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## Supporting Immersion Teachers: An Autoethnography

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SUPPORTING IMMERSION TEACHERS: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to immersion teachers.

The important work you do each day is what inspired me to write,  
and to keep on writing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincerest thanks to Dr. Lucy Spence, without whom, I would not have finished this epic journey. Your open-mindedness, encouragement, and dedication to my writing process have been invaluable.

I would also like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Victoria Oglan, Dr. Christie Martin, and Dr. Paul Mahlovr. Your dedication of time and wisdom has helped me become a scholar.

Finally, I acknowledge my friends, family and colleagues who have supported me through this long and often tiresome process. And to my precious son Jake, you keep me smiling and keep me sane, my sweet boy.

## ABSTRACT

Immersion programs face a variety of challenges that are common to the field, such as lack of materials appropriate for students' language abilities, assessment, teacher recruitment and retention, balancing content and language, and relevant, high quality professional development for teachers. However, within specific micro-contexts, other issues can affect the success of immersion programs. Since the teacher's role is critical in all aspects of the immersion classroom, more emphasis needs to be placed on talking with teachers about their experiences in order to provide better professional development, and to build a stronger community of support.

This narrative autoethnography examines my journey both as immersion teacher and teacher coach, as well as the insights of six current immersion teachers in a relatively large Spanish immersion program, spanning four different schools. Based on interviews, reflections, observations, field notes, and narrative inquiry, this study sought to better understand the lived experiences of immersion teachers in order to answer the questions:

1. How do teachers' stories help us understand the context of immersion teachers in one school district?
2. How does this understanding lead to better support of immersion teachers?

Findings indicate that in certain micro-contexts, issues of marginalization, devaluing of the second language, and a school within a school dichotomy can occur. Furthermore, teachers themselves have answers to many of these problems if they are

given a voice. Using liminal theory to re-frame the discussion of language value and marginalization, this study reports teachers' stories of classroom success, professional support, language and content integration and becoming. By re-framing the dialogue, immersion teachers and administrators should be able to gain agency to confront the social and political dominance of a monolingual education system. Furthermore, continuous, embedded professional development with a focus on sociocultural theory and practice is another manner to address the need for high quality, ongoing professional development of immersion teachers.

## PREFACE

To preface this work, I want to acknowledge that no educational program is perfect, or without room for improvement. The program I have written about is exceptional, but due to the unique challenges of immersion education, still has room for change and improvement. Acknowledging issues or concerns that do exist, does not take away from the strength and success of a program or the teachers, administrators, district support, students or parents who make it possible. Instead, I believe it demonstrates a dedication to growth and the continued pursuit of excellence. Any critique in this work is shared with a spirit of respect and admiration for everyone involved in immersion education. It is a challenging and rewarding endeavor worthy of further study.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	v
PREFACE .....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	6
CHAPTER 3 METHODS.....	36
CHAPTER 4 THE VALUE OF A SECOND LANGUAGE AND STORIES OF SUCCESS .....	60
CHAPTER 5 MARGINALIZATION AND STORIES OF SUPPORT .....	74
CHAPTER 6 SCHOOL WITHIN A SCHOOL: A THRESHOLD EXPERIENCE .....	85
CHAPTER 7 IMPLICATIONS .....	97
CHAPTER 8 BECOMING STORIES .....	104
REFERENCES .....	111

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Participant Information.....	46
Table 5.1 Descriptions and Examples of Marginalization.....	74

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1 De-valuing and Valuing Descriptions of the L2.....	60
Figure 5.1 Descriptions of Marginalization .....	74
Figure 6.1 From Separation to Integration.....	90

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

“When I sit down to write, I find the story behind the memories; I then begin to make sense of those memories, their meaning for me and for others”

(Giorgio, 2013, p. 406).

Looking back at my first year of immersion teaching, I still feel overwhelmed. Teaching a new language and new academic content at the same time is a true challenge, not only because of the academic rigor involved, but also due to the variety of sociopolitical issues that affect language teaching in the United States (Cummins, 2000). Only in existence in the United States since 1971 (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004), immersion education is still relatively new on the educational landscape and can be defined simply as an approach to teaching another language in which students are immersed in that language during the school day (Fortune & Tedick, 2003). Research has confirmed its usefulness in achieving higher levels of second language acquisition than other school models (Campbell, Gray, Rhodes & Snow, 1985; Harley, et al., 1990; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2010; Forrest, 2007, 2011; Lindholm, Leary & Howard, 2008; Fortune, 2012). Other benefits corresponding to full bilingualism, which is the goal of immersion education, (Fortune, 2012) include strong critical and divergent thinking, (Bialystock, 2001; Cenoz & Genesee, 1998; Hakuta, 1986), problem solving skills, (Bamford &

Mizokawa, 1991), and a greater ease in learning other languages (Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Sanz, 2000).

However, research has also shown that there are complex issues that result from the particular micro-contexts in which any immersion program is established and that heavily impact the perception and functioning of immersion programs, even down to the uniqueness of each individual classroom and teacher (Swain & Johnson, 1997; Walker & Tedick, 2000). Understanding the micro-contextual challenges that my colleagues and I face as immersion educators is a primary goal of this study.

Our district follows a partial immersion model, which means that only part of the academic day is taught in the second language (L2). In this model, most of the students are English speaking Americans who receive science and math instruction in the L2. We are located in the southeastern United States, in a large public school district known for its focus on language learning and the global citizen. As a former teacher in the program, my insider status led me to choose autoethnography as my method of inquiry. An ethnographic form of research written from a first person perspective, autoethnography draws upon the narrative inquiry approach with an emphasis on story as a means of knowing (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Bochner, 2012; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It is typically chosen because it gives the researcher freedom to fully acknowledge her own subjectivity, and use that to help interrogate her understanding and representation of the experiences being studied.

Personal Teaching Reflection: Speece, April 2015

I came in at the beginning of the year with a goal of getting my students to read, write and speak in Spanish. This was my biggest goal, and I think the first half of the year, I might have sacrificed some of the content, in order to get them speaking more Spanish. During one of the collaborative planning sessions with the other immersion teachers, I realized that teaching content is really the most important part of our job. The Spanish is secondary in the eyes of the school. This is difficult because for me to adequately teach the content, they simply MUST know the Spanish. So this is a difficult conundrum.

#### Personal Teaching Reflection: Speece, Week 2

I've had them create a Spanish folder, and I think I'm going to do a weekly vocabulary quiz in Spanish...

I gave the first vocab test and then I realized I don't have a grade for Spanish. If it doesn't fit under science or math, then I can't really take a grade...hmmm...  
...Everything I teach is going to have to be so well articulated into the content area...

These personal reflections illustrate the initial struggle I faced as I tried to understand my role as a Spanish immersion teacher, in the Southeastern United States. I was a third grade science and math teacher, however my students were not yet proficient in the language I was using to teach math and science. I was being asked to develop bilingual learners, but the larger educational system did not seem to support my efforts.

After a year and a half in the immersion classroom, I began a new job in the district as the teacher coach for world languages. Part of my job now involved providing

professional development that was relevant and effective for the needs of our immersion teachers and students. I turned to research in immersion to guide me in this endeavor, only to find out that the existing literature on immersion points to a need for professional development that is specialized for the unique challenges presented by teaching content, language and literacy in an L2 (Lyster & Ballinger, 2011; Fortune, Tedick & Walker, 2008; Fortune, 2012). I also noticed a trend in the research that sought to understand and emphasize the experiences of immersion teachers themselves, and to give them a voice in the development of the field (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Fortune, Tedick & Walker, 2008; Walker & Tedick, 2000).

As I continued to work with immersion teachers as a coach, I became more and more passionate about the need for their input in all areas of the program. What I had noticed while I was still a teacher, throughout a variety of interactions with colleagues in the immersion program was a general desire to implement more effective strategies, particularly with regard to L2 development. It seemed that the majority of teachers were so overwhelmed in keeping up with the multitude of demands on time and effort, myself included, that we often felt ineffective and discouraged. Moving into the role of teacher coach, I became very curious about how other immersion programs function, how to provide meaningful professional development, and about the experiences of other immersion teachers. All of these wonderings led me to the central questions of my doctoral study:

1. How do teachers' stories contribute to understanding the language immersion context in one school district?
2. How does this understanding lead to better support for immersion teachers?

The rest of this autoethnography will be devoted to describing how I have sought to answer these particular questions, as I use personal experience to examine the larger cultural experience (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013) of immersion education

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In reflecting on my journey as a teacher, student, coach and researcher, it is important to consider not only my memories and experiences, but also the theoretical underpinnings that shape how I teach, coach, write and research. My choice to use autoethnography as a method of inquiry into the immersion context of my school district is tied closely to my theoretical beliefs. In this chapter I will delineate my own methodological and theoretical beliefs, and also situate this investigation within the literature on immersion education. It is important to note that while this is my story, I believed that in order to better understand my own experiences, I needed to talk with other current immersion teachers about the questions I was exploring. Therefore, many voices are represented in this study.

#### **Autoethnography**

Born to anthropology and raised by feminist and critical thought, autoethnography is a qualitative research method that enables the researcher to tell his or her own story giving voice to the insider and heralding story as a legitimate means of understanding. Autoethnography gives the great life narrative its rightful place within the academic community and more particularly as an appropriate methodology for

educational research. Within this style of research, we recognize that our own experience and bias greatly affect not only our classroom practices, but also our research and writing about classroom practices (Davies, 1999). Kuby (2013) states, “Writing is a way to unpack stories across time and spaces and intentionally try to understand ideologies, experiences, and memories that influence teaching, learning, and researching.” The narrative format of autoethnography, or research through storytelling (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) is an appropriate method of classroom research as it focuses on reflection and the voice of the writer (Duncan, 2004; Wall, 2006) and how that personal experience affects teaching and learning. Other defining features of autoethnographic study include breaking from the familiar pattern of research practice by bringing insider knowledge into the forefront, confronting and examining pain, confusion or uncertainty, and making research more accessible (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013).

Personal Reflection: Speece, January 2017

I have always been curious about language. I remember lying on the floor of my parent’s bathroom counting to 10 in Spanish when I was in the third grade. I’m not sure where I learned it, but I practiced and practiced, trying to get the accent just perfect. I also remember singing “Frere Jacques” over and over again when I was just a young child, trying to copy a French accent. Later on when I got to high school, I finally began to study Spanish, and I fell in love immediately. Many years later, I am fluent in Spanish, have taught Spanish at almost every level, from Pre-K to college, including Spanish immersion. My son is in kindergarten in a French immersion school, and I work as a teacher coach for the

world language teachers in my school district. In many ways I have come full circle, and yet I'm still in the middle of my journey.

Why do I share these memories? “The burden of the social science story teller is to make meaning out of all the stuff of memory and experience” (Bochner, 2012, p. 161). That is exactly my aim in this autoethnography, to make meaning out of significant memories that relate to my own experiences as an immersion teacher and teacher coach, while examining the cultural practice of immersion education. I will highlight my own reflection and experiences in order to understand how I connect with the context I am studying (Ngunjiri et al., 2010), and how I connect with other immersion teachers. Based on my insider status, I will explore the lived experiences of six other immersion teachers alongside my own and attempt to make meaning that will help support immersion educators in the future. Finally, I recognize that sharing my own story can potentially create more openness with my readers (Ngunjiri et al., 2010) and thus allow greater possibility for change.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Perhaps in an attempt to better understand my current position as neophyte researcher, I decided to peruse my collection of notebooks from the classes I took in my course of study. In so doing, I came across two documents that were part of my qualifying exam to become a Ph.D. candidate. I was surprised to see how closely they still fit within my framework of beliefs, and I share them as a type of reflective triangulation of my current beliefs, my past beliefs and the beliefs of other teachers.

My passion has always been helping through the church and in the non-profit community. The study of critical literacy is illuminating how my role as an educator fits with my desire to change the world, not only in my personal interactions with students in helping them to succeed in life, but in helping them to think critically about issues of life, power and transformation. Sometimes it's hard to believe there was a time when I didn't know what I now see so clearly through the study of Freire, Gee, and the Frankfurt School. But I think it's important to always remember that reflection, action and transformation should be a continual part of my journey as an educator. I should never think of myself as having arrived.

The second section that is resoundingly germane to the study at hand has to do with reflection:

And finally, through studying the art of teaching, the true importance of reflection became clear as well. Nieto (2003) stresses the need for adult conversations amongst teachers. There is danger in isolation. Since learning is a social process, it only makes sense that teachers learn through personal reflection and discussion with others. Parker Palmer (2007) also stresses the importance of both personal reflection, and safe conversations with colleagues to help us improve our teaching and refresh ourselves personally, as this is truly exhausting and weighty work. Palmer stresses the connection of heart and mind in a both/and model, stating, "What I want is a richer, more paradoxical model of teaching and learning than binary thought allows, a model that reveals how the paradox of thinking and feeling are joined—whether we are comfortable with that paradox or not" (2007).

My story and my work with immersion teachers are situated within a critical, socio-cultural framework. My beliefs about how children learn also affect my choice of professional development and curriculum, which affect teachers. Similarly, taking a critical perspective in my research causes me to focus on issues of power and privilege, which also affects how I approached the over-all design of the study as well as how I made sense out of the data.

### **Critical Theory**

Critical Theory is a social theory focused on critiquing and changing society as a whole, therefore questions regarding relationships between self and society, and the individual and structure, saturate Critical Theory. From this perspective, and drawing upon the work of critical theorists such as Freire (1973), Volosinov (1989), and the Frankfurt School (Benjamin, 1989; Habermas, 1989; Horkheimer, 1989; Marcuse, 1989) in approaching this autoethnographical study of immersion teaching, I am continually examining situations and texts for issues of power and position, as well as instances of oppression. Furthermore it is also important to consider how language itself can be used to dominate, marginalize and exploit others (Cummins, 2001; Gee, 2008). For example, Cummins (2001) studies in-depth the role of relations of power within schools in response to which students are encouraged to achieve bilingualism and which are not. Similarly, Apple (2000) examines how societal power structures heavily influence what content is deemed worthy to be included in curricula and considers that educators should be aware of the power structures that are in place and how they affect classroom teaching.

## **Socio-cultural Theory**

At the heart of socio-cultural theory is the idea that historical and cultural contexts cannot be divorced from learning and development. Lev Vygotsky (1978), the father of socio-cultural theory (SCT) wrote about language as a tool. He suggested that the mind is mediated by a variety of tools, most importantly language. These tools mediate our relationship with the world, and set us apart from the animals. Vygotsky offered a new way of thinking about human mental development, which is applicable to educators, and more particularly, language educators. According to Vygotsky (1978), participating in life's social activities is how children learn language, and furthermore most important cognitive development occurs through this interaction. Central to an understanding of this perspective are the ideas of mentoring and participation as crucial to development and learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1999; Rogoff, 2003), and the belief that there are many types of literacies, beyond the traditional idea of literacy (Rogoff, 2003), such as technological literacy or even social literacy.

Especially critical to language learning from a socio-cultural perspective is Vygotsky's construct of the ZPD (1978) or Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky envisioned an imaginary plane within a learner in which what he or she is able to do alone intersects with what he or she is able to do with the help of a mentor. The resulting area is known as the ZPD and it represents where learning actually occurs. It is within this interaction between expert and novice that dialogue and communication allow for the novice to accomplish tasks otherwise unattainable independently, including language-learning tasks.

As a bilingual educator who has worked for many years in the public school system, in higher education, and as a university supervisor to student interns, my experiences have led me to embrace the belief that people of all ages learn best when their history, perspectives and experiences are believed to be a valuable part of who they are and how they make sense of new ideas, also known as “funds of knowledge” (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005).

As a critical socio-cultural theorist, it is important to consider what type of immersion program is being offered, who is given access to it, and how it evolved (Cummins, 2001). In the case of my current school district, the primary reasons for strong support of second language learning K-12, and particularly the inclusion of partial immersion programs has to do with supporting academic achievement, providing cognitive benefits to students, and affecting attitudes and beliefs about other cultures. Part of the district’s mission is to prepare students to participate in a global society; therefore language learning is a vital part of that pursuit. Questions I might ask as I analyze this statement from a critical perspective might be: How are immersion teachers marginalized and which languages are valued? These are issues that concern me as a critical theorist.

### **Liminal Theory Applied to Education**

Another theoretical construct that influences how I make meaning of data is the concept of liminality or liminal theory, which was explored by Victor Turner. Turner (1967, 1969, 1974) was a British cultural anthropologist who studied the Ndembu tribe in Zambia during the 1950s and became interested in rites and rituals as a part of social

change. He became known for two particular concepts: liminality and 'communitas'. Turner draws from the work of Van Gennep's (1960) 'rites of passage' in which he suggests that every change of state or social position is marked by three phases: separation, margin and reaggregation. It is the marginal state that he also refers to as the 'limen,' which is the Latin word for threshold, and signifies a crossing over that is in process but has not yet occurred (Turner, 1974). The term liminal is derived from the Latin, 'limen.' According to Turner, (1974), Gennep's three parts could be applied even to events that were not rituals, rather to a variety of situations in which a group or individual changes from one state to another. Most astonishing is the belief that during the liminal phase, the passage itself, individuals were liberated from the usual norms of culture and society. Turner states, "In this gap between ordered worlds, almost anything may happen" (p. 13). This is the point in which some researchers recognize the potential for transformation occurring through and as a result of liminal experiences.

Furthermore, the idea of "communitas" (Latin for community) refers to a quality of relationship that is achieved in liminality in which groups are freed from conformity to general, societal norms (Alexander, 1991). It is further described as "unstructured communion of equal individuals" (Turner, 1969). "Communitas" is an abstract concept used to describe social relationships outside of the usual limits of social structures.

Turner's understanding of the liminal state also grew from his study of the rites of passage of the young Ndembu male tribe members. To the Ndembu, becoming a man required a time of seclusion in which the initiates were neither boys, nor men. Turner describes the liminal being as one who defies structural classification. Throughout the existing literature on liminal theory in education, there are those who use liminal theory

as a means of easing a transitional experience (Hoffman & Voloch, 2012; Bosetti, Kawalilak & Patterson, 2008; Sinner, 2012). Others apply liminal theory simply as a way to describe and understand the transition under study (Rice, 1991; McCadden, 1996; Bettis, 1996; Pierce, 2007; Coffman et al., 2012; Connor, 2012; Humphrey & Simpson, 2012; Wilkins et al., 2012; Field & Lynch, 2015). Of the first group, those who sought to ease a transitional experience, Bosetti, Kawalilak & Patterson (2008) write about their personal journeys as females in academia navigating the transition into positions of leadership. Exploring their liminal state during transition allowed them to share common experiences and build a support network. On the other hand, in a case study of one student, Sinner (2012) conceptualizes the student teacher's transition to becoming a teacher that occurs during the field experience. She describes this time in the life of this student as a liminal state rather than an apprenticeship because the experience was not a positive one for the student, and she wanted to raise awareness to the variety of experiences student teachers have during field experiences. Yet another application of liminal theory comes from Hoffman & Voloch (2012) who seek to better understand the liminal space of dual enrollment in order to ease the transition of students from high school to college. I found these studies to be insightful, and they gave me a better understanding of liminal theory applied to an educational setting, but none of them pertained directly to the way I was conceptualizing liminality within our immersion program.

Another facet of liminality is the idea of social limbo, or existing between social or cultural identities. In further description of *communitas*, Turner (1969) states, "The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (threshold people) are necessarily

ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space” furthermore, they are “‘Neither here nor there’, betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony” (Turner, 1969, p. 95).

### **Reflections and connections to liminality, “communitas,” and immersion**

The liminal phase is described as marginal, invisible, secluded, paradoxical and confusing (Turner, 1967). The liminal being is simultaneously no longer classified and not yet classified. I was first introduced to the concept of liminality in a course on curriculum and change and I immediately made a personal connection with the theory. In the majority of my Spanish teaching jobs, I had felt like I did not quite belong, or like I was working toward a different goal than the rest of the teachers were. What I could achieve with students in their L2 was vastly different than what other teachers could achieve with students in their L1. Then again when I entered the doctoral program in Language and Literacy, I began to feel a similar tension. I was in a program that was designed for English language arts teachers, but my experiences were in second language and literacy teaching. While the majority of my classmates had very different backgrounds in teaching and experience than I did, I still found the coursework to be relevant to my own experiences. However, I did often feel like a hybrid in the program. I had one foot on the literacy and language side of the threshold, and the other foot on the teaching a second language side. It was not until I encountered the work of Victor Turner (1967, 1969, 1974), that I was able to name this experience of liminality, and understand it through a perspective of living in the freedom between, rather than feeling like an outsider to the majority.

When I started teaching in immersion, I began to understand the liminal experience in yet a different manner. Once again I was a teacher, but I was unlike the others. Was I a content teacher or a language teacher? In my heart I was a language teacher, but in the system, I was required to be a content area teacher. I did not believe that the general education teachers experienced this same dilemma, and therefore I felt set apart. I interpreted this feeling of marginalization as isolation, but when I considered applying liminal theory to my situation in the immersion classroom, it re-framed the experience, and made it seem less negative and more fluid, as if there were potential for growth and change.

While my intuition and prior experiences led me to believe that this concept of the liminal being, someone who exists in the threshold or intersection of different stages, was applicable to my research, it wasn't until I continued a thorough review of the literature on liminality in education that I felt justified in applying liminal theory to my study of immersion teachers. While none of the literature I explored on liminal theory in education was applied directly to an immersion program, I did find several studies that used liminality to understand the experiences of adults learning English as a second language in other countries. For example, Baker (2009) studied relationships between language and culture in the ESOL classroom in a university in Thailand, and Horiguchi & Imoto (2015) explored transformation within an alternate learning space for Japanese University students studying ESOL. Similarly Baynham & Simpson (2010) researched how different spaces could transform adult ESOL learners' student identities.

I found that the majority of studies used liminal theory to understand transition, ranging from the experiences of newcomer teachers (Rice, 1991), to new teachers (Pierce, 2007; Wilkins et al., 2012) as well as the study of kindergarten ethics as a rite of passage (McCadden, 1996) and doctoral students' transition to researcher and scholar (Humphrey & Simpson, 2012; Coffman et al., 2016). Bettis (1996) investigates the transitions of socioeconomic change for urban youth, while Connor (2012) focuses on Special Education administrators' attempts to transition from pre-accountability era education to post-accountability era education.

While each of these studies led me to a deeper understanding of the usefulness of examining threshold experiences in education, there were two other groups of studies that conceptualized liminality similarly to my own vision of the liminal experience of immersion teaching. Viewing liminality as a means to reframe otherness (Mansary, 2006; Rollock, 2012; Kasun, 2014), as well as the liminal experience as transformational or positioning the liminal being as an agent of change (Jackson, 2006; Cook-Sather & Alter, 2011; Chavez, 2012; Junker, 2013; Busher et al., 2015; Felux, 2015; Salazar, Martinez & Ortega, 2016). These studies connected to the critical potential of liminal theory in education. For example, Cook-Sather and Alter (2011) capitalize on the agentive aspects of the liminal being who occupies a position of great potential for social and cultural change in their discussion of change in higher education. This study examines the use of student consultants in a faculty development program. Student consultants are seen as liminal beings because they are neither a traditional student, nor a faculty member rather they serve as a bridge between the two because of their fluid and transitional state. They explore liminality less as a transitional state, and more as a

transformative process between clearly established roles, particularly student and teacher, and thus as a potential change agent in higher education learning and teaching practices. Rollock (2012) presents a counter-narrative to illustrate her liminal experience as a black female in the white world of private schools and the academy. She uses her liminal position as an alternative to understanding existing positions of other and marginality of black middle class engagement with the education system.

These studies highlight some of the powerful, critical aspects of liminality, drawn from Turner's (1967) comparison of the liminal stage to gestation. He states, "Undoing, dissolution, and decomposition are accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns" (Turner, 1967, p. 99). However, these studies do not highlight the experience of "communitas" which I believe has the greatest potential for change. Therefore I apply both concepts of "liminality" and "communitas" to better understand the experiences of immersion teachers.

### **Immersion Education**

What is immersion education and why is it a struggle to develop and maintain an immersion program in the United States? The rising popularity of language study for communicative purposes, along with the rise of language diversity within the United States, has led to an increase of immersion programs for language acquisition and language preservation (Swain & Johnson, 1997). Full and partial immersion programs focus on the addition of a second language (L2) through the teaching of content, such as math or science. Students in a full immersion program receive the majority of their academic instruction in the L2. In a partial immersion program, typically half of the

student's academic instruction is given in the L2 (Fortune & Tedick, 2008). This emphasis on bilingualism within the regular elementary school classroom, places immersion programs, teachers, administrators, parents and students, outside of the normal school experience, and therefore leads to a variety of challenges worthy of investigation.

First I will review issues in immersion regarding challenges. Next, I will explore the literature outlining the struggle for recognition and self-efficacy within immersion education. Finally, I will examine the literature on professional development within immersion or content-based language teaching.

### **Issues in Immersion**

Having received a Masters Degree in Teaching Foreign Languages in 2003, I understood the foundations of immersion teaching, but at the time I actually began teaching immersion and at the time of writing my comprehensive exams, I had not yet delved deeply into the most current research. In my quest to understand my own experience as an immersion teacher, I found the articles that spoke most clearly to my situation came from CARLA (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition), a part of the University of Minnesota. As I read the literature on immersion I learned that the most heavily researched areas of immersion had to do with the benefits and challenges of immersion, as well as pedagogical strategies to improve immersion teaching.

In regards to the challenges of immersion teaching, I was quickly finding those out on my own. I was a little surprised to learn that access to materials that are appropriate for students' language abilities and for their grade level is still a commonly

documented concern (Fortune, 2012), along with teacher recruitment and retention (Fortune, 2012). It seemed to me that in a relatively established program, we would have better access to relevant materials. However, I found that I, along with most of my colleagues, was still translating materials that would be best suited to our classrooms. I also was struggling to find a classroom assessment that would work to evaluate student language proficiency rather than content knowledge.

Amidst the articles that gave information about immersion programs in general, there was one particular article that spoke to me as an immersion teacher when I was struggling to find the balance between teaching language, and teaching content, and as I was experiencing feelings of isolation. As I read, I became convinced that someone had snuck into my classroom, read my personal teaching reflections, and secretly published them. Due to its pivotal place in my own development as a teacher, as well as its influence in the development of the methodology of this study, I will spend more time discussing this article, first in how it impacted me as a teacher, then by how it influenced the methodology of this study, and finally how it shaped a great deal of my work as a teacher coach.

### **Balancing Content and Language**

The article titled, “Balancing Content and Language in Instruction: The Experience of Immersion Teachers,” is a study of three immersion teachers which attempts to understand their experience in trying to balance content and language in instruction (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012, p. 251).

The following quote from one of the teachers in the article resonated with my own personal experience:

[To balance language and content] is still not entirely realistic as an immersion teacher because there are so many things going on that when you sit down to plan...to look at language standards and [content] standards it's difficult...it's just time. (Teacher A, Int. #1, p. 32) p. 259, 2012.

Personal Teaching Reflection: Speece, Week 1

“I'm overwhelmed with trying to learn the new content material, learn how to present it to the kids and make it comprehensible. I've never taught science or math, so I've basically just defaulted into being a Spanish teacher.”

Another of the participant quotes that I could relate to, but almost in reverse, had to do with envisioning herself on a content-language continuum.

She says:

I found that really valuable to think about...my own teaching practice, that I'm really at this really far end of this continuum on the content side...but I can put myself way down there and say, ‘Oh, I need to really bring myself to the middle,’ [between content and language] because that's where, I think, it's an important part to tend to the language pieces... (Teacher C, Int#1, p. 57).

As I said, my experience was the opposite, but relates because we both found ourselves at different ends of the content-language continuum. I identified so heavily with the teachers in the article because clearly we were all feeling the struggle of how to teach language and content simultaneously.

My reflections show how early on in the teaching process, I was clearly more likely to sacrifice content in order to teach language, but I also realized that while I was not yet capable of finding the balance, I was aware that I needed to work toward it, and to do so quickly.

Finding that article led to an epiphany for me as teacher, because it validated the feelings and the struggles that I faced each day with the overwhelming task of improving language, which takes time, but staying on schedule with content. The strong connection I made to this article as a teacher, resurfaced when I was designing my own study.

Moving past my interaction with the Cammarata & Tedick article as a teacher, when I began to design my research study for my dissertation, I went back to the same study, but with new eyes. Remembering how powerful it had been for me to hear what immersion teachers from other programs had to say, I decided that interviewing immersion teachers in our district would be central to my collection of data. In this reading of the article, I focused more on the methodology. My over-arching question of study was how can we best support partial immersion teachers, particularly in the integration of content and literacy? Cammarata & Tedick (2012) cite a lack of knowledge regarding immersion teachers' actual lived experiences as a barrier that keeps us from improving content and language integration. This was the impetus for their

research design. Since I was an immersion insider, I decided to focus my study on my own lived experience as an immersion teacher, through the autoethnographic method. When I had the fortune to get the job of teacher coach, it changed my study design, in that I felt that including the voices of my colleagues alongside my own, would provide information that is currently lacking from the field. Therefore I set up my study similarly to theirs, based on lived experiences of immersion teachers. However, rather than simply seeking to better understand their experiences, I took my study a step further, and asked not only about their experiences with language and content integration, but also with their professional development experiences, including suggestions they had for more helpful professional development and support.

### **Language Theory in Immersion**

All of the struggle teachers experience around balancing content and language leads to an important question. Why are immersion programs structured the way many of them are if students did not seem to be acquiring language through the content area without a more specific focus on language structure and vocabulary? I began to delve further into the language theory behind immersion programs and how it has evolved over the years. In an overview of immersion, one of the original major immersion efforts in North America is the St-Lambert, Quebec's French immersion program in Canada and Miami-Dade County, Florida's Spanish/English bilingual program in the US. Initially it was believed that students would naturally acquire the L2 with enough exposure to it (Fortune, Tedick & Walker, 2008). Therefore, the majority of immersion programs are set up similarly to ours in that the content areas are taught in the L2, rather than teaching the L2 as a language arts class. However, research has shown that there is a limit to the

range of forms and functions of language that students will be exposed to through content-based instruction (Swain, 1988; Lyster, 1994). More recent advice to immersion programs has called for a more systematic approach to language and literacy instruction (Met, 2008; Fortune, Tedick & Walker, 2008). Until finding and digesting these articles, I had felt that there might be something terribly wrong with our immersion program because the students weren't producing language as accurately and abundantly as I had imagined they would. Finding out that these are documented issues and concerns across the field, helped me as a coach, relax a little on the one hand because it meant we were not as behind the curve as I thought. It also empowered me to design professional development experiences that I believed would be truly meaningful for our immersion teachers.

### **Isolation**

In the cafeteria I stayed beside my students and did not socialize with the other third grade teachers. I couldn't speak English in front of my students. In the hallways, I could only briefly say "*Hola*" to the other teachers because I couldn't speak English in front of my students. I started to feel like I lived inside a little Spanish box, and it was keeping me from being able to connect with the rest of the school. Being a very social person, a true extrovert, I found that this struggle had been bothering me on a deeply personal level. I felt lonely in my job even though I was constantly surrounded by people. It wasn't until I read that other immersion teachers also experienced this struggle, that I was able to truly identify the struggle I was feeling and begin to understand it.

In Cammarata & Tedick's (2012) study, one teacher explained:

I find lots of times that if I want to get rid of that feeling like I'm an island, I'm the one who needs to go to my English-speaking math teachers. They're not gonna come to talk to me about it or anything. And they don't need to; they just keep turning the pages of their provided curriculum. They don't think...honestly, they are not thinking at all about how I can incorporate language into my lesson. Not at all.

(Teacher B, Int #2, p. 32, 2012, p. 259).

This quote reminded me of a time when the third grade lead teacher began photocopying a master copy of all of her math worksheets to distribute to all of the other third grade teachers in case they wanted to use them as enrichment. I didn't realize until halfway through the semester that she was not including me because she didn't think I would be able to use them. I had to ask her specifically to include me so that I would have a better idea of what they were doing and how they were presenting the information to students, even if I couldn't use the actual worksheets because of the English. The combination of research, practice and reflection led me to ask questions about our immersion program such as: Why don't the other teachers think we can use their materials and ideas? Why don't they offer and include us more?

Cammarata & Tedick (2012) go on to mention two analogies used by teachers to describe their isolation: an island, and a single candle in the wind that could blow out at any moment. "The second analogy...underscores the risks involved in attempting to engage with both content and language in an environment that does not support this

instructional balancing act” (p. 260). As a teacher I had often wondered if other immersion teachers felt the same way, but until I was able to name the feeling of isolation, and read that others had experienced it too, it continued to disturb me on a subconscious level and undoubtedly detracted from my work. Once I was able to name it and categorize it as part of immersion teaching, it was less confusing, but also helped me to understand that I might not be able to teach immersion long term, based on my personality and my need for connection.

### **Professional Development of Immersion Teachers**

In a review of five studies of Content Based Language Teaching (CBLT) programs, Lyster and Ballinger (2011) determine that the teacher’s role in (CBLT), is critical in the areas of influencing students’ language choice, structuring engaging lessons which merge content and language, planning collaborative tasks, supporting written discourse, and engaging students in discipline specific pedagogies. Therefore they advocate high quality professional development in which teachers are given enough time and opportunities for peer coaching.

Fortune, Tedick & Walker (2008) involved immersion teachers in a study of their own practices of integrating language and content through observing videos of themselves teaching and reflecting on these specific experiences. Teachers described feeling like they were always teaching language, but that content takes precedence. They also struggled with a constant concern for being the only language model the students have, which placed a significant amount of pressure on them to be accurate at all times in their speech and grammar. Teachers became more aware of the kind of language they

were using, namely questions and cues, and finally they recognized that in order to adequately teach language, they would need to plan specifically for language teaching. It would not come about as a by-product of their content teaching. This adds yet another layer to the already complicated planning, and time for planning needed for high quality language and content integration in the classroom. They concluded that while the teachers learned a great deal about their language use and planning in the classroom through the videotaping, reflection and discussions that were implemented through the study, there is still a need for professional development experiences that help teachers identify and attend to the specific language features that are being taught in their content-focused lessons. Furthermore, Fortune (2012) cites inadequate teacher preparation as one of the leading challenges for immersion programs. She goes on to recommend professional development that is specialized for the unique challenges presented by teaching content, language and literacy in an L2.

The next section outlines my own journey toward self-efficacy as a teacher, researcher and coach. I also connect immersion literature with a study focused on university level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Mexico, literacy teachers in the United States, and self-efficacy and recognition theories often applied in adult education and professional development research.

### **Struggle for Recognition and Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is defined as one's belief in his or her ability to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1997). The construct is different from self-confidence because of its task-specific nature. Essentially the idea is that people are more likely to try something

new, or take a risk, if they have high self-efficacy, meaning they believe they will be successful. As a doctoral student conducting research at the university, and teaching in the immersion program, I felt that I had a healthy amount of self-efficacy. I was overwhelmed with the nature of classroom teaching, and the learning curve of a new school, new curriculum, and job demands from parents and administrators that I had not experienced while teaching Spanish at the college level. However, my broad experiences in teaching, which had included education courses as a Teaching Assistant in the College of Education as well as literacy courses, and supervising of student teachers, all gave me a sense of personal agency. I was confident in my knowledge of pedagogical strategies and particularly in my theory and practice of literacy.

Another characteristic that set me apart from some of my immersion colleagues was my constant connection to theory and research in the fields of language teaching and literacy as a result of my dual identity as teacher and graduate student. As I came across difficult and confusing situations, I approached them from the lens of a researcher-practitioner, seeking out studies and theory that would guide my classroom practice. I also had developed a strong practice of reflexivity, which enabled me to discern what did and didn't work in the classroom, let go of strategies that did not work, and appropriate and implement new ideas that might be useful, particularly in the area of content and language integration.

As I mentioned in the introduction of this study, I had noticed a general desire amongst my immersion colleagues to implement more effective strategies. Also a frustration toward the specialized nature of what we did compared to what the non-

immersion teachers did. I also got the feeling that there was a general sense of powerlessness to do anything to change the situation.

I believed that incorporating time for the study of language through literacy (particularly reading and writing) was the only chance I had at improving students' language skills without detracting from the core subjects I was supposed to be teaching. So I went to talk to another expert in language teaching, my partner teacher. In our program, the Spanish teacher teaches science and math, while the English speaking teacher is responsible for English language arts (ELA) and social studies. We are partners. We share two homeroom classes, and switch homerooms half way through the day so that both classes get half of the day's instruction in Spanish and half of the day's instruction in English.

Amanda and I were both new to immersion teaching. Perhaps that is what caused us to bond so closely that year. She was a mentor to me in many ways, and we navigated through the joys and challenges of bilingual education in a monolingual school system together. She had taught first grade for many years prior to teaching third grade immersion on the ELA side. She had extensive experience teaching reading and writing, and also had a deep knowledge of the literacy skills of our students. She was in charge of testing, assessing and developing their reading, writing and comprehension abilities in English, therefore I concluded that she would be the ideal person to help me improve their Spanish literacy and language.

In her class, amongst other strategies, they used a model of language study in which students worked regularly in independent language stations. In its most basic

form, it is a workshop rotation in which students get to choose what kind of independent work they do to practice the language strategy they are learning about in class. The five general options she used included: 1) reading to self, 2) reading to a partner, 3) working with words, 4) listening to reading, or 5) writing. Both classes loved the independent literacy learning stations and would often mention them to me and talk excitedly about the projects they were working on. I went to Amanda, and asked her to show me her classroom practice and help me figure out if I could do a modified Spanish version of these literacy stations that would give my students a chance to interact with language in meaningful ways that would improve their overall production and fluency of the L2. On the printed out copy of my reflections from that year, I scrawled in pen out to the side, “Literacy stations became a turning point.” And it is true. Because I was incorporating the Spanish language and vocabulary that they did know, from Math and Science, they were connecting to the structures they already knew and were familiar with in English, but using the Spanish they had acquired.

#### Personal Teaching Reflection: Speece, Week 5

Literacy Integration Stations have been the best thing to incorporate into my classroom...They really like having a choice of what to do, and they also seem to really like working independently or with a partner. It's challenging to keep it quiet enough in the room for my liking, but the good news is that they enjoy what they're doing, and they are trying to use Spanish.

While this was my attempt to begin dealing with a problem, lack of productive language, particularly speaking and writing, it was not perfect as is evidenced by my reflections that year.

#### Personal Teaching Reflection: Speece, Week 6

I've started displaying for the class, the work of students during Integration Stations. It's interesting. I've noticed that once I display a good paragraph, or someone that's written a book, during the following class periods, I get many more that are similar. I've also given them the idea to use books in my library as mentor texts to help them find the vocabulary and structures that they need. It's exhausting for me because they are using me like a giant personal dictionary.

#### Personal Teaching Reflection: Speece, Week 8

One challenge with Daily 5 is keeping that time from turning into arts and crafts. They have already used up all of my craft paper, and yet they've not produced as much as I would have hoped in terms of reading and writing. They also spend a lot of time stapling and taping things. Amanda and I are reminding them to write first and illustrate second, also to not use the stapler or the tape unless they ask us first. We'll see if this helps.

#### Personal Teaching Reflection: Speece, January

Some of my kids are blowing me away with their work during Integration Stations! This has been such an incredible tool for my students...

The more I've read and investigated about content area literacy, the more I'm finding ways to incorporate Science and Math into our Integration Stations. I've also been asked by my supervisor to present on content area literacy to the other immersion teachers. I'm excited to share what I'm learning and what I've already started implementing.

#### Personal Teaching Reflection: Speece, March

I also got to place my literacy order. So exciting. I bought lots of informational texts for science and math. My studies for comps have really motivated my teaching and helped me figure out how to incorporate more content while still focusing on language and literacy. While I still don't love teaching math and science, I do love figuring out how to incorporate language and literacy and to be more effective in those areas.

Looking back on these reflections, it seems that my willingness to try something new in the immersion classroom, even though none of my colleagues were doing it, and no one had told me to try it, is what is known as personal agency. I was also grounded in socio-cultural theory so I knew the value of what I was seeing Amanda do with language arts, even though I did not necessarily articulate it at the time.

From my work as a coach and writing about all of these experiences as a researcher, I am coming to new understandings about what else was going on during my time in the immersion classroom. The process of identifying and naming the strategies and theories that were being enacted is an important job of the researcher. It is through understanding and naming what is happening that we are able to talk about it and learn

from it and compare it to the experiences of others. Therefore in this section, I will continue identifying and naming what I think was going on during that time in the hopes that it will be transferable to other immersion educators. While qualitative research is not generalizable in the sense that quantitative research is considered to be generalizable, I hope that through reading my story other practitioners, administrators, researchers or policymakers will be confronted with ideas, thoughts, experiences or suggestions that cause them to interrogate their own thoughts or behaviors in regards to immersion education. In this way, autoethnography adds to the research and builds on what has gone before.

In a study on self-efficacy beliefs and teacher effectiveness, Bray-Clark and Bates (2003) make the argument that teacher self-efficacy is an important factor in teacher effectiveness and should therefore play an important role in the professional development of teachers. They suggest that personal agency aids in teacher effectiveness and state, “The link between personal agency and a teacher’s efficacy beliefs lies in personal experience and a teacher’s ability to reflect on that experience and make decisions about future courses of action” (p. 14).

As I was teaching and trying to implement a structure for improving student language and literacy, I did not see the bigger picture. It wasn’t until I began to read research about professional development of foreign language teachers and literacy teachers that I began to make thematic and theoretical connections. As I read, an important theme emerged: the importance of self-efficacy and recognition. Gillings de Gonzalez (2011) conducted a life history study within a university setting in Mexico. She analyzed her own lived experiences, as well as the lived experiences of 11 other EFL

teachers from 1989-2003 who engaged in educational change including curriculum design and teacher development and professionalization. She described how their lack of formal pre-service training initially led to isolation and insecurity, but ended up motivating them toward active professional development which led to institutional change. As I read I made notes to myself in the margins of the study such as, “similarities to immersion = no initial certification” (p. 76) and “Perceived limitations: lack of training, language limitations, isolated from TEFL community and University community” (p. 79). I was noticing how the experience of these EFL teachers in Mexico mirrored some of the experiences of immersion teachers in the United States.

Basing her study in the theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), and interpreting her data through Honneth’s (1995a) theory of recognition, helped her make sense of the experiences she and her colleagues had on their journey to transforming their professional identities. She describes how the faculty members within their own team started by recognizing each other’s strong work ethic, honesty, reliability and commitment. This led to recognition of professional self by others and finally to a sense of professional self-esteem. Interestingly, they no longer felt isolated within their context once they had achieved wide recognition of their social identity.

Research in literacy also shows that teachers with a strong sense of teaching effectiveness are more likely to persist in progressive writing instruction. In a study of 18 elementary school writing teachers, (McCarthy, 2008) one of the teachers resisted high-stakes testing and mandated curriculum by persisting in her use of integrated curriculum and thematic units. Troia, Lin, Cohen and Monroe (2011) studied six teachers who participated in writing workshop professional development in order to understand

teachers' epistemologies, beliefs, and actions. The study found that teachers with a strong sense of general teaching efficacy adapted their instruction and implemented more key elements of writing workshop. These studies suggest having a strong theory of teaching and learning leads to feelings of teaching effectiveness that can withstand administrative and political pressure. When teachers develop a sense of teaching efficacy they may continue effective practices even in the face of pressure to adopt less effective practices.

Through my research and experience, when I became the teacher coach of world language teachers, I had become convinced that self-efficacy and recognition were important to the development of all teachers, but particularly immersion teachers due to the isolating nature of our work, the lack of initial certification status in immersion, and the general lack of knowledge, interest and experience with bilingualism in the monolingual education system. My next question was how could I increase teachers' belief in their own abilities to solve problems and try new strategies in the classroom?

I decided to survey immersion teachers to find out what literacy practices they were currently employing in the classroom and what areas they wanted to learn more about. From there, I decided to build teacher's knowledge base in literacy, through an online "Immersion Literacy Kit" that I created and offer a few strategies that they could try as an option. DuFour et. al (2006) emphasize the increase in teacher self-efficacy through the setting of achievable school wide goals and the consequent celebration when those goals are met. They also suggest that the expectation of success leads to action and effort. As I went to teacher's classrooms to observe, I found that many of them had begun to employ the strategies we were working on, and so I took pictures, wrote about them in my observation notes, complimented them to their principals, and tried to

publicize the good work in L2 literacy that was going on in immersion classrooms across the district. We also set aside regular time in our Cross-Site collaborative planning meetings to celebrate success in literacy, and to share ideas and strategies that were working in their classrooms.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

The following excerpt from an observation of one of our new immersion teachers, illustrates the uniqueness of the variety of settings in which this story unfolds. This is only one immersion classroom in one immersion school, but it represents the type of learning that goes in on all of our immersion classrooms.

Professional Reflection: Speece, November 2016

While watching Marina teach Science (in Spanish) with a lens toward language and literacy, I am amazed at the layered learning that is taking place in this classroom. This teacher to me is the epitome of teaching. She is transmitting and developing so many things at the same time. I can practically see the thought bubbles over each student's head where such complex processes are taking place. Next door I hear "You're a Grand Old Flag" sung passionately by children in their music class preparing for the Veteran's Day celebration. In this moment I feel at the core of my being that there is no greater joy or honor than being an immersion teacher. We truly are building multi-lingual citizens, in spite of and along with hardships and difficulties. With triumphs and defeats, *seguimos adelante*/we keep moving forward, "From sea to shining sea." This is the beauty of our country. We are a diverse group of Americans. I see the pledge of allegiance posted in Spanish

at the front of the class and it reminds me that we can express our patriotism in many voices and in many languages. *Yo prometo lealtad a la bandera de los Estados Unidos de America.../I pledge allegiance, to the flag, of the United States of America...*

Walker & Tedick (2000) suggest that the micro-contexts of immersion programs are the schools, the teachers and the students. After extensive research with immersion teachers they conclude that while looking at the macro-contexts of immersion education and issues that tend to affect all programs is valuable, it is more useful to understand individual programs and their micro-contexts “from the inside out” (p. 24). Therefore, choosing the method of autoethnography for my study makes perfect sense. One of the most important facets that sets qualitative research apart from quantitative, particularly autoethnography, is its contextualized nature.

Autoethnography is driven by curiosity and wonder, an attempt to understand any phenomenon from an insider’s perspective by situating the research in context and allowing it to develop from a natural setting. As previously mentioned, I have chosen to call this an autoethnography because I am telling my own story while weaving in the stories of other immersion teachers. The larger narrative that emerges from this blending will illuminate aspects of teaching language and literacy through content that are difficult to understand outside of their true context. While some research on macro-contexts is helpful, what works in a Chinese immersion school in Utah might not work in a French immersion school in Canada.

This study takes place within the southeastern United States, in a large public school district. The emphasis is on my own experiences as a third grade immersion teacher and coach, along with the stories and insights of six other teachers within this district. While students are mentioned collectively or individually, no student is named, or is a direct participant of this study.

In all of the four schools where teachers were surveyed, Spanish is the language of the immersion classroom. The district also has Mandarin, French and German immersion schools. For the purpose of this study, I limited my research to the Spanish speaking elementary immersion schools, since Spanish is my language and where my greatest experience and expertise is found. School and teacher names are fictitious, to respect privacy. Within the setting of this story, I will introduce you to each school and each teacher as I remember encountering them.

## **Context**

### **Meadow Brook Elementary**

“Good morning. Welcome to Meadow Brook. We’re so glad you’re here.” Said the friendliest school secretary I have ever met. “We have snacks and drinks set up for your students already, and we have a sign-in sheet for them right here,” she continued as she ushered me through the hallway and into the classroom we would be using for the university course I was co-teaching with my advisor. It was a literacy class, and we had an on-site component for our pre-service teachers to experience working with elementary school students so they could try some of the teaching strategies they were learning about in the course. I have never felt more welcomed at a school than I did the first time I

walked into Meadow Brook Elementary, and over the course of my educational career, I have walked into a lot of different schools. That day, I had no idea that I would eventually end up teaching in the Spanish immersion program at Meadow Brook, and eventually working for the district, but my first impression of the school will always remain.

Meadow Brook Elementary has a population of around 800. It was one of the original three immersion schools in the district and has been in existence for 11 years. The majority of the students are white with a poverty rate of 20 percent. Sixteen percent of the student population is identified as gifted, and Meadow Brook has consistently received a grade of “Excellent” on the school report card, with over half of the teachers holding advanced degrees.

### **Rolling Bluff Elementary School**

I am not sure why I did not visit Rolling Bluff Elementary sooner after becoming teacher coach. Perhaps it is because I did not yet have a close relationship with any of the teachers or administrators there. Whatever the reason, when I did finally visit in the fall of 2016, I was hoping to speak to the new immersion teachers on their first day back to school. After a big change in staff the previous year, Rolling Bluff had three new international teachers this year. While the school building and classrooms were not fancy, I noticed immediately that the classrooms were prepared for learning. Our new teachers had already begun posting anchor charts and word walls around the room, as we had recommended in our first PD meeting, to give language support to students. Our push for the year was to integrate literacy with the content areas through Reading

Workshop, Read Aloud, building our L2 class libraries, and posting visual cues in the classroom. I was pleased that our new teachers were taking our literacy ideas seriously and implementing them from the start.

Rolling Bluff has Title One status and was also one of the original three immersion schools serving 583 students, pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade. The gifted and talented program serves six percent of the students and sixty-three percent of students fall within the poverty rate. Seventy-six percent of teachers hold advanced degrees. Rolling Bluff has received an “Average” rating for the past three years on its school report card.

### **Granville Elementary School**

“Where is this place?” I wondered, as I drove and drove down a winding country road. It seemed that with every mile I drove, I traveled a little further back in time. When I finally arrived at Granville Elementary School, a full twenty-five minutes away from the heart of town, I was surprised. The pavement was old and cracked, and I couldn’t figure out where to enter. A locked gate blocked one of the main entrances, and I finally saw a sign that pointed me toward the main office. I was visiting to observe two of the new immersion teachers. The assistant principal greeted me and walked me down the hall, around the corner, through several buildings and walkways, and finally to the fourth grade classroom. By far the oldest school building I had yet visited, I was also surprised by how small the class was. There were fewer than 20 students, and it looked like a number of them might be Hispanic. While the age of the school and its distance from town had created a number of expectations in my mind, when I saw the instruction

that was taking place within the classroom, students were excited about science and math, and were speaking lots of Spanish.

I knew that Granville was divided into a primary school, grades K-2 and an elementary School, grades 3-5. The Elementary and Primary schools are next door to each other, and have different administrators. The immersion program there started five years after the original three immersion schools started. At Granville Elementary, the enrollment is closer to 700, and the school rating has been “Good” for the past three years. With Title One status, the gifted and talented program serves fifteen percent of the student population and fifty-six percent of the students identify as students in poverty. Over half of the teachers hold advanced degrees.

### **Granville Primary School**

Located right next door to the elementary school, Granville Primary looks very similar, but the age of the building and its distance from town does nothing to suppress the learning that goes on inside those aging walls. The first time I visited Granville Primary, I took note of the signs on all of the immersion teachers’ doors. I also took pictures to share with other immersion teachers: “We are proudly bilingual.” The signs go on to explain why they preserve a Spanish-only atmosphere for the children’s language development and growth putting a positive spin on their request for total Spanish immersion.

Professional Reflection: Speece: May 1, 2016

Granville Primary blew me away. No kids were speaking English K-2. I was really impressed. They have organized their day differently than the other classes

in order to keep kids in the L2 all morning with no interruptions. They have signs on the doors reminding visitors not to speak English to them in front of the kids. Clearly those teachers and administrators have gone the extra mile to make sure that the L2 is the priority.

Enrollment in the Primary School is 770, and the school report card rating has been excellent for the past three years. Also, with Title One status, sixty-three percent of students are considered to be in poverty, and there is no gifted and talented program until third grade at the Elementary School. Over half of the teachers hold advanced degrees.

### **Participants**

The seven teachers I interviewed, including myself, reflect the variety of training and backgrounds that are often found within immersion programs. Using pseudonyms to protect anonymity, and sharing their own words along with mine, in this section I will attempt to paint a picture of who they are as immersion teachers. Their uniqueness will help you understand the field of immersion teaching and also help to answer the question of how to best support them.

#### **Jane Hammond, First Grade Immersion, Meadow Brook Elementary**

I walked Jane with her notes in hand. Of course she had printed out the interview questions and written thorough notes to prepare for our interview. We hugged, and then sat down at my kitchen table. Having known each other for years, this was not her first visit to my home, but the nature of the interview process made us both get right down to business. Jane is the first teacher I interviewed, and also the teacher I have known the longest. She and I have similar backgrounds in that we are both white, non-

native Spanish speakers in our thirties. We met as classmates in a Foreign Language MAT program at a local university, and quickly became friends and later colleagues. Jane is also one of the most experienced immersion teachers in our district. She went straight into immersion teaching after graduating from the MAT program and helped start the immersion program in our school district. She was trained in the basics of immersion at a workshop held at the University of Minnesota, along with the other teachers and administrators of the three original immersion schools. She taught kindergarten for one year at Rolling Bluff Elementary, then moved to Meadow Brook and taught first grade for nine years. She made the switch back to kindergarten this year, but was still teaching first grade at the time of our interview. To give a little more background, Jane is National Board certified, and has served on the Immersion Leadership Team for the past two years.

### **Serena Harper, Second Grade Immersion, Meadow Brook Elementary**

Laughter echoes down the hall where Serena, second grade immersion teacher at Meadow Brook, is known for her loud easy laugh, and her exciting Science experiments. “Look at the slime we made in Sra. Harper’s class!” Excited second graders yell as they head out to the car-rider line. Greeted by mothers or grandmothers in SUVs and minivans, Meadow Brook immersion students proudly show off their latest Science experiment. Serena is 35 years old and a heritage Spanish speaker who grew up in New Jersey. Her family is Puerto Rican, and her background includes teaching English as a second language in South Korea for one year, and teaching in a bilingual school in New Jersey for three years. She also taught a mixed class of dual immersion first and second grade for one year in New Jersey. She has been teaching in this school and district for

four years. She has a B.S. in Sociology and Criminology and a Masters degree in Instructional Technology.

**Marina Canela, Fifth Grade Immersion Teacher, Granville Elementary**

Walking into Sra. Canela's fifth grade class at Granville Elementary, I saw students huddled in small groups around their tables trying to figure out how to help their teacher. She knew that to motivate her students' curiosity for science, she needed to present them with a real world problem, "Oh no! My shirt has a stain and I don't know which solution will get rid of it." Students began writing about the different solutions they were testing in their interactive science notebooks. As the teacher coach, I had been to observe her class long before I had the opportunity to interview Marina for this study. When she showed up at my office for our interview, I already knew her teaching style and that she was the only returning teacher on her current immersion team. Coming from Venezuela three years ago, Marina was the anchor holding her team in place as the third and fourth grade teachers were both brand new to immersion, and one was brand new to the country. She taught at Rolling Bluff for a year before she switched to Granville. Also in her mid-thirties, Marina has been teaching for the past 14 years. She holds a degree in Elementary Education from a University in Venezuela, and a Master's Degree in Social Psychology from a university in Spain.

**Gayle Quevada, Kindergarten Immersion Teacher, Granville Primary School**

Bursting into song, speaking with passion and conviction and getting right to the heart of an issue characterize Gayle based on our interactions throughout the years that I have known her. Gayle is the oldest and most experienced immersion teacher of the six

who were interviewed and quite possibly the most energetic. She and her sister came to the United States from Cuba when she was 12 years old and Spanish is her first language. She is currently the kindergarten teacher at Granville Primary School and has been in the district since we began immersion. Before that she taught partial immersion at a private school in another city in the state. She also attended the original series of workshops with Jane and the teachers and administrators of the other immersion schools. She taught first grade at Rolling Bluff Elementary, before she moved to kindergarten at Granville Primary School, which was started later, and is only in its seventh year, whereas the original three programs are in their eleventh year of existence. Gayle has been teaching for 31 years and is 68 years old. She is planning to retire soon.

**Yolanda Villa-Real, Fourth Grade Immersion Teacher, Rolling Bluff Elementary School**

I noticed Yolanda immediately at our first in-service PD meeting before school even started. Tall, thin and confident, Yolanda was not shy to interact and share from her teaching experiences. Even as an international teacher, brand new to the country and district, she spoke with the other teachers and me as if she had known us her entire life. I thought to myself, “She is going to do just fine here. This is a strong teacher.” Yolanda taught English for 15 years in her home country, Venezuela, and she was an Elementary fourth grade teacher for three years at a private bilingual school in Venezuela. She is in her mid-fifties and she holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education.

### **Mariana Santillana, Third Grade Immersion Teacher, Rolling Bluff Elementary**

Rushing down the hall, already 15 minutes late for our interview, I arrived at Mariana's classroom breathless and flustered. Another meeting had gone late, and I hated to keep her waiting, when she was already doing me a favor by agreeing to the interview. She graciously welcomed me into her classroom, and we got right down to business. She had obviously prepared for our interview as she had thoroughly thought through each question and had multiple concrete examples to share about her experiences as an immersion teacher. During and after our interview, I realized that I had new respect for my colleague, and felt that she had great ideas and experiences to share. Mariana is originally from Honduras, and taught there in a bilingual school for 12 years before coming to the United States four years ago.

**Table 3.1 Participant Information**

Teacher	School	Grade Level	Native/Non-Native Speaker	Years of experience teaching	Country of Origin	Age
Gayle	GPS	K	Native	31	Cuba	68
Jane	MB	1	Non-Native	11	U.S.	37
Serena	MB	2	Heritage	9	Puerto Rico	35
Mariana	RBE	3	Native	12	Honduras	35
Yolanda	RBE	4	Native	18	Venezuela	50
Marina	GES	5	Native		Venezuela	34
Liza	MB	3	Non-Native	10	U.S.	38

## **Methodological Journey**

When I decided to use autoethnography as my method of research, I was a complete novice to this experimental genre. As I read and studied autoethnography, I learned that it was derived from the fields of anthropology and feminist and critical thought. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that enables the researcher to tell his or her own story, and views the very act of writing as the method of inquiry itself (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). Another way of describing autoethnography is the use of personal experience to examine cultural experience (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013).

After reading a wide variety of current autoethnographies, tracing the history of the method of research, and comparing it to similar methods, such as narrative inquiry, I began to feel that I understood the genre and was ready to write my dissertation proposal. However, when I began writing the data analysis section of the dissertation proposal, I didn't have a lot to say. I went back to my exemplars and reviewed them for their data analysis sections, only to find very little explicit description of how exactly they made meaning of their data, if there was a data analysis section at all. Almost all I could come up with was storytelling and reflection (Gornick, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Bochner, 2012). This did not fit my prior schema of scholarly research, and so I kept searching until I found some studies that alluded to thematic coding (Duncan, 2004; Maydell, 2010.). "Phew! This is a familiar research term," I thought. That sounds respectable. I did my best to thoroughly describe the data analysis process, and slipped it into my methods section. Unfortunately, during my proposal defense, I was found out. One of the concerns that was voiced was the lack of methodological clarity, particularly

in regards to data analysis. I include the data analysis section from my proposal below in order to illustrate my point:

### **Data Analysis**

In order to self-narrate the story of being and becoming a Language Teacher Support Specialist, I will approach the data with a structured, reflective stance. Using the process of memoing (Groenewald, 2008), I will combine artifacts with memories. By letting the memories flow from the reading of the artifact, I will first make sense of the artifact, and then write about it. Beginning with my own Professional Reflections and Researcher's Log, I will read through, memoing as I read in order to capture impressions, memories and preliminary themes that arise from the data, also known as open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Secondly, I will listen to the interviews, and memo as I listen. This process will help me to record my thoughts and memories, as triggered by the interviews, and will also allow me to make connections between my own being and becoming alongside the participants' being and becoming. It will also allow for further generation of recurring themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Finally, I will organize the themes that arise and discuss how they relate to issues of becoming a language teacher and support specialist, relating to other teachers, and the kind of support language teachers need. My account of teaching in an immersion setting will not produce "one true account" of all language teachers, rather it will be a "representation" (Iser, 1972; 1978; Holman-Jones, et

al., 2015). Nevertheless, it will provide insight that could help others better understand the needs of language teachers, such as other support specialists, department chairs, and district instructional support staff.

In re-reading my original description, after deeper and more intense study of the genre, as well as having now had the experience of actually writing an autoethnography, I understand how the description made sense to me at the time, and also how it was an incomplete picture of the process for my committee. I took their concerns seriously and moved forward with other aspects of the study until I could come to a deeper understanding of the data analysis process.

My next major concern and nagging doubt had to do with the inclusion of interviews in an (auto)-ethnography. My committee members had also questioned whether participant interviews were a legitimate source of data for an inquiry into my own personal experiences. Was I now changing my methodology to a collaborative autoethnography, or was I using the interviews as a way to better understand my own experience?

With these two concerns in mind, I forged ahead with the collection of data as previously stated (interviews, teaching reflections, professional reflections and memos). But when it came time to actually analyze the data, and write the methodology section of the dissertation, I found that I was still confused by how to describe what exactly I was doing, as is evidenced by my reflections of that time.

Personal Reflection: Speece, October 2015

I just want to tell my story, but the problem is that I am my story. My story is unfolding as I press my fingertips to the keyboard which allows the words to crawl across the page in front of me. In order to tell my story, I have to remember it, but there is pain in remembering...

Is autoethnography the most extreme case of not being able to separate your personal life from your professional life? And is that really such a bad thing?

Are we coming to a point in academia in which we realize that the cold hard facts are not enough, that they have never been enough? Are women bringing heart to academia? Is our counter-narrative worth listening to?

Why have I been so stumped when it came to research design? Because analyzing myself and my story is not cut and dried. It is very personal and it is bringing up all sorts of issues in my personal life that I wouldn't consider to be connected to my work at all, or to my identity as a teacher...

### **An Outside Perspective and Methodological Crisis of Belief**

During the course of my dissertation writing process, our language and literacy faculty was interviewing a potential new faculty member. His research interest was narrative inquiry, and so my advisor invited me to meet with him to talk about my dissertation. We all met up before they had a dinner engagement and went for a short walk by the river. As we sat there talking, Dr. S began questioning me about my methodology. How was I planning to interpret the data? I mentioned thematic analysis, but he alluded to other methods such as structural analysis, telling and re-telling, as well as other interpretational strategies used in narrative inquiry. He also asked me if I would

be incorporating art or performance. The more we talked, the more I began to worry that maybe my study was more of a narrative inquiry than an autoethnography, and thus, while he had given me a lot to think about, I began to have another methodological identity crisis. Am I really writing an autoethnography? I asked myself.

As a result of this encounter, I dug deeper into handbooks on narrative inquiry and autoethnography, but this time with a clearer focus. I was going to nail down the data interpretation piece. Since I had already determined that I would employ thematic interpretation, I went to a source of narrative inquiry methodology since it was more explicitly explained than autoethnography and since the two genres are closely linked. I asked myself the following questions about what type of thematic analysis I would employ:

- Am I interested in the form of the narrative or only it's thematic meanings and point?
- Is my focus on the act of the narrative?
- How much of the interview dynamic and interpersonal conditions do I want to include?
- How important is the local context?

Since I had already generated my data, I was now better able to answer those questions and imagine how I could explain the process, through the lens of autoethnography as an emerging genre. Nevertheless, I was still struggling with the lack of clarity I was encountering regarding specific steps to the overall methodological structure. Finally I was reassured by Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) who cite two reasons for a lack of methodological clarity in the genre. First they suggest that

autoethnographers tend to draw from a variety of methods, often even changing and experimenting as they interpret data and draw conclusions. This was one of the biggest clues that I was, in fact, an autoethnographer, because I found myself doing the very same thing on my research journey. My methods were evolving simultaneously with my study.

Secondly, they state that the methodological clarity is often lacking because the goal of the autoethnographer, “is not to highlight methodological criteria, but rather to tell a story in a way that reveals the self as a central character with rich emotional evocation that serves to ground the story being told” (p. 65). They even go on to recognize the difficulty this can present for graduate students trying to pursue this form of research for dissertations because of the common criticism that the methodology lacks rigor. Finally they state, “Autoethnographic inquiry is guided less by specific techniques of data collection than it is by a set of ethical, aesthetic, and relational sensitivities that can be—and are being---incorporated into a wide variety of autoethnographical modes of inquiry” (p. 65).

“Finally,” I thought, “Someone has stated the obvious, and essentially said that while it is a somewhat ambiguous form of research, that is simply part of what makes it an autoethnography.” The centrality of self, embedded in exploring cultural practice, is what makes an autoethnography, more so than any particular method of data collection and analysis. While this was reassuring, I still needed to make meaning out of the interviews, reflections and memos. I delved into a recently published handbook on autoethnography (Jones, Adams and Ellis, 2013) and I was finally able to trace a general set of suggestions on styles, methods and approaches. According to Jones, Adams and

Ellis, (2013), autoethnographies currently tend to fall somewhere on a continuum between “analytical” (Anderson, 2006) and “evocative” (Ellis, 1997). The analytical approach, which is what I decided to use, is more familiar to qualitative researchers in that data are generated either through interviews, field notes, reflections, memories or artifacts, and then analyzed for recurring themes (Chang, 2013).

I also learned that a collaborative autoethnography (Ngunjiri et. al, 2010) had less to do with the inclusion of participant interviews, but rather was a collaborative effort between multiple researchers. Therefore, I determined that my study was not a collaborative autoethnography. In which case, I needed to consider the ethics behind my interviews. Was I in fact, using my participants, rather than truly seeking to understand and represent their voices? I found that it is acceptable to incorporate the voices and perspectives of others into an individual autoethnography, and interview others related to the research topic (Chang, 2008: 2013). After examining several examples of autoethnographies that included interviews (Marvasti, 2006; Adams, 2016) I noticed that sharing the reflective space with others was a powerful tool for more fully examining a cultural issue. From a critical perspective I also decided to include the stories of others so as not to privilege my own voice as the researcher. Instead, I prefer to include the voices of practitioners who are currently living the reality that I am remembering.

While I had become deeply convinced of the importance and authenticity of this emerging style of research, I wondered how my committee would react, since this data analysis section was still relatively similar to what I had presented in my proposal. And so I determined to make a clear and compelling argument for this style of research, and hope that they would see the value in it. This too was a theme that emerged from my

studies of autoethnography, that autoethnographers often wonder who will publish this? Will it be accepted? Will people take it seriously? Being transparent about this reality helps to confront the issue head on, instead of trying to disguise autoethnographical research as something it's not.

I had also noticed in many of the autoethnographies I read, that part of the genre included educating the reader on the practices found within this method of qualitative research. Thus, I decided to follow that design as well. One of the best explanations of the genre in terms of its variety and structure comes from Ellis and Bochner (2000). They break down the term into its three parts: 'auto', having to do with self, 'ethno', having to do with culture, and 'graphy', having to do with the research process. They explain how different researchers might emphasize one of the three parts over the others, which makes the research structurally different, but still within the same genre.

I learned that field notes, interviews and personal documents emerge as the most common types of data collected by autoethnographers, which one can imagine relates heavily to the more traditional approach of ethnography. However, it is important to note that collection and interpretation of these data depend on the focus of research (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). Also characteristic is the use of autoethnographic vignettes, in which the researcher writes about a specific memory or event that was memorable, and important to the topic being researched. Personal documents are also considered valuable forms of data collection, including diaries, journals and reflections (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013).

Thus, after a second, deeper foray into autoethnographic methodology, I realized that what I had noticed and gleaned from the large variety of autoethnographies I had collected and read, is that I did, in fact understand the autoethnographic method, and that what I had included in my proposal was a valid start, it just required further explanation. Therefore, in this study, I blend typical aspects of narrative inquiry and autoethnography to create a polyvocalic, deeply reflexive, narrative experience. Polyvocalic because of the inclusion of other teacher's voices, as well as the variety of voices I use in telling my story. Deeply reflexive due to the continual and recursive reflection I employed throughout the entire process, and narrative because I am telling a story.

### **Methods of data collection**

I collected and generated data in the form of personal teaching reflections, interviews and professional reflections. In ethnographic study, these methods provide the opportunity for in-depth study (Bochner, 2012; Quick, 2009; Lincoln & Denzin, 1994) of a particular group or setting, based on lived experience.

**Personal Teaching Reflections.** Reflections include all personal reflections generated during my year and a half teaching third grade partial immersion. I view the personal teaching reflections as artifacts since they were not written with the intention of research, but rather as a way of understanding and improving my own performance as a teacher. Reflections are written both in a typical journal fashion and from a standpoint of creative writing. Collected artifact reflections were kept sporadically by myself, generally on a weekly basis, written either during my planning period at school, after school, or in the evening at home. These are organized loosely by the month of the year

in which I wrote them, as they were originally intended only for personal use, and sometimes the specific date. They have been compiled and saved in a folder on my computer titled Personal Teaching Reflections.

**Professional Reflections.** I kept these reflections during my work as teacher coach on a weekly basis, with the intention of documenting visits to immersion classrooms, and other aspects of my job that might contribute to the study. They have been compiled and saved in a folder on my computer titled Professional Reflections.

**Interviews.** I conducted six reflexive dyadic interviews (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013) which incorporate the traditional interview protocol, but also allow the interviewer to share his or her own experiences and feelings, turning the interview into more of a conversation (p. 69), and are seen as an “active co-construction of reality, feelings and understanding” (p. 71). The incorporation of the researcher’s experiences or feelings adds to the insider perspective during interview and sets participants at ease.

I emailed the list of interview questions in advance so that participants could think about or write their answers before the interview if they wanted to, but I did not request that they write anything. I offered to meet at my office, at my home or in their classroom. Three participants met with me in my home, one met in my office, and I went to the classrooms of the remaining two. I audio-recorded and transcribed all interviews using Recordium, an audio-recording application designed for easy playback for transcription purposes. One interview was conducted in both Spanish and English. I translated the Spanish portions after transcribing the entire interview. All recordings

were saved on my tablet which is password protected for security. All transcriptions were saved on my laptop which is also password protected.

I also conducted one self-interview. Anderson & Glass-Coffin (2013) describe the self-interview as a “dialogue between one’s past and present selves” (p. 69). I did this in a written format.

## **Data Analysis**

As previously mentioned, I decided to pursue the style of the analytical autoethnography combined with narrative analysis. According to Anderson (2006), there are 5 key features to analytical autoethnography (1) complete member researcher status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis (p. 378). As previously mentioned, having taught in the same program myself gave me complete member researcher status.

In order to analyze the data, I decided to reveal and explore the variety of identities or voices that I incorporate throughout the process of remembering, reflecting and memoing (Chang, 2013). I chose to view the data through four different lenses, myself as a teacher and graduate student, myself as a researcher, myself as a coach, and through the voices of my participants, current immersion teachers. This was also a way to demonstrate narrative visibility of myself as the researcher, the first key feature in Anderson’s (2006) description of analytical autoethnography.

The first of part of my analytical process included manually transcribing the interviews and memoing (Groenwald, 2008) on interviews as well as reflections.

Throughout the entire experience, as advised by Anderson (2006), I have employed continual and recursive reflection on the interviews, reflections, my own experiences and memories, as well as the memos. While reading and memoing, I let themes emerge from the data, which is known as open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The themes that emerged are Marginalization Leading to Isolation, Value of the L2, and the issue of a School within a School. Then I re-read interviews and reflections with these themes in mind, while continuing to memo and reflect. I sorted answers to the interview questions in a variety of ways. First I compiled the answers of each teacher in a table sorted by question. Next I pulled out what I considered to be key quotations that either sparked my own memories, or that fell into the initial set of themes. I also created charts to help me categorize, classify and organize the information I was reading with the themes in mind.

During my third reading of each interview, I felt the need to interact more physically and visually with the information. I used a separate sheet of chart paper for each teacher and one for myself. As I read each interview transcription, I highlighted and made notes on sticky notes regarding anything of interest to the study found in that teacher's interview. During this phase, I also made notes regarding the way I was connecting to each teacher's interview and kept those organized on my own sheet of chart paper. This was a concentrated attempt to further understand my own story alongside my participants' stories, and how these stories informed the counter-cultural practice of immersion education. This also demonstrates Anderson's (2006) fourth key feature of an analytical autoethnography, dialogue with informants beyond the self. At this point I engaged in narrative analysis by constructing a participant vignette based on each individual teacher, using the tables, charts, chart paper collections and key phrases

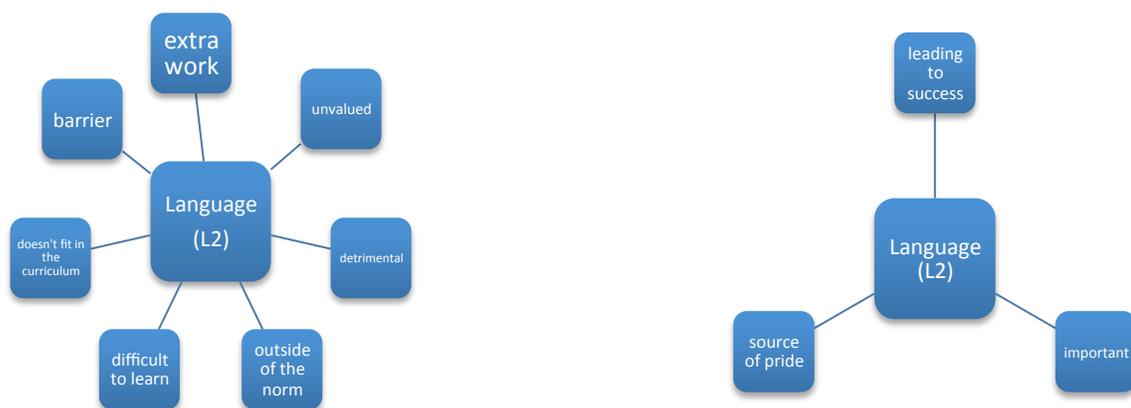
documents I had previously created. Each vignette included a section in which I narrated how I interacted with that teacher's words through multiple lenses, that of teacher, coach and researcher. This was helpful for my process of understanding each teacher more deeply along with my own connection to each teacher. My final decision was to go back to the original interviews and pull out the stories that best illustrate the experiences we are discussing, and I kept them in their original form because I found that our stories were more powerful when told in the teachers' own words. My commitment to theoretical analysis, as advised by Anderson (2006) will become evident in the following three chapters which are all dedicated to findings and discussion.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE VALUE OF A SECOND LANGUAGE AND STORIES OF SUCCESS

In the findings, I will share the thematic analysis followed by the narrative analysis. There were three major themes that occurred through the data analysis process and each will be treated as a separate chapter. First, the way the L2 was valued or not valued in the school setting, next, the theme of marginalization leading to isolation, and finally, the concept of a school within a school.

The first theme that emerged from the data was the idea of value, and whether the L2 was valued within the school or not. In order to best illustrate this idea of how language is or is not valued, I created a chart to show the instances of L2 being devalued, versus the ways in which it was seen as valuable.



**Figure 4.1 De-valuing and Valuing Descriptions of the L2**

## **Devaluing descriptions of the L2**

Several examples of the devalued perspective toward the L2 came up throughout the interviews. One strong assumption of value is that the L2 is not important.

**Gayle.** In talking about assessing student language proficiency in the L2, Gayle states,

“But unfortunately, unless it’s tested, it’s not important” (Interview, p. 1, lines 13-14).

“It’s not important. It’s not important to the principals because they’re not going to be evaluated on that data [student L2 proficiency], and it’s all about data. It’s all about data. It’s not about the individual child” (Interview, p. 2, line 27).

When the major purpose of an immersion program is the acquisition of a second language, it seems counter-intuitive that the L2 would not be considered important. In order to make sense out of this finding, I asked myself what complex ideas within the school administration, district and community could be at play in this devaluation of the L2. Gayle relates it to the issue of accountability. While administrators might personally see the value of students learning an L2, if their performance as administrators is only being assessed based on other measures of student performance, such as Math scores or ELA scores, this could affect how seriously they strive to implement an immersion program at their school.

**Serena.** When I asked Serena to describe a moment that she felt successful as a language teacher she was able to recall a story from a previous teaching job, but regarding her success in the current immersion program she said,

I wouldn't be able to tell you, just cause it's almost like anything else in life, you need something to grade it by, or to judge it by, and we don't have that  
(Interview, p. 3, line 59).

While grades 3-5 do take a standardized language test, grades K-2 do not have any required tests or assessments of the L2. All tests and grades come from the content areas of math and science and are not true measures of students' language abilities. The reasoning behind this goes back to the original thinking on immersion programs in which it was believed that complete language acquisition would be a natural by-product of immersion (Fortune, Tedick & Walker, 2008).

**Jane.** Jane refers to the interruptions in English that often take place in the immersion class, from the front office announcements, to visitors into the classroom. She says,

So when the person in charge [the principal] is coming in speaking the quote/unquote language of power [English], then the children immediately think, 'Well I don't have to speak Spanish if she can't. If she doesn't have to, why do I have to?' I think it's a lot more powerful than the principals realize that it is  
(Interview, p. 20, line 452).

Jane suggests that due to the exclusive use of English by administrators and others, the L2 is seen as less important to the students, and their motivation to speak it diminishes.

Jane also describes her journey toward National Board certification. She felt that being an immersion teacher was detrimental to the process and threatened to be a barrier to her success. She says,

One of the moments for me personally when I felt successful was passing National Boards. That was a huge deal. Because I felt like, you know, the National Board process really does not acknowledge immersion. There is no immersion option. You either have to certify as a language teacher, or you have to certify as early childhood or elementary (Interview, p. 3, lines 54-61).

She goes on to explain how all three of the teaching segments she had to submit had to be transcribed and translated, requiring double the work of anyone not teaching immersion. She went on to explain,

Jane: And then I felt like the people who grade don't understand immersion, so like, the first part of the portfolio for early childhood is on language and literacy. Well what my children can do with their reading and what my children can do with their writing is NOT gonna be what an average first grade child can do.

Liza: Did they acknowledge the Spanish part at all? Like, it seems like you would get extra points for that.

Jane: No. No, it's it is um, detrimental really to the whole portfolio process. It was very frustrating (Interview, p. 4, lines 73-92).

This is only one of the examples of the extra work it creates for immersion teachers to translate materials into the L2, as well as the reality that there is not time built into the curriculum for explicit L2 instruction, or planning for L2 instruction. These findings have potential implications for how time and PD is allotted for immersion teachers.

**Marina.** When I asked Marina for specific improvements she said,

Well, in an ideal world it would be to give a little more emphasis on the grammar, but I don't know, in reality, it doesn't fit. It's either science, or it's math, but grammar or whatever it might be, we're going to study the verbs, we're going to study the structure of a sentence, doesn't fit. So more time is taken from this (Interview, p. 7, line 150).

This quote is important for two reasons. First, because Marina is commenting on how the L2 is devalued, in the sense that explicit instruction of the L2 does not fit within the parameters of our immersion program. Secondly, I notice that Marina's theory of language seems to be skills-oriented, whereas mine is socio-cultural. This is an important difference and one that has implications for professional development of immersion teachers. If language must be taught as a separate skill, it could be more difficult to integrate into the current structure of our program. If language development is social in nature, and can be influenced through practice and interaction, it could possibly be integrated within the current structure through targeted planning and PD.

In conclusion of the findings from thematic analysis of the devalued perspective toward the L2, it seems that the importance of providing assessment of the L2, and including it as a criteria for the success of an immersion principal could be an implication for practice. Similarly there appears to be a need for administrators and office staff to model attempts at bilingualism in order to give value to the L2. Extra time could also be built into the schedules of immersion teachers for L2 specific planning and translating.

**Success stories.** In contrast to the examples of the devalued perspective toward the L2, there were a few moments in which the L2 was viewed as an asset rather than a

detriment. These are best described through the stories that the teachers and I told about moments in which we felt successful as language teachers. These stories are helping me to understand the micro-contexts of each teacher and how we all define success differently. They also help to illuminate how a multilingual educator might need to view success in order to survive in a monolingual education system.

*Liza: Paragraphs about pumpkins, math stories and Fly Guy.* I would have to say when my students started writing informational texts and creating Jeopardy boards and fiction books during Integration Stations, I felt like I had finally done something that mattered. Integrating socio-cultural principles had influenced their ability to write as well as encouraging them to use the Spanish language. With the informational texts and Jeopardy boards, they were also studying and practicing Science. It was so fun to see the stories they came up with. It all started with the implementation of socio-cultural principles in language through Integration Stations. I printed out some lined paper in the shape of a pumpkin, and one of my students wrote a math story about pumpkins.

*Un dia una nina y su mama y su papa comprar algunas calabazas para Halloween. Cuando regresaron a la casa empezaron a tallar los 6 calabazas. Cuando el papa fue al bano el perro comio la calabaza. Ahora tiene 5 calabazas. Empezaron a tallar los otros calabazas y la mama fue al bano y el perro comio la calabaza. Cuantas tiene ahora?—Third Grade Immersion Student*

One day a girl and her mom and her dad buy some pumpkins for Halloween. When they got back to the house they started to carve the 6 pumpkins. When the dad went to the bathroom, the dog ate a pumpkin. Now he

has 5 pumpkins. They started to carve the other pumpkins and the mom went to the bathroom and the dog ate the pumpkin. How many does he have now? (Errors are intentionally included in both versions to illustrate students' writing ability.)

My second year teaching it was incredibly gratifying when students began writing so many books that I couldn't even read them all to help edit them. One student, Jonas, started a series of mini-books called "*Personas.*" /People. The stories all followed the same format; he wrote about the stick figures he drew. They were short and simple and they were all in the form of a math story. The *Personas* books became incredibly popular with the rest of the class and Jonas ended up with a cult following. At the end of the day as we waited for the final announcements, his classmates would start chanting, "*Per-so-nas, Per-so-nas!*" And then they would all cheer when he came to the front to read his book. It was like nothing I've ever seen. The amount of classroom community that came out of those books was incredible. Others started writing their own book series, and students would take each other's ideas and add to them or change them depending on their interests. In my mind, it was a content literacy phenomenon, because students were writing math and science stories with all of the passion that any fiction writer might show to his or her topic. The *Personas* phenomenon taught me that literacy is a powerful tool in the immersion classroom, and that students who read in their L2 can become students who write and speak in the L2 as well. I had to create the necessary conditions to get them reading and writing, and they took off with it. All they needed were the time, the materials, some direction with a great deal of freedom, and many mentor texts. This is one of my proudest moments as an immersion teacher. What I noticed about this structure is that it made sense with my socio-cultural beliefs about how children learn

best. They were able to connect socially with language either during the workshop time, or afterwards when they had the opportunity to share their work with the class. They were able to work within their ZPD by forming natural mentoring relationships with each other (or with me) during partner work, and they were given mentor texts to guide them in development.

Finally, I had a very bright student with autism who struggled in class for many reasons, mostly to do with behaviors rather than ability. He loved the Hombre Mosca books (Fly Guy) and most days he would ask to read with me instead of reading with a partner. He liked to read the same book almost every day. He became fluent with that one book and could read it perfectly. This showed me that letting our students read and re-read books, is a great tool for fluency. It also allowed me to build a personal relationship with a student who had previously struggled in his immersion class. He began to speak more and more Spanish as the year went on, and eventually made a B in math and an A in science, even though he had struggled terribly at the start of the year. Based on my socio-cultural view of language learning, as well as my understanding of self-efficacy, I believe that gaining confidence with his Spanish reading helped to give him confidence in the other subjects (Self-interview, p. 2, lines 66-104).

***Jane: Indoor recess and paper hearts.*** I taught Carson last year and he was one of those kids that hated Spanish, had NO desire to learn, you know, just didn't. And I remember the day that I finally felt like I reached him was when we had indoor recess...and the kids were able to do art projects, or play little Spanish word games, or you know, whatever they wanted to do. Well, he decided to do an art project and he cut out two hearts. One was bigger than the other one and he wrote, "Srta. Hammond and

Carson.” On the other side, and that’s when I knew, he wrote, “*de Carson*” instead of “from Carson.” He always wrote in English no matter what. It was like pulling teeth to get him to do anything in Spanish and when he finally, you know, opened up to it, it was like, awww (sigh), finally! Those are the moments you look for and I would say in general, the moments when you see the children’s lights come on (Interview, p. 2, lines 30-53).

This is an example of socio-cultural theory at work. He chose to do this artwork and he wrote in Spanish for a purpose and to a particular audience. It was not a structure-based, skill and drill type of activity to practice the Spanish language. Instead, it was meaningful to him.

***Serena: Seeing their growth.*** I think that was when I probably started off teaching in NJ in fourth grade and they have a bilingual program which is kids that come from Latin America and are just getting to the country and instead of being put in a mainstream all English classroom and getting pulled out for ESOL, they are put in my classroom with a person who speaks Spanish, but is teaching them in English and Spanish at the same time. That was harder, that was more challenging because a lot of those kids come from countries that they’re not required to go to school, so they come reading at different levels, and speaking different languages, and for me, the most successful part was seeing them, seeing their growth at the end of the year and seeing how much they’ve grown with their English language levels from where they came, and how much they’ve progressed and the growth that they’ve made. I think that has probably been the most successful (Interview, p. 2, lines 35-46).

The model Serena described is different from the model in my study. She was describing a type of transitional ESOL program in which students enter the program without English, and the teacher bridges their entrance into the English only school environment through a period of bilingual classes. The fact that she spoke Spanish and English helped them develop both languages on their journey to learning English. She was also better able to see growth because of mandated testing of English Language Learners.

***Marina: They're going to be successful.*** Last week, a parent that she's a teacher at the school, I have her daughter last year, and she say, "Whoa Mrs. Canela, I'm very proud of my daughter because now she's in sixth grade and she make a 12 in an essay and she was like the only one doing that grade, and the others were below." It's very important that my students speak Spanish in my class because they're going to be successful and they say, "Whoa, that's good!" Thank you because you know, I was dealing with this girl all year, "You need to speak Spanish."

"Why Sra. Canela?"

"You need to speak Spanish," and then she realized it was important to speak the target language. So that's very, I'm so proud (Interview, p. 1, lines 13-19).

Marina's story illustrates success in the face of at least three of the struggles faced by elementary immersion teachers. First is the amount of time it takes for students to achieve academic language in the L2. Research suggests that it can take as much as five years for students to become fluent in academic language rather than social language (Cummins, 2001). This affects the second reason, which is the difficulty caused by well-

meaning parents who simply do not understand the length of time it takes to reach fluency. It is challenging for them to understand the struggles their children might face in the earlier grades. The third issue goes back to the assessment issue. In our district, immersion students do not begin getting grades in the L2 until middle school. Therefore, until the mother saw an actual grade reflecting her daughter's language proficiency, she did not truly understand how much her daughter actually knew. The fact that students in elementary immersion do not receive a grade for the L2, can make it difficult to show growth to parents.

*Mariana: Translation, motivation and mini-me's.* My students were doing a presentation on a Hispanic Country where they had to share about the flag and the national bird, and other information. When visitors came into the class who only spoke English, my students came up with a solution. They decided they would still speak Spanish, but they would translate to English for the visitors. And they did it very well. I think it is important that they could speak about it in Spanish, but the fact that they could also translate it I think is an important skill that shows how well they understand the language.

Another moment when I felt successful as a language teacher is when some of my colleagues from the school back in Honduras asked if their students could make videos to send to us. And when my students saw native speakers of Spanish, it's like it completely motivated them. And they were listening to how they pronounced the words, and their facial expressions. It really motivated them to practice their Spanish. And they asked to make videos to send back, so as soon as I get all of the permissions, I will let them make videos to send.

Another successful moment is that I have some very high achieving students and some much lower achieving students. I think before I struggled to meet the needs of both groups and I ended up teaching more toward the lower students and I noticed that the higher students were getting bored and not using their time. So, I let them become model teachers, or “Mini-Sra. Santillanas”. And they go around and help other students. They have to speak in Spanish and they have to act like a teacher. And it’s so funny you can even hear their tone of voice sounding like mine. And I think, “Do I really sound like that?” I think that has really helped them to learn and to stay on task (Interview, p. 1, lines 13-36).

The first two stories Mariana shares both relate to language as communication for real purposes. In the first situation, students recognized that the visitors did not speak Spanish, and so they needed to translate in order for the visitors to understand. Similarly, with the videos, they were truly interested in understanding what these native Spanish speakers from a different culture were trying to say to them. Their desire to respond stemmed from a true desire to communicate, rather than a skills-based test in which students are asked to produce language. And finally, the “mini-me’s” are a perfect example of mentoring, which is a crucial aspect of SCT.

***Yolanda: We didn’t have customers, we had families.*** Sometimes you live your life and you don’t know where your life is going to lead you. Due to the things that happened in my country, my husband lost his job. So I decided to open an English Academy. And even though in my other school, I was extremely successful, teaching in the Academy was something that was extremely special to me because I could see the development of somebody who knew nothing, to somebody who was extremely fluent.

To the point that some people who came here, when they were put in high school, they were put in the advanced level of English. Somehow that is, when I receive emails like, “Thank you, you don’t know what you have done for us. Look, what my kid is doing.” And still I receive calls from parents, “What can I do for my kid? What academy do you recommend for my kid?” And I think that was not because we gave something, because we had the best instruction in the world, but because we didn’t have customers, we had families. And I usually see in each child my own sons. And that commitment, you have to do it. You have to get that kid to learn no matter what. I think that somehow was what made us so successful and that was really rewarding (Interview, p. 3, lines 58-73).

Yolanda’s description of the importance of personal connection, of families and community, speak directly to the heart of SCT. By getting to know her students, she was learning about their personal “funds of knowledge” (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005).

**Gayle: Give value to the language.** We’ve done that in every school that I’ve been to, announcements always started in Spanish. The date, hello I’m such and such, today is, and they do a little song (singing) “*Bandera de tres colores, yo te doy mi corazón. Te saludo mi bandera con respeto y con amor.*”/Tri-colored flag, I give you my heart. I salute my flag with respect and with love... So just doing that, it changes the whole atmosphere. It gives value to the language. And at Granville it’s even more because we have so many Hispanics. Not all of them are in immersion (p. 6, lines 116-124).

The socio-cultural aspects of Gayle’s story have to do with the idea of connecting to the backgrounds of the language minority students, those who speak Spanish as a first

language and are learning English in school. Gayle's description of valuing the L1 of the native Spanish speakers reminds me of Nieto's (2009) comparison of language to a bridge in teaching:

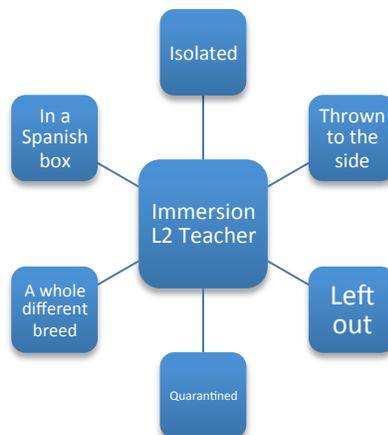
A bridge provides access to a different shore without closing off the possibility of returning home; a bridge is built on solid ground but soars toward the heavens; a bridge connects two places that might otherwise never be able to meet. The best thing about bridges is that they do not need to be burned once they are used; on the contrary, they become more valuable with use because they help visitors from both sides become adjusted to different contexts. This is, however, a far cry from how diverse language and cultures tend to be viewed in schools...in sociocultural theory, learning and achievement are not merely cognitive processes, but complex issues that need to be understood in the development of community (p. 17).

Through analyzing these data regarding value of the L2 in immersion and in the school community at large, we recognize that several factors seem to be identified as contributing to the problem of a devalued L2. First is the importance of assessment in determining success in a school setting. Second is the need for more models of bilingual adults in positions of power. Third is the amount of extra time and work required of an immersion teacher. Fourth, and finally, we recognize that how a teacher views success and language learning, whether from a skills-based approach, or from a socio-cultural perspective can greatly inform the way in which the L2 is valued.

## CHAPTER 5

### MARGINALIZATION AND STORIES OF SUPPORT

Another prevalent theme that emerged from the data is the marginalization of the immersion teacher. Not all of the teachers mentioned it, but I have already established in the review of the literature how I struggled with feeling isolated, and how that experience is part of what drove me to investigate what other immersion teachers might be feeling, and how to best support them. Similarly, isolation was an issue that emerged in the literature on immersion as well. In examining the instances that are described by the teachers in this study, I believe that the situation is more than mere isolation, rather it is a type of marginalization of the Spanish speaking teachers. Three of the six participants described feelings of isolation, marginalization or otherness. First I include a table that summarizes the findings on marginalization, followed by the narrative explanations in the teacher's own words.



**Figure 5.1 Descriptions of Marginalization**

**Table 5.1 Descriptions and Examples of Marginalization**

Marginalization	
Descriptions	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isolated</li> <li>• Quarantined</li> <li>• A whole different breed</li> <li>• Different curriculum</li> <li>• Different language</li> <li>• Different program</li> <li>• In a Spanish box</li> <li>• Thrown to the side</li> <li>• Difficult to be supported by the school</li> <li>• Forgotten by the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great math ideas not shared by grade level team</li> <li>• “You don’t do this, you don’t work on that.”</li> <li>• Left out of school PD</li> <li>• Parents can’t talk to me in English</li> <li>• Monolingual English speaking visitors to the class are disturbed by students addressing them in Spanish</li> </ul>

**Different**

For example, I asked Serena what her relationships are like with other teachers at her school. This was her response,

Ok, I’ll tell you about second grade since I teach a whole different curriculum and a whole different language. It’s kind of like I’m left out. I find that we’re quarantined, isolated because it is a whole different program that we’re doing and there’s always that between the students, the immersion students and the non-immersion students, the general teachers and the immersion teachers in the sense that we’re a whole different breed to them.

Liza: Can you talk about anything that makes, because I can relate to that...

Serena: Feeling isolated?

Liza: Yeah. How, what, can you give me any examples, or like, explain that anymore?

Serena: Of feeling isolated...

Liza: That's something I really want to explore in this paper and I was curious if anyone else would bring that up.

Serena: Yeah, it's just very different as far as, when they're doing lessons for math, ok, so we're all teaching a second grade math lesson and we all do place value, and they will come up with great ideas for place value and not think or consider that maybe the immersion teacher might want to use this, even though it's in English, she can translate it or she can implement it in her own way (Interview, p. 6, lines 127-143).

### **Thrown to the Side**

Another example came from Jane as she characterized what she has heard other immersion teachers say, "Yeah, I think a lot of time it's easy for immersion to kind of get, you know, for the immersion teacher to kind of be thrown to the side because 'oh, you don't do this, or oh you don't work on that'" (197-198). And while Jane shared a variety of ways that she has felt supported by her team, she recognized that this is not the case for all immersion teachers. From her experience, many of them seem to be left out.

### **Forgotten**

The third example came from Mariana. I asked her to describe a moment when she felt well supported in her role as a language teacher. She said,

Well, it's difficult for the school to support us. For example, recently we had a beautiful faculty meeting with these wonderful activities where we went into model classrooms throughout the school and saw materials and strategies, but none of the classrooms were an immersion classroom. So, was that helpful for us? Not really. I think that sometimes at the school they tend to forget your needs" (p. 2, lines 41-45).

Being left out is another form of isolation when a person or group of people is positioned on the outside of something, or not included in the group, this can lead to feelings of marginalization.

### **Language Separation**

Gayle does not refer to isolation as a problem, however, she shares two stories that suggest that the only way to get students producing the L2 the way we would like, is to keep the English and Spanish separated. I suggest that this strict separation is part of what leads to the feelings of isolation and marginalization for some immersion teachers. This is a common issue that comes up for immersion teachers, how do I maintain the L2 while still taking part in normal school activities and interactions with parents, administrators and other teachers? Gayle illustrates this dilemma through a story she told me during the interview:

It's so hard to get the parents to understand that they can't just come up to me and talk to me in English, you know? I had a grandfather yesterday just come in my door and just started speaking in English, and he was like, "Well, I don't speak Spanish." You know, just his attitude was so negative. I'm sorry, but I can't

speak to you in English. You know, so I just took him to the English classroom. But just getting that across... And I have a note on my door. Maybe I need to make it bigger, you know? And he has to stand there and knock on my door to get in. My husband told me one time he says, "Honey, just have a little note that you can just put in their hands, you know, when they walk in the door." Well, I have one, but I forgot to do it. (laughs) (Interview, p. 9, lines 184-194).

Gayle has clearly thought through this issue and attempted several different ways of handling the L2 only issue, but still struggles to help non-Spanish speaking family members understand.

She shared a second vignette regarding the issues of visitors in the classroom who do not speak Spanish. She says:

Gayle: The other thing, you know, with the expectations of the school, you're supposed to have somebody, you're supposed to have a child come and greet [visitors]. And I've tried that, but people that don't speak the language that walk in the classroom, and a little child, you know, comes up to them and talks to them in Spanish, they freak out!"

Liza: Really? Like how? Give me an example.

Gayle: They just, they come up and they say, "I, I don't speak Spanish." You know, it's like, "uh, uh, uh..."

Liza: Like petrified or scared? Wow.

Gayle: You gotta, you gotta kindergartener, a 5 year old that's coming up to you speaking Spanish perfectly, because they can, and *they* can't do it, and they're adults. It just, they just go, "Uh, duh..." and all they can do is speak in English, you know? And so it throws the little child off (Interview, p. 9, lines 195-206).

In situations where immersion teachers feel isolated, or even possibly create isolating contexts for themselves and their students, it is important to examine further the micro-context that is affecting this situation. Our district policy for immersion teachers is to only speak the L2 at all times in front of students. In the early grades, most teachers even pretend that they do not speak or understand English in order to create the need for students to use only the L2 to communicate. While this is a common practice amongst immersion programs, it is part of what creates the marginalization which can lead to feelings of isolation. In a population like ours, where the majority of teachers, administrators and parents are monolingual, it is difficult to promote healthy relationships and communication across the L2 immersion classroom and the rest of the school, and still remain true to the district requirement for L2 only for immersion teachers.

### **Support stories**

While feelings of otherness or marginalization can be a real problem for some teachers, I found through my analysis of the data, that teachers did still feel supported in a variety of ways. In order to illustrate the ways in which our teachers and I did feel supported, I include the following stories.

**Liza: My partner teacher.** I mostly felt supported by my ELA partner teacher. I went to her to find out what she was doing with the kids and how I might be able to

transfer that to Spanish. She shared with me how she used a structure of independent learning stations with the kids. She showed me how she organized it, told me what it should look like, how she charted stamina, how she arranged the classroom, what each station should look like. She showed me everything. Then, I went online and researched the independent literacy stations further to see if there was anything available in Spanish, and there was. So, I believe I stayed late one afternoon setting up everything, and then I implemented it. That was the key to language and literacy success in my classroom, and it was my ELA partner teacher who provided that support (Self-Interview, p. 3, lines 112-121).

I believe this exchange was made possible because of my socio-cultural theory of language learning in which students are encouraged to interact with texts and with each other in order to make meaning out of language, including form, structure and conventions. This also relates to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the ZPD in which students are able to achieve much more linguistically when they are mentored by someone (teacher or more advanced student) or something (mentor text).

**Jane: Multiple support networks.** I would say the most support I felt was the very first year when I taught kindergarten, probably because the entire program was new and there were only three of us who, you know, three language teachers who were in it. And I felt like Danielle was wonderful. Any questions I had, any parent conferences, anything like that that I needed, she was there for. So, I felt very supported with the small numbers as well because I mean, we were very, very close with each other. You had to be (laughs).

In general I have also felt well supported by my principal in conferences over the years, with parents. She is very good about reminding them that, you know, don't be so quick to jump ship. It takes time for your child to acquire the language, it takes time for them to be comfortable, it takes time for them to reach fluency. So, I feel like, I feel like she's always been pretty supportive. And then, Belinda, my old partner teacher, was really good about, you know, when parents would try to attack me about their child not liking math, or not liking Spanish she would remind them, well, you know, if they're having issues in my class and they're having issues in her class, then it's not about her, it's not about Spanish. This is just something difficult your child is going through (Interview, p. 6, lines 127-150).

Jane's experience differs from some of the other teachers for several reasons that have implications on how immersion programs can function in a more supportive manner. Her administrator, though not bilingual herself, has accepted and understands some aspects of second language acquisition; therefore she is able to support her teachers when parents feel frustration over their child's struggles. Also, by encouraging grade level teams to meet regularly, she has provided a structure for the immersion teacher to be supported by her grade level team, as long as that team understands ways in which they can best support the L2 immersion teacher.

**Mariana: More intentional.** I have felt more supported by the professional development offered by the district coordinators, like the collaborative planning (CP) days. Those are the teachers who understand your needs [other immersion teachers], the challenges you face and what kinds of strategies can help. For example, last year we talked about implementing literacy in math lessons, but it was very general. Like, you

should be implementing literacy in math and science lessons. But this year there was a recent meeting when there was a demonstration of a read aloud and a mini-lesson, and it is teaching us how to implement literacy in math and science little by little. It's stuff that most of us are already doing, but helping us to be more intentional about it (Interview, p. 3, lines 47-56).

The collaborative planning sessions that Mariana and others refer to is one venue in which the district office is able to provide support to immersion teachers. One day each month is designated by the district as collaborative planning. This is a half-day for students, and the second half of the day is devoted to teacher-led collaboration. During the afternoon, immersion teachers used to meet cross-site for collaborative planning, however, this left them out of important grade level collaboration that was going on at their home school. Danielle, the WL Coordinator, brought these concerns to the Senior Leadership of the district and asked for release time for immersion teachers so they could meet together cross-site in the morning, and then return for grade-level collaboration in the afternoon. As a result, L2 immersion teachers are currently given release time for four of the CP days. On these four days, the district pays for substitutes for the L2 immersion teachers in the morning, and that is when Danielle and I are able to provide the majority of our PD to L2 immersion teachers.

**Marina: One thing at a time.** Okay, last year when I was struggling with my, uh, with these parents at the beginning of the year, Danielle came to my class and observed my class and she said, "You know, we support you, we are with you, and you are doing all you need to do, so let's go one thing at a time and hang in there." So I say, "Ok." So you feel that you are not alone, that you have that support and they say that you are doing

what you need to do, so you feel more calm, more confident, so that's good (Interview, p. 2, lines 27-32).

In this situation, Danielle, the WL Coordinator for the district, was called in to support Marina when she was having issues with some concerned parents. While it is necessary at times to bring support in from outside the school, we have continued to recommend that administrators themselves can support immersion teachers, similarly to the way in which Jane's principal supports her to parents.

**Yolanda: We became like sisters.** Well, language teachers I think they need a lot of the support of the people who are working with them. I felt extremely supported in Venezuela because there was a strong, well, what I meant, I had been working with the same teacher for five or six years, and we became like sisters. So, whatever was taught in English was also taught in Spanish, and that was something that was really good because you could make connections. So if you're teaching the Solar System and you have a higher level of words, it's really important to have the support of someone who can be using the words in the L1 of the students so you don't have to make translations or something like that (Interview, p. 5, lines 93-110).

Yolanda's story emphasizes the importance of nurturing strong relationships between L1 and L2 partner teachers of immersion, not only for the exchange of literacy strategies, but also for the reinforcement of content vocabulary. Without the bridge between the L1 and L2, students could be developing incomplete understandings of both content and language, as teachers could be missing out on natural ways to support the interconnectedness of all of the content areas.

Salient findings from the analysis of marginalization versus support include strong partnerships on a variety of levels within the school and across the district. For example, strengthened relationships with the ELA partner teacher and with the grade level team can be very beneficial to lessen feelings of marginalization. Also of great importance is an educated, supportive principal who puts into place the necessary structures for collaboration. And finally, the need for professional development conducted across schools for immersion teachers, since their needs do differ from the needs of their school-based colleagues who do not teach immersion.

## CHAPTER 6

### SCHOOL WITHIN A SCHOOL: A THRESHOLD EXPERIENCE

#### **School Within a School, or Liminal Journey?**

The third theme relates to the issue of marginalization and ties closely with the theory of liminality. While making meaning out of the interview data and comparing it with my own experiences, I began to visualize a duality regarding the issue of the immersion program being a separate school inside the school. The way this issue is discussed by different teachers leads to a continuum of opinions. Some teachers describe the school within a school as a negative construct; whereas other teachers strive to become more of a school within a school. I suggest that this tension comes from the liminal state of being an immersion teacher, as well as the liminal quality of the program itself.

#### **Invoking a Liminal State**

Marina says:

Immersion, even though you don't want it to be, is a separate group within the rest of the school. So, here you don't really see an immersion team. We are immersion teachers, but we still aren't an immersion group.

L: Do you feel like they see, how do you think the school in general views immersion or sees...are you a part of the school? Do you have a place?

M: Yeah, I mean, they don't see. Yes, you are the immersion teacher, but you are the third grade teacher.

L: So you feel included and accepted?

M: Yes. That's why I said that we need to find out an immersion team, immersion group (Interview, p. 18, lines 389-400).

Marina seems to feel like the immersion team needs to find an identity that is separate from the rest of the school. She feels that they are not seen as different. Instead they are seen simply as the grade level teacher. She wants to acknowledge that what they are doing is different and should be seen as different and treated accordingly. In this situation it is as if Marina is invoking a liminal status upon the immersion team because she recognizes that they are doing something different, even though they are teaching the same curriculum in the same school as all of the monolingual, English speaking teachers. I suggest that it is the nature of bilingual education, within a monolingual system that makes it necessary for teachers to classify or categorize themselves as different or other.

### **Liminal Confusion**

While talking with Mariana about guidelines for immersion schools that would include guidelines for all of the teachers in regards to their collaboration with immersion I asked her,

L: Where do you think that should come from, the district saying that or the administration? I think it would have to be the administration of the school.

M: Mmhhh. But it could also be the district. I don't know how it works. I really don't know how it works, how they decide which school is going to be an immersion school. Like, okay, if you wanna be an immersion school, this is what you need to have in place" (p. 5, lines 110-115).

Mariana wanted to know who was responsible for the decisions and the changes that need to be made. Who is actually running the immersion program? Is it the district or is it the school? If the immersion program could truly function in the same manner as the rest of the school, this question would not need to be asked. But if majority monolingual administrators are running schools that are striving to educate bilingual students, additional support must come from somewhere.

Similarly, Marina recommended that especially the new international teachers be taught about the culture of the school in order to help them transition and be more effective in the classroom from the start. She alludes to the responsibility piece in her following questions:

"So, how does the culture of the school function? But of course, this doesn't have to do with immersion, it's the school" (Marina, p. 13, 292-293).

She is suggesting that this is the responsibility of the school to initiate new teachers into the culture of the school. Previously, her administration had seen much of the responsibility for the immersion program and teachers as the responsibility of the WL

Coordinator, and so there remains a liminal confusion regarding immersion in some schools.

### **From Liminality to Communitas**

Gayle and Mariana come to some similar conclusions when they talk about the school within a school aspect of immersion. Mariana says,

She [the administrator] talked a lot about we aren't a separate program, but we are. And how last year, even though it wasn't a good situation, they were on the same schedule, it was a red hall schedule, and they had common planning and how good that was (p. 2, line 45).

She goes on to say,

It would also be nice to have a set of guidelines for what it means to be an immersion school. For example, if you're a lighthouse school, every teacher has to be a part of it. So, it would be nice if the P.E. teacher would ask, "What are some games they play in Spanish speaking countries?", and teach those to the kids. Or if the art teacher could include art or music from the music teacher, it would be nice if the whole school bought into it. Some teachers do, but not all of them. I know it should be my responsibility to go to the P.E. teacher or to the art teacher. But it would be nice if they would show an interest in what we are doing (p. 4, lines 83-90).

Mariana also states,

“If you want to stand out, if you wanna be different, you have to do things differently. There have to be things or extra things you have to do. You know? If you wanna be an immersion team, this is what the immersion team has to do throughout the year, with parents, or with the non-immersion groups. I don’t know. Even the kids would feel even prouder. We go to recess with the non-immersion third graders, and they love it! How I speak to them in Spanish, and the other kids are like, “Huh? What did she say?” And they’re like, “Oh, she said this, this and that.” You know they feel proud, they feel good... So let them be able to shine because they are different, you know? They’re giving their best effort to learn a second language. So, let them shine” ( p. 9, lines 196-206).

Mariana recognizes that the administration insists that immersion is not a separate program, but the teachers and the students see that they are, and that there are some positive aspects of being separate. But as she talks, she begins to envision an even better situation in which the entire school takes ownership of immersion and contributes in whatever way they can. Almost as if she is inviting the rest of the school to join them in the liminal state, so that together they can experience “communitas”, a communion amongst equals without the structures of language or culture that so often separate and classify within a normal societal structure.

Gayle says,

We are a school within a school. It can be done. It can be done. The thing is, having an immersion program and having the kids speak another language, kids

love languages. Use it. You know? Use it. Why can't the announcements be in both languages? Why can't you integrate it? (p. 22, lines 494-497).

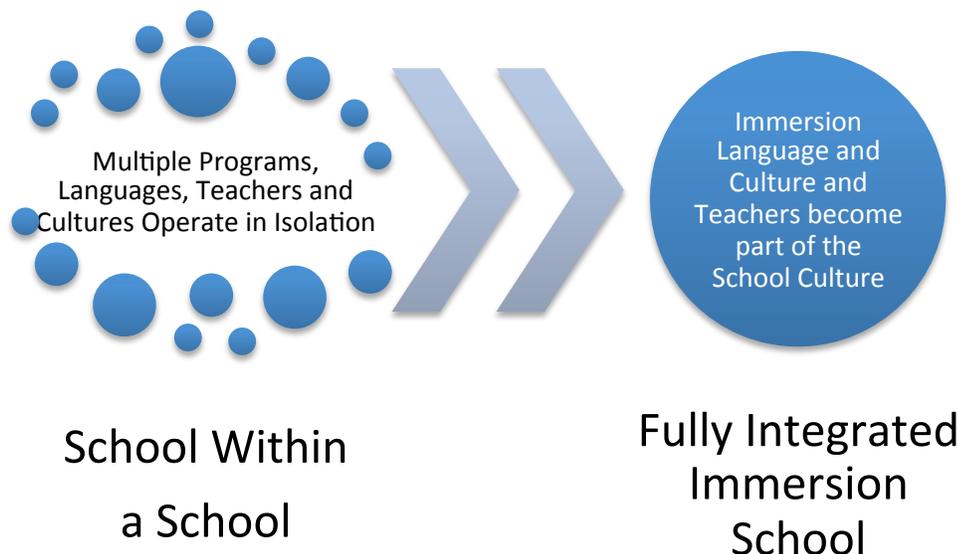
Later she amended her statement. She said,

“I don't think it's a school within a school. I think it's the principal saying, this is a golden resource, let's use it to our advantage. And let's figure out a way we can integrate some of this” (p. 23, lines 509-511).

And finally she comments,

“The thing is, I can't do it. I've tried and by myself I can't do it. I can't even do all this stuff that I think of in my classroom, much less for the whole school” (p. 23, lines 514-516).

Here she alludes to the need for whole school buy-in, particularly on the part of the principal.



**Figure 6.1 From Separation to Integration**

## **L2 Language and Literacy Integration Stories**

In order to counteract the school within a school phenomenon that contributes to the feelings of marginalization that many immersion teachers feel, the teachers and I recommend integration. The stories I share next in which our teachers have begun to be intentional about integrating L2 language and literacy with the content areas of math and science symbolize a bridge between the two classrooms, and therefore the two languages.

**Marina.** When I asked Marina how she saw literacy as a vehicle for content development, she gave me several examples, particularly a story she had students write that was a characterization of the concept of erosion, a perfect example of content and literacy integration. Students had to tell the story from the point of view of a rock, and the experiences that happened over many years until it eroded into a grain of sand. She was surprised by the results of the stories and the students really enjoyed them. It was a great bridge activity because they read the exemplar in English one day with a substitute, but then wrote their own stories in Spanish using a translator and the teacher and their science notes for input. In her own words:

They already had the idea of the story, so I explained the steps that should be in a story, the beginning, middle and end. [the kids] “This is the same thing that we do in English!” and me, “Yeeeeees, what else do I put here, then?” of course they made the connection to what they see in English and what they see in Spanish. [the kids]“It’s like Sra. Kaminer says that it’s like a roller coaster, you have to explain where the people are, what they are doing, then you have to

explain the problem, what feelings, and later you have to explain the end of what happened.” And the stories were very good (Interview, p. 17, line 365).

Next she explains further how she got students writing:

*M: Entonces, yo les puse, podemos comenzar, “Había una vez una roca que se llama Bob. Que vivía en, Donde vivía la roca? En una montaña. Ok, la roca vivía en la montaña. Con quien vivía? Vivía con su familia. Se los dejo. Que pasó con la montaña? Quien vino? /So I tell them, we can start, “Once upon a time there was a rock named Bob. Who lived in, where did the rock live? On a mountain! Ok, the rock lived on the mountain. Who did he live with? He lived with his family. I leave them there. What happened with the mountain? Who came? (Interview p. 17, lines 376-382).*

Her technique of question asking is a great example of scaffolding students into their writing, and Marina has skillfully integrated literacy and content. Students enjoyed the activity and were successful. While she notes specifically that their verb tenses were not correct, she is still proud of their accomplishments. After sharing the literacy integration story she states:

*M: Yo pienso si uno es consistente todas las profesoras hay un mismo camino en lo que se hace, cuando se llega, tiene un resultado excelente. Porque por lo menos Paulson [la maestra previa], con este grupo, ella por lo menos en idioma, hizo un excelente trabajo. Y los niños dicen, “Hablo español, hablo español.” 90% de las veces, siempre hablan español conmigo. Entonces si todos somos consistentes, no habla ingles, y la maestra no habla ingles, tiene un*

*resultado. De verdad, si funciona.* I think that if you are consistent with all of the teachers on the same path of what they are doing, when they arrive, they will have an excellent result. Because for the most part, Paulson [the previous year's teacher], with her group, she at least in language, did an excellent job. And the kids say, "I speak Spanish, I speak Spanish," 90% of the time they always speak Spanish with me. So if we are consistent, don't speak English and the teacher doesn't speak English, you will really have a result, it works (Interview, p. 17, lines 368-373).

The students noticed the connection to work they were doing in their ELA classroom, and successfully applied it to the Spanish classroom. This is one example of a bridge experience both between literacy and content, as well as between L1 classroom and L2 classroom.

**Gayle.** When I asked Gayle how she sees literacy as a vehicle for content, she shared several stories and examples.

Everything I do is language related. So all the games have language that I'm trying to get them to do...so it's just language because we are talking about putting your hand in the container, taking out one shape, all of that is language that is assumed in an English classroom, but in a Spanish class, it's language that you give them... So when we throw the die, I have a little song, (singing) "*Tira el dado, arriba de la mesa, no en suelo o pierdes el turno.*" / "Throw the dice on top of the table, not on the floor or you lose your turn." Well, look at all the language

I'm giving them, ok? Is it a math game? Yes it's a math game. But is it language? It's language (Interview, p. 15, lines 339-344).

She emphasizes the games not only for their content, learning numbers, or shapes, but also for their emphasis on teaching the classroom words and phrases that they need in order to use the L2 in the classroom.

She goes on to share another example:

So, we have two telephones, and this is huge language, but it is also math because they have to put in the number of the telephone of the child that they're talking to. But it's a language game. They love it. But once they know the basic vocabulary, they go, "Oooh, I don't know if he's here right now. Hold on a minute and let me see." Haha, I'm giving them language, but it's Math. It's numbers... So you see, everything, everything has to be connected to language. You can't assume that you're gonna play a game and you're not gonna teach them, "It's my turn, it's your turn" (Interview, p. 16, lines 347-352).

I often felt the need for teaching this type of language in my classroom, but did not know how to fit it in the schedule or how to enforce it. Gayle's description sounds so natural, a completely holistic integration of the language, the content, and the school vocabulary students need in order to successfully use the L2 throughout the day with their teachers and peers. This socio-cultural view of language as social and language as practice are relevant to our understanding of literacy integration in immersion. Two factors that might contribute to her students' L2 production are her complete commitment to L2 only and the measures she takes to achieve that, along with her administrator's willingness to

schedule immersion differently than the rest of the school to minimize interruptions from lunch, recess and related arts when students naturally use English.

**Yolanda.** When I asked Yolanda how she sees literacy instruction as a vehicle for content development she said,

That is something that is wonderful because you cannot have one without the other. If the student is not well versed in the language it is very difficult for the student to become a better learner or to master the content that he is supposed to. So it's something that's extremely important (p. 10, lines 210-219).

While she does not share a specific story about integrating language and content, she expresses the importance of how interdependent language and content are.

Later in the interview, she does share a story that is similar to the experience I had when I first began teaching immersion. I had tried to teach Spanish language as a separate subject, until I realized I could not grade it as a separate subject. Yolanda says,

I love working with science and even with mathematics with problems. I used to have Spanish classes at the beginning, but they didn't like it. [mimics the students] "No, I'm not, I don't know why I'm here, I don't understand it." They don't want Spanish. It's understandable. It makes everything harder for them, ok? So what I'm using is plenty of vocabulary, a lot of word problems where they are forced to read, to understand or to speak whether they want it or not. And yes, you need to support that language part because if not, teaching what you want to teach is going to be impossible. And besides, you are not getting to your

goal and your goal is not only to be a teacher, but to be an immersion teacher and teach the language as well (p. 10-11, lines 220-228).

Yolanda characterizes the job of the immersion teacher to be a teacher, as well as being a language teacher. This is another example of the extra work involved in immersion teaching if we are to successfully unite literacy, language and content. It also illustrates the liminal state of being an immersion teacher.

**Liza.** In my mind, the language, literacy and content in the immersion classroom are inseparable. No learning takes place apart from language. It is the most fundamental building block that shapes who we are and how we think, how we learn and how we interpret the world. “The limits of my language are the limits of my world.”—Ludwig Wittgenstein (Self-Interview, p. 5, lines 188-191).

To conclude the findings on school within a school constructs in immersion, the most important questions to ask ourselves as immersion educators and supporters of immersion education are, “Who is responsible for immersion? Is it the school, the district, or some combination of the two?” Secondly, I believe we must ask principals to consider, “Can the immersion program be a school-wide resource to engage all students and teachers in the study of other languages and cultures?” And finally, “How can we focus on the centrality of language, literacy and content integration as a possible bridge between the separation of immersion and the rest of the school?”

## CHAPTER 7

### IMPLICATIONS

What are implications for current immersion schools, and those who might be hoping to start an immersion program? I suggest it is the intentional and systematic integration of language and literacy, through a school-based collaborative network, that is augmented by a cross-site community of practice. Based on the literature, my experiences, and the experiences and suggestions of the other six teachers, we suggest considering the following implications for pedagogical practice within immersion schools.

#### **Build Space, Time and Value for the L2**

In order to respond to the ways in which the L2 in an immersion school is either valued or devalued I will consider one at a time, the four major findings that resulted from my review of the data.

**L2 Assessment.** First I noticed that assessment of the L2 was a crucial need for the language to be valued. While standardized language assessments are available, they are expensive and can be difficult to implement. Instead, training immersion teachers to rate students' proficiency in the language using a recognized framework such as the American Council on Teaching Foreign Language (ACTFL) Proficiency Scale is a

potential solution. By training teachers on the ACTFL proficiency scale, and including spot-checks on language throughout the year, teachers would have more information to share with parents and administrators to help validate students' acquisition of language. It would also give teachers a framework for judging their own success in teaching the L2 alongside the content. Finally, it would provide a record of growth in the language, that some teachers need, in order to feel successful as a language teacher.

**Bilingual models.** Another issue that emerged as a finding from data analysis is the need for bilingual models in positions of authority in the immersion school. While I do not believe it is realistic to expect all administrators to learn the L2 of the immersion program to a point of proficiency, it could be required for administrators and office staff to learn a few key phrases in the L2 of the immersion program. If secretaries dismissed students in the L2, that would be a model to students of other adults trying to speak the L2, and is currently done in some immersion schools, though not all. Similarly, if administrators would learn basic greetings and positive expressions such as, "Good job!" or "Keep up the good work." or even, "How do you say \_\_\_\_\_?" this would again reinforce to students that adults in the school take in interest in the L2 they are learning, and that these adults are willing to take the same risks that students are being asked to take by communicating in another language. Similarly, as Gayle recommended, if the school announcements were to include even a short segment in the L2, perhaps a word of the week, or a calendar segment in the L2, this would also add value to the language.

**Individualize PD.** Another strong message to teachers regarding the value of the L2 would be for administrators to continue building time into immersion teachers' schedules for peer coaching, as well as recognizing the need for extra planning time for

language and literacy integration. I believe that principals of immersion schools need to individualize PD for their faculty and staff by choosing carefully which PD immersion teachers must attend, and allowing exemption from those PD experiences, or other duties which are not relevant to work in the immersion classroom.

For example, many schools require teacher involvement on committees that meet after school. Allow immersion teachers to be on an immersion committee that would give them time to meet as an immersion team, K-5 since they all have different planning periods. During their immersion committee meetings they could also plan for some of the extra experiences, such as “Family Immersion Night”, or other functions that help promote understanding of the immersion program within the school and amongst the parents.

Another example of PD that could be exempted is the meetings for ELA data analysis. While meetings that train ELA teachers on teaching strategies might be helpful for the L2 immersion teachers, they fail to see the relevance of some ELA meetings. Giving the L2 immersion teachers this time to plan for L2 language and literacy instruction would be a more valuable use of their time. Similar help for the L1 immersion teacher is the ability to hire a substitute to help with the class so that she can conduct the many one-on-one assessments that are required for ELA. This overload of ELA assessments contributes to the frustration and burn-out of the L1 immersion teacher and leads them to be less likely to want to teach immersion. Another option would be to distribute some of the extra student writing samples that have to be graded within the entire grade level of ELA teachers. Since the L1 immersion teacher has double the

number of students as the other grade level teachers, it would help if the principal set the practice of grade level collaboration for grading of writing assessments.

While sometimes the general education teachers have felt like this is special treatment of the immersion teachers, if a principal is a highly informed, strong proponent for L2 acquisition, he or she would be able to explain to the rest of the faculty why the immersion teachers are attending different types of PD instead of whole school PD, or why the L1 immersion teacher needs help with assessments in order to minimize confusion or concerns of inequity within the school faculty at large.

**SCT education for immersion teachers.** Finally, the need to educate immersion L2 teachers in socio-cultural theories of language is another implication for pedagogical practice. They could be taught how to emphasize the social nature of learning. They could also learn how to incorporate strategies of mentoring and strategies for valuing and incorporating the cultures of the students in the classroom. Education in socio-cultural theory could give immersion L2 teachers a perspective of language learning that integrates more fluidly with the immersion model of content-based language teaching. Through workshop and independent practice models of literacy learning, that highlight metacognition on language form and function, immersion teachers gain tools for integrating literacy throughout all instruction, regardless of the content. They would also gain a practice of seeing language success stories within the classroom structures, and not only through formalized assessment.

## **Respond to Marginalization With Support**

Implications for practice based on the findings regarding marginalization all spring from better communication and education amongst all interested parties. For example, building strong partnerships both within the school and across the district to support immersion teachers is a vital component to their success. First and foremost, an informed principal who can articulate the foundational tenets of immersion and who will guard their implementation is a must. Within our district, we are currently working on a plan to create a virtual network of support between immersion administrators in which they can help support and mentor each other as issues come up that are specific to immersion. This is something that requires district-level support, as well as buy-in from administrators; however, we believe that this is a potential for increasing the cross-site support.

Fortune, Walker & Tedick (2008) specify that immersion teachers need support in the areas of curriculum design, and development of learning activities that integrate language and content. While the school can support immersion teachers in many aspects of their teaching, such as math instruction, science instruction, classroom management, and building a class library; planning for language and literacy integration requires knowledge of both the L2 and language and literacy strategies. While strengthening the partnership between the L1 and L2 immersion teacher can help, it is not enough. Allowing teachers release-time for cross-site collaboration, and setting aside money in the district's budget to bring in professionals from the field of immersion teaching would help immersion teachers to feel less isolated, and support ongoing attempts to integrate language, literacy and content.

## **School Within a School Versus Strong Multi-Lingual, Multi-Cultural School**

Finally, there are several implications that arise from the discussion on school within a school, some more drastic than others. For example, two of the teachers I interviewed mentioned the possibility of taking all of the immersion programs out of their current schools and creating one Immersion School in which Spanish, French, German and Mandarin are all taught side by side in the same school. This would require complete re-structuring of the program, and while it might be a potential solution to the school within a school dilemma, other possibilities could be less disruptive and more quickly implemented.

My suggestion is the continual sharing of literacy integration stories, and continued training in language, literacy and content integration. This helps teachers and administrators understand ways in which L2 immersion teachers and L1 immersion partner teachers can bridge the gap that creates the school within a school. By strengthening partnerships within the entire school through math and literacy coaches, ELA partner teachers, grade level teams, and administration, our immersion teachers are symbolically holding out their hands and inviting the rest of the school to join them in the liminal state between monolingual and bilingual education. From this threshold between regular educational practices, and additive bilingual practices, I believe it is possible for the entire school to experience “communitas.” I imagine a “communitas” in which all teachers and students share in the language and culture of the immersion program. Although not all students would learn the L2 to a point of fluency, all students and teachers could share in learning about the cultures that are represented by the L2. If all teachers participate in activities such as world language week, in which the cafeteria

prepares meals from the different countries where the L2 is spoken, that would promote whole school buy in. If the related arts teachers were to share practices and products from the countries where the L2 is spoken, as suggested by Mariana, that would also promote whole school buy in to the immersion program. If the other implications for practice were implemented, such as administrators who model the willingness to learn phrases from the L2, integration of L2 in the morning announcements, and even cultural education through related arts teachers, I can imagine a sense of excitement, interest and curiosity for other languages and cultures that would permeate the culture of the immersion school. Our immersion schools could become thresholds for change in the greater education system at large.

## CHAPTER 8

### BECOMING STORIES

One of the characteristics of an autoethnography is an unfinished nature, and a comfort with more raising more questions. That is exactly why I have chosen to end my story with beginnings, rather than a conclusion. When I asked each teacher what traits or characteristics had led them to this career, along with some identifiable characteristics, they all expounded by telling me a story. I have titled these “Becoming Stories” because each one shows the path we took to become a language teacher. Sharing traits was not enough; instead we needed to share stories, to name what brought us to language teaching. I end with stories of what led each teacher to this career, because it is important to understand from each teacher’s own words, what matters to her. It helps us understand why we would stay in a field that is so difficult. It also illustrates the potential each teacher has to be a change agent in the surrounding culture of monolingual education, to bring forth “communitas.”

**Jane:** I want to make a difference in the world, I love children, and I am obsessive organizer.

When I was a kid, my great aunt Barbara bought me a National Geographic subscription when I was, when I turned eight. I loved it so much she renewed it every year and I remember every year when she would renew it, I would get a big map of the

world, or a blow up globe of the world and I would look at all the countries and you know, I would read things about it in the magazine and I thought, ‘I want to be able to speak another language and see different places in the world.’ So that kind of led me to it [language teaching].

Me: That’s cool. For as long as I’ve known you, I don’t think I’ve ever heard that story. (p. 1, lines 11-20)

**Yolanda:** There is no other career that can make you have a bigger impact in society than teaching.

To tell you the truth at the beginning I used to work in computer science. I have a technical degree, but computers, I used to work with, data... And I left my career because I became a mother and I didn’t want to leave my kids by themselves. So there was a time that I wanted to go back to work and well things had grown so much in the computer field that I realized it was totally out of date. So I started substituting, replacing the teacher in the school where my kids used to study, and the principal told me, “You should become a teacher.” And I finally said, “Yes.” And I love what I’m doing. There is no other career that can make you have a bigger impact in society than teaching. If you want to, make a mark, just become a teacher because there is no other profession more important than that. Presidents are presidents because they had a teacher, and doctors are doctors because they had a teacher. I know it’s not the most recognized or the best paid, but it’s definitely the most important” (Interview, p. 2, lines 36-41).

**Gayle:** I have always been interested in helping people but I love children most of all. I love to see them grow and bloom.

I came from Cuba January 12, 1962. My sister and I came together she was six and I was thirteen. We lived in an orphanage until my parents came two years later...I worked part time to teach adults Home Economics skills. I have been teaching 31 years. I taught Home Economics to high schoolers for four years. I had a baby and I stayed home one year. Then I worked part time for a preschool that my daughter attended teaching computer. I did this for a couple of years. I went back to school and got my Masters in Education in Reading. While getting my Masters in Reading I worked part time for a community college providing help for those students that needed to stay in school. I worked with a friend who got a grant to provide help to content area teachers showing them how to incorporate reading in their curriculum. We went all over the state of California teaching teachers.

I moved to South Carolina and my daughter's teacher asked me to teach her class Spanish. I fell in love with teaching children to learn another language and giving them that opportunity. I went back to school to get my credential for Spanish, Early Childhood and Elementary. I am still teaching Spanish to children 26 years later. I started part time at a church school, then moved to a public school in the area.

I have a BS in Home Economics Education, Master in Reading Education, and many add on certificates. I taught Microwave cooking to adults when this was new. I have taught tennis to beginners as well as cake decorating for Wilton. For me, it has always been education. I am 68 years old (email follow up to interview).

**Marina:** I like to help.

I think that to help the society or culture, well, the base are the children, so, coming here I not only share the culture, but I leave a little bit of me with the kids. Even if you don't see it now, but in the future, you have left something with them (Interview, p. 1, lines 7-10, translated from Spanish).

**Serena:** I can understand other people's point of view, I'm pretty flexible and understanding and I have patience for kids.

For me to go into education was a career change of what I originally had intentions after I graduated, from Rutgers, I graduated going into sociology and criminal justice and then, decided I would probably do better in a career where I could give back. So that's how I ended up teaching and since I couldn't teach because I didn't have any education courses, I went ahead and started taking some over the summer and then left to Korea just to get some experience and then came back (Interview, p. 1, lines 3-9).

**Liza:** I love people, I love communicating, and I want to save the world.

What led me to study Spanish? I liked Spanish in high school. It was fun and I enjoyed memorizing the vocabulary and learning about the culture. By the time I got to college, I believed my calling was to be a missionary. I had gone on mission trips throughout high school with my youth group, and I loved helping people. I fell in love with the different cultures I had visited, and I knew I would end up overseas one day.

But my joy for Spanish began to wane as I took class after class of grammar that I didn't understand, and sat quietly in class because I didn't know what the teacher was

asking. In college I was expected to listen and respond in Spanish. In high school, all I had done was memorize verb conjugations and vocabulary lists. I spent the first three years of college Spanish classes in a state of confusion trying to pretend I knew what was going on. I checked out the English translation of whatever book we were supposed to be reading, and studied my notes enough to fake it on tests, but I had very little idea about what was going on in most of my classes. What kept me on track with the Spanish major was my desire to be a missionary. If I hadn't had that higher calling, I would have quit. I remember following Sra. Castro back to her office one day after a particularly discouraging conversational Spanish class. I told her I was thinking of quitting the Spanish major and switching to religious studies. "You can't quit." She told me. "You are going to make a difference." And so I continued on and finished the semester.

The summer before my senior year of college, I finally had the immersion experience that revolutionized my language learning. I had gone to Honduras with a mission organization focused on rebuilding after Hurricane Mitch had devastated what was already a very needy country. During the first few weeks I dreaded the moment when someone would ask me what I was studying in college. "Spanish," I would mutter quietly, knowing that they would never believe it given how little I could say or understand. But as the summer wore on, little by little, the sounds started to make sense. And I could hear the words I knew, and I could find the words I wanted to say. This was the moment all of my teachers had been talking about, when it finally started to click. When I returned home, my senior year of college was a breeze. For the first time I actually understood what all of my professors were saying, and I was able to

join the conversation. I couldn't believe how much easier my classes were now that I finally understood Spanish.

When I got my first Spanish teaching job, almost by accident, my true calling found me. After graduating college with no career aspirations, I decided to move to a new town with my best friend. The next day at church, I found out that a private school had lost one of their Spanish teachers over Christmas Break. Monday morning I walked into the front office of the school. The executive secretary greeted me and asked if she could help me.

“I heard you're looking for a Spanish teacher. I was hoping to apply.”

“Did God send you here?” She asked me with complete astonishment.

“I don't know,” I said, “maybe.”

They hired me on the spot to teach sixth grade Spanish. I hadn't taken a single education class and was completely unprepared, but they gave me a copy of the Spanish textbook, and I did the best I could. That began my career in education. Like I said, teaching found me.

While there are no easy answers to improving the variety of challenges that face immersion teachers in general, there are stories of growth and change within our immersion program. I suggest the partnerships through literacy and content integration, both thematically, and on a personal level between L1 and L2 immersion partner teachers is one key aspect to bringing about change in our program. Our L2 immersion teachers share the common desire to make a difference, and the common trait of speaking more

than one language. Our L1 immersion teachers share the common trait of expertise in language and literacy theory and practice, and intimate knowledge of students' knowledge and abilities. Together, there is no reason why integration cannot happen on multiple levels. We encourage our fellow immersion teachers to fully embrace and experience the liminal journey, and to extend their hand to the rest of the school to join them, bringing about a state of "communitas," a communion of equals in a celebration of languages and literacies.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead

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