CHAPTER 11 Literacy Practices across Learning Contexts

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1 Introduction

In recent years we have witnessed a departure from the central concerns that motivated much of the early twentieth-century research on literacy, namely, whether societies were primitive or literate and what cognitive skills could be possibly linked to literacy development. Literacy was then understood, in its more restrictive sense, as the ability to read and write. While at the center of these research concerns was the commitment to modernity and to finding the answers to questions about the diversity of development and learning across societies, a number of consequences ensued from these efforts, some positive, some less benign. Today we continue to build from this foundation and to expand on its scope.

Initially situated in the field of psychology, literacy has become an interdisciplinary subject of study that draws from theoretical and methodological perspectives in linguistics, anthropology, human development, and education, addressing learning as a lifespan process and across a variety of learning contexts (schools, community- and school-based programs, religious institutions, to name but a few). Newer conceptualizations of literacy development, especially those from research carried out in US schools, have sought a more complex understanding of the interplay between local literacy practices (i.e., literacies indigenous to communities) and those of more formal institutional practices (i.e., public education) in an effort to describe the range of literacy practices that individuals experience in their lifetime. This chapter reviews recent approaches to the study of literacy and highlights research addressing the role of language in literacy development, while continuing to make an argument for comprehensive, integrative approaches that consider language (oral and written) as central to the development of literacy in its historical and social context.

2 The Scope of Literacy

Central to the main thesis of this chapter is the notion that language (its use, teaching, and learning) works as a mediating, interpretive system in the development of literacy. In this respect, language is considered a tool for learning (Vygotsky 1978; Cole 1985, 1996). Fundamental to this perspective is the recognition that it is through language and through the language practices (the ways participants in interaction employ language forms while engaged in purposeful activity) of particular social or cultural groups that literacy takes place. This necessitates a definition of literacy that accounts for the mediating power of language, a definition that is couched in an understanding of text and context, of what counts as literacy, and the power that social institutions have in shaping what gets to be constructed as literacy.

No longer considered as the ability to read and write, literacy has been increasingly conceived as a process of interpretation. Literacy is part of one's orientation to a lived reality made meaningful through the interpretation of text, that is, to written and oral descriptions and explanations of events that are endowed with sociohistorical value.[1] From this perspective, literacy development entails reformulating existing knowledge and experiences to understand new knowledge (Olson 1985; Langer 1987; Wells 1985; Berthoff 1984). Literacy is thus an interpretive, experiential, and developmental process that is mediated through language. The link between what is already known and what is potential new knowledge takes place through literacy practices that use language as the means to negotiate such connections. Literacy is less a set of acquired skills and more an activity that affords the acquisition and negotiation of new ways of thinking and acting in the world. Literacy is learning to become competent members of a community.

Increasingly, there is a collective sense among literacy theorists to speak of "literacies" or "multi-literacies." A new scholarly endeavor addresses this emergent perspective under the umbrella "New Literacy Studies" of which a prominent international group of researchers called the New London Studies Group[2] has been its most avid proponent. This critical, avant-garde group of intellectuals has proposed a redefinition of literacy that calls for the recognition of the multiplicity of literacies that people develop regardless of their degree of participation in mainstream practices – and even the global economy. Attention to these multiple literacies would account for greater inclusivity in the more institutionalized contexts of literacy instruction in ways that would not privilege only one form of literacy, often at the expense of others.

As with other cultural practices, literacy practices (and the interpretive processes they imply) invoke culturally defined social relations. That is, the process of literacy development is often determined by community and societal structures and ideologies that constrain, give shape to, and transform literacy practices. In this respect, any discussion of literacy implies a discussion of the relations of power that are at play, of the history of particular literacy activities, and of the ways in which that history is encoded in moment-to-moment interaction and is projected in its accumulated trajectory over time (Cole 1996). Literacy then is a product of sociohistorical development and involves a set of practices, which are shaped by political, social, and economic forces. It is embedded in relations of power (Lankshear and McLaren

1993; Luke 1994) where what counts as literacy is never free of sociopolitical consequence.

An example that illustrates this point is found in one educational policy in the state of California. Despite the large number of Spanish-speaking students in public schools and the relative success of bilingual education programs over the span of twenty years (aimed at providing literacy support in the native language), a voter-referendum, Proposition 227, was passed in 1998 eliminating bilingual education in the state. The measure has had a devastating impact on the affective, moral, and cognitive development of students who speak languages other than English and who benefited from such programs. In California alone, Spanish-speakers represent the majority of English limited proficient students (47.9%).[3] In a state where speakers of other languages comprise one quarter of the state's total student population, the elimination of bilingual education reflects ongoing ideologies of the value of other languages *vis-à-vis* the privileged status of English as the language of literacy development and public education.

3 Studying Literacy in Context

Since the early 1980s literacy researchers have turned to the writings of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky to understand the processes of cognition, thinking, learning, and human development in their sociocultural contexts. Their theoretical approach, most recently termed Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Cole 1996), offers a more productive perspective for understanding the cultural and historical situatedness of literacy; that is, the development of literacy skills and of literacy practices over time and in particular contexts. It also offers a framework for understanding the social basis of literacy learning, in essence, as a process that takes place through interaction with others and through language as the "tool of tools."[4] Learning and development, from this perspective, are socially mediated through bi-directional, apprentice-like interactions with more expert others and through the use of mediating artifacts or tools, primarily language (grammars, practices) in the construction of meaning (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986; Ochs 1988; Rogoff 1990; Lave and Wenger 1991). This approach to literacy learning is based on a reconceptualization of the relationship between instruction and development where instruction precedes development. In contrast to notions that students or learners (apprentices) must be "ready to learn" before being presented with new material, literacy development from a Vygotskian perspective recognizes the social nature of learning and the bridgeable gap between what needs to be taught and what a student is ready to learn *with assistance*. The act of learning takes place in social interaction through joint, collaborative activity. Learning takes place first at the social level (the inter-personal level) and is later appropriated by the individual (the intra-personal level) (see also Rogoff 1990, 1993). This bridgeable gap is called the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and refers to the cognitive potential of what a learner can do with the assistance of more capable others. This construct has contributed a great deal to our understanding of the relationships and goals of collaborative work in learning contexts and has had its most significant influence in schools. Teaching and learning are not only mutually dependent processes, they are also reflexive and

reflective. Thus, from a Vygotskian perspective, teachers (the expert others) are potential learners in any given learning interaction. Learning is a more agential activity and can be best measured as change in participation in activities over time (Rogoff 1993; Gutiérrez and Stone 1997).

The centrality of language in the development of literacy, and more broadly, learning, has also been recognized in recent studies of human development focusing on language socialization. Language socialization studies recognize that language is the medium through which children or novices acquire the knowledge, practices, and other social dispositions that would render them culturally and linguistically competent members of a community. In this respect, language socialization research addresses the ways in which people are socialized *through* the use of language as well as how they are socialized *to* use language (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). The relevance to literacy development is important. Children and novices are socialized to literacy through the language of literacy activities. These activities reflect the expectations of communities and of the competencies that members learn to display. In this respect the now widely employed notion of "communities of practice" can be a productive way for conceiving activities as contexts where particular schooling practices and competencies are learned, displayed, and valued. At the core of the model of "communities of practice" is the notion that competence develops in social interaction and in collaborative activity (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). In their lifespan, members of society participate in multiple (whether overlapping or disconnected) communities. Moreover, these competencies conform to the expectations of communities of practice in which members participate (e.g., trades and professional groups, and we can also include schools and other institutionalized programs). These competencies can naturally extend to include literacy competencies both in and out of schools, since these are learned in social interaction and collaboration with others and conform to expectations of particular learning communities. One must be careful, however, to avoid thinking of communities of practice as neatly bounded or unproblematic. The inherent heterogeneity of communities affords the possibility of collaboration and for spaces of conflict and tension to occur. As will be discussed later, tension and conflict can in fact be productive strategies for learning.

4 A Method for Studying Literacy Learning in its Cultural-Historical Context

With the increasing recognition of the linguistic and cultural impetus and constraint on literacy there has been a surge of interdisciplinary efforts to document its development. While cross-fertilization in method is indeed desirable (see Duranti, this volume), the issue of discipline-specific methodology inevitably arises. Disciplines adhere to specific methodologies and researchers look for answers to their research questions from particular theoretical perspectives. Whether one is looking for cognitive, linguistic, cultural, or political explanations of literacy phenomena, research designs will reflect one's disciplinary training and orientation. Moreover, the role of language practices in the study of the development of literacy has not yet become prominent. Finally, a less benign consequence of theoretical and methodological differences in the study of literacy is the production of findings that have negatively

influenced policies across social institutions, especially schools. These findings have had a profound impact on the ways we characterize literacy learning processes across cultural groups. More often than not, such investigations have produced monolithic accounts of cultural groups and their literacy practices. These accounts have (sometimes inadvertently) led to deficiency models of learning for non-mainstream groups who are often compared to an American, white, middle-class norm. A case in point is the elimination of bilingual education in California discussed earlier. Arguably, it is not that different methodological and theoretical perspectives may have contributed to this situation, rather it is the lack of a unified research agenda in the study of literacy development that has made it difficult to provide adequate descriptions of literacy practices across and within groups.

Indeed there are many advantages to doing cross-disciplinary work in literacy research. Analyses that take a closer look at grammar and the pragmatics of talk in interaction are invaluable for understanding the cultural practices that construct, maintain, and transform literacy expectations across institutional contexts. Attention to linguistic detail allows for the opportunity to observe emergent literacies *in situ*. Similarly, the study of practices over time in the form of ethnographies helps outline the diachronicity of such practices and to identify recurrent patterns. Drawing from Duranti and Ochs' (1997) study of literacy across two Samoan contexts (an island community and an immigrant community in Southern California), Gutiérrez and Stone (2000) propose a syncretic approach to capture both diachronic and synchronic dimensions of literacy as social practice. According to the authors, "syncretic" means "the principled and strategic use of a combination of theoretical and methodological tools to examine individual actions, as well as the goals and history of those actions" (Gutiérrez and Stone 2000: 150). The value in such a framework lies in its links to cultural-historical activity theory (this is implied in the terms "goals," "history," and "actions") as a productive lens for documenting literacy activities over time. But more importantly, the proposed method acknowledges the constraints of a single method for capturing the complexity of literacy instruction and learning; hence the need for transdisciplinary work. Within a syncretic approach, discourse analytic and ethnographic methodologies are invaluable for situating analyses beyond moment-to-moment interactions to address sociopolitical concerns and ideological stances. The prospects for understanding these relationships in current and future studies look particularly auspicious as we continue to move toward more productive methodological and theoretical ground that will no doubt help render visible the complexity of literacy learning across contexts.

5 Engaging Literacy in Its Social Context: Learning in and out of School

The engagement of children in literacy is a constant that is organized across social institutions (e.g., in families, schools, day-care centers, after-school programs). A distinction between in-school and out-of-school literacies (or alternatively formal and non-formal learning) is thus useful for assessing the range of practices in which learners participate. A comparison between learning inside schools and learning in out-of-school contexts need not imply a dichotomy. Instead, it is productive to think that

each context may employ elements of the other. For example, home literacy practices may resemble school practices during homework activities. Similarly, small group activities in the classroom may look similar to joint activities in home or community settings. Life within and beyond the confines of the average school day is full of opportunities to learn and for novices to become competent members of their communities, employing a range of literacy practices that may or may not always overlap.

A particular example of the study of literacy practices and development across contexts is illustrated in Scribner and Cole's (1981) now classic study of comparative literacies among the Vai of Liberia. The Vai could employ three different languages to engage in three distinct literacy practices across institutional settings: English for Western-style education, Arabic for Qu'ranic instruction, and Vai for local social and economic transactions. While the three literacies (and not all Vai are proficient in these) might lead us to believe that the more literacies, the more "literate" a person is, in the case of the Vai, literacy was highly dependent on the context in which those literacies were employed. The Vai studies highlight the situatedness of literacy practice, its teaching and learning, and the difficulty of making uniform assessments across contexts. Other studies have contributed to our understanding of the role of local literacy practices in ethnic communities and the possible match with academic literacies in schools. Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) description of the literacy practices in the two working-class communities of Roadville and Trackton (described more fully below) suggests that when the practices of the home, the Sunday school, and the public school overlap, children's academic performance increases. Attending to such a continuum of practices underscores the importance of recognizing home and community literacies in curricular development.

5.1 Literacy development inside schools

In her landmark language and literacy study of Roadville and Trackton, two working-class communities in the Piedmont Carolinas, Heath (1983) contends that a formula for academic success might rest in the continuity of certain practices across home and school. In her longitudinal study, the (mostly white) children of Roadville entered schools with a competence that prepared them for tackling school tasks more effectively, while African American children from Trackton developed literacies that did not always match those of the school. A closer look at these two communities' home practices unveils a rich array of language and literacy practices illustrating the ways in which different ethnic communities engage in rich literacy practices with their young as the norm rather than the exception. The fact that the children of Roadville were initially better prepared to use in schools the skills learned at home does not come as a surprise, since historically these practices underlie many schooling traditions, that is, they are based on European, white, middle-class normative values. Yet, the question of what is needed to sustain children's (such as Roadville's) academic success in school continues to drive educational efforts. We continue to question schoolchildren's failure to acquire academic literacies and desperately seek the answers following the match or mismatch model compellingly posited by Heath's study.

In the face of fast-changing demographics in schools, especially in urban centers, literacy reform efforts have also come under pressure to produce effective schools and

higher levels of academic literacies. Increasingly, in linguistic and culturally heterogeneous schooling contexts, what counts as knowledge and how this knowledge is made accessible to students from diverse backgrounds is a question that permeates the educational and political realms, often at the expense of large numbers of nonmainstream students who act as repositories of curricular decisions with little or no opportunities to use home or local repertoires for literacy development.

As noted earlier, literacy learning extends beyond the acquisition of reading and writing skills to the use of more interpretative skills. As an interpretative practice, then, the acquisition of literacy both utilizes prior experience and also creates experiences for learners within and beyond the current activity. This last point has immediate consequences for learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, especially in schools. If to utilize prior experience means using the available, local knowledge, how do such learners fare when their prior experience is of little or no relevance to the academic curriculum that they must command? This preoccupation has led to efforts to create alternative pedagogical methods to include students and the local knowledge of their communities in the literacy learning process in schools. Moll's (1992, 2000) and Moll and Gonzalez's (1997) study of "funds of knowledge" has revealed that when teachers learn to identify and use the economic and social relationships that exist in their students' communities they have more opportunities to include this knowledge as a literacy resource. The teachers, who are trained as ethnographers, learn to map out local resources, practices, and literacies that can then be incorporated into the curriculum.

An interesting example of the incorporation of local practices in the curriculum is provided in Lee's (1993) report on the use of African American discourse for teaching high school literature.[5] Through the inclusion of students' own understandings and uses of signifying, indirection, and other cultural and linguistic resources available across many African American communities, Lee (a university professor and researcher who has also taught high school) leads her senior high school students through an analysis of complex literary text and unpacks the intricacies of everyday use of indirection (signifying) in African American discourse.[6]

5.1.1 Bridging literacies: local repertoires in academic language and literacy development

In the excerpt below from Lee (2000), Lee and her students are reviewing the questions they have been answering while trying to interpret the different stances and relationships in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Here the teacher (T) prompts students (S) to consider possible interpretations of the purpose of Celie's (the main character) letters to God and provides links to other characters in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that the students had also read:

T: Because when she writes them her writing is another way of her speaking and expressing herself in things that she can't do. This is an idea to keep in mind because talk does become important in this book, doesn't it? 'Cause does Celie begin to change along the dimensions of talking?

S1: Yes.

T: Where?
S1: She starts signifying. There is a lot of signifying in this book.
T: What is important?
S1: What? The signifying? That depends on where it is at. In some places they were just sitting around jocking. In other places, they were serious, like when they told her, you ugly, you can't cook and all of that, and she came back and crack on him.
T: Does the signifying in that instance have anything to do with the signifying in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*?
S2: Nope.
S3: Yes it do. Because when they were in the store when Jody told Janie that she was ugly and that she was getting old and stuff. That is the same thing he is telling her.
S4: No, he was just trying to front her.
S5: You know how Jody never did want her to say anything. He didn't want her to speak. In a way, Mister was the same way with Celie. She couldn't do nothing but what he told her to say. So in a sense, it's like the same.
S6: I think there is a little bit of similarity to it. They both are trying to front each other.

To those familiar with traditional classroom instruction, dominated by a pattern of initiation–response–evaluation (IRE),[7] the most striking features of this example from this classroom discourse include the amount of talk from students and the number of participants in discussion. Similar to the research on "funds of knowledge," Lee's (1993, 2000) and Heath's (1983) studies illustrate the benefits of knowing and using the students' background knowledge in the development of academic literacies. The excerpt illustrates an engaged exchange among six high school students and their teacher in the interpretation of written dialogue that employs signifying examples. This interpretive classroom practice is precisely what has been illustrated in Heath's (1983) study of Trackton and Roadville students. When local linguistic and cultural repertoires and practices become part of the curriculum, meaning-making and interpretation take on a different dimension – they become a relevant, meaningful, affiliative activity. Local linguistic knowledge becomes a tool for interpretation across different literary texts. Such generative use of local resources for literacy learning underscores the importance of understanding and negotiating local codes, including those in the traditional official (teacher-led) and unofficial (student-generated) discursive spaces of the classroom. It is possible to reorganize even the most traditional classroom instruction to promote literacy development that builds on collaborative interpretive practice.

5.1.2 Learning in the Third Space

A recent body of research in successful urban classrooms examines the possibility of learning in the "Third Space,"[8] a space of negotiation of knowledge, positionality, and competing discourses that can promote literacy development.[9] Rather than dismissing students' talk as potential off-topic disruptions, and much like the data in Mrs. Lee's classroom discussed above, in classrooms where learning is organized in ways that set the conditions for Third Spaces to occur, teachers see students' comments as potential contributions and as the next steps for interpretation and for sustained learning

interaction. Indeed, heterogeneous classrooms, where the use of multiple and hybrid[10] linguistic codes and registers are the norm, are also the contexts for the negotiation of competing language practices and the development of potential Third Spaces of learning. Consider the following exchange in a multi-aged Spanish immersion class that included second- and third-graders and their teacher who have been discussing the topic of human reproduction during a six-week lesson on the subject. Previously discussed in Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda (1999), in this classroom exchange, local knowledge, alternative language registers, non-verbal interpretations, and formal and informal registers contribute to meaning-making. As the teacher writes on the board the questions from a student-generated list on the topic of human development, a student reads out loud: "¿Qué es esperma?" ("what's sperm?"). Jorge, another student in the class, responds to the question on the board:[11]

Official Space	*Third Space*	*Unofficial Space*
S: **¿Qué es esperma?** What is sperm?		Ss: ((Student rumblings and side discussions sprouting up))
T: **Cómo vamos – esa es una buena pregunta. ¿Qué es esperma? Ahorita la apunto. ¿Cómo crecen lo:s esperma?** Since we are – that is a good question. What is sperm? I'll write it down right now. How do the sperm grow? ((Still writing on the board, laughs silently at Jorge's description))		Jorge: **Es como un *tadpole*.** It's like a tadpole ((makes swimming tadpole motions with his hands))
	T: **Jorge, parece como renacuajos ((turns and faces Jorge smiling)), pero no <u>son</u> renacuajos.** Jorge, they look like tadpoles but they are not tadpoles.	
T: **¿Qué son los espe:rma?** ((Writing on the board)) **Muy buena pregunta.** What are sperms? Very good question	Anabel: ((Laughs out loud))	
	Jorge: ((Grins widely))	

In this classroom exchange the potential for the Third Space emerges when the teacher acknowledges Jorge's comments. The teacher's response validates Jorge's knowledge, even though he used English in the context of a Spanish lesson. Moreover, the teacher's translation of "tadpole" into Spanish potentially supplies for the class (and Jorge) the missing lexical reference, in this way expanding their linguistic repertoire. Finally, the positive affective stance of the teacher expressed through her smiling at Jorge's answer and later on when she addresses him directly minimizes laughter as counterscript (as a student practice in opposition to the official space) and

incorporates it in the Third Space. Notice too that Anabel laughs out loud and Jorge grins at the teacher's response. During the course of the six-week lesson, there were several instances of the Third Space, partly due to the already hybrid nature of the activity. The lesson had been generated by the students and with parental and school permission it was, in itself, an example of a curricular Third Space.

Whatever the curricular or pedagogical approach, the point that is emphasized through these examples from classroom instruction is clear. Literacy experiences are far more meaningful and productive when local, hybrid repertoires of language and literacy emerge in the learning process; that is, when students' sociocultural backgrounds shape the form and content of the literacy activities of the classroom.

5.2 Out-of-school literacy development

Besides offering a comparison across different learning settings, the study of out-of-school literacy practices opens up a window into the complex nature of community learning settings and of local interpretive practices. As Hull and Schultz (2002) note, many of the studies of literacy out of school have had a significant impact in shaping the field of literacy. Studies on the collaborative nature of computer-mediated activity in after-school programs, for example, illustrate the ways in which language practices influence cognitive activity (Nicolopoulou and Cole 1993; Cole 1996; Stone and Gutiérrez, in press). Educational research in local community institutions, for example, the work of Moss (1994) on African American church sermons, offers insights into the ways in which this genre is a rich literacy event that draws participants affectively and interactionally into community. Farr (1994) and Guerra (1998) have mapped the literacy practices of Mexicano communities in both Chicago and Michoacán, Mexico, charting a continuum of practices that does not stop at geographical or political borders. Together, they have studied the literacy development of an older woman, Josefina, in the form of letters to God as part of a prayer study group. Josefina's writing reveals an interesting blend of genres, letter and prayer, as her personal interpretation of Bible passages and her Christian faith (Guerra and Farr 2002). Duranti, Ochs, and Ta'ase (1995) draw from fieldwork in both (formerly Western) Samoa and a Samoan community in Los Angeles to illustrate the ways in which the same tools for learning afford different literacies and worldviews. For example, reciting a Samoan alphabet tablet with Westernized pictures socializes Sunday school students to American values in Samoa, but in a Samoan church in Los Angeles, the same instrument is a diasporic link to their culture. In what follows I highlight the language practices in two learning contexts, children's Catholic religious instruction at a neighborhood parish and an after-school program for children of elementary school age,[12] to further illustrate learning and literacy development in community settings.

5.2.1 The case of *doctrina* instruction: narrative activity as an interpretive practice

In my study of language and literacy practices at St. Paul's Catholic Church in Los Angeles I investigated the resources that teachers employ to involve students during

Saturday religious instruction that prepares them for First Communion[13] (Baquedano-López 1997, 2000). St. Paul's offers two tracks in its Saturday children's religious instructional program, one in Spanish (called *doctrina*) and the other in English, generally referred to as catechism. While the majority of the population in *doctrina* classes comprised mostly recent Mexican immigrants, there was also a small population of second-generation immigrants who had traveled or lived in Mexico for brief periods of time. The parish also offered catechism classes to a more ethnically diverse student population of European American, Asian, African American, and Latino students, including a few children of Mexican descent (mostly second- and third-generation immigrants). My research in the religious education classrooms centered among other things on narrative as a literacy activity, focusing in particular on one narrative that commemorates the apparition of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* in Mexico in the year 1531. Narrative as an interpretive process is a whole lot more than a recollection of events; indeed, through narrative people make sense of their past as well as their present experiences, in order to influence and project possible outcomes (Ochs and Capps 1996, 2001). In this interpretive dimension, narrative is also a site of literacy.

In the religious narrative of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared several times to an indigenous craftsman named Juan Diego and instructed him to deliver a message to the local bishop. The Virgin Mary's message was, in essence, a request that the bishop build a shrine in her honor. After several failed attempts to gain an audience before the bishop, Juan Diego finally explained to the Virgin Mary his predicament. He was not a believable messenger, and had even been asked to deliver a sign of the apparition. The Virgin Mary then instructed Juan

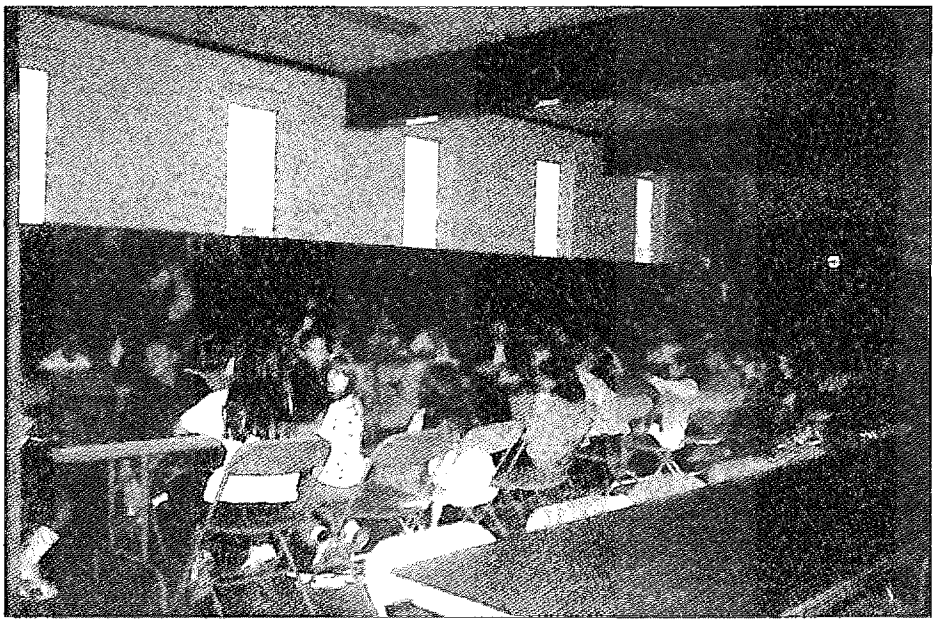

Figure 11.1 *Doctrina* children celebrating their First Communion. Photo: Patricia Baquedano-López

Diego to gather roses in his tunic and to take them to the bishop. In the presence of the bishop, Juan Diego dropped the flowers to the ground and the image of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* remained imprinted on his tunic.

Through questions posed during the telling of this religious narrative *doctrina* teachers relate the text of the narrative to the students' present experience. They explicitly link the children's life experiences to their emerging classroom narrative version. In the example below, while recounting the setting of the events of 1531, the teacher, Señora Lala, makes a link between the main character of the narrative, Juan Diego, and the *doctrina* students in her class:

Lala: **Pero? (pause) Juan Diego**
But Juan Diego

no vivía donde vivía el obispo.
did not live where the bishop lived

vivía como en un ranchito.
he lived in a little ranch.

y como dijo él, había muchos cerros.
and like he said [referring to a student's previous contribution], there were many hills

entonces, él iba a la doctrina como ustedes.
then he used to go to doctrina like you.

iba: (pause) de su ranchito,
he went from his little ranch

(pause) hasta dónde estaban? (pause) los sacerdotes.
to where the priests where

(pause) a un:: (pause) a una iglesia
to a church

que se llama todavía Tlaltelolco.
that is still called Tlaltelolco

Allí iba Juan Diego?
Juan Diego went there

A?
To?

(pause)

A recibir catecismo.
to catechism

While teachers often engage in longer elaborations of events, describing in detail the setting of the apparition or ventriloquizing the voices of the characters of the narrative, teachers organize narrative tellings expecting the participation of the students. Such participation is built into narrative tellings through the use of intonation cues which model answers that prompt students to complete the teacher's turn, as shown by the pauses and question marks in the example above. Such linguistic

features, or contextualization cues (Gumperz 1982), signal to students appropriate ways of interacting, that is, the expected competencies. The content of the narrative is made meaningful to these students by linking a feature of the character of Juan Diego with *doctrina* students' experiences: "*él iba a la doctrina como ustedes*" ("he attended *doctrina* like you"). To involve students and socialize them to the appropriate responses to teachers' questions, teachers model student responses. Lala prompts students in: "*Allí iba Juan Diego? A?*" ("Juan Diego went there, to?"). The answer is subsequently supplied by the teacher in "*a recibir catecismo*" ("to receive catechism instruction"), which restates the link between the students' experiences and Juan Diego's. Both attend catechism (*doctrina*). Figure 11.2 illustrates the ways in which the narrative tellings of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* help construct meaning and interpretation.

Through contextualization cues and other narrative resources teachers and students interactionally achieve a local interpretation of the narrative events. As the seemingly monologic excerpt from a *doctrina* narrative illustrates, the process of interpretation does not necessarily have to include overt talk. An important interpretive link is made in the figure of the past, Juan Diego, who becomes relevant to the students in the present as a *doctrina* student and church goer. As the *doctrina* excerpt illustrates, the narrative activity provides a context for the employment of local literacy resources, which are guided by particular ideological stances as to what constitutes learning. This example of local literacy practice also affords us the opportunity to

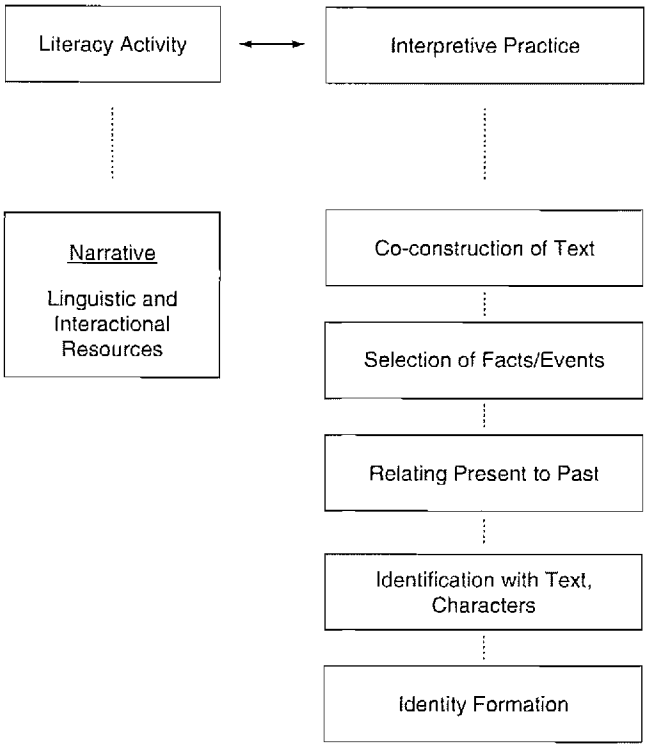

Figure 11.2 The narrative of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* as interpretive practice

appreciate the range of literacy contexts that Latino children experience besides formal schooling, especially when we consider that many children who participate in institutionalized local community instruction (such as *doctrina*) might also attend public schools where they are most likely to engage in literacy practices that may not necessarily utilize their language or knowledge as resources for learning. Such discontinuities may have drastic consequences for failure or success as already suggested in Heath (1983).

5.2.2 The playful world of *Las Redes:* Hybridity as a resource for learning

A foundational notion in the study of human development is the belief that play is conducive to learning. The importance of play in the learning process has been a topic of growing interest across different fields of inquiry and theoretical orientations, and, not surprisingly, pedagogical models of literacy development in which play is fundamental to learning are increasing in number.[14] There is much to learn from the ways in which children organize play activity, particularly since play can promote the development not only of physical skills but also of important linguistic, social, and cognitive competencies.[15] As such, play constitutes an enduring site for understanding children's socialization and learning. Similar to literacy activities, play activities are oriented to future action, where the skills learned and practiced can serve as blueprints for cognitive and cultural ways of interpreting and acting in the world.

The *Las Redes* ("networks")[16] after-school program at an elementary school in Los Angeles is grounded in cultural-historical notions that cognitive development is embedded in social processes and activities, including play. Based on the 5th Dimension model (Cole 1996; Nicolopoulou and Cole 1993; Griffin and Cole 1984), *Las Redes*[17] fosters a culture of collaboration where novices work with more competent others while playing board and computer games, and where the interactions are organized in ways to maximize the inherent material, ideological, linguistic, and ethnic diversity at local urban educational settings. At *Las Redes*, university faculty, postdoctoral fellows, graduate students, and undergraduate students participate playing educational computer and board games with elementary students. Located in a port-of-entry school district, *Las Redes* serves a large population of Latino immigrant (mostly from Mexico and Central America), Tongan, and African American students. At the time when the findings of this study were first reported (1997–2001), English language learners comprised 94 percent of the student population at this school. To understand the dynamicity of linguistic diversity in Los Angeles requires us to recognize its heteroglossia, or its diversity of social voices (Bakhtin 1981), made visible in the exchanges and contact among people of diverse backgrounds. The varieties of Spanish and English spoken at *Las Redes* are a microcosm of the diverse linguistic reality of the city in which it is embedded. This hybridity in language, including the mix of codes and registers, does not only exist within and across communities, it is also inherent in the speech choices of a single individual.

A central component of the interactions at *Las Redes* is a cyber entity called El Maga. Rendered neuter in gender in its Spanish code, "El Maga" responds to email messages from the students at *Las Redes*. As part of the daily activities at the program,

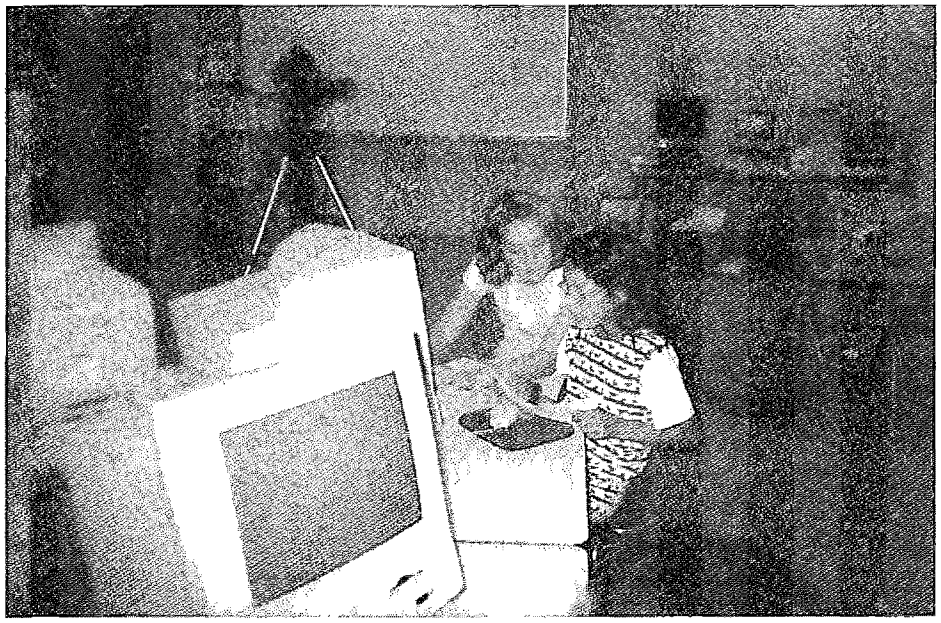

Figure 11.3 Undergraduate and elementary students reading instructions to play computer game at *Las Redes* (Photo: Héctor H. Alvarez)

elementary students write to El Maga about their experiences playing computer or board games. The intent of the exchanges is to problem-solve with El Maga about particular discontinuities with games or with other social interactions. It is also not uncommon for El Maga to respond to queries about her/his/its gender, marital status, and even physical appearance. Overall, the children seem to find El Maga an endearing, all-knowing cyber creature. El Maga is also very knowledgeable about the students' work and participation at the program and has access to such information through the *Las Redes* records and through anonymous direct participation (El Maga's anonymity allows for multiple ways to observe and participate in daily *Las Redes* activities). Because of this novelty element in El Maga, children are initially very engaged with email writing, although interest tends to wane over time. Below I reproduce two examples of correspondence from a database of *Las Redes* email exchanges.[18] These examples help illustrate the extent to which these email exchanges are literacy activities that promote not only learning, but also cultural and linguistic affiliation. Moreover, the email exchange itself is an example of the use of the local hybrid linguistic and cultural repertoire in a learning environment.

Martha and El Maga

A regular participant of *Las Redes*, Martha, a third-grader, emails El Maga about "Reader Rabbit II," a computer game that proves to be problematic for students due to a troublesome bug in the software. The two exchanges reproduced below span a period of a little over a month. In the first exchange, the rather routine nature of Martha's email in English is radically changed by El Maga's response, which includes

a key word in Spanish that makes it possible to enter a shared world of interpretation.[19]

Exchange 1
Email from Martha to El Maga:
2/4/97
dear El Maga, are are you? the pond was little bit harder. I couldn't understand the game and Christina helped me figure it out. In the end, I passed the first level and I was surprised. thanks for writing to me.

In this email Martha displays the genre conventions of letter-writing and engages in a narrative description of the game that includes her evaluative reaction to her own performance, which was aided by Christina, an undergraduate student participant of *Las Redes*. This is El Maga's response to Martha's email:

Email from El Maga to Martha:
2/4/97
Dear Martha,
I am doing pretty good, thank you for asking!!! How are you?? I hope you still have that big smile!!! The pond was difficult to figure out, huh? That frog causes many of us problems. It has a mind of its own and sometimes it does not want to do what we program it to do. Que ranita . . .
I am glad that Christina helped you figure out the game. What kinds of things did you both do?? Did the frog do every thing you told it to do???
Write back,
El Maga

El Maga responds by addressing the main problem identified by Martha, that the game was difficult to play. In addressing the problem, El Maga mentions a character of the computer game, the frog, that causes problems to many game players. In the description of the frog, however, El Maga switches to Spanish in the phrase "qué ranita," which humorously translates into "that mischievous frog." The use of Spanish in the description of the unpredictable frog influences the emails that Martha subsequently writes to El Maga. Indeed, the phrase in Spanish restructured the nature of the relationship between Martha and El Maga. In an ensuing response, Martha expresses her surprise at El Maga's being bilingual; in fact, the second message that she writes is entirely in Spanish. El Maga responds also in Spanish, signaling in this way co-membership in a group of Spanish-speaking cyber participants. El Maga's email continues to socialize Martha's involvement and continuing membership in *Las Redes* by focusing on the game activity and following up on the learning task.

The third email exchange, reproduced below, is the most sophisticated response from both parties. Here Martha codeswitches between Spanish and English, addressing a wide range of topics that displays a different kind of agency that expands the email genre convention. In fact, Martha restructures the activity and its goals. Similar to the ways in which *doctrina* teachers appropriate versions of the narrative of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* in addressing their students' experiences, Martha simply appropriates the email exchange as a means to link the activity with her own personal experiences:

Exchange 3
Email from Martha to El Maga:
3/12/97
Dear La maga
don't you like tortillas? Today I played la Corrida de Toros. The game was too easy for me, but in the hard level I was too confused because I didn't read the word list because I was too floja [lazy]. My brother gave me some candy. The candy was so delicious. Quiere probar some candy? [would you want to try some candy?] You could ... buy it in the store! ha ha ha! I make you laugh. I'm funny today because today my boyfriend gave me a kiss. but in a picture! haha hah ... la maga, I decided that you are a girl to me because I am a girl and oscar de la hoya told me el maga is my admirador preferido [my biggest fan] ... se you later alligator, ha, ha, ha. I'm scooby doooooooooo where are you? I'm right here.

In this email Martha still includes the description of the game and her affective reactions to it (being both good at it, but also lazy). She also mentions other figures of her personal life, including her brother who gave her candy – even teasingly offering candy to El Maga. She invokes two characters and personalities that index two different cultural worlds, Scooby Doo the American TV cartoon character, and the Mexican American heavyweight boxing champion Oscar de la Hoya. Even El Maga's identity is changed to a feminine entity "La Maga" as Martha playfully and explicitly informs El Maga that she will be a girl like her. The linguistic and cultural hybridity of this exchange stands in stark contrast to Martha's initial email, and likewise El Maga's response:

Email from El Maga to Martha:
3/12/97
Hi Martha,
Are you kidding – I love tortillas. I make my own. my mom taught me how to make them. do you know how to make tortillas? if you do we must exchange recetas [recipes]. You do make me laugh with your e-mail. keep up the good work and please write me more like you wrote me today. ha ha ha! ai nos vamos, vimos, viendo [we'll see/be seen/be seeing each other]
El Maga

In this response, El Maga culturally affiliates with Martha by mentioning the fact that tortilla-making is part of El Maga's experiences at home. El Maga also brings to their email correspondence the figure of its/her/his mother. El Maga praises Martha's participation in the computer game and encourages her to continue writing like she did on that day. El Maga ends the email with a popular Spanish playful take on the conjugation of the verb phrase "going to see each other" ("nos vamos, vimos, viendo").

In the hybrid context of the email exchanges between Martha and El Maga, the development of Martha's emails over time move from a report of the game activity[20] (figure 11.4) to a range of activities and characters that incorporates her experiences outside *Las Redes* and which includes her centrally as a developing protagonist (figure 11.5).

Indeed, Martha's email exchanges with El Maga are examples of literacy activities that promote engagement with text by addressing a problem-solving dimension (the report of the computer game interaction) that expands, in the context of interpretive

Figure 11.4 Exchange 1

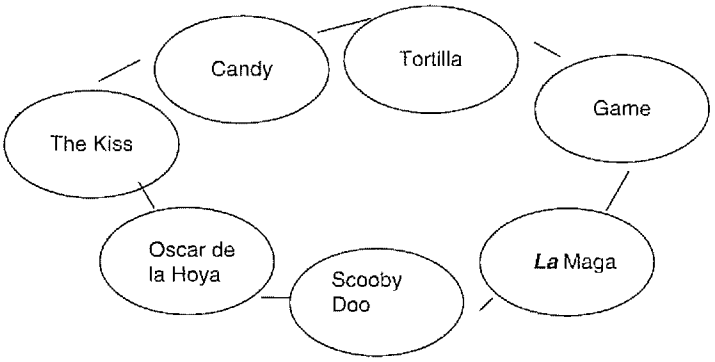

Figure 11.5 Exchange 3

practice, to a more complex web of cultural events. This interpretive practice also includes the elements of selectivity, relatability, affiliation, and identity formation as illustrated in figure 11.6.

Much like Lee's high school lessons on signifying, the Spanish-immersion unit on human reproduction, and the religious education classroom narrative of *doctrina* classes, the email exchanges between Martha and El Maga at *Las Redes* are examples of local ways in which these texts and activities are constructed and interpreted and of how participants make sense of a literacy activity while engaged in it. In all these examples there is an interrelatedness of text, activity, and language (e.g., the use of verbal genres, question–answer sequences, codes, registers, or codeswitching) as mediating tools. Take for example Lee's high school class. The possibility of discussing and affiliating through knowledge and discussion of the shared practice of signifying allows for engaged participation and meaning-making across two literary texts and the students' knowledge of a verbal practice. At *Las Redes*, the email exchanges build on each writer's cultural and linguistic resources as they employ a range of genres from a report to problem-solving to humor, as both Martha and El Maga construct their identities as members of an after-school program and of a larger linguistic and cultural group. The email exchanges in this way signal co-membership beyond the literacy activity and task.

6 Conclusion

The examples of literacy activities described in this chapter collectively illustrate that local cultural and linguistic resources can be used in literacy development and in the organization of learning to allow students opportunities to display what they know

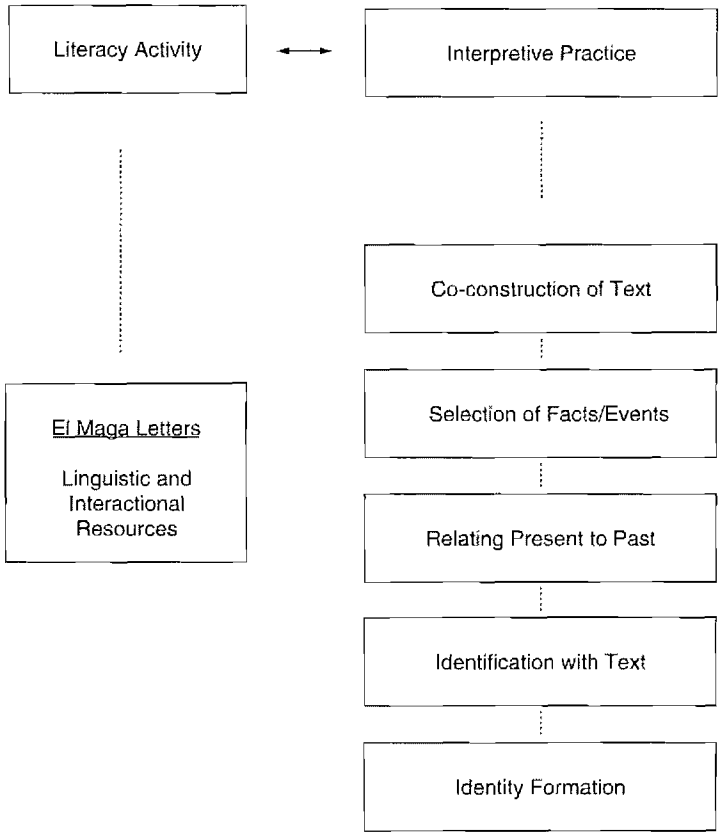

Figure 11.6 Email exchanges as interpretive practice

and to build on it. Finally, the centrality of language in the learning process as exemplified in these excerpts from learning contexts both in and out of school cannot be overemphasized. Understanding language as an interpretive lens can help us to better understand issues in schooling and the complexity of learning. There is still the impending task of documenting how the larger society's ideologies and practices, and the relations of power articulated in what counts as literacy, shape the learning process, especially for linguistically and culturally diverse learner populations. And perhaps this might make us move away from deficit thinking with a focus on the problems of alternative forms of learning. Instead, we might find it more productive to understand how local literacy practices are organized by the participants, how they work for them and can be useful for interpreting new material; in short, how talk and cultural knowledge can create and make possible the imagination of past, present, and possible worlds that promote literacy learning and knowledge for all.

NOTES

1 Giroux (1992) states: "Texts must be decentered and understood as historical and social constructions marked by the weight of a range of inherited and specified readings . . . Texts

must also be understood in terms of the principles that structure them. This suggests not only identifying precise ideological interests ... understanding how distinctive practices actually frame such texts by looking at the elements that produce them within established circuits of power" (p. 30). See also Wertsch (1997) for a similar argument on the historicity of text.

2 The New London Studies Group 1996.

3 California Department of Education: *English Learner Students and Enrollment in California Public Schools, 1993–2001.*

4 Cf. John Dewey as cited in Vygotsky 1978: 53.

5 Mrs. Lee's class was part of a quasi-experimental design study of underachieving seniors in two urban high schools. The study showed positive correlations between the use of local knowledge (including features of African American Vernacular English) and problem-solving in academic contexts (Lee 1993, 2000).

6 In Lee's words, "To signify within the African-American community means to speak with innuendo and double meanings, to play rhetorically upon the meaning and sounds of words, and to be quick and often witty in one's response" (Lee 2000: 221). See also Gates 1984, 1988; Mitchell-Kernan 1981; Lee 1993; and Morgan 1998.

7 Mehan (1979) and Cazden (1988) provide the first comprehensive analyses of classroom discourse dynamics.

8 The Third Space is a particularly useful concept for capturing the disruption of center–margin, official–unofficial, time–space dichotomies. A productive construct in cultural studies (Bhabha 1994), it is increasingly being used in the study of literacy instruction and learning (see also Wilson 2003).

9 Cf. Gutiérrez, Rymes, and Larson 1995; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Turner 1997; and Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda 1999.

10 In this body of work hybridity refers to the coexistence and contradictions that result from employing different linguistic codes and registers.

11 The transcript has been slightly modified. The example is discussed at length in Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda (1999).

12 This project was part of an ongoing collaborative effort reported in Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Alvarez, 2001 and in Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, and Chiu 1999.

13 First Communion is a Catholic sacrament, a rite of passage that signals membership as a more mature member of the congregation.

14 Cf. Nicolopoulou and Cole 1993; Olt and Woodbridge 1993; Griffin and Cole 1984; Vásquez 1994; Cole 1996; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Alvarez, 2001; Stone and Gutiérrez, in press.

15 Also Baquedano-López and Alvarez (1999) and Baquedano-López, Alvarez, and Gutiérrez (1998).

16 This was primarily a University of California sponsored project. The P.I. was K. D. Gutiérrez at the University of California, Los Angeles.

17 The program is a response to various political initiatives that threaten the educational channel for ethnic and linguistically diverse students into higher education, most notably the ballot-initiative that passed in 1998 and which banned bilingual education in the State of California (discussed above).

18 These excerpts are discussed at length in Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, and Chiu (1999) and in Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Alvarez (2001). They are also reviewed in Hull and Schultz (2002).

19 These examples are reproduced as close to the original as possible.

20 Ochs and Taylor (1992) make a useful distinction between a *story* of personal experience and a *report* of personal experience. A *story* is more a problem-centered past-time narrative

that eventually orients tellers (and participants) toward solving some aspect of the narrated events seen as problematic, whereas a *report* does not entail such a problem-centered or problem-solving interaction or treat problematic events as causal events that generate other events. Martha's emails with El Maga illustrate a progression from report to story.

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