on Daisy's part that this might happen, but it's not a certainty.
JM	51. Oh my gosh! We can get the help from the <u>Spanish</u> teachers,	Exclamatory	can get the help, <i>repeating Daisy's level of modality.</i>
	52. That's a <u>great</u> idea!	Exclamatory, <i>excited about Daisy's idea.</i>	That's a great, <i>no modality, it is simply a great idea ☺.</i>
	53. Hector.	Declarative	
Hector	54. Um I got a friend who		
	He's He's fro:m He's from um Taiwan.	Declarative	
JM	55. He's from <u>Taiwan</u> ↑	Interrogative, <i>interested in what Hector is saying here.</i>	
Hector	56. Whe:n, whe:n that, Whe:n like the tea:ms That Who was in <u>co:llege</u>		
	And they came in the <u>school</u>		
	And she And um she was from Taiwa:n.	Declarative	

JM	57. You remembered that from that <u>long</u> time ago.	Declarative, <i>using the declarative sentence to tell how Hector's memory is so great.</i>	
	58. We had <u>all</u> of those friends from UGA,		
	59. Remember that day		
	that we talked about <u>language</u> ↑	Interrogative, <i>to check children's memory, and be sure they are following what she is saying.</i>	
	And they sat at tables		
	And we went around to different groups↑	Interrogative, <i>to check children's memory, and be sure they are following what she is saying.</i>	
	And we had probably <u>15</u> different friends from college		probably <u>15</u> different friends, <i>not exactly sure how many there were, so there is some room left open for error/ approximation by the word "probably."</i>
	Who came in		
	to see us↑		
	And talk about <u>language</u> ↑	Interrogative, <i>to check children's memory, and be sure they are following what she is saying.</i>	
	60. I Maybe we can invite some people back,	Declarative, <i>using Hector's statement to lead into another possibility for adult connections to see the book they are creating. Building off of student ideas for this declarative statement, rather than a pre-conceived notion of content that will be discussed.</i>	Maybe we can, <i>again</i> , here's "maybe" when JM is extending options for the involvement of others in the language book project.
	61. Yeah.↓		
	Maybe when we get our <u>book</u> together		Maybe when we get, <i>here it is again!</i>

	We can invite them back.↓	Declarative, <i>See comment for Message Unit 108.</i>	
Hector	62. And when When		
JM	63. I lo:ve		lo:ve, <i>strong verb – not “like,” or “see,” but “love.” Shows that their excitement is particularly important to her, and she solidifies this by inviting the children to talk to partners about what they are thinking.</i>
	how excited you are Now about this.	Declarative	
	64. I’m going to give you a partner,		
	I want you		I want you, <i>while the words “I want” signify a certain topic that JM prefers they remain on, the idea of telling what they are thinking (Message Unit 118) is rather open-ended.</i>
	to tell your partner		
	What you’re thinking,		
	And the:n we’ll start the book,		
	okay?	Declarative/ Interrogative, <i>the entire sentence is declarative, and again follows JM’s pattern of only asserting her “teacher power” when turn-taking is involved. The ending of the sentence is interrogative, though, where she asks the students if this Think/Pair/Share activity is something they want to do. Ends up softening her directions for them to do something.</i>	
	65. So Robert tell		<i>No modality in choosing</i>

	Dahlia		<i>partners – again, JM is in charge of that.</i>
	What you're thinking about right now, sweetie.	Declarative, <i>Again, teacher assertion comes during turn-taking/how talk time is working.</i>	

Message Units 4, 7, 11, 16, 75, 89, 108, 110 – *In each of these Message Units, JM uses words like “maybe” or “we can” to describe possible events/interactions with families, other adults, and the students. When she is building off of a student’s idea (as she is in all of these examples, as they never come directly from her), she is careful not to assign certainty to it. This could be because she is unsure about whether or not it could come to fruition, or b/c she is unsure that other students would agree that this is the best way to involve others in their book-making project. In Message Unit 88, Daisy even adopts JM’s careful stance, saying that we “can” invite the Spanish teachers to be help us write our books. This indicates the student’s understanding that not all ideas can come into being, but that suggesting possibilities is key to the classroom being able to decide among the best possible options for involvement. (Modality)*

Message Units 12, 15, & 43 – *In these Message Units, both Sandra and JM (suggested by Sandra) discuss how the activities they are going to engage in are “like last time,” a reference to a Family Writing Workshop Night event when the students were in Kindergarten. There is no modality here – just the certainty that these discussions, and possibilities for family partnerships are like that event so many months ago. (Modality)*

Message Units 31, 38, 39, 40, 41, 51, 86, 87, 91, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 121 – *In these Message Units, JM shows her most prevalent tendency for “teacher power.” She is the person who controls who speaks, when they speak, and in some cases, what they are talking about with partners. She does elude to being careful that everyone gets a turn, suggesting that she does this to be fair to others, but the children do not negotiate the fairness themselves – she is the major driving force in this area. (Mood)*

Message Unit 21 – *Asking Mack what he’s thinking – doesn’t have a preconceived notion/idea of what she wants to hear. There is no specific question asked suggesting the typical I-R-E classroom patterns. (Mood)*

Throughout the entire text, it is clear that JM uses the declarative statements of the students to create her own declarative statements, based off of the children’s ideas. They are not evaluative, they are simply restatements of what the children said. In this way, the children’s ideas/connections are being carried throughout the text, and are being given weight in conversation. (Mood)

Appendix F

Creative Problem Solving: Examination of Intertextuality

(Adapted from Bloome et al., 2005)

**This excerpt has BOTH THEMES embedded within – 1) metalanguage/speech genres, and 2) language/skin color/persecution/social justice.*

**There is also a lot in this excerpt regarding dialogue/negotiation of power in discussion.*

Line #	Speaker	Message Unit	Proposed Intertext?	Acknowledged Intertext?	Recognized/ Extended Intertext?	Specific Intertextual Connection	Social Significance	Commentary/ Comments
	Michael	1.And then And then after <u>*all*</u> that↑ 2.And after <u>all</u> All all All through the story↑ 3.We have like 4 pages left. 4.And And then it say After 50 years later↓						

		5.*Martin* and um And Ro:sa came Came victorious↓	X (m.u. 5)			<i>“Proper talk” – using “book talk” – metalinguage</i>		<i>Kids don’t think a thing of Michael using these words in a book context, but it’s not how he</i>
	JM	6.Aawww! <i>Breathes in.</i> 7. <i>“*Because* of their work↓”</i>		X (m.u. 5)		<i>Power</i>	<i>Michael’s exact idea is taken in by teacher – words used straight from Michael</i>	<i>“normally” speaks – it’s a different genre. The students’ speaking genres are fluid</i>
	Michael	8.Victorious means they won.			X (m.u. 5)	<i>“We smart” connection</i>		
	JM	9.“50”			X (m.u. 5)			
	Michael	10.They were like very smart.			X (m.u. 5)	<i>Again, “we smart” connection JM takes students’ exact words – dialogue</i>		<i>Also, Maggie’s discussion about how the students realize, through literature, that</i>
	JM	11.“50 years later,” *The:y became* victorious, Michael?↑						<i>“this is how writing sounds” – May interview</i>
	Daisy	12.What’s victorious?			X (m.u. 5)	<i>Social learning</i>	<i>Daisy and JM both look to Michael for the answer</i>	
	JM	13.What’s victorious?						
	Michael	14.Um like you Like you wi:n↑ Like you win						
		15.“This means they						

	JM	won”			X (m.u. 5)			
	Michael	16.What did they win?			X (m.u. 5)			
		17.The um	X (m.u. 17)					
		The um						
		The						
		The sla						
		Like the um						
		Skin color thing↑						
	JM	18.* <u>Okay</u> *,		X (m.u. 17)				
		19.This means			X (m.u. 17)			
		They						
		The:y helped people be kind?↑						
		Because of skin color?↑						
	Michael	20.Uh huh.						
	JM	21.Okay.						
		22.“They <u>helped people</u> be <u>kind</u> to <u>others</u> with <u>different</u> ”						
		23.Skin colors↓						

Again, JM takes exact student words “We smart” and social learning – Michael is the source of knowledge

Michael is the source of knowledge

References about skin color – Mack & otherwise – Michael later connects language and skin color

Was this the beginning of Michael’s skin color/ language connection?

Again, JM checks to make sure she is using students’ exact words

	Students	24. “Skin colors”↓			X (m.u. 17)	<i>Social learning</i>	<i>Students accept and pick up the proposed intertextual connection here.</i>	
	JM	25. Okay						
	Michael	26. Yeah.						

For ease of analysis, I will segment this chunk of discourse into message units, or bits of conversation that are separated by such markers as participants taking a breath, finishing a thought, pausing, or having an emotional reaction (Bloome et al., 2005), while maintaining the transcription conventions I originally applied.

The social significance of the connections being made will draw attention to the conversational roles being performed by participants, in that it will push me to recognize the proposed and intended social goal of the activity, and whether or not participants used their words to adhere to or push against this goal.

As I listen again to the audiotapes with this new table/analysis in mind, I will be able to consider such questions as:

- a) What texts did participants extend?
- b) What texts did participants pick up/not pick up?
- c) Are the origins of these connections from the micro-, meso- (institutional), or macro- (societal) levels?

Overarching Speech Genre Thoughts:

- I-R-X – Initiate, Response, *Extension!* A dialogic co-construction of knowledge is occurring here. JM’s ideas are not privileged, and power is shared. JM puts forth a common idea/question to discuss, student responds, and JM “evaluates” the response by extending the idea of the student.

Appendix G

Creative Problem Solving: Mood and Modality

Speaker	Message Unit	Mood	Modality
Joseph	1. My brother a little bit↑ He speak Chinese↓	Declarative	little bit↑ He speak Chinese↓
JM	2. Your Really?	Interrogative	
	3. You're brother can speak a little Chinese?	Interrogative, <i>no preconceived answer here – she is honestly wondering.</i>	little Chinese?
	4. Maybe we could get		Maybe
	your brother to help↑	Declarative, <i>building this sentence and the next off of the idea of involving families.</i>	
	5. One thing I thought		
	we <u>might</u> want to do↓		<u>might</u> want
	After we're <u>done</u> with our book↓		
	6. Is send it * <u>ho:me</u> * To our families		
	To see		
	if <u>they</u> can Check it for us.↓	Declarative	if <u>they</u> can, <i>again, not showing certainty – there is an element of leaving this open as a possibility, especially since the families haven't agreed to this yet.</i>
Sandra	7. Like last time.	Declarative	<i>No modality here – Sandra is certain this experience with families is like the last!</i>
JM	8. To see		
	if they like it	Declarative	
	9. Like last time!	Exclamatory	

	10. Or maybe we could even <u>invite</u> our families to school		maybe, in lots of JM's Message Units (so far, in Message Unit 4, 7, and 16) where she extends opportunities for connections with families, she says "maybe," or "we might." The final decision is always left up to the students. They decide what ends up happening. In the case of families here, they were both invited to be the book's editors, and invited to the school for a language book celebration.
	To have them come in		
	And <u>talk</u> to us about the book		
	And see		
	what <u>they</u> would do.↓	Declarative	
	11. What are you thinkin' Mack?	Interrogative, <i>asking Mack what he is thinking, without a preconceived notion of what she wants to/might hear.</i>	
Mack	12. Um, that I can That I can talk a little Chine:se.	Declarative	I can talk a little Chine:se. "A little Chinese" – realistic modality here 😊.
JM	13. Really?	Interrogative	
	14. That's awesome.	Declarative	
Mack	15. Like this.	Declarative	
	16. Si how.↓	Declarative	
JM	17. Yeah!	Exclamatory	
	18. And that's what		
Mack	19. Si how new ha.	Declarative	
JM	20. Oh.		
	21. Sandra and Naldo, last And Daisy, last three.↓	Declarative, <i>This shows her authority in deciding turn-taking, and who gets to talk.</i>	<i>In these "turn-taking" exchanges, where JM decides who goes next, there is never any modality.</i>
4 min 17 sec	22. Hector, You had a chance a second ago		

	Is it okay		
	if we give		
	these three friends a chance to talk?	Interrogative, <i>However, she gives the power right back to the students here, when she explains her reasoning for not calling on Hector and asks him if it's okay that the other students get a turn.</i>	
Hector	23. I forgot		
	but I now got it.	Declarative	
JM	24. Okay, four.	Declarative, <i>and then he persuades her, so she gives him the turn back!</i>	
	<u>Last</u> four↓,		
	and then we'll start the book.	Declarative	
	25. Go ahead, Sandra.	Declarative, <i>Definitely leading the conversation, and these declarative sentences show that.</i>	
Sandra	26. Um It's like		
	Um It's like last year,		<i>Again, no modality for Sandra, and in Message Unit 47, JM continues this line of thinking – the intertextual connection is made and extended.</i>
	When we When we made a book		
	And we And we all sent one to our families		
	And they can have it.	Declarative, <i>Sure about the relevancy between this activity and another family/school partnership activity.</i>	
JM	27. That's right,		
	It's a connection to last year's <u>family</u> book,		
	Isn't it?	Interrogative, <i>again, bringing the source of</i>	

		<i>information back to Sandra, by acknowledging through this question that Sandra is the one who made the connection.</i>	
	28. Cool.	Declarative	
	29. Naldo.	Declarative	
Naldo	30. Um, that, um, I I got a movie↑		
	31. And I um I just keep it all of it↓		
	32. Cuz I wanna		
	Cuz I wanna um		
	Show you the movie↑	<i>Declarative, with an upswing in tone at the end of the sentence, making it sound like a question</i>	
	33. It It It has Chine:se		
	and um And And And Spa:nish	Declarative	
	and you can learn	Declarative	
	34. And um And um And there's another one of		
	There's a um		
	Thing that you can um Do *animal* la:nguage.↓	Declarative	
JM	35. <u>A:nimal</u> language!	Exclamatory, <i>excited about Naldo's idea.</i>	
	That's <u>another</u> one.	<i>Declarative, affirming the validity of Naldo's idea of listening to animal language.</i>	
Naldo	36. I can bring it.	Declarative	<i>I can, not as strong as "I will," or "I am going to." Sort of asking if that's</i>

			<i>alright to do. JM continues this extended opportunity in Message Unit 70, validating Naldo's idea to bring in the movie.</i>
Student in Background	37. Mooooooooo!	Exclamatory	
JM	38. *So* it		
	So, Naldo		
	39. Moo. <i>Laughing.</i>		
	40. What you can do		
	Is bring that in		
	And show us		
	and we can look at that, too.	Declarative, <i>using her authority to extend this invitation in a way that gives Naldo the power – Naldo is bringing it in, and he is showing the class, so everyone can see the video.</i>	
	41. That's <u>another</u> part		
	That we can use		can use, <i>again, not as strong</i> – not saying “we will use,” but leaving the option open to use it or not.
	To help us		
	solve our problem.	Declarative, <i>stating the relevancy of the video, and linking it in an assured way to its being able to help “solve our problem.”</i>	
Naldo	42. You'll have to go to my home.	Declarative, <i>Going to a child's home in this classroom was a regular occurrence – this could be why Naldo used a statement here, rather than asking if JM would be able to come to his home.</i>	You'll have, <i>no modality here – for this to happen, JM will HAVE to go to Naldo's home.</i>
JM	43. Oh.		
Naldo	44. It's not a movie,	Declarative	
	It's a movie in In the um		
Robert	45. TV	Declarative	
Naldo	46. TV, yeah	Declarative	

JM	47. *Oh*...Oh...		
	48. We'll talk more about that later then, okay?	Interrogative, <i>Not abandoning the topic, just asking if it's okay to postpone it for awhile.</i>	We'll talk, <i>no modality—this is a certainty. JM will talk to Naldo more about this later.</i>
	49. Daisy and Hector, last two.	Declarative	
5 min 45 sec	Go ahead, Daisy.	Declarative, <i>Again, the only time JM is using her "teacher power" in this excerpt is when she is deciding whose turn it is to talk.</i>	
Daisy	50. And we can get the Spa:nish teacher.	Declarative, <i>this is a statement, rather than a question, possibly b/c Daisy is accustomed to having adults and other teachers visit the classroom, and this would be something likely to happen for her.</i>	can get, <i>again, not as strong as "will get."</i> There is an element of understanding here on Daisy's part that this might happen, but it's not a certainty.
JM	51. Oh my gosh! We can get the help from the <u>Spanish</u> teachers,	Exclamatory	can get the help, <i>repeating Daisy's level of modality.</i>
	52. That's a <u>great</u> idea!	Exclamatory, <i>excited about Daisy's idea.</i>	That's a great, <i>no modality, it is simply a great idea ☺.</i>
	53. Hector.	Declarative	
Hector	54. Um I got a friend who		
	He's He's fro:m He's from um Taiwan.	Declarative	
JM	55. He's from <u>Taiwan</u> ↑	Interrogative, <i>interested in what Hector is saying here.</i>	
Hector	56. Whe:n, whe:n that, Whe:n like the tea:ms That Who was in <u>co:llege</u>		
	And they came in the <u>school</u>		
	And she And um she was from Taiwa:n.	Declarative	

JM	57. You remembered that from that <u>long</u> time ago.	Declarative, <i>using the declarative sentence to tell how Hector's memory is so great.</i>	
	58. We had <u>all</u> of those friends from UGA,		
	59. Remember that day		
	that we talked about <u>language</u> ↑	Interrogative, <i>to check children's memory, and be sure they are following what she is saying.</i>	
	And they sat at tables		
	And we went around to different groups↑	Interrogative, <i>to check children's memory, and be sure they are following what she is saying.</i>	
	And we had probably <u>15</u> different friends from college		probably <u>15</u> different friends, <i>not exactly sure how many there were, so there is some room left open for error/ approximation by the word "probably."</i>
	Who came in		
	to see us↑		
	And talk about <u>language</u> ↑	Interrogative, <i>to check children's memory, and be sure they are following what she is saying.</i>	
	60. I Maybe we can invite some people back,	Declarative, <i>using Hector's statement to lead into another possibility for adult connections to see the book they are creating. Building off of student ideas for this declarative statement, rather than a pre-conceived notion of content that will be discussed.</i>	Maybe we can, <i>again</i> , here's "maybe" when JM is extending options for the involvement of others in the language book project.
	61. Yeah.↓		
	Maybe when we get our <u>book</u> together		Maybe when we get, <i>here it is again!</i>

	We can invite them back.↓	Declarative, <i>See comment for Message Unit 108.</i>	
Hector	62. And when When		
JM	63. I lo:ve		lo:ve, <i>strong verb – not “like,” or “see,” but “love.” Shows that their excitement is particularly important to her, and she solidifies this by inviting the children to talk to partners about what they are thinking.</i>
	how excited you are Now about this.	Declarative	
	64. I’m going to give you a partner,		
	I want you		I want you, <i>while the words “I want” signify a certain topic that JM prefers they remain on, the idea of telling what they are thinking (Message Unit 118) is rather open-ended.</i>
	to tell your partner		
	What you’re thinking,		
	And the:n we’ll start the book,		
	okay?	Declarative/ Interrogative, <i>the entire sentence is declarative, and again follows JM’s pattern of only asserting her “teacher power” when turn-taking is involved. The ending of the sentence is interrogative, though, where she asks the students if this Think/Pair/Share activity is something they want to do. Ends up softening her directions for them to do something.</i>	
	65. So Robert tell		<i>No modality in choosing</i>

	Dahlia		<i>partners – again, JM is in charge of that.</i>
	What you're thinking about right now, sweetie.	Declarative, <i>Again, teacher assertion comes during turn-taking/how talk time is working.</i>	

Message Units 4, 7, 11, 16, 75, 89, 108, 110 – *In each of these Message Units, JM uses words like “maybe” or “we can” to describe possible events/interactions with families, other adults, and the students. When she is building off of a student’s idea (as she is in all of these examples, as they never come directly from her), she is careful not to assign certainty to it. This could be because she is unsure about whether or not it could come to fruition, or b/c she is unsure that other students would agree that this is the best way to involve others in their book-making project. In Message Unit 88, Daisy even adopts JM’s careful stance, saying that we “can” invite the Spanish teachers to be help us write our books. This indicates the student’s understanding that not all ideas can come into being, but that suggesting possibilities is key to the classroom being able to decide among the best possible options for involvement. (Modality)*

Message Units 12, 15, & 43 – *In these Message Units, both Sandra and JM (suggested by Sandra) discuss how the activities they are going to engage in are “like last time,” a reference to a Family Writing Workshop Night event when the students were in Kindergarten. There is no modality here – just the certainty that these discussions, and possibilities for family partnerships are like that event so many months ago. (Modality)*

Message Units 31, 38, 39, 40, 41, 51, 86, 87, 91, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 121 – *In these Message Units, JM shows her most prevalent tendency for “teacher power.” She is the person who controls who speaks, when they speak, and in some cases, what they are talking about with partners. She does elude to being careful that everyone gets a turn, suggesting that she does this to be fair to others, but the children do not negotiate the fairness themselves – she is the major driving force in this area. (Mood)*

Message Unit 21 – *Asking Mack what he’s thinking – doesn’t have a preconceived notion/idea of what she wants to hear. There is no specific question asked suggesting the typical I-R-E classroom patterns. (Mood)*

Throughout the entire text, it is clear that JM uses the declarative statements of the students to create her own declarative statements, based off of the children’s ideas. They are not evaluative, they are simply restatements of what the children said. In this way, the children’s ideas/connections are being carried throughout the text, and are being given weight in conversation. (Mood)

Appendix H

Language Family Dialogue Journal: Examination of Intertextuality

(Adapted from Bloome et al., 2005)

**This excerpt is mostly about negotiation of power – how our classroom community of learners created (or tried to create) a place for dialogue, where everyone’s voices were heard.*

**I will want to pay close attention to the development of community in this chapter, and link things back to INTENTIONAL community building activities that were happening from K-1st grade. Discuss my own involvement in this, as I have throughout this “power” conversation – I was not absent, but also an integral part of developing this community. Think about connections to the dialogue charts, Timothy the Tiger, etc., in addition to the way I tried to honor the students’ voices and build off their ideas.*

Line #	Speaker	Message Unit	Proposed Intertext?	Acknowledged Intertext?	Recognized/ Extended Intertext?	Specific Intertextual Connection	Social Significance	Commentary/ Comments
	JM	1. We’ll see if we have time to do that. ↓ 2. Y’all what do you want to <u>make</u> your question?						
	Sandra	3. What do you wanna ask your families? 4. What do you know	X (m.u. 4)			Redefining		Focusing on purpose – dialoguing with families!

		about books				<i>family partnerships/ family involvement</i>		<i>Sandra's voice is not heard after this – I wonder why? M.U. 4 & 5 are similar – the topic for journals has been about language and language books</i>
	Michael (over Sandra)	About English and Spanish? 5.Ooh, ooh! What do you know about language?↑	X (m.u. 5)					
	JM	6.Okay.↑		X (m.u. 4 & 5)				
	Michael	7.What do you know						
	JM	8.And we can kinda put those together and say “What do you know about English, French, and Spanish <u>boo:ks</u> ?”			X (m.u. 4)	<i>Redefining family partnerships</i> <i>Also, social learning</i>		
		9.Or “what do you know about the <u>language</u> in English, French, and Spanish books?”			X (m.u. 4 & 5)			
	Christopher	10.Or, or Or, or Language.	X (m.u. 10)					
	JM	11.Or what <u>languages</u> do			X (m.u. 10)	<i>Connecting more broadly to</i>		

	<p>Michael</p> <p>JM</p>	<p>you know.↑</p> <p>12.Ooh, ooh,</p> <p>I'm goin' with <u>that</u> one.</p> <p>What <u>language</u> do you know.↓</p> <p>13.Okay,</p> <p>14.Now, they</p> <p>I wanna <u>prepare</u> you.</p> <p>15.If your family says,</p> <p>English,</p> <p>And that's it,</p> <p>They could do that,</p> <p>It's kinda like a yes or no question.</p> <p>16.Or they might just say <u>Spanish</u>.</p> <p>17.And then that's all we have to talk about it</p> <p>At</p> <p>At the carpet.↓</p>		<p>X (m.u. 10)</p>	<p>X (m.u. 10)</p>	<p><i>"language"</i> <i>Social learning – connecting with Carlos' idea</i></p> <p><i>Power – balancing power and simply contributing to the conversation</i></p>	<p><i>Not competing for one idea to be chosen over another – just looking for the best option for what they are asking their families about.</i></p> <p><i>JM doesn't say "no, that won't work" – she says, "I wanna prepare you."</i></p>	<p><i>BALANCE. Key here.</i></p> <p><i>Careful to mention English and Spanish as options – making clear the importance of and value</i></p>
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		<p>18.How could we make that question</p> <p>So that they have a <u>lot</u> more to say?</p> <p>19.How could we <u>change</u> it?</p> <p>20.Christopher can we change it a little bit?↑</p> <p>21.Like,</p> <p>Um,</p> <p>Which</p> <p>*Uuu:mm*</p> <p>Languages</p> <p>Language can you talk↑</p>					<p><i>Power – still in the hands of the children, in many ways – they are changing the question. Although, JM is the ultimate authority as to whether the “change” is acceptable...</i></p>	<p><i>Still dialogic – still negotiating together</i></p>	<p><i>placed in home language!</i></p>
	<p>Christopher</p> <p>JM</p>	<p>22. Which language can you talk?↑</p> <p>23.Okay.</p> <p>24.They could <u>still</u> just say English or Spanish.</p> <p>25.Michael,</p> <p>What are you thinkin’?</p>				<p>X (m.u. 10)</p> <p>X (m.u. 10)</p>	<p><i>Power – “teacher” role (who may have something valuable to add/offer) with “collaborator,” whose</i></p>	<p><i>Passes to</i></p>	

	Michael	26. Like they What do you know			X (m.u. 10)		<i>voice is just one of many.</i>	<i>Michael – I wonder if he had his hand up? Was Christopher done?</i>
	JM	A different language?↑ 27. What do you know about different languages?↓ 28. What do you think about that? 29. Yes.			X (m.u. 10)		<i>JM just helps phrase the question – not be correcting, but by modeling and still asking for thoughts</i>	<i>Consistent with my philosophy on language instruction</i>
	Christopher JM	30. That would get some more responses, Wouldn't it? 31. <i>Unintelligible.</i>		X (m.u. 10)				<i>Still same basic connection, but rephrased in an open- ended question format.</i>
	Sandra Christopher	32. Like I know about: Um English and I I I talk in English.			X (m.u. 10)			<i>I love how Christopher himself doesn't just say "yes" (m.u. 29), but offers here support for his understanding of why/how this question will lead to</i>

	JM	33.Yeah! 34.And your family could say that, <u>Couldn't</u> they? 35.They could say, I know about <u>this</u> language, This is when I use it. 36.Okay?↑ 37.Mmmm, My, My, My uncle 38.Ooh, What about this? 39.When do we learn about <u>different</u> languages? 40.Or when do you <u>u:se</u> different languages? 41.Or,		X (m.u. 10)	X (m.u. 10) <
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	Michael	<p>42. <u>*No*</u>!</p> <p>43. I like your question better.</p> <p>44. Can we stick with Michael's question?↑</p> <p>45. Okay.</p> <p>46. So Michael,</p> <p>You said</p> <p>47. And Ms. M,</p> <p>I was <u>gonna</u> get <u>so:methin'</u></p>	X (m.u. 47)		X (m.u. 10)		<i>Offering Michael the chance to restate his own question</i>	
	JM	<p>48. Can I get somethin' Ms. M?↑</p> <p>49. Whaddo you mean, Get somethin'?</p>			X (m.u. 47)			
	Michael	<p>50. Uum,</p> <p>I'm gonna get that globe</p> <p>51. So we can</p> <p>So we can see where they come from.</p>					<i>Family stories/ learning about each other – one way we did this was through map and globe exploration – “Where are our family stories on a map?”</i>	

	JM	<p>52.Let's get our question down first, Michael,</p> <p>53.And then we can go get that and look,</p> <p>54.Okay?↑</p> <p>55.<u>What</u></p> <p>56.Cause we have to have the question</p> <p>So that our families know</p> <p>What we're <u>asking</u> them.</p> <p>57.You said,</p> <p>What do</p> <p>You know about other languages?</p> <p>58.Or about different languages?↑</p> <p>59.Okay.</p> <p>60.What do <u>you</u></p> <p>Know</p> <p>About</p>		X (m.u. 47)		<p>X (m.u. 10)</p> <p>X (m.u. 10)</p>	<p><i>Family as partners/ redefining partnerships</i></p>	<p><i>Acknowledges but doesn't extend here – again, balancing student input with accomplishing/ completing journals to send home. M.U. 56 – explains reasons for not getting globe to Michael. Going back to focus on this lesson/ segment. Again, asks if her interpretation of question is correct – doesn't assume</i></p>	
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		Different						
		61.Uum						
		62.Languages.						
	Christopher	63.Is this <u>cursive</u> or somethin'?↑						
	JM							
	Michael	64.Nope, it's just quick.						
		65.Oh.	X (m.u. 63)					
	JM	66.Alright, see this?↑						
	Michael	67.Here's your question		X (m.u. 63)				
	JM	68.See this <u>line</u> right here?↑				X (m.u. 10)		
		69.Your question starts right here.						
		70.What do <u>you</u> know about different languages?						
		71.Alright, Michael,						
		If you						
		Are ready,						
		Write your question here so that your family can						

*Cursive was
being
experimented
with by a boy
@ Michael's
table almost
all year –
and older
brothers and
sisters were
also using it*

		respond.						
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For ease of analysis, I will segment this chunk of discourse into message units, or bits of conversation that are separated by such markers as participants taking a breath, finishing a thought, pausing, or having an emotional reaction (Bloome et al., 2005), while maintaining the transcription conventions I originally applied.

The social significance of the connections being made will draw attention to the conversational roles being performed by participants, in that it will push me to recognize the proposed and intended social goal of the activity, and whether or not participants used their words to adhere to or push against this goal.

As I listen again to the audiotapes with this new table/analysis in mind, I will be able to consider such questions as:

- a) What texts did participants extend?
- b) What texts did participants pick up/not pick up?
- c) Are the origins of these connections from the micro-, meso- (institutional), or macro- (societal) levels?

Overarching Speech Genre Thoughts:

- As the children create their question, there is a sort of evaluation as JM “prepares” them for the possibility of their families only answering *yes* or *no* to their proposed FDJ question. Crafting this question to families becomes a joint effort, though, and JM actually ends up *retracting* her own answer in favor of a student-constructed question offered by Michael (still “evaluation” – “I like your question better” – m.u. 43).

- There is a back-and-forth, and a give-and-take, to this one. Students offer thoughts and they are picked up by JM (m.u. 4, 5, 10), students pick up one another's thoughts (m.u. 12), and students extend their thinking to show an understanding of why one question over another will create a richer family response without being prompted to do so (m.u. 32).
- Christopher is cut off once, when extending a thought about his uncle, but JM doesn't seem to hear him as she interrupts to insert her own thoughts. I feel comfortable saying she doesn't hear him and isn't just ignoring him, b/c of her consistent efforts throughout this and other excerpts to *hear* and *build upon* student ideas.

Appendix I

Language Family Dialogue Journal: Mood and Modality

Speaker	Message Unit	Mood	Modality
Joseph	1. My brother a little bit↑ He speak Chinese↓	Declarative	little bit↑ He speak Chinese↓
JM	2. Your Really?	Interrogative	
	3. You're brother can speak a little Chinese?	Interrogative, <i>no preconceived answer here – she is honestly wondering.</i>	little Chinese?
	4. Maybe we could get		Maybe
	your brother to <u>help</u> ↑	Declarative, <i>building this sentence and the next off of the idea of involving families.</i>	
	5. One thing I thought		
	we <u>might</u> want to do↓		<u>might</u> want
	After we're <u>done</u> with our book↓		
	6. Is send it * <u>ho:me</u> * To our families		
	To see		
	if <u>they</u> can Check it for us.↓	Declarative	if <u>they</u> can, <i>again, not showing certainty – there is an element of leaving this open as a possibility, especially since the families haven't agreed to this yet.</i>
Sandra	7. Like last time.	Declarative	<i>No modality here – Sandra is certain this experience with families is like the last!</i>
JM	8. To see		
	if they like it	Declarative	
	9. Like last time!	Exclamatory	

	10. Or maybe we could even <u>invite</u> our families to school		<i>maybe, in lots of JM's Message Units (so far, in Message Unit 4, 7, and 16) where she extends opportunities for connections with families, she says "maybe," or "we might." The final decision is always left up to the students. They decide what ends up happening. In the case of families here, they were both invited to be the book's editors, and invited to the school for a language book celebration.</i>
	To have them come in		
	And <u>talk</u> to us about the book		
	And see		
	what <u>they</u> would do.↓	Declarative	
	11. What are you thinkin' Mack?	Interrogative, <i>asking Mack what he is thinking, without a preconceived notion of what she wants to/might hear.</i>	
Mack	12. Um, that I can That I can talk a little Chine:se.	Declarative	I can talk a little Chine:se. "A little Chinese" – realistic modality here 😊.
JM	13. Really?	Interrogative	
	14. That's awesome.	Declarative	
Mack	15. Like this.	Declarative	
	16. Si how.↓	Declarative	
JM	17. Yeah!	Exclamatory	
	18. And that's what		
Mack	19. Si how new ha.	Declarative	
JM	20. Oh.		
	21. Sandra and Naldo, last And Daisy, last three.↓	Declarative, <i>This shows her authority in deciding turn-taking, and who gets to talk.</i>	<i>In these "turn-taking" exchanges, where JM decides who goes next, there is never any modality.</i>
4 min 17 sec	22. Hector, You had a chance a second ago		

	Is it okay		
	if we give		
	these three friends a chance to talk?	Interrogative, <i>However, she gives the power right back to the students here, when she explains her reasoning for not calling on Hector and asks him if it's okay that the other students get a turn.</i>	
Hector	23. I forgot		
	but I now got it.	Declarative	
JM	24. Okay, four.	Declarative, <i>and then he persuades her, so she gives him the turn back!</i>	
	<u>Last</u> four↓,		
	and then we'll start the book.	Declarative	
	25. Go ahead, Sandra.	Declarative, <i>Definitely leading the conversation, and these declarative sentences show that.</i>	
Sandra	26. Um It's like		
	Um It's like last year,		<i>Again, no modality for Sandra, and in Message Unit 47, JM continues this line of thinking – the intertextual connection is made and extended.</i>
	When we When we made a book		
	And we And we all sent one to our families		
	And they can have it.	Declarative, <i>Sure about the relevancy between this activity and another family/school partnership activity.</i>	
JM	27. That's right,		
	It's a connection to last year's <u>family</u> book,		
	Isn't it?	Interrogative, <i>again, bringing the source of</i>	

		<i>information back to Sandra, by acknowledging through this question that Sandra is the one who made the connection.</i>	
	28. Cool.	Declarative	
	29. Naldo.	Declarative	
Naldo	30. Um, that, um, I I got a movie↑		
	31. And I um I just keep it all of it↓		
	32. Cuz I wanna		
	Cuz I wanna um		
	Show you the movie↑	<i>Declarative, with an upswing in tone at the end of the sentence, making it sound like a question</i>	
	33. It It It has Chine:se		
	and um And And And Spa:nish	Declarative	
	and you can learn	Declarative	
	34. And um And um And there's another one of		
	There's a um		
	Thing that you can um Do *animal* la:nguage.↓	Declarative	
JM	35. <u>A:nimal</u> language!	Exclamatory, <i>excited about Naldo's idea.</i>	
	That's <u>another</u> one.	<i>Declarative, affirming the validity of Naldo's idea of listening to animal language.</i>	
Naldo	36. I can bring it.	Declarative	<i>I can, not as strong as "I will," or "I am going to." Sort of asking if that's</i>

			<i>alright to do. JM continues this extended opportunity in Message Unit 70, validating Naldo's idea to bring in the movie.</i>
Student in Background	37. Mooooooooo!	Exclamatory	
JM	38. *So* it		
	So, Naldo		
	39. Moo. <i>Laughing.</i>		
	40. What you can do		
	Is bring that in		
	And show us		
	and we can look at that, too.	Declarative, <i>using her authority to extend this invitation in a way that gives Naldo the power – Naldo is bringing it in, and he is showing the class, so everyone can see the video.</i>	
	41. That's <u>another</u> part		
	That we can use		can use, <i>again, not as strong</i> – not saying “we will use,” but leaving the option open to use it or not.
	To help us		
	solve our problem.	Declarative, <i>stating the relevancy of the video, and linking it in an assured way to its being able to help “solve our problem.”</i>	
Naldo	42. You'll have to go to my home.	Declarative, <i>Going to a child's home in this classroom was a regular occurrence – this could be why Naldo used a statement here, rather than asking if JM would be able to come to his home.</i>	You'll have, <i>no modality here – for this to happen, JM will HAVE to go to Naldo's home.</i>
JM	43. Oh.		
Naldo	44. It's not a movie,	Declarative	
	It's a movie in In the um		
Robert	45. TV	Declarative	
Naldo	46. TV, yeah	Declarative	

JM	47. *Oh*...Oh...		
	48. We'll talk more about that later then, okay?	Interrogative, <i>Not abandoning the topic, just asking if it's okay to postpone it for awhile.</i>	We'll talk, <i>no modality—this is a certainty. JM will talk to Naldo more about this later.</i>
	49. Daisy and Hector, last two.	Declarative	
5 min 45 sec	Go ahead, Daisy.	Declarative, <i>Again, the only time JM is using her "teacher power" in this excerpt is when she is deciding whose turn it is to talk.</i>	
Daisy	50. And we can get the Spanish teacher.	Declarative, <i>this is a statement, rather than a question, possibly b/c Daisy is accustomed to having adults and other teachers visit the classroom, and this would be something likely to happen for her.</i>	can get, <i>again, not as strong as "will get."</i> There is an element of understanding here on Daisy's part that this might happen, but it's not a certainty.
JM	51. Oh my gosh! We can get the help from the <u>Spanish</u> teachers,	Exclamatory	can get the help, <i>repeating Daisy's level of modality.</i>
	52. That's a <u>great</u> idea!	Exclamatory, <i>excited about Daisy's idea.</i>	That's a great, <i>no modality, it is simply a great idea ☺.</i>
	53. Hector.	Declarative	
Hector	54. Um I got a friend who		
	He's He's from He's from um Taiwan.	Declarative	
JM	55. He's from <u>Taiwan</u> ↑	Interrogative, <i>interested in what Hector is saying here.</i>	
Hector	56. Whe:n, whe:n that, Whe:n like the tea:ms That Who was in <u>co:llege</u>		
	And they came in the <u>school</u>		
	And she And um she was from Taiwa:n.	Declarative	

JM	57. You remembered that from that <u>long</u> time ago.	Declarative, <i>using the declarative sentence to tell how Hector's memory is so great.</i>	
	58. We had <u>all</u> of those friends from UGA,		
	59. Remember that day		
	that we talked about <u>language</u> ↑	Interrogative, <i>to check children's memory, and be sure they are following what she is saying.</i>	
	And they sat at tables		
	And we went around to different groups↑	Interrogative, <i>to check children's memory, and be sure they are following what she is saying.</i>	
	And we had probably <u>15</u> different friends from college		probably <u>15</u> different friends, <i>not exactly sure how many there were, so there is some room left open for error/ approximation by the word "probably."</i>
	Who came in		
	to see us↑		
	And talk about <u>language</u> ↑	Interrogative, <i>to check children's memory, and be sure they are following what she is saying.</i>	
	60. I Maybe we can invite some people back,	Declarative, <i>using Hector's statement to lead into another possibility for adult connections to see the book they are creating. Building off of student ideas for this declarative statement, rather than a pre-conceived notion of content that will be discussed.</i>	Maybe we can, <i>again</i> , here's "maybe" when JM is extending options for the involvement of others in the language book project.
	61. Yeah.↓		
	Maybe when we get our <u>book</u> together		Maybe when we get, <i>here it is again!</i>

	We can invite them back.↓	Declarative, <i>See comment for Message Unit 108.</i>	
Hector	62. And when When		
JM	63. I lo:ve		lo:ve, <i>strong verb – not “like,” or “see,” but “love.” Shows that their excitement is particularly important to her, and she solidifies this by inviting the children to talk to partners about what they are thinking.</i>
	how excited you are Now about this.	Declarative	
	64. I’m going to give you a partner,		
	I want you		I want you, <i>while the words “I want” signify a certain topic that JM prefers they remain on, the idea of telling what they are thinking (Message Unit 118) is rather open-ended.</i>
	to tell your partner		
	What you’re thinking,		
	And the:n we’ll start the book,		
	okay?	Declarative/ Interrogative, <i>the entire sentence is declarative, and again follows JM’s pattern of only asserting her “teacher power” when turn-taking is involved. The ending of the sentence is interrogative, though, where she asks the students if this Think/Pair/Share activity is something they want to do. Ends up softening her directions for them to do something.</i>	
	65. So Robert tell		<i>No modality in choosing</i>

	Dahlia		<i>partners – again, JM is in charge of that.</i>
	What you're thinking about right now, sweetie.	Declarative, <i>Again, teacher assertion comes during turn-taking/how talk time is working.</i>	

Message Units 4, 7, 11, 16, 75, 89, 108, 110 – *In each of these Message Units, JM uses words like “maybe” or “we can” to describe possible events/interactions with families, other adults, and the students. When she is building off of a student’s idea (as she is in all of these examples, as they never come directly from her), she is careful not to assign certainty to it. This could be because she is unsure about whether or not it could come to fruition, or b/c she is unsure that other students would agree that this is the best way to involve others in their book-making project. In Message Unit 88, Daisy even adopts JM’s careful stance, saying that we “can” invite the Spanish teachers to be help us write our books. This indicates the student’s understanding that not all ideas can come into being, but that suggesting possibilities is key to the classroom being able to decide among the best possible options for involvement. (Modality)*

Message Units 12, 15, & 43 – *In these Message Units, both Sandra and JM (suggested by Sandra) discuss how the activities they are going to engage in are “like last time,” a reference to a Family Writing Workshop Night event when the students were in Kindergarten. There is no modality here – just the certainty that these discussions, and possibilities for family partnerships are like that event so many months ago. (Modality)*

Message Units 31, 38, 39, 40, 41, 51, 86, 87, 91, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 121 – *In these Message Units, JM shows her most prevalent tendency for “teacher power.” She is the person who controls who speaks, when they speak, and in some cases, what they are talking about with partners. She does elude to being careful that everyone gets a turn, suggesting that she does this to be fair to others, but the children do not negotiate the fairness themselves – she is the major driving force in this area. (Mood)*

Message Unit 21 – *Asking Mack what he’s thinking – doesn’t have a preconceived notion/idea of what she wants to hear. There is no specific question asked suggesting the typical I-R-E classroom patterns.*

(Mood)

Throughout the entire text, it is clear that JM uses the declarative statements of the students to create her own declarative statements, based off of the children’s ideas. They are not evaluative, they are simply restatements of what the children said. In this way, the children’s ideas/connections are being carried throughout the text, and are being given weight in conversation. (Mood)

Appendix J

World Changers Go Time Traveling

Characters: Rosa Parks, George Washington Carver, Abraham Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's Friend, Ruby Bridges, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Wizard

Once upon a time, Rosa Parks met a time-traveling wizard on a ship. She told him how she changed the world.

Rosa said, "people were separating us on the bus. I had to stop this, so black and white people could sit together. Lots of people boycotted the buses with me."

The wizard said, "What is your wish?"

"Will you build a time machine so I can meet other world changers? I don't know about all world changers. I only know about some of them" said Rosa.

The wizard said, "yes. I am a wizard for world changers. All you have to do is spin my magic globe and make your wish!"

Rosa spun a magic globe. The wizard pulled her in to Washington D.C.

"Good luck," said the wizard to Rosa. "It's dangerous out there."

Rosa traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet Martin Luther King, Jr in 1967.

"Where have you been?" said Martin. "I have a speech to give here in Washington, and I want you there so everything can be okay."

Martin gave his "I have a dream" speech, and Rosa watched it. "I have a dream, that one day..."

Because of their work, 50 years later they became victorious. This means they helped people be kind to others with different skin colors.

MLK, Jr. found out about the time traveling globe, and spun it fast. The wizard spun his hand around and pulled him in.

MLK, Jr. traveled back in time to Abraham Lincoln's home in Illinois in 1861.

MLK, Jr. said, "Hello! I'm Martin Luther King, Jr. I used to play baseball. Then I grew up and gave a speech for black people and white people. I know about you. I'm sorry your son Edward died from pulmonary tuberculosis. You changed the world for everyone. Thank you for changing the world by freeing the slaves."

Abraham Lincoln said, "you're welcome. Thank you for changing people's lives who have dark skin."

The time traveling wizard spun the globe and went into it. Abraham Lincoln went with him and landed in front of Ruby Bridges home in New Orleans in 1980.

Abraham Lincoln said, "Why do you have strange looking things that can move by themselves?"

He saw Ruby Bridges, and she looked funny at him. "Who are you? Why are you wearing that hat?"

He said, "This is not a weird hat! I'm a president!"

"You are supposed to be dead! You're Abraham Lincoln!" said Ruby Bridges. "You said a speech to white people to persuade them to think that black people of Africa did not deserve to be treated like slaves."

Abraham Lincoln said, "You're right! But I don't know who you are!"

Ruby Bridges said, "I'm Ruby Bridges, I'm from the new times. I was born after you. I was one of the first African Americans to go to a white school."

"Thank you for telling me that!" said Abe. "I really appreciate it."

“Because you did that, you are a world changer. Now you get to spin this globe and travel through time.

The wizard will tell you more,” said Abe.

The wizard appeared. He said, “spin the globe, Ruby. And my magic stick will touch it and the globe will stop. You will travel through time.”

Ruby touched the globe to meet George Washington Carver. She traveled to a log cabin in Missouri in 1864.

Ruby landed in front of George Washington Carver’s house.

George’s neighbor saw Ruby land and said, “Whoa! Who are you???”

Ruby said, “I’m Ruby Bridges. I changed the world. Did you change the world?”

George Washington Carver said, “I am an inventor. I made all kinds of stuff out of peanuts because I like peanuts. It’s good. Do you want to try some?”

Ruby said, “yes.” She tries some peanut butter.

“Mmmmmm!! Good. Can I have more?” said Ruby.

George Washington Carver said, “don’t get yourself caught up too much in all this peanut butter. It might make you sick.”

“Yeah...I think I better stop, because it will make me sick. But thank you!” said Ruby.

“How did you get here?” said George.

“I spun a magic globe and this wizard put me in it!” said Ruby.

The wizard appeared again. He said, “You’ve done well, and you’ve had good luck. George, you were also a world changer. You changed the world because you were one of the first African American inventors. You can go in the globe.”

Then he spun the globe and one year later, they all gathered together in the ship again.

The screen goes black, and says “one year later...”

“Because of these world changers, all children go to school together and play together and drink from the same water fountains, and eat some peanut butter together.”

“But don’t eat too much.”

“The end!”

Appendix K

Un Equipo de Fútbol Mexicano Con Una Roca Mágica

A Mexican Team With a Magic Stone

En 2011, hay un equipo del fútbol en una escuela secundaria en México. El día de un gran partido, los miembros del equipo – Julio, Alexa, Javier, Tomás, Mike, Max y Delia – están en la escuela.

In 2011, there is a soccer team at a high school in Mexico. The day of a big game, the team members – Julio, Alexa, Javier, Thomas, Mike, Max and Delia – are at school.

Durante la hora de almuerzo, Javier está buscando su pelota de fútbol alrededor de la escuela. Entra en un polvoriento armario para buscarla. Él ve algo brillante y verde detrás de una fregona en una esquina. Él se corre sin el armario para encontrar a sus otros miembros del equipo en la cafetería.

During lunch break, Javier is looking around the school for his soccer ball. He walks into a dusty closet to look for it. As he bends down to grab his ball, he sees something green that is glowing under a mop in the corner. He runs out of the closet to find his other team members in the lunchroom.

Se reúnen en un círculo y Javier les dice sobre la cosa verde y brillante que vio. Todos ellos caminan juntos al armario. Javier cuidadosamente lo recoge y descubre que es una roca mágica. Tomás la pone en su mochila. Los miembros del equipo piensan en la roca que se encuentran el resto de la jornada escolar.

They gather in a circle and Javier tells them about the glowing green thing he saw. They all walk to the closet together. Javier carefully picks it up and discovers that it is a stone. Javier, Julio, Alexa, Max, Delia, and Mike all touch the stone. Thomas puts it in his book bag. The team members think about the stone they found for the rest of the school day.

Después de la escuela, Tomás cuidadosamente lleva su mochila al vestuario. El cambia su ropa rápidamente antes de que nadie vea la roca mágica. Después Tomas se pone su uniforme de fútbol, se pone la roca mágica en el bolsillo.

After school, Thomas carefully carries his book bag to the locker room. He changes quickly before anyone sees the glowing magic stone. After Thomas changes into his soccer uniform, he puts the magic stone in his pocket.

Julio, Alexa, Javier, Mike, Max, y Delia están esperando en el gimnasio. Inmediatamente, comienzan preguntar donde está la roca mágica. Tomás lentamente saca de su bolsillo para mostrarla a sus amigos. De repente, el entrenador, Señor Grayden, entra en el gimnasio, gritando a los jugadores para llegar rápidamente al campo del fútbol. Tomás pone la roca en el bolsillo y todos los jugadores corren al campo para el partido.

Julio, Alexa, Javier, Mike, Max, and Delia are waiting for him in the gym. They immediately begin asking where the magic stone is. Thomas slowly pulls it out of his pocket to show his friends. Suddenly Coach Grayden comes into the gym, yelling for the players to quickly go to the field. Thomas puts the stone back in his pocket and they all run to the field for their game.

El árbitro hace sonar el silbato y comienza el partido de fútbol. Javier, Delia, Max, Alexa, Tomás, Julio, y Mike comienzan a jugar el partido. ¡Después de jugar por unos minutos la roca mágica cae del bolsillo de Tomás! De alguna manera la piedra mágica vuela hacia el balón y le pega. Sorprendentemente, la roca verde cambia para combinar con los colores de la pelota de fútbol. En ese momento, Alexa patea la pelota hacia el portero. ¡Mágicamente, la pelota pasa por el portero y en la portería!

The referee blows the whistle and the soccer game begins. Javier, Delia, Max, Alexa, Thomas, Julio, and Mike all begin playing the game. After playing for a few minutes, the magic stone flies out of Thomas' pocket! Somehow the magic stone flies toward the ball and sticks to it. To their surprise, the green color changes to blend into the ball. Just then, Alexa kicks the ball toward the goalie. Magically, the ball goes through the goalie and into the goal.

¡Todo el mundo está tan emocionado que corren juntos y golpean el pecho para celebrar!

Mike mira a todos y les pregunta si vieron lo que pasó. Todos los miembros del equipo de acuerdo en que la roca mágica hizo que la pelota va por el portero. Ellos se sorprenden de que la roca podría hacer algo como esto ocurre. Max le dice en voz baja a su grupo que el uso de la roca mágica es hacer trampa. Los miembros del equipo de acuerdo con Max, y todos ellos deciden que hacer trampa está mal.

Everyone was so excited that they ran together chest bumping each other to celebrate. Mike looks at everyone and asks if they saw what happened. All the team members agree that the magic stone made the ball go right through the goalie. They are amazed that the small stone could make something like this happen. Max quietly tells his group that using the magic stone is cheating. The team members agree with Max, and they all decide cheating is wrong.

Julio corre hacia la pelota y agarra la piedra mágica. Rompe la piedra mágica y lo tira a la basura. El equipo decide que Delia debe correr al árbitro y decirle que su equipo accidentalmente tocó el balón con las manos antes de que el gol anterior se marcó, para que no se merecen el punto. Todos los amigos deciden que no quieren encontrar una otra roca mágica nunca más.

Julio runs over to the ball and grabs the magic stone. He breaks the magic stone and throws it into the trash. The team decides Delia should run to the referee and tell him that their team accidentally touched the ball with their hands before the previous goal was scored, so they should not get the point. All of the friends decide they never want to find another magic stone again.

Appendix L

Shakira Moves to Georgia

Shakira Déménage à Géorgie

Our friend is named Shakira. She is 8 years old. She lived in Haiti with her mom, dad, brother, and sister. Her family decided to move to Georgia because the earthquake destroyed the house and they thought it was dangerous.

Notre amie s'appelle Shakira. Elle a 8 ans. Elle habitait à Haïti avec sa mère, son, père, son frère et sa sœur. Sa famille a décidé de déménager à Géorgie parce que sa maison a été détruite par un tremblement de terre. Ils pensaient qu'elle était trop dangereuse.

Her family drives to the dock where they get on a super sonic speed boat. When Shakira gets close to the United States and she sees the ocean, she is happy.

Shakira et sa famille vont en voiture à un quai où ils embarquent sur un navire. Quand Shakira voit l'océan près des Etats-Unis, elle est heureuse.

When she arrives at the Georgia coast, her family rents a blue SUV to drive.

Quand elle arrive à la côte de Géorgie, sa famille loue un 4x4 bleu pour aller.

The next day, Shakira's mom takes her to school to a 1st grade class. Shakira tells her mom, "I hope to make new friends today."

Le lendemain, Shakira et sa mère. Elles arrivent à la classe de première année. Shakira dit à sa mère, « J'espère trouver de nouveaux amis aujourd'hui. »

As soon as she walks in the classroom, a boy waves to her. He says, “Hi! My name is Jarrod. What’s your name?” Shakira doesn’t understand his funny words. Shakira responds by saying, “Bonjour.”

Jarrod looks confused.

Aussitôt qu’elle entre dans la salle de classe, un garçon lui fait signe de la main. Il dit, « Bonjour. Je m’appelle Jarrod. Comment t’appelles-tu? » Shakira ne comprend pas ses mots bizarres. Elle répond, « Bonjour. » Jarrod semble confondu.

Jarrod tries again. He points to himself and says, “Jarrod.” Then he points to Shakira and she says “Shakira.” Throughout the day, Jarrod helps her by pointing at objects and teaching her new English words.

Jarrod essaie encore. Il s’indique lui-même du doigt en même temps qu’il dit « Jarrod ». Puis il indique Shakira du doigt et elle dit, « Shakira. » Pendant la journée, Jarrod indique des choses du doigt et répète le nom des objets pour enseigner les mots anglais à Shakira.

After lunch, Shakira is on the playground. As she is sliding on the slide, she bumps into a boy from a third grade class. She says sorry in French, but he turns around and pushes her, saying “You don’t belong here! Only English speakers belong here.”

Après le déjeuner, Shakira est dans la cour de récréation. Quand elle glisse sur le toboggan, elle cogne par hasard un garçon d’une classe de 3^e année. Elle dit « Pardon. Je suis désolée ». Mais il la pousse et il dit « Tu ne peux pas rester ici. Seulement les gens qui parlent anglais peuvent rester ici. »

Jarrod sees what’s going on and runs fast to help Shakira. They tell a teacher what happened. Shakira is very sad.

Jarrod voit cet événement et il court vite aider Shakira. Ils expliquent à une institutrice ce qui s’est passé. Shakira est très triste.

Her teacher talks to the class about how Shakira can only speak French. To cheer her up, they decide to all help teach her English using body language, and she helps them learn some French phrases.

L'institutrice explique à la classe que Shakira ne parle que le français. Ils décident qu'ils peuvent aider Shakira. Ils peuvent utiliser le langage corporel pour lui enseigner l'Anglais. En même temps, elle leur enseigne des phrases françaises.

By the end of the day, Shakira has made lots of new friends and has learned some new English words. She is excited about her new life. As she is waving goodbye to her new friends she says, "Au revoir! Goodbye!"

À la fin de la journée, Shakira a rencontré beaucoup de nouveaux amis et elle a appris de nouveaux mots anglais. Elle est contente de sa nouvelle. Quand elle dit au revoir à ses nouveaux amis, elle dit, « Au revoir ! Goodbye ! »