TESTING THE LOW CLASS:
STANDARDIZED ASSESSMENT IN THE LIVES OF
HISPANIC ELL STUDENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“I have always felt that the action most worth watching is not at the center of things but where edges meet. I like shorelines, weather fronts, international borders. There are interesting frictions and incongruities in these places, and often, if you stand at the point of tangency you can see both sides better than if you were in the middle of either one.”

(Anne Fadiman, 1997, p. x.)

1.1 Introduction

One of my favorite accounts from Ann Fadiman’s book *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*, does not have to do with healthcare concerns, but with a standardized test and an immigrant community’s creative use of its resources to get around it. Mr. McDoniel, the manager of the Merced (California) County Department of Motor Vehicles, explained to Fadiman why Merced’s Hmong community may have gotten an reputation as unsafe motorists: they were passing their driver’s test by cheating. Elana Shohamy (2001) writes that “tests create fear, anxiety and subversion in test takers, leading them to develop strategies to comply with the demands of the tests.” The Hmong of Merced prove her point.
This newly arrived Southeast Asian immigrant group comes from an oral tradition (Hmong was written for the first time only in the 1950’s) and could not even to begin to decipher the written English questions on the driver’s test. Because operating a car and having a driver’s license are necessities for survival in central California, community members relied on one another to achieve these essential goals. Hmong immigrants would go to the DMV and fill in the tests’ response bubbles randomly and then take the corrected answer sheets home to share with friends. Gradually groups of friends and family members were able to discern the correct response bubble for each of the 230 questions on the five different versions of the driving test. Of course, no one could possibly memorize that many answers, so Hmong women, expert cross-stitchers and well known for their beautiful story-cloths or paj ntaub, embroidered sleeves and lapels with tiny cheat sheets. Mr. McDoniel showed Fadiman his collection of confiscated shirts, sweaters and jackets neatly embroidered with minute stitches representing the answers to the five driver’s tests. On learning of this phenomenon, the California Department of Motor Vehicles instituted oral exams in Hmong and the rate of cheating dropped to levels found in other communities. (Fadiman, 1997, pp. 241-242).

1.2 Background of Proposed Research

Every year, millions of immigrant children in the United States come face to face with that classic American educational tool, the standardized test. Test developers embedded in mainstream U.S. culture write these assessments mostly with a mainstream audience in mind. When an immigrant to the United States faces a standardized
assessment, it becomes a point of contact between two cultures, a place “where edges meet.”

The purpose of educational assessment is “to determine how well students are learning and is an integral part of the quest for improved education. It provides feedback to students, educators, parents, policy makers and the public about the effectiveness of education services” (Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001). Scores on standardized tests of student achievement are used for many different purposes. Haladyna (2002) includes the following in an extensive list:

- To measure whether students are meeting high standards as required by legislation
- To compare schools, districts, classes and students
- To monitor student achievement over time
- To place students in educational programs
- For accountability purposes:
  - To provide information to policy makers to make wise decisions about programs and resource allocation
  - To hold someone responsible for a set of scores
- To determine a ‘good neighborhood’ to buy a house
- To retain teachers or give a teacher or principal a pay raise (p. 46)

Taking a critical approach to testing, Shohamy (2001) writes that there is an “official story” and a “real story” about the purposes of particular standardized tests as they are used in a particular place. The official story is that tests are for measuring knowledge. The unofficial story is that sometimes a test in “only a means, an excuse for other
agendas.” Shohamy found that a particular test that she researched “was used by different bodies as a tool to control, screen, classify, group, punish, threaten and demonstrate authority” (p. xii).

Standardized assessments are written tests whose scores are interpreted by reference to the scores of a norm group which has taken the test and which is usually considered to be representative of the population which takes the test (wordIQ.com, 2004). Test validity, or the degree to which a test measures what it intends to measure, is compromised with students for whom English is not a native language. Those students may have the required knowledge but not understand what the test question is asking. In a valid test of academic content, incorrect responses are assumed to indicate lack of skill or knowledge rather than lack of familiarity with the test’s language. Valdés and Figueroa (1994) argue that standardized tests that are developed for and normed on monolingual populations are not valid even for bilingual populations. According to them, bilingual learners think differently and respond differently than monolinguals.

Accommodations in format, response and environment attempt to level the playing field. Butler and Stevens (1997) define English language learner (ELL) accommodations as “support given to a student for a given testing event either through modification of the test itself or through modification of the testing procedure to help students access the content in English and better demonstrate what they know.” A variety of accommodations for ELL students have been cited in the literature: extra time, use of test-specific bilingual glossaries, plain-language format, translated versions of tests, and bilingual test administrators are some accommodations suggested for
improving test validity for ELL students. In addition, test orientation for ELL students and their families prior to the testing event could also be considered an accommodation.

The intent of this study is to explore how large-scale standardized testing is situated in the lives of seven Salvadoran ELL students in order to support ELL parents in exercising their rights regarding their children’s participation in such testing programs. In the case of the Hmong test-takers in California, the community drew on their capital—the strength of their community, their knowledge of needlework, and the skills developed from centuries of maintaining their language and culture in other people’s countries—and successfully met a survival need. They had no choice but to find a way around the driver’s test; passing it the usual way was impossible for them at the time. The California DMV, whose charge is safe roadways, instituted accommodations for Hmong test-takers that would allow them to demonstrate their knowledge of driving regulations. This study documents how another immigrant community, Salvadorans in Maryland, understands and responds to a school system’s standardized testing program. The research hoped to identify problems if they existed, and with the community, to address the problems in ways that would benefit the children’s education.

1.3 A Critical Ethnographic Approach

This project sought to use critical ethnographic procedures to make out the landscape of large-scale standardized testing for seven Salvadoran fifth-graders during the 2004-05 school year in a Maryland classroom where I took a position as a teacher of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). I approached the study as a participatory research project where I both observed and participated. Because of the
qualitative nature of the research, I will take the necessary steps here and in the
description of the methodology (Chapter 3) to explain my own background and biases
rather than to pretend that I was an objective bystander.

I come to this topic as a veteran bilingual teacher and bilingual program specialist,
teacher educator and researcher. I admire Paulo Freire’s educational philosophy as well
as the efforts of many others who have followed his ideal of humanization and liberation
of oppressed people and their oppressors. I have worked in educational programs in
many places where edges meet: with Hmong refugee children and Mexican migrant
children in a Central California middle school, with undocumented Salvadoran
immigrants and their children in the Washington, D.C. area, with Garifuna fishers and
farmers in Honduras. In all of these cases I did my best to be an ally and tried to be
humble given my privileged position. I know oppression, too, as a gay man. I
experience the feeling of powerlessness, for example, when my partner of 18 years, our
son and I watch religious and political leaders debate whether same-sex couples deserve
the privileges of marriage. I have worked for my own liberation through grassroots
organizing around the issue of safe schools for the GLBT community. That work helped
to heal and strengthens me in my current efforts.

The point of departure for this study began with a question posed to me by
Rebecca Kopriva at the Center for the Study of Assessment Validity and Evaluation at
the University of Maryland College Park where I have worked as an employee and
consultant: Are there accommodations for ELL students who are taking large-scale
standardized assessments that will address cultural differences?
To begin to answer such an unusual question, I believe it was first necessary to delimit the aspect of ‘culture’ to be studied. I decided to look at interactions of immigrant children with standardized assessments and the consequences of those assessments on the academic lives of the children. When an ELL student becomes involved with a standardized testing program that has been designed by U.S. assessment professionals with a mainstream U.S. audience in mind, then the test-taking becomes a point of cultural contact and a potential site of cultural discontinuity (Section 1.6). One would probably have to ask such questions as, “How is assessment done in this country? How is it done in the student’s country of origin? What are the similarities and differences?” U.S. school personnel who might consider culture-based accommodations cannot possibly know all the cultural diversity that their ELL students bring to the testing event. ELL students and their parents can be the school’s resource on culture because they hold the knowledge that school personnel need to know in order to provide the best learning environment for the children. I believe it is critical to enter into dialog with ELL parents and children together about testing in the U.S. and testing in the country of origin before we can decide on any accommodations based on culture. We could ask parents, “What do you remember about testing in your country? What do you tell your children about testing? What are the purposes, formats, administration, etc., of testing where you come from? How are the results of tests reported and used?” We should find out what parents already know about U.S. testing: “What have you learned from the school, from your children, from other parents?” We might invite the children to explain how they perceive testing here and in their country of origin and how they feel when testing. We could exchange information with families about how testing is done here and its
purposes. We might have the families do a sample test so they could experience the format and types of information required. We could name the similarities and differences and determine what obstacles are in the way of successful completion of the test and then design together accommodations that might overcome those obstacles.

I suggest, then, that the first accommodation to mitigate cultural differences would be a family-based assessment orientation where families and school personnel could participate as described above and then decide on the cultural accommodations they might need for their children on the upcoming standardized assessment. While family assessment orientation seems right on the surface, and parent meetings around standardized testing are often attempted at schools, something is missing. I believe the problem has something to do with what Kincheloe (1995) would call a technocratic or ‘cookbook approach.’ I doubt that a parent training model with a predictable beginning, middle and end would best serve ELL families when dealing with standardized assessment. Shohamy’s (2001) notion that there is an official story and a real story about the purposes of testing also influences my outlook in working on the issue of ELL parent involvement in standardized assessment. If we are to describe standardized assessment to an immigrant family, we would have to touch on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law and its strict test score accountability demands. We could not talk about U.S. standardized testing for ELL students without bringing up the related controversies and discussing solutions and parents’ roles in those solutions. There are democratic processes in place for parents and other community members to influence how schools operate: school districts are overseen by elected school boards; parents elect PTA officers; teachers support their unions and belong to professional organizations, etc. A family
assessment orientation, if it were truly participatory might lead to action for change. This type of parent involvement would not have a predictable path or a defined final goal from the start. The research would have to be flexible and would have to evolve. As I began my research, I decided to keep in mind what Thomas (1993) writes:

All ethnography possesses the potential for ad hoc restructuring of the initial topic. Critical ethnography is especially susceptible to the need for flexibility, because the questions that are most interesting may not be revealed until considerable background data emerges (p. 21).

1.4 Problem, Purpose & Significance of This Study

Educators and politicians use the results of standardized tests to make critical decisions about student placement, accountability and administration of school districts. It is therefore important that the assessments be fair and accurate and that the decisions that come out of testing be appropriate. Critical ethnographers who have examined standardized testing in U.S. schools call for documentation and analysis of life inside public schools that have been affected by standards-based accountability. Templer (2004), for example, calls for a critical ethnography of high-stakes testing and points out the lack of ‘thick’ description of the realities of such testing in specific places. He cites Pavlau’s (2003) call for studies of parents’ and students rights as major stakeholders in the testing of second language learners. Apple (2000) writes: “…it is absolutely essential that we ask critical questions about the realities of life in schools in those places where standardization has become the universal answer to the deep-seated problems of education” (p. xvi). Moreover, focus groups organized by the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños & Research Foundation for the National Latino/a Education Research
Agenda cited a need for studies on how high-stakes testing impacts Latino and Latina students and their teachers at particular schools (Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños & Research Foundation, 2003). These recommendations for research come from the need to know if the consequences of testing effect individuals and communities in ways that support the communities’ goals or if they simply reproduce historical inequities.

The intent of this study is to document how large-scale standardized testing is situated in the lives of seven Salvadoran and Salvadoran-American English language learner (ELL) students in order to support ELL parents in exercising their rights regarding their children’s participation in such testing programs. (In Chapter 3, I describe the process for selecting the specific site and the families who were involved in the study.) It is possible that by involving ELL parents in the process of identifying testing accommodation and by empowering them to learn about and exercise their options in their children’s testing program, ELL students may eventually be more appropriately assessed and the school may have a more accurate understanding of their ELL students’ academic progress.

It is difficult to isolate and study a single aspect of children’s schooling such as parent involvement in assessment because each facet of education is connected with the others. Shohamy (2001) writes that “…tests cannot be viewed as isolated and neutral events but rather as embedded in educational, social, political and economic contexts” (p. xvi). Assessment programs cause significant and unexpected washback, or impact on the curriculum. For this reason, to understand how standardized testing impacts ELL students at a particular school, I undertook an ethnographic study to discern what sociologists might call an ‘ecology of testing’ to understand how it shapes the academic
lives of seven particular ELL students from El Salvador. By attaining an emic or insider’s view of the school as a participant-observer, I hoped to support ELL families to address their assessment needs and to identify a course of action, if any, that they might consider taking on behalf of their children.

The results of this study potentially benefit several different interests. As culturally and linguistically diverse families tackle the issues of ELL accommodations and exemptions for their children, they may provide insights to test developers on how to improve assessment validity for ELL students. The schools, under NCLB pressure to raise standardized test scores for ELL students, will benefit from more accurate assessments, as well. Most importantly, individual ELL students will gain if their teachers have a clear understanding of what they know and can do; teachers will have more information to use in planning learning environments that meet the ELL students’ needs. In addition, by rejecting tests or by making them more accurate, ELL students will not waste valuable academic time preparing for and taking tests that are not valid for them. Finally, as immigrant parents learn more about their children’s academic program, they may learn to involve themselves in democratic action to shape their children’s learning environment to better address their needs.

In her 1997 book The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down Anne Fadiman, shares the story of one Hmong girl with epilepsy and her family’s dealings with their U.S. doctors. By involving herself in this small case, Fadiman managed to stand “where edges meet” and to reveal an unobstructed view of two colliding universes. By looking at how U.S. standardized tests effect the lives of seven fifth-grade immigrant children from El
Salvador, I hope not only to see both universes more clearly, but perhaps help to make their inevitable collision a less damaging.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions will frame this proposed research project:

1) How do U.S. standardized testing programs effect the lives of seven Salvadoran immigrant families whose fifth grade children are identified as English language learners by their school district?

2) Do the parent participants in this study perceive testing differently than their children and their children’s school? If so, what are the consequences of these divergent perceptions?

3) In what ways can this research process positively affect standardized testing for ELL students in the researched community?

4) What larger themes are revealed in this process that relate to the power relationships between the US mainstream and immigrant communities?

1.6 Definitions of Key Terms

*Cultural discontinuity*: Differences between home culture and school culture that affected academic performance for students from non-mainstream groups who attend U.S. public schools.

*ELL accommodation*: Butler and Stevens’ (1997) definition is appropriate to this research: “support given to a student for a given testing event either through modification of the test itself or through modification of the testing procedure to
help students access the content in English and better demonstrate what they know”. In addition, test orientation for students and families as well as test-taking skill development prior to the testing event will also be considered accommodations. A variety of accommodations for ELL students have been cited in the literature: extra time, use of test-specific bilingual glossaries, plain-language format, translated versions of tests, bilingual test administrator are some accommodations suggest for improving test validity for ELL students.

**English language learner (ELL) students:** In selecting research participants, ELL students will be defined as those students whose primary language is other than English and score in the range of Non English Proficient or Limited English Proficient on the IDEA Proficiency Test. This is the definition used by the school district in the study site.

**High-stakes test:** A test in which “the test taker faces significant consequences when approaching a testing situation” (Haladyna, 2002, p. 157).

**Parent involvement programs:** Programs which attempt to include parents in their children’s formal schooling.

**Standardized assessment:** For the purpose of this study, a written test whose scores are interpreted by reference to the scores of a norm group which has taken the test and which is usually considered to be representative of the population which takes the test (wordIQ.com, 2004). Standardized assessments currently in place at the study locale are the Maryland State Assessment, IDEA Proficiency Test and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) test. Other tests which may impact the study site will also be considered.
Test validity: “...the degree with which the inferences based on test scores are meaningful, useful and appropriate...[it] is a characteristic of a test when it is administered to a particular population” (Brauldi, 1999).

Washback: The impact a test or testing program has on the curriculum (Coombe & Hubley, 2005).
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“Sometimes when you want to talk about one thing, you end up talking about everything.”

Esther Dikongue, 7th grade ELL student from Cameroon.

2.1 Introduction

U.S. schools have experienced growing cultural and linguistic diversity among their student populations, but these children are not generally experiencing success in many aspects of their schooling. However, lawmakers hold public schools accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students, including English language learners. Politicians and the public assume that rising test scores indicate increased learning, so they rely on these numbers to measure schools’ progress, often not questioning how “rising” has been defined and who has defined it. Schools and school personnel receive awards and punishments based on their students’ test scores. Student placement and other decisions result from these scores, as well. This scenario presents tough issues for schools and for pupils who are not yet proficient in academic varieties of English.

Knowing that schools have been able to increase minority student achievement by reaching out to their parents, different parent involvement programs and approaches have evolved. One way that parents can become empowered in their children’s educational institutions is through the democratic processes that shape public schools;
school boards, PTAs, teachers unions, the media and elected officials together determine what happens in public schools. Teachers have an important role in the empowerment of their English Language Learner (ELL) students’ families. Although the majority of U.S. teachers come from the Anglo mainstream, they can act as allies in helping parents of culturally and linguistically diverse students to tap in to their power within the democratic processes available to public school participants. ELL parents can and should use these processes to make a difference in the standardized testing program that their children face.

The aim of this proposed study is to explore how large-scale standardized testing is situated in the lives of seven fifth-grade Salvadoran ELL students at an elementary school in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C. This inquiry will support ELL parents in the broader community to exercise their rights regarding their children’s participation in such testing programs. This research is built upon a theoretical foundation related to immigration, education and the social structures in which people live their lives. The following review of literature will address education of ELL students including standardized testing and standards-based accountability (Section 2.2), options for parents of ELL students related to standardized assessments (Section 2.3), ELL parent involvement (Section 2.4), and teachers as allies (Section 2.5).

2.2 Education of ELL Students

English language learner students come from many different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and their number in U.S. schools continues to grow. The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of English Language Acquisition, Language
Enhancement and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students (OELA) reported in 2002 that state education agencies identified more than 4.5 million U.S. students as limited English proficient (LEP). This represents nearly ten percent of the total school enrollment and a 105% growth rate over the previous ten years. While students identified as LEP speak an astonishing 460 different languages, nearly 80% speak Spanish as their primary language (Kindler, 2002).

Students in the United States whose native language is other than English confront the formidable challenge of mastering a new language while advancing their understanding of required academic content. The U.S. Supreme Court obligated educators to look for ways to meet English language learner students’ educational needs when, in 1974, it outlawed submersion and required that school districts provide specialized programming for ELLs. The Court ruled in *Lau v. Nichols* that “there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education” (Baker, 2001, p. 186). Subsequent laws and court cases have specifically required school districts to provide ELL students with a program that addresses their development of English language proficiency and allows them access to the core curriculum (Lessow-Hurley, 2003).

More recently, the federal government in Title III of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) holds states accountable for ELL students’ progress toward English proficiency and in meeting the same challenging academic content standards as their native English-speaking peers. A school’s failure to meet the educational goals for ELL students will result in the loss of federal funding and reassignment of school personnel,
among other sanctions (NCLB Title III, Subpart 2, Sec. 3122). While federal legislation
and court cases have not prescribed particular educational programs for ELL students,
they do require that the educational programs that districts select be built upon sound
educational theory, provide trained personnel with appropriate instructional materials,
and include a reliable evaluation process (Lessow-Hurley, 2003).

2.2.1 Academic Programs for ELL Students

ELL students achieve high levels of academic success when they receive quality
instruction in both mother tongue and target language (in this case English). Students
also progress when they learn through their own culture as well as learning about the
dominant culture and others. Many immigrant students do not experience academic
success when schools expect them to abandon their native language and culture
(Cummins, 1995; Ogbu, 1987). Appropriate schooling designed to meet the needs of K-
12 students who are learning the English language have four components: 1) instruction
and support in the student’s primary language, 2) instruction for English language
development, 3) sheltered academic content, and 4) multicultural education woven
throughout the curriculum (California State Department of Education, 1995; Freeman &
Freeman, 1998; Skuttnab-Kangas, 2000; Ramirez, 2002). Assessment of learning should
measure ELL students’ growth in each aspect of the framework, and should be fair, valid
and used to support students’ progress toward their goals.

Bilingual education programs have been found to promote high academic
achievement for ELL students (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Baker, 2001; Freeman &
Freeman, 1998; Ramirez, 1992; Thomas & Collier, 1997). The current political climate
in the United States, however, opposes such instructional programs. Voters in California,
Arizona and Massachusetts, for example, have eliminated most bilingual programs in favor of structured English immersion where ELL students receive all instruction in English. Name changes of national agencies also bear witness to this political trend. What used to be the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA) is now The Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students (OELA). What the public once knew as the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education is now the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs. Although NCLB does not outlaw mother tongue instruction for immigrant students, the current focus of education for ELL students emphasizes English language teaching over providing access to content or literacy in students’ primary language. In the same way, NCLB permits testing in students’ primary language, but most states do not do so. (Bratt & Sunderman, 2005.)

2.2.2 Accountability and Standardized Assessment of ELL Students

Developing a reliable and valid evaluation process presents problems for test developers who need to accurately document ELL students’ academic progress despite limited English proficiency, cultural disconnects and lack of opportunity to learn the material being tested. Too often, the academic assessments of ELL students have mostly measured their ability to understand what is being asked of them, rather than their level of knowledge of the content area assessed. When teachers and administrators make important decisions based on ELL students’ scores on standardized tests, the children become at risk of inappropriate judgments.
In their position paper on testing of ELL students, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (2003), the international professional organization, states:

Inasmuch as [standardized] tests measure content in combination with linguistic abilities, English language learners are at a distinct disadvantage that is difficult to accommodate. Further, cultural differences and limitations concerning opportunity to learn can lead to unfair interpretations of low test scores and assessment discrimination…[S]ince high English proficiency is a prerequisite for success on high-stakes tests, such assessments are not appropriate for English language learners and often do more harm than good.

The American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association and National Council on Measurement in Education (1999) in *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* also caution on decision-making using the results of standardized tests with English language learners:

…test norms based on native speakers of English either should not be used with individuals whose first language is not English or such individuals’ test results should be interpreted as reflecting in part current level of English proficiency rather than ability, potential, aptitude or personality characteristics or symptomatology (p. 91).

### 2.2.3 High-Stakes Testing in Schools

Those who tout the merits of standardized tests believe that the assessments can inform individual students, their teachers and parents about their academic achievement relative to other students; that they can help to identify groups of students who are
achieving outside expected norms; and they can help schools and districts understand the overall level of achievement of their students. However, proponents of standardized tests also emphasize that scores on such tests should be only one factor among many that informs decision-making (Farr & Trumbull, 1997).

When a single test score is used to decide a student’s educational placement, or some other important consequence, it is considered a ‘high-stakes’ test. The high-stakes nature of NCLB’s testing accountability have been found to strongly effect the educational environment in U.S. schools (Wright 2002; Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Schools in many states are rewarded and punished depending on whether or not their students’ test scores rise according to mandated goals called “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP). Researchers have documented that low-performing schools have narrowed their curriculum and have excluded or de-emphasized subjects that will not be tested (McNeil, 2000; Haladyna, 2002; Crawford, 2004b). Students in low-performing schools have been documented to spend large amounts of time taking and training for tests. Closely correlated with excessive test preparation are excessive motivational practices such as pep rallies and pizza parties which are considered a source of test score “pollution”, systematic error which increases scores in ways that are unrelated to what the test is intended to measure. (Haladyna, 2002). While many schools have accomplished higher standardized test scores, this has not been found to actually improve teaching or overall student learning (Amrein & Berliner 2002). Stephen Krashen (2002) refers to teaching-to-the-test as a “bogus” way to raise test scores and compares such methods to “trying to raise the temperature of a room by lighting a match under the thermometer.”
The power of high-stakes testing has particularly troubling consequences for ELL students. Schools with large numbers of ELL students have been shown to fall disproportionately into their states’ low-performing category (Escamilla, Mahon, Riley-Bernal, & Routledge, 2003). Because valid standardized testing of bilingual students remains illusive (Solano-Flores & Trumbell, 2003; Huemphner, 2004; Valdés & Figueroa, 1994), punishments or educational placement based on poor performance on such tests must be considered cause for serious concern.

Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing state that “Consequences resulting from the uses of the test, both intended and unintended, should …be examined by the test user” (AERA, APA, NCME, 1999). This recommendation speaks directly to test developers’ obligations to ensure the validity of their products. Brauldi, (1999) defines test validity as “…the degree with which the inferences based on test scores are meaningful, useful and appropriate…[it] is a characteristic of a test when it is administered to a particular population.” An aspect of assessment validity, known as consequential validity, “…is concerned with a tests’ impact on individuals, institutions and society, and with the use that is made of test results” (Weir, 2005, p. 1). Messick, (1989) includes consequential validity in a unified definition of validity and writes that "Validity is an integrated evaluative judgment of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on test scores or other modes of assessment" (p. 13). He further states that “The questions are whether the potential and actual social consequences of test interpretation and use are not only supportive of the intended testing purposes, but at the same time are consistent with other social values” (Messick, 1989).
2.3 Options for Parents of ELL Students Related to Standardized Assessments

Considering that, overall, standardized assessment for ELL students is problematic, it makes sense for ELL parents, the major stakeholders in their children’s education, to be made aware of the situation and for them to weigh the options available to them in relation to standardized assessment: 1) they can have the child take the test without special accommodations; 2) they can accept the accommodations that the school chooses for them; 3) they may negotiate with the school a set of accommodations for their child; 4) they could decide to exempt their children or 5) take some other form of action to influence the testing process.

2.3.1 Accommodations for ELLs in Large-Scale Assessments

ELL students and other students with special needs are allowed to receive accommodations during test-taking as long as those accommodations maintain the test’s validity without giving the students an unfair advantage. States have begun to look seriously at how to include English learners in their standardized testing programs and have implemented a wide range of accommodations. Butler and Stevens (1997, p. 6) cite the four accommodations that states most frequently use for ELL students on large-scale standardized tests:

- separate testing session (17 states)
- small group administration or flexible scheduling (15 states)
- extra assessment time (14 states)
- simplification of directions (11 states)
Other accommodations include use of dictionaries and glossaries, providing recorded instructions in the student’s primary language (L1) and allowing students to respond in L1, (American Federation of Teachers, 2003), additional breaks, modifications of the test setting, responding without writing or responding in L1, using computers and other tools or resources (Kopriva, 2000, p. 51), administering the test in small groups, allowing students to choose either English or L1 versions of test questions (Solano-Flores & Trumball, 2003), administration of the test by a person familiar with a test-taker’s primary language and culture (Hakuta & Beaty, 2003) and out-of-level testing (Minnema et. al., 2000).

It is still unclear if these accommodations level the playing field or give ELL students an unfair advantage. In their review of the literature Sireci & Scarpati (2003) reviewed 19 studies of testing accommodations for ELL students. Accommodations studied were oral presentation, use of a dictionary or glossary, linguistic modification of test, dual language versions of tests, and extended time. They concluded that “…the research that has been done indicates that some accommodations, such as linguistic modification and provision of a dictionary or glossary, show promise” (p. 59). They found that evidence on other accommodations is inconclusive. Abedi (2001a) suggests that “customized dictionaries are a viable alternative to providing traditional dictionaries as accommodations. A traditional dictionary may provide ELL students an unfair advantage on certain types of tests” (p.5).

Abedi (2001b) documented a gap in performance between LEP and non-LEP students that “increases as the language load of the assessment tools increases” (p.1).
He found that “the only accommodation that narrowed the gap between ELL and non-ELL students was linguistic modification of those test questions with excessive language demands” (p. 4). His research also determined that translating test items into a student’s native language does not improve performance if the language of instruction does not match the language of the test. Reducing the language complexity makes more of a difference in narrowing the gap. Butler and Stevens (1997) in their review of the literature also find that translation of test items is “problematic.” They promote instead parallel development of tests in different languages where specifications ensure content continuity across languages and cultures. Test-translation problems stem from differences among languages in terms of the degree of difficulty of vocabulary and grammatical structures. A second problem stems from the assumption that bilingual speakers know both languages equally well in every circumstance. Circumstantial bilinguals may be more fluent in one language or the other depending on the situation. While they may be “limited” in one or the other language under certain circumstances, when total linguistic knowledge is considered, bilingual children often have greater overall linguistic expertise than their monolingual peers (Kestler & Peña, 2002). Solano-Flores & Truball (2003) recommend presenting bilingual versions of tests that have passed through all phases of the development process together and allowing students to choose the response language on an item-by-item basis. Because ELL students have different skill levels in their different languages and in their different academic subjects, students who are given a bilingual test and given the choice to answer in either or both languages may more accurately demonstrate what they know and can do. While this type of test has not yet been developed, the concept aligns with linguists’ research on bilingual
speakers’ code-switching, which allows them to better communicate with other bilingual people (Auer, 1995; Zentella, 1997; Shin, 2005). By encouraging students to use both of their languages and allowing switching between them, standardized test scores may become more valid for bilingual students.

**Figure 2.1: ELL Accommodations Currently in Use for Large-Scale Assessments**

- more time
- bilingual dictionary
- glossary of words found in assessment
- translated assessment
- independently developed assessment in L1
- bilingual assessment
- separate testing session small group administration or flexible scheduling
- simplification of directions
- additional breaks,
- modifications of test setting,
- responding without writing
- responding in L1
- using computers and other tools or resources
- administering the test in small groups,
- allowing students to choose either English or L1 version of test questions,
• administration of the test by a person familiar with test-takers primary language and culture
• out-of-level testing (not recommended)
• pictures
• recorded L1 instructions and student responses

(Butler and Stevens, 1997; American Federation of Teachers, 2003; Kopriva, 2000; Minnema et. al., 2000; Sireci & Scarpati, (2003); Abedi, 2001a; Solano-Flores & Trumball, 2003).

To decide which accommodations to provide ELL students, a one-size-fits-all policy does not appear logical. Researchers have noted that it is important to consider that ELL students, as a group, are not easily lumped together in a single category because they represent diverse cultural and experiential backgrounds and language proficiency levels. Abedi (2001a) and Butler & Stevens (1997) have concluded that decisions on which large-scale test accommodations to make available to ELL students must therefore take into account these wide variations in student backgrounds. These researchers concur that the three most important variables are English language proficiency, prior formal schooling, and length of time in the U.S.

Butler & Stevens (1997) hypothesize that

…if the test takers are recent arrivals who have had formal schooling in their home country, but have little or no proficiency in English, the most appropriate test accommodation may be content assessment in the native language if it is available. If, on the other hand, test takers have demonstrated intermediate to
advanced proficiency in English, allowing additional testing time may be sufficient accommodation. For students with little first or second language literacy, the use of accommodations with any type of standardized or large-scale assessment may prove to be ineffective. (p. 7)

2.3.1.1 Culture-Based ELL Accommodations

In Maryland during the 2004-05 school year (the setting for this study), parents were expected to meet with an ELL committee at their child’s school and sign a document that described the accommodations their children would and would not receive. States and school districts, like the research, show little agreement about which accommodations to provide to ELL students. Parents of ELL students, in all likelihood, need information in order to truly participate in this particular decision-making process. While there is limited (and mostly inconclusive) research on test accommodations for ELL students, those studies do not appear to address students’ specific cultural needs or take into account the families’ testing experiences or the parents’ wishes for their children.

2.3.1.2 Cultural Discontinuities in Schooling and Assessment

Abedi (2001a) and Butler & Stevens (1997) have concluded that decisions on which large-scale test accommodations to make available to ELL students must take into account the wide variations in ELL student backgrounds. The literature identifies cultural issues, including acculturation and acculturative stress as factors that affect ELL students’ academic performance. Ogbu (1987), for example, found that students from immigrant minority groups who could alternate between home and school cultures without crisis of identity enhanced their chances for academic success.
Bresica & Fortune (1988), for instance, write in their review of literature on standardized testing of Native American students that language and test motivation were the two major factors affecting achievement test scores. Test motivation, they claim, is tied to level of acculturation, with less acculturated students demonstrating less understanding of test importance and test response strategies. Deyhle (1987) found that Navajo second graders misunderstood the purpose of tests, unlike a comparison group of Anglo youngsters. Although both groups of students received similar instruction regarding test-taking, the Navajo second-graders did not view tests as “…device[s] for judging personal success or failure...” (p. 105).

In addition to language proficiency issues that interfere with accurate assessment of academic content knowledge, social and cultural discontinuities between ELL test-takers and the testing situation hampers accurate assessment. Kopriva (2000) explains that differences in cultural expectations may cause misunderstandings if test developers assume prior experiences or a value system more prevalent among students who have grown up in the U.S. According to the *Gale Encyclopedia of Childhood and Adolescence* (1998) “students from a minority culture may be more likely to interpret and answer a question in ways that differ from the prescribed answer.” These students’ test taking may yield results similar to gifted children’s “divergent thinking” which standardized tests tend to penalize. Kopriva & Sexton (1999) write that “students read an item based on their values and experiences and the values and experiences prevalent in their culture. Since values and experiences of the students’ native culture and the U.S. culture may be dissimilar, there is room for misinterpretation.” Kopriva & Saez (1997) on discussing ELL scoring difficulties, write that…
Some students… may interpret the items and problems in ways that may be unexpected or that appear atypical for a scorer. Such background characteristics may prompt students to focus on certain types of information over others or to emphasize aspects of a problem or its solution that would not be accorded a similar priority by the scorer…the responses of some ELL students may be understandable and defensible and the solution presented may be acceptable and consistent with the interpretation…required by the assessment developers (pp. 3, 4).

Solano-Flores & Trumball (2003) conclude that students’ socio-economic backgrounds influence how they interpret test items. He found that low-income students projected their own concerns and expectations onto a NAEP math word problem in which the mother had “only $1.00 bills” to give her child for lunch money. While the question asked for the minimum number of bills required for a week of lunch, poor students understood the question to mean that they would have to decide what the child could buy for lunch with only one dollar.

Although there is little research on specific cultural discontinuities that affect large scale standardized test-taking, ethnographic studies have found important differences between home culture and school culture that affected other aspects of academic performance for students from diverse backgrounds who attend U.S. public schools. Some examples:

- Differences in story-telling style affected literacy development among native Hawaiian children (North Central Regional Educational Labs, 2004);
• Mexican origin families’ use of adult authority differed significantly from mainstream U.S. teachers’ classroom expectations (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987);

• Differences in communication styles between Haitian immigrants and U.S. teachers caused Haitian immigrant children to misunderstand behavioral expectations in the U.S. classroom (Ballenger, 1999);

• Beliefs held by working-class families of Mexican origin regarding what constitutes “success” differed from U.S. mainstream beliefs and had important implications for students’ long-term academic achievement (Valdés, 1996);

• Navajo children at home decide when to demonstrate their competence at a task and demonstrated it only when the task can be accomplished without error (Dehyle, 1987);

• Middle-class Anglo parents’ verbal interactions with their children better prepared them for classroom interactions than did parent-child interactions in nearby working-class African American and Anglo communities (Heath, 1983);

• Papago Indians’ value on restrained speech styles and nonverbal communication was discontinuous with mainstream school expectations; preschool teachers from the students’ communities helped children to bridge the gap (Macias, 1987).

In developing culture-based accommodations for linguistically and culturally diverse students, policy-makers might consider the attempts in other areas of education to be inclusive. For example, Lee (2002), in her review of the literature on scientific inquiry with culturally and linguistically diverse students writes that…
for students who are not from the culture of power, teachers need to provide explicit instruction about that culture’s rules and norms rather than expecting students to figure out these rules on their own. Without explicit instruction, the students lack opportunities to acquire the rules…[T]eachers [also] need to make visible students’ everyday knowledge, the relationship between students’ knowledge and academic tasks, and the transition from one domain to the other” (pp. 40, 41).

For the purposes of ELL parent participation in standardized testing programs, this means school personnel should be talking to families about the related experiences and knowledge they bring to test-taking while at the same time making explicit the consequences and expectations inherent in U.S. standardized testing. A family assessment orientation that truly empowers parents would also have to address the possibility that parents might exercise their option to exclude their children from some testing or perhaps elect some other course of resistance.

2.3.2 Resisting Standardized Testing

The U.S. media reports scattered examples of resistance to standardized testing. Students, teachers and parents have been reported to boycott standardized tests as a way of taking a stand against what they perceive as unfair, unnecessary or misapplied assessment. Teachers have accepted sanctions from their school districts for refusing to administer tests; parents have organized to keep their children home on test days; administrators have resigned in protest of inappropriate use of standardized tests (Kohn, 2001). The California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE, 2005) announced in
April 2005 that it has retained counsel to challenge California’s decision to test only in English. There are cases of students who have concluded that standardized tests are not relevant and have refused to take them. One website, www.nomoretests.org, for example, organized by a student group with the ironic acronym SAT (Students Against Testing), encourages students, teachers and parents to resistance unfair testing through boycotts, letter-writing campaigns and teach-ins.

Organized parent actions have contributed to the downfall of at least two state testing programs. In 1994, the Traditional Values Coalition organized conservative Christian parents in California to contact state school board members, the media and other elected officials to condemn the California Learning Assessment (CLAS) which they believed violated their moral values (Asimov, 1994a, 1994b, 1995). The California Department of Education first addressed their concerns by altering test questions and reading selections, but in the end replaced the test with a multiple choice format that did not require student opinions and avoided controversial reading selections. In 2002, the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) also succumbed to pressure from parents and administrators in affluent Montgomery County when some schools’ test averages showed inexplicable double-digit changes from one school year to the next. (Aizenman, 2002). As in the case of California, Maryland moved from a performance-based assessment to a multiple-choice format, the Maryland School Assessment (MSA), to assuage parent discontent among other reasons.

Resistance may take other forms besides organized democratic action. Cheating by teachers and students, students filling in response sheets without reading the questions or answering “I don’t care” on essay exams (Aizenman, 2002) might arguably be called
test-resistance as well. Affluent parents’ and private schools’ claiming that their students have a learning disability in order to take advantage of the extra time accommodation on the SAT may also be considered a form of resistance to high-stakes testing (Kurtzig-Freedman, 2003; Lewin, 2003). Whether it is resistance or simple lack of ethics, cheating becomes more common as the stakes become higher (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

While there is a certain assortment of examples of mainstream students, parents and teachers organizing grass-roots efforts at resisting standardized testing (particularly in affluent suburban communities), none of the reports mentions ELL students and their families actively taking a stand against high-stakes testing in a language they have not yet fully acquired.

2.4 Parent Involvement and the Achievement Gap in U.S. Public Schools

Culturally and linguistically diverse students generally are not doing well in U.S. schools if the traditional measures of standardized test scores, dropout rates and college attendance are used. Mexican American students, for example, generally are experiencing “a decline in high school completion rates, a steady rise in the drop out rate, and high numbers of students two or more years behind grade level” according to Chavkin and Gonzalez (1995, p.1). There is a gap in measures of academic achievement for Hispanic students in the U.S. compared to Anglo students. This gap is not getting smaller. Graduation rates, test scores and other measures of academic success demonstrate that U.S. schools have not successfully met the needs of this rapidly growing population of students (Lee, J., 2002).*

* There is a growing body of literature on school failure by boys which claims that schools may not be meeting the specific needs of that population, either. According to these claims, inadequate learning
The general lack of academic success in schools of certain U.S. ethnic groups has been explained by different theories. One school of thought, patently racist and rejected by most, is a genetic inferiority theory. A second theory is the “cultural deprivation” theory: the child’s home culture is lacking and is incapable of preparing children for school (discussed in Valdés, 1996, p. 17). Third is the discontinuity theory which states that cultural practices in a minority household do not mesh with the expectations of mainstream schools. This cultural “mismatch” prevents students of some ethnic groups from experiencing success in school. (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987, p. 333). Finally, the socio-political perspective states that schools maintain power and privilege for an elite few; the rest are set up for failure through disabling institutional discrimination (Cummins, 1995, p. 107). Within this framework, Ogbo (1987) posits that discrimination affects minorities groups that have been historically dominated in the U.S. such as African American and Latinos more than ethnic minorities who have voluntarily immigrated to the United States and have their country of origin as their primary source of identity. Academically successful minority students were those who could move between cultures without a “crisis of identity.”

2.4.1 Latino Parent Involvement

Parents are key to their children’s academic success. School-parent-community partnerships provide support for student achievement (Chavkin and Gonzalez, 1995). U.S. schools expect a type of family participation in academics that Latino families do not traditionally involve themselves in. Mainstream U.S. definition of “success” according to Guadalupe Valdés (1996) also varies from that of Mexican origin families. Environments lead to greater proportions of male suspensions, drop out and special education placements
Valdés believes that Latino families expect schools to take care of academic instruction. Luis Moll and others who demonstrate that when educators learn about their Latino students’ families and learn about their “funds of knowledge”, they view their students families as valuable resources into which they can tap to create relevant curriculum for children (Gonzalez et. al., 1993).

2.4.2 Collaborations Between Language Minority Families and Schools

Schools are increasingly committed to reaching out to parents in an effort to combat students’ weak academic achievement. Many school employees, following a belief that parents are somehow to blame for their children’s lack of success, try to train parents in an effort to build up their parenting skills. This approach reflects the school’s cultural deprivation belief that families are lacking and in need of improvement (Valdés, 1996, p. 28). On the other hand, some schools attempt to forge partnerships with parents and work together to make schools a welcoming and welcomed member of the community. Recognizing school’s historic role in maintaining unequal relations of power, they bridge the traditional gap between educational institutions and minority communities. Meaningful relationships have been built because educators have respected the strengths of families and communities rather than taking a deficit approach (Gonzalez et. al. 1993).

Chavkin and Gonzalez (1995) report that “research has shown that one of the most promising ways to increase students’ achievement is to involve their families; “family participation in education was twice as predictive of academic learning as family

(Gurian & Stevens, 2005; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Kipnis, 1999, Viadero, 2006) (Section 4.6.3).
socioeconomic status” (p. 1). Cummins (1995) cites research that demonstrates that “dramatic changes in children’s academic progress can be realized” when educators take a collaborative approach with traditionally dominated groups (p. 108).

To consider involving language minority parents in school means to consider issues of culture, language and teacher preparation. While nearly 30% of K-12 students in the U.S. come from minority populations, currently more than 85% of U.S. teachers are white and 92% of preservice teachers are white. (Chisolm, 1994, p. 3). Only 2.5% of teachers who instruct English Language Learners possess a degree in ESL or bilingual education (Barron & Menken, 2002, p.1). Nearly 75% of teachers feel they are unprepared or only somewhat prepared to work with language minority students (Barron & Menken, 2002, p.1). In the U.S. currently, 9.6 % of the student population are English Language Learners. Since the 1990-91 school year the population of language minority students in the U.S. has grown 105% while the general school population has grown only 12%. Immigrant students in the U.S. speak 400 different languages, though nationwide nearly 80% of English language learners speak Spanish as their native language (Kindler 2002, pp.1-6). Given the diversity of students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds, it is impossible for teachers to be familiar with every language and culture that they may be presented with during the course of their careers. For this reason, it is crucial that teachers learn to rely on families and communities as resources in bringing languages and cultures into schools and classrooms in an effort to understand and mitigate cultural discontinuities, address issues of unequal relationships of power, and to make academic subjects accessible to language minority students.
At the same time, however, educators must face the fact the majority of language minority students in the U.S. are Spanish speakers from Mexico and Central America. Most school personnel who work with culturally and linguistically diverse students need to pay particular attention to increasing their knowledge of Latino linguistic and cultural issues in education as well as different cultural ways of being within Latino groups.

2.4.3 Overview of Family Involvement Programs

Family involvement programs have existed for many years and have taken many different forms. Valdés (1996) distinguishes three categories of school programs that attempt to bring families into the academic process: 1) Parent Education, 2) Parent Involvement and 3) Parent Empowerment. Calabrese Barton et al. (2004) provide yet another lens, that of 4) “ecologies of parent engagement” to describe the non-traditional, informal parent involvement that they observed in a high-poverty urban school.

The first type of program, “Parent Education”, views “parents as receivers of information.” “Parent Education has focused on imparting instruction to parents on childrearing practices in general,” as well as topics such as “nutrition, discipline, health or activities that promote early learning.” Valdés derides these programs as attempting to fix what schools perceive as bad parenting (p. 193-94). Parent Education follows what Freire (1970) calls a “banking model” in which information is transmitted to passive receivers of knowledge. These parent education programs may have one of four objectives:

1. Giving parents guidelines, materials, and training to carry out school-like activities in the home.
2. Training parents in effective parenting.

3. Teaching parents about the culture of American schooling.


If one examines the underlying assumptions of the transmission model of training parents to improve their children’s academic performance we discern the following erroneous beliefs, all of which expose schools’ deficit approach to working with parents:

- Ethnic and linguistic minority families should engage in literacy at home but do not.

- Students who speak other languages at home are at a disadvantage.

- Home is the root cause of literacy problems (p. 7).

The second type of program, what Valdés (1996) classifies as “Parent Involvement,” “views parents’ interaction with schools, teachers, and their children’s schoolwork as essential to school success.” Involvement programs attract parents to school functions, ask parents to volunteer in classes, and train them to tutor children at home (p. 194).

The third type of program in Valdés’ analysis is “Parent Empowerment.” According to Valdés these programs organize parents to make changes in their communities. The programs are designed to help parents understand that, as opposed to what many school personnel often claim, their children’s futures and school success are dependent on a complex set of factors for which they, as parents, are not responsible. If such empowerment programs were successful, parents would no longer accept blame for being ‘uninvolved,’ ‘uninformed,’ or ‘undedicated’ parents (p. 195).
McCaleb (1997) might include a “Community of Learners” approach in “Parent Empowerment” category. The Community of Learners approach has the following underlying assumptions:

1. Teachers and learners are co-participants in the learning process.
2. New knowledge is built on old knowledge.
3. Parents and communities need to be seen as equal contributors of understanding and knowledge to the educative process.
4. Through analysis and critique, all people are capable of engaging in actions that may transform their present realities (p. 25,26).

The fourth lens for focusing on parent involvement is what Calabrese Barton et al (2004) called “Ecologies of Parent Engagement”. Parent engagement is an individual empowerment model rather than an organized group dynamic. By interacting with parents in a high-poverty urban school Calabrese Burton documented parent engagement as “a dynamic, interactive process in which parents draw on multiple experiences and resources to define their interactions with schools and among school actors” (p. 3). Parental engagement includes parental presence which they claim has been an overlooked facet of parent involvement research. They document parents in high-poverty urban schools who became “present, observant, and willing to intervene in their children’s classrooms.” Parents in this view are agents who draw on their own strength and vision to create non-traditional and informal spaces for themselves and become a part of the school’s social fabric, influencing the school on behalf of their children. Parents can author their own space rather than only allowing the school to position them in pre-conceived structures such as PTA or home-tutor.
2.4.4 Barriers to Involvement by Language Minority Families

Since schools often perceive language minority parents as ‘uninvolved’ in their children’s education, they implement a variety of strategies to bring parents into the process of schooling their children, often with poor results (Valdés, 1996). So, many researchers have identified obstacles to school involvement by language minority families. These impediments can be grouped as follows:

- Schools’ negative attitudes toward parents
- Parents’ negative attitudes toward school
- Language barriers
- Logistical/material problems
- Differences in levels of educational attainment between parents and school personnel
- Parents’ lack of knowledge of how to participate
- Parent’s perception of the different roles that schools and parents should play in children’s education


Researchers have looked into programs that have been successful in including language minority families in the formal education of their children. Three themes emerge in terms of what educators need to do in order to truly collaborate with culturally and linguistically diverse families:
• Educators should reflect on their assumptions about language minority families.
• Educators should give up deficit approaches to school-family collaboration.
• Educators should know and respect parents’ perspectives.


2.4.5 Exemplary Programs in School-Family-Community Collaborations

The National Parent-Teachers Association (PTA) (2001-05) cites evidence from the literature on parent involvement that

Schools with strong parent involvement programs experience profound benefits for students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Research shows that when parents are involved in students' education, those students generally have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and more consistently completed homework.

Parent involvement programs that involve parents as partners have been more likely to see parents implement successful strategies with their children. For children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds successful family involvement programs “bridge the gap between the culture at home and the learning institution” (Ada & Campoy, 1998) Successful parent collaboration projects can lead the way in helping schools to understand how to integrate parents into the social fabric of the school. Some examples follow:
Family Literacy and Family Math are two nation-wide programs of parent education that many schools have adopted:

2.4.5.1 Family Literacy

Because of the increased academic achievement gain by parent involvement, many schools in economically disadvantaged communities have implemented formal family literacy programs. Holloway (2004) describes the common components of family literacy programs which have demonstrated significant advantages for children whose parents and caregivers have participated:

- Basic skills education for adult family members to help them learn skills for the workplace.

- Early childhood education for the children to bolster the skills they will need to succeed in school.

- Parent education that enables adult family members to discuss parenting practices, nutrition and the importance of literacy learning for their children.

- Time for the adults and children to participate together in literacy activities that they can also do at home.

- Parents learn interactive literacy activities to help support their children’s learning. (p. 89)
2.4.5.2 *Family Math*

Family math is an extension of family literacy programs. Lawrence Hall of Science’s well-known Family Math creates a space where “adults and children in a family enjoy doing mathematics together.” The four- to six-week series of classes focus on problem solving, hands-on activities that include math topics by grade levels and is available in Spanish. “Research on Family Math indicates that parents who attend Family Math nights tend to become and stay more involved in their child’s school…” Children benefit significantly from their parents’ involvement; they appreciate the value of math more because their parents do and they have more chances to practice math (Hartog & Brosnan, 1994)

Family Literacy and Family Math are promising practices that many schools rely on in order to meet the ELL children’s academic needs. Other school-family programs focus on curriculum night, science education, and student behavior. All these programs report positive influences on student achievement. These family education programs address cultural and linguistic diversity in order to welcome all families.

The following are examples of specific successful family involvement programs that have been implemented in schools and documented in the literature:

2.4.5.3 *“Family Test Preparation”*

Lam (2004) reports on a family test preparation workshops for low-income parents, including language minority families. Lam provided two sessions during the year--one for math and one for language arts. The family test preparation workshops explained test forms and types of questions to be expected. Families completed practice
tests with sample questions, practiced test-taking strategies and how to check students’
writing against a rubric. Lam reports increased test scores and improved parent-teacher
communication regarding specific academic goals.

2.4.5.4 “The Mexican Folkdance Project”

Nancy Jean Smith (2001) in her article “Schools and Families: What is
Transformative Collaboration?” describes the yearlong Mexican folkdance project she
organized with the families of her Mexican-origin kindergarten students. Moving beyond
a superficial celebration of colorful exotic customs, Smith incorporated the project into
lessons of geography, reading and music. The families in Smith’s class were involved in
all facets of the project from planning, fundraising, and teaching dance, to making
costumes and organizing presentations. Because folk dancing is a regular part of the
Mexican school curriculum in elementary school, participation in Smith’s project built on
the families’ prior knowledge and positive past experiences. Parents felt empowered and
began to take action to transform their role in other aspects of their children’s schooling
as well.

2.4.5.5 “The Brookline Teacher Researcher Seminar”

The important results of teacher research and reflection are highlighted by
Cynthia Ballenger’s (1999) documentation of her work with Haitian preschoolers.
Ballenger belonged to the Brookline Teacher Researcher Seminar, a group of teachers
who met regularly over several years to reflect on their classroom-based research. The
seminar gave Ballenger a forum to focus on the discontinuity her students experienced in
her approach to classroom discipline. Through dialog with Haitian coworkers and colleagues in the seminar, Ballenger was able to understand how Haitian adults firmly guide children to appropriate behavior and she used this understanding to improve her classroom interactions with students.

2.4.5.6 “El Instituto Familiar”

Carmen Zuniga and Sylvia Alatorre-Alva (1996) describe the “Instituto Familiar” in Southern California that a middle school implemented with Latino immigrant parents. 

_Institutos_ are common ways in Mexico for obtaining further education and training. The _Instituto Familiar_ grew out of meetings in which parents articulated their educational needs. Classes were organized to teach specific marketable skills requested by families such as fixing electrical appliances, sewing, home repair, cosmetology and computer skills. Qualified parents in the school community taught the courses. The program was successful because it capitalized on the community’s knowledge base and the networks of families that relied on one another for subsistence.

2.4.5.7 “Funds of Knowledge” Research

Luis Moll organized teachers to visit their students’ families in a Latino neighborhood in Tucson, Arizona. Taking an ethnographic research approach, the teachers discovered the “funds of knowledge” that the families possessed and how they exchanged that knowledge and skills with others in the community to support their families. Teachers incorporated the families’ knowledge into their classroom curricula in different ways. The teachers also recognized that getting to know their students’ community helped them
to better support their pupils’ academic progress. (Gonzalez et al., 1993).

2.4.5.7 “Rough Rock Arizona Community School”

Opened in September 1966, this Navajo community school bases its entire curriculum on the community’s language and culture. Community members participate in every aspect of teaching and learning and have integrated Navajo language and culture into all subject areas in all grades. Students become proficient in both mainstream U.S. and Navajo language and culture and their academic achievement has been impressive by any standard (McCarty, 2002).

As these exemplary programs demonstrate, school-parent-community collaboration can take many interesting and successful forms. Schools with large ELL populations have special challenges that can be overcome when teachers value their school communities as rich resources and act with them as allies. Since schools in the U.S. are part of a democratic system of government, language minority communities with teachers as allies and other border-crossers can also make political gains that benefit their children.

2.5 Critical Pedagogy and Teachers as Allies

Critical pedagogy is an approach to education which confronts the fact that society is organized around relationships of power that allow unequal access to resources and power to different groups. Through action and reflection, members of dominated groups can make changes in institutional structures, alter relationships of power and claim goods and services previously denied them. Based on the educational philosophy
of Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy has transformed social injustices through action and reflection on the part of oppressed groups (Freire, 1970). Within this framework, members of dominant groups may become allies to dominated groups of people through personally experiencing their lives and then acting as a resource in their struggles. In the case of immigrant linguistic and cultural minorities, mainstream allies may serve as guides to maneuvering in the new culture. Middle class teachers in immigrant communities have an important responsibility in this respect: supporting their students and their families in their struggles and resisting the reproduction of the society’s oppressive structures.

2.5.1 Becoming Allies: How Teachers Can Counter Social Reproduction

Class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and language make a difference at school. The National Center for Education Statistics (2003), for example, reports that there are achievement gaps between White students, who score more favorably on different measures, and African American and Latino students. While the test scored gap has closed somewhat since the early 1970’s, the disparity continues in terms of math, reading and drop out rates among other measures (Lee, J., 2002). Gaps in reading and math are also evident by income level, with students who are eligible for free lunch underscoring their more economically privileged counterparts by between twenty and thirty points on standardized tests. Zweig (2000) reports that “in 1992 two out of three high school graduates from the top quarter of the income distribution went on to a four year college while only one in five high school graduates from the lowest quarter did so” (pp. 44-45). The Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSN) (2001) reports
that Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered (GLBT) youth disproportionately miss school or drop out compared to their heterosexual counterparts because of higher rates of victimization by harassment, verbal abuse, and physical attacks at school.

The mainstream ideology of working hard in school and playing by the rules to get ahead, or meritocracy, does not actually hold true for most students. Sociologists have shown how schools reproduce divisions of labor in order to maintain capitalist profits and domination patterns. (Fine & Weiss, 2003, p. 10). MacLeod (1995) writes:

In the popular mind, school is the great equalizer: By providing a level playing field where the low and the mighty compete on an equal basis, schooling renders social inequality superfluous. Reproduction theorists, in contrast, show that schools actually reinforce social inequality while pretending to do the opposite (p. 11).

The concept of social reproduction explains how, despite generations of efforts at schooling, students from working class communities, students of color and others continue to lag behind their privileged counterparts in different measures of school achievement.

While nearly 30% of K-12 students in the U.S. are people of color, currently more than 85% of U.S. teachers are white and 92% of preservice teachers are white. (Chisolm, 1994, p. 3; Lewis, 1999). Teachers come predominantly from the White middle class, and from the heterosexual majority. This means that in order to address the unequal outcomes and experiences of oppressed groups, educators, particularly middle class, White, heterosexual, monolingual English speaking teachers, must address the inequalities.
Coming from the advantaged groups, middle class White teachers, as an example, often are blind to the inequities around them. Sociologist Beverly Tatum (1997) writes that “because they represent the societal norm, Whites can easily reach adulthood without thinking much about their racial group” (p. 93). She also explains that “there is a lot of silence about race in White communities, and as a consequence Whites tend to think of racial identity as something that other people have, not something that is salient for them” (p. 94). The same could be said for members of other privileged groups.

Considering this example of lack of awareness, how is it possible for people of dominant groups to provide educational services to students from dominated communities? Can an monolingual English speaker be a guidance counselor for a limited English proficient child? Can a heterosexual male teach sex education to gay youth? Can an older, White middle class woman provide school leadership in a working class African American community? Because all of the above situations take place in schools every day, it is not a question of whether it can or cannot happen. The question is, What is the best way for school personnel from dominant groups to work with children from dominated communities and how can they be prepared to meet that challenge?

2.5.2 Allies and Solidarity

The late Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, developed an educational philosophy based on his experiences working with unschooled peasant farmers in Brazil, Chile and other economically impoverished regions of the world. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) he writes about the leaders of his revolutionary literacy programs:
Usually this leadership group is made up of men and women who in one way or another have belonged to the social strata of the dominators. At a certain point in their existential experience, under certain historical conditions, these leaders renounce the class to which they belong and join the oppressed, in an act of true solidarity…..it represents (when authentic) an act of love and true commitment (p. 144).

Similarly, Beverly Tatum (1997) writes about “…Whites who have resisted the role of oppressor and who have been allies to people of color.” These White allies “spoke up…worked for social change…and resisted racism…” (p.108). The GLBT community, for example, has made advances toward wider acceptance thanks to their allies in the form of Parents, Friends and Families of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG).

Immigrant students find support and encouragement from teachers who have visited their country of origin or learned their language. Calabrese Barton et al (2004) write of teachers in high-poverty urban schools who invited parents into the school space which led parents to author their own non-traditional informal participation in the school’s social fabric. These examples of commitment by people of dominant groups point the way for teachers who want to properly address the needs of students from marginalized groups.

Dominant societal structures do not make this course of action easy for teachers. Henry Giroux (1988) in his book “Teachers as Intellectuals” writes about social reproduction and how the dominant structures inhibit teacher empowerment in order to maintain and reproduce current inequities. He writes that approaches to school reform “…display little confidence in the ability of public school teachers to provide intellectual
and moral leadership for our nation’s youth.” Teachers are “…the object of educational
reforms that reduce them to the status of high-level technicians carrying out dictates and
objectives decided by experts far removed from the everyday realities of classroom life”
(p. 121).

While acknowledging social reproduction as a valuable theory, Giroux also writes
about the need to examine that theory in terms of the possibility for change:

This means regarding schools as democratic sites dedicated to forms of self and
social empowerment….Instead of defining schools as extensions of the workplace
or as front-line institutions in the battle of international markets and foreign
competitions, schools as democratic public spheres are constructed around forms
of critical inquiry that dignify meaningful dialogue and human agency (p. xxxii).

2.5.3 Community Contact

In order for people from privileged groups to become allies with dominated
communities, many educational theorists acknowledge the importance of experiencing
the reality of the “Other”. Tatum writes that White allies gain “awareness of racism and
White privilege as a result of personal encounters in which the social significance of race
is made visible”. This consciousness-raising may begin through a close friendship or
romantic relationship (p. 96). Shor (1987) recommends that teachers learn about the
communities and students they teach using ethnographic methods. Peace Corps
volunteers and international exchange students certainly learn about other cultures
through their immersion experiences. By learning the reality of the ‘Other’, potential
allies can more easily see the oppressive situation about which they may have previously been unaware.

Nancy Jean Smith of California State University, Stanislaus, for instance, founded and coordinated the Seminar on Transformative Literacy in Oaxaca, Mexico. For twelve years, this summer program provided a community experience for U.S. educators which combined community investigation and dialogue to raise teachers’ awareness of the reality of Mexican children and their schools. Most teachers came from California and worked in schools with large populations of Mexican and Chicano students. By living with families in a rural Mexican community, working in local classrooms and participating in community celebrations, they moved closer to being the allies that their Mexican students need.

In my own work with teachers of English language learners at McDaniel College, participants in the summer program in English Learner Educational Services worked with immigrant students in classrooms and made extended visits to their homes. They got to know families and also visit community service agencies in order to better understand the reality of one immigrant neighborhood in Maryland. Through dialogue and study of scholarly literature, they came to conclusions regarding their teaching. Participants in the program developed projects in solidarity with their host families that supported the host children’s education.

2.5.4 Praxis

The idea of projects and study of theory relates to Freire’s idea of praxis. Praxis is action in the world and reflection on that action. It is a cycle of theory informing practice, and practice shaping theory. Social action against oppressive societal structures
springs from an awareness of oppressive conditions. Community action is a political step to make real change in oppressive structures. Bob Moses’ Algebra Project, for example, demonstrates how community activism raises people’s awareness of poor math education for African American children as a civil rights issue. From this perspective, the students and parents see a link between math and racism and so force schools to reform their programs. (Cass, 2002).

Allies of oppressed people stand in solidarity with the community and support their actions. For example, a straight ally might become the sponsor of a high school gay-straight alliance. A monolingual school principal might set up a bilingual program. These actions come from investigation in the community, dialogue and reflection. Through more political awareness of oppressive situations, teachers as allies come to stand in solidarity with oppressed students and attempt to resist unequal relationships of power. By involving students in activities to change their social environments, they learn about power in a democratic society.

In 1996 I was a bilingual middle school teacher in a predominantly Hispanic community in Stockton, California. My students and I organized to translate the morning announcements into Spanish and to read them to the whole school. The translations became an important part of our curriculum in the Spanish literacy class for heritage and native speakers who had never learned to read the language. This project resulted from the complaint that many students did not understand the announcements in English and were not aware of activities and opportunities available to them and their families. A small group of teachers attempted to stop our Spanish announcements, but students organized a petition drive and were able to save the project.
2.5.5 Education for Democracy

In my role as a teacher educator in the field of TESOL, I have felt that most of the students in my classes arrive because the state has required it of them in order to transmit the English language to immigrant students. Rather than focus solely on language instructional techniques, I prefer to educate teachers to understand the many different educational needs of immigrant communities and to come to their own conclusions regarding instruction. Giroux (1988) writes that “…teacher education programs are designed to create intellectuals who operate in the interests of the state, whose social function is primarily to sustain and legitimate the status quo” (p. 160). When viewing ESOL in Maryland, his statement comes close to the truth. People expect immigrants simply to learn English. The children have many other needs, however, that relate to learning not just the language, but the core curriculum; to adjusting to a new life in a new country; to facing discrimination due to race, language and nationality; to economic struggles; to maintaining their native language and culture with pride while learning English and acquiring the cultural capital necessary for success in the United States. ESOL teachers need to be allies to the community and as Valdés (1996) suggests, accompany the families in their journey.

In order for teacher allies to support their students, they need to engage in a kind of radical democracy where they empower students and their families to make change in schools and systems which do not always meet their needs. Giroux writes that teachers need to see themselves as intellectuals, not technocrats. They need to examine their idea of the function of schools: “…Educators need to define schools as public spheres where
the dynamics of popular engagement and democratic politics can be cultivated as part of the struggle for a radical democratic state.” (p.173). They need to link the political struggle within the schools to broader societal issues:

…schooling would be analyzed for its potential to nourish civic literacy, citizen participation, and moral courage. A theory of critical citizenship for teacher education programs must begin to develop alternative roles for teachers as radical intellectuals both in and out of schools. (p. 173).

Taking these concepts of from critical pedagogy and teachers as intellectuals, the current research project entailed my working in a classroom with students for a year as a participant-observer, making home visits, and interviewing the stakeholders in the standardized testing of ELL students at a particular school. The information about testing that I learned through what Freire calls “reading the world”, combined with the knowledge I have acquired from “reading the word” (i.e. the above literature review) can be presented in a problem-posing format to the parents in the community. From there, I hoped that organization and action through democratic process could emerge.

### 2.6 Conclusion

Testing professionals have determined that tests created for and normed on monolingual, mainstream U.S. students are not valid for ELL students. They articulate this conclusion through the simple act of suggesting accommodations for them. If the tests were valid, then accommodations would be unnecessary. At this point, the overwhelming majority of suggested ELL accommodations cannot be presumed valid. There is little conclusive research that strongly favors a particular accommodation or set thereof beyond simplified language and possibly bilingual glossaries. In addition, the
fact that different states, school districts and schools select different accommodations for ELL students means that ELL students’ test scores in different locations are not equivalent and that the validity of standardized tests accommodations for ELL students is still a source of disagreement.

Testing professionals also warn against using a single test score to make important decisions regarding students’ futures. Nevertheless, standardized assessment of ELL students continues and students’ academic lives are undermined not only by single, invalid test scores but also through washback or curricular impact from the testing programs themselves. Politicians, school district bureaucrats, and teachers have yet to find a way to fairly and accurately assess the knowledge of ELL students. Perhaps ELL parents should be aware of this and weigh their options.

These conclusions regarding standardized testing of ELL students build on the literature from testing, parent involvement, ELL education and critical pedagogy. By describing the total context of testing for particular ELL students at a particular school, a teacher-ally can offer information, consciousness-raising and support for a grass-roots parent engagement strategy in which ELL parents might reflect critically on their children’s testing program and consider ways that they can use their power and the democratic process to change what is a patently unfair situation for their children.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

“Why should we be content to understand the world instead of trying to change it?”


3.1 Introduction

I have used a critical ethnographic approach to describe how large-scale standardized tests were situated in the lives of English language learner students in a Salvadoran immigrant community in the Washington, D.C. area. The study intended to analyze how power relationships played out for seven particular Salvadoran students in the classroom where I had been hired to work as a teacher of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The study included a praxis phase in which a community-based project was develop in collaboration with the parents of ELL students who can be marginalized by inappropriate use of standardized assessments.

This study assumes that research should support efforts at creating a more just society. It assumes that certain groups in society have privilege over others and that naming oppression can help to transform it. It is understood that in our democratic society, informed, organized and active citizens create a better society. It is a problem for students, their parents, and schools when educational futures are determined by testing done in a language in which the children are not proficient. Parents should be aware of the testing programs in which their children participate and understand the consequences of this testing. They should understand their rights and have the opportunity and the support to know and to exercise their options.
3.2 Critical Ethnography

Thomas (1993) concisely states that “conventional ethnography describes what is”, whereas “critical ethnography asks what could be” (p. 5). A critical ethnography attempts to uncover unequal relationships of power, name them and make changes that will make a difference for people who are marginalized by those relationships. Thomas quotes Schroyer (1975) when he describes the assumptions that guide critical researchers:

Constraints that give some groups or individuals unfair advantage to the disadvantage of others, or social elements that automatically exclude some people from full participation in (and benefits of) the resources commonly available to those more privileged (e.g. health care, education, or employment) are considered unnecessary (p. 9).

Carspecken (1996) repeats Kinchloe and McLaren’s description of the basic assumptions of critical ethnography found in their 1994 book, *You Can’t Get To The Yellow Brick Road From Here*:

- that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations which are socially and historically constituted;

- that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription;

- that the relationship between concept and object and signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often
mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption;

- that language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness);

- that certain groups in any society are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression which characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary or inevitable;

- that oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g. class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them;

- that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race and gender oppression. (p. 4)

Because of this last assumption, critical research goes beyond traditional practices and includes action that addresses the identified social injustice. Thomas writes that action “… may range from modest rethinking of comfortable thoughts to more direct
engagement that includes political activism” (p. 17). Kincheloe (1995) dismisses uncritical action research in education because it encourages “a cookbook style of technical thinking, characterized by recipe-following teachers…Such thinking does not allow for complex reconceptualizations of knowledge and as a result fails to understand the ambiguities and the ideological structures of the classroom” (p. 73).

While critical ethnography is a qualitative approach to research, it does not reject quantitative approaches and may build upon them. Thomas states that “critical ethnography is grounded empirically in explicit prior evidence of a variety of debilitating social conditions that provide the departure point for research” (p. 33). Social problems documented through quantitative research methods may call critical researchers to describe how some groups become more disadvantaged than others and seek to work with communities to take action to change the situation. Writing on the history and politics of critical qualitative research, McLaren and Giarelli (1995) argue that “critical theory is, at its center, an effort to join empirical investigation, the task of interpretation, and a critique of this reality. Its purpose is to reassert the basic aim of the Enlightenment ideal of inquiry; to improve human existence by viewing knowledge for its emancipatory or repressive potential” (p. 2).

3.3 Critical Ethnography of High-Stakes Testing

Templer (2004) calls for a critical ethnography of high-stakes testing and points out the lack of ‘thick’ description of the realities of such testing in specific places. He cites Pavlau’s (2003) call for studies of parents’ and students’ rights as major stakeholders in the testing of second language learners. In addition, the effect that testing
has on schools and curriculum, known as “washback”, can and should be documented through an ethnographic approach. The critical perspective would determine who benefits and who loses from the assessment of ELL students and organize those who are marginalized by the process to name the problem and to take some sort of democratic action to improve their situation. Fetterman (1993b) points out that ethnography has a long history of creating changes in public policy. As such, a critical ethnographic approach to standardized testing of ELL students may prove to be a powerful tool for improving education for that group of children.

This research will keep to a critical, qualitative approach following Carspecken (1996). Carspecken describes critical qualitative research as taking place in five stages after forming “general, flexible” research questions (p. 41). While I intend to focus on standardized testing of ELL students, I kept in mind what Thomas (1993) writes:

All ethnography possesses the potential for ad hoc restructuring of the initial topic. Critical ethnography is especially susceptible to the need for flexibility, because the questions that are most interesting may not be revealed until considerable background data emerges (p. 21).

Fetterman (1993a) lists the fundamental techniques of ethnography in educational research which I intend to use during an initial data collection stage:

Key elements of this approach involve conducting fieldwork and maintaining a cultural perspective. Concepts that guide this effort involve maintaining a holistic and contextual perspective, eliciting the emic or insider’s perspective about their reality, and adopting a nonjudgmental attitude. Additional ethnographic tools include key informant interviewing; informal, semi-structured interviewing; and
triangulation. These methods and concepts, traditionally used to understand sociocultural systems, are applied to educational evaluation in an attempt to assess more accurately the relative merits of a given education approach, setting or system (p. 4).

This is what Carspecken (1997) refers to as Stage One, in which critical ethnographers “build up a set of notes based on journaling and observations and conversations” (p. 41).

Stage Two is an analysis phase in which the data from Stage One was analyzed to determine patterns, roles and power relations. In this stage, Carspecken explains that the researcher “takes conditions of action constructed by people on nondiscursive levels of awareness and reconstructs them linguistically” (p. 42). Freirian educators would call this phase ‘naming’ the world and may be brought out through and problem posing education (Freire, 1970).

Stage Three is when I dialogue with the research participants and other community members using interviews and discussion groups. “Stage three generates data with people rather than records information about them” (p. 42). It is the phase of democratizing the process through dialog and action.

Carspecken refers to Stage Four as “Discovering system relations” in which I examined the connections between the children and the classroom and other social sites that bear some relation to it.

The final phase of critical qualitative research is Stage Five, “Using system relations to explain findings”. At this point I attempt to connect the previous research to “the broadest system features… having to do with the class, race, gender, and political
3.4 The Researcher, the Topic and the Setting

3.4.1 Researcher Background

As a researcher doing a qualitative study, my own background and biases are important to explain because they shape the form and outcomes of the study. Qualitative researchers recognize that a completely objective stance toward their work is impossible. Rather than hide biases, it is necessary to make the researcher’s assumptions and perspectives explicit in the study. As Thomas (1993) writes, “The penetration of values is unavoidable and the solution is not to try to expunge them from research, but rather to identify them and assess their impact” (p. 21).

I have been shaped by my life experiences, and these in turn have molded my interests and my points of view as a researcher. By sharing aspects of the story of how I came to choose the research topic and the study site, I believe I will shed light on my background, philosophy and biases.

3.4.1.1 The Cheating Scandal

I taught English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at Silver Spring International Middle School (SSIMS) during their infamous ‘cheating scandal’ on the sixth grade math CTBS. (See Sokolove, 2002 for an in-depth report on this incident.) Teachers had given some sixth graders the math test questions as practice prior to the actual examination. The math team leader said that she had given photocopies of the test to the teachers so that they could adjust the sequence of their math curriculum to ensure
the students’ an opportunity to learn what would be tested. Some of the teachers claim that they believed that the questions were samples and not the actual test questions. Whether it was intentional cheating or a lapse of test security, the principal, assistant principal, math department chair and four other math teachers were removed from the school for various roles in the incident. They were at work one Thursday morning in May and gone that afternoon. They were given one hour on Saturday to return to their classrooms and offices to collect their things. It was traumatic for us faculty and staff, not to mention the sixth graders whose math teachers were gone, apparently for good. We faculty and staff had to support the abandoned students while they processed their anger and hurt at losing their teachers without good-byes six weeks before the end of the school year. Following my bias toward critical pedagogy, I supported my advisory students, all sixth graders suffering from the loss, as they decided on how to turn their grief and outrage into action. They decided to make a large butcher paper banner that read “Forgive and Forget” and hung it in the hallway outside our classroom. They spread the word that their schoolmates should sign the poster to demonstrate their disagreement with the firings. Hundreds of SSIMS students signed it hoping it would somehow convince the superintendent to change his mind about the firings. We taped the paper banner outside the school and it was on local news, which was broadcasting live from the school parking lot, and was mentioned in opinion pieces in the Washington Post (Chenoweth, 2001; Fisher, 2001). Other students, following our lead made posters of support for the teachers a hung them with our banner on the school’s front wall.

In addition to student efforts, angry parents organized and demanded all the teachers and administrators be returned to their posts. They did not want substitute teachers for
their children no matter how highly qualified. I believe that in part because of those parents’ efforts, two teacher were reinstated. It was the most stressful time of my twenty-year career in education. I could not fathom why standardized testing had to take on such huge significance with such dire consequences. While the experience caused me to feel skepticism and fear over standardized tests, it also reminded me that informed and organized parents could make a difference.

Besides the testing debacle, I endured an additional disappointment with the school: it had turned out not to house an actual two-way immersion program as I had been told during my interview process ten months earlier. English language learner (ELL) students with whom I worked, nearly all of whom spoke Spanish or French, were not permitted to enroll in classes with the Spanish or French Immersion students. In a two-way immersion program ELL students and native English speakers learn both languages together, and the newcomer ELL students at SSIMS would certainly have benefited from one or two class periods in their native language. The original administration and counselors were not open to debate on enrolling ELL students into the program; it was a magnet program reserved for English-speaking students to learn a foreign language. Neither the interim principal nor the replacement principal were willing to make any major programmatic changes at the school, either. As a bilingual teacher and former bilingual program specialist, I was frustrated and not interested in teaching any more. I had been active in the unsuccessful political fight against Proposition 227 in California which attempted to ban bilingual education; as a bilingual program specialist in California, I had also struggled for three years with personnel in many different schools who resisted complying with programmatic requirements that
would have benefited ELL students. So in January 2002, I threw in the towel and left classroom teaching to pursue a PhD and to work in ELL research and teacher education.

I spent those first two years designing, developing and teaching in an ESOL certification program at McDaniel College. My perspectives on bilingualism were respected and supported in this tiny grant-funded project. I was given the opportunity to work creatively with prospective ESOL teachers. I called this Master’s level program “English Learner Educational Services” to stress the importance of comprehensive planning for second language learners rather than restrict preparation only to the teaching of English. Like Valdés, (2001) I felt that it was critical for our middle class, predominantly white female students recognize the political dimensions of their practice and to begin thinking of ESOL teaching in terms of becoming border-crossers in their school communities rather than as technocrats who had to implement a transmission model of education.

Inspired by Paulo Freire, Alma Flor Ada, Luis Moll, Guadalupe Valdés and Nancy Jean Smith, who look at immigrant communities’ knowledge as valuable resources, I arranged for McDaniel students to spend time in immigrant neighborhoods in addition to doing their academic readings. (As Freire (1970) would say, we read the world and read the word.) McDaniel students would visit ESOL classrooms to work with students and would later go home with the children and get to know their families. The parents or guardians were compensated through grant funds to be teacher-trainers, responsible for explaining their culture, immigration experiences, their perspectives on their children’s education and their hopes for the children’s future. The McDaniel students spent 15 hours during two weeks with the families-these were not brief visits-
and the families were expected to provide them a lunch as part of their duties as trainers. McDaniel students visited community agencies and had visits from social service workers to learn about community needs and available resources. Each teacher or pair of teachers then developed some action project in solidarity with the family. Some McDaniel students helped their host family’s children get library cards and learned how to get to the library to check out books. One student helped to expand a mom’s home-cooking business. Another McDaniel student helped her ELL student to get a community service job for high school credit. Another McDaniel student helped the mom to find and enroll in daytime ESOL classes. All of these projects developed from an in-depth awareness of the families’ needs and the teacher’s knowledge as a member of the dominant culture. However, no matter how much the projects benefited the families, it was the teachers who benefited the most. Many have told me and have demonstrated in their teaching and personal practices that the experiences changed their lives forever. This positive outcome, where critical pedagogy’s dialectic of action-reflection, or praxis, made a lasting difference for the people involved, solidified my commitment to the approach.

After two years at McDaniel, I spent six months in the odd world of academic assessment at the University of Maryland’s Center for the Study of Assessment Validity and Evaluation (C-SAVE). As an ELL specialist for psychometricians and project managers, I looked at the research behind the testing of English language learners, particularly testing accommodations, and added my expertise in ESOL and bilingual education to the mix. At C-SAVE I began to formulate a research project based on my participation the Taxonomy for Testing English Language Learners (TTELL) which
assigns different testing accommodations for different ELL students. I found the experience quite different from the community approach I was able to take at McDaniel College’s English Learner Educational Services program. Looking at standardized assessment from my point of view, my colleagues took what appeared to me to be a very scientific and technocratic approach to education because their focus was on validity of specific test items. They seemed to have only a vague awareness of the reality of low income immigrant families and seemed to have only passing concern over how standardized tests impacted real schools after they had been designed and piloted. I found myself considering Shohamy’s (2001) perspective: “Testers, I realized, were not concerned with how tests were being used after they had been constructed; for testers, the use of tests was irrelevant” (p. xii). I concluded that there was a need for an examination of the social impact of standardized testing in a real school within an immigrant community.

So, after a two and a half year hiatus from K-12 teaching, I decided to return to the classroom and document how large-scale standardized assessment was situated in the lives of specific ELL students in a specific community. I hoped to introduce standardized assessment to critical pedagogy. I would never have guessed when I left discouraged from SSIMS and the ‘cheating scandal’, that many months later I would joyfully return to the classroom, not only to teach ESOL again, but also to do research on standardized testing of ELL students.
3.4.2 Choosing the Research Site

In this section, I explain how I chose a school where I could teach ESOL and also conduct my dissertation research on the standardized assessment of ELL students. By describing the process of interviewing with four principals and selecting a school, I shed light on the school district in general as well as the wide range of attitudes and understandings that school administrators had with regard to ELL students in the school district where the research took place. In addition, since critical ethnography does not claim to be objective, the following account also displays my own biases which strongly impacted my decisions about my research, its site, as well as its conclusions.

Schools in Maryland are administered through a centralized bureaucracy organized at the county level. I chose to work in Parker County Public Schools* because it is close to my home, in need of ESOL teachers and quickly and efficiently offered me work. Parker County Public Schools had a 2004 enrollment of 137,285 students distributed among 205 schools. Roughly 78% were African American and 11% Hispanic. 27% of its schools were labeled “Identified for Improvement” according to criteria set by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. At the elementary level, 50% of students qualified for free and reduced meals and 7.8% were classified as English language learners. 51% of classes in 2004 were not taught by ‘highly qualified’ teachers according to NCLB. The per pupil expenditure was $8403.

In the spring of 2004, I went through the interview process with Parker County Public Schools (PCPS) and was offered a job for the upcoming school year. I was nervous during the interview process. I had not taught in a school for nearly three years.

* Names of people and places are pseudonyms.
I carried the phantom of the 2001 cheating scandal with me to the interview process even though I had not been involved. Because I had left Silver Spring International Middle School mid-year of 2002, I feared I would be suspected of being one of the infamous “Silver Spring Seven” who were let go in May of 2001. Although I did need to clarify that for one interviewer, thankfully it did not matter in the end. I was hired and given a much higher salary, better benefits and more job security than I had had when I worked at the college level.

Once hired, the county ESOL office gave me the names of four schools (Mason Elementary, Childers Elementary, Longwood Elementary and Marysburg Elementary*) and told me to arrange interviews with the principal of each of them. Because I am very experienced and well-trained in the field, I felt that I would in all likelihood be in the privileged position of choosing which of the four school faculties to join. I wanted first and foremost a school that would be a good work environment and in the back of my mind I wanted an appropriate setting for doing ethnographic research on standardized assessment of ELL students. I decided that I would look for a school with a large Spanish-speaking population, many ELL students, preferably as near home as possible and with an administration that was knowledgeable and supportive of bilingual education. That would be my ideal.

I decided that I would have one crucial question to ask each of the principals: What is your philosophy on ELL students’ use of primary language? Coming from a bilingual education background, I believe that ELL students need to develop oral proficiency and literacy in both English and their native language. In my experience in Maryland, there is great emphasis on teaching ESOL nearly to the exclusion of other
aspects of ELL educational programming (See Valdés, 2001). In fact, people refer to ELLs as “ESOL students” as if they only have one school subject. Although not a perfect label I believe that ELL is a more appropriate label than “ESOL student” if a label must be used. In my teacher education classes, I tell the ESOL teachers-in-training that ELLs are also science students, math students, art students, etc. (In this study I used the term “ESOL student” to refer specifically to students who are enrolled in the county’s ESOL program, “ELL” as a general term for anyone for whom English in not their native language and “LEP” or “Limited English Proficient” only when I use the federal government’s designation.) As a bilingual educator, I feel that ESOL classes are a piece of a total program, NOT the total program. The other critical components of education for ELL students are primary language instruction and primary language support, access to academic content through Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) and multicultural/anti-racist/critical pedagogy woven throughout instruction (See for example California State Department of Education, 1995; Freeman & Freeman, 1998; Skuttnab-Kangas, 2000; Ramirez, 2002; Banks, 1998). I thought by asking about primary language, I could roughly discern the level of support for ELL students and the degree of philosophical match between the school and me. As a researcher, I also saw the interview process as an introduction to how ELL education is conceptualized in the school district, as well as a way of learning about other county-wide issues.

I visited Mason Elementary first. I had been immediately impressed with the principal, an Anglo male near retirement age, because when I phoned the school he asked me to come for an interview that very afternoon. That gave me the impression that he was decisive and wanted to get moving right away. I discovered that he was concerned
because the school would be receiving a large number of ELL students for the first time in the fall. Prior to this upcoming school year, PCPS had bussed the neighborhood ELL students to an ESOL center at another school and so they had not been his responsibility before. They would be enrolling soon and he was not sure how he would handle them. He said that he was told to do a plug-in ESOL program, but that he would probably end up doing a pull-out program instead because it seemed to make more sense to him. (In a plug-in program the ESOL teachers works with ELL students in the mainstream classroom. In a pull-out program the ESOL teacher removes the ELL students from the class to work with them in a separate space.) I asked him the litmus question regarding his attitude toward primary language and he responded by asking me to explain the difference between ESOL and bilingual education. I was surprised at his lack of awareness, but respected his honest request for information. At one point in the interview he mentioned that there were a lot of students at the school that speak ‘Hispanic’. It shocked me to think that he did not know that Latinos speak Spanish and I hoped it was a slip of the tongue rather than evidence of a serious lack of awareness. Mason Elementary became my second choice for employment because I felt that I could be a good resource for the school and would be able to make a significant contribution. On the other hand, there was no way to predict over the long run what the principal would decide about the direction of the program for ELL students. Mason Elementary School was also the farthest away from home.

The second school I went to was Childers Elementary. It is a small K-6 school with one classroom at each grade level. Each grade level had a small number of ELL students. The African American female principal was very kind and polite, but seemed
to hold an emotional distance and interviewed me as she organized her office for summer cleaning. She left me with the impression that she wasn’t necessarily interested in hiring me but would accept whomever was sent there to teach ESOL. She said that I was very qualified and asked what my “real goal” was. I believed at the time that she felt I was over-qualified and had a hidden agenda. (I learned later that she was looking for an ESOL teacher with more elementary school experience and my experience had been mostly at the secondary level.) When I asked about her philosophy regarding ELL students’ primary language, she spoke about an after-school program where they were teaching English-speaking children how to speak Spanish. I interpreted this as not distinguishing between a foreign language program and a primary language program and a sign of lack of awareness. At one point this principal, like the principal at Mason Elementary, referred to the students’ language as “Hispanic”. She also said that she intended to have a pull-out ESOL program the same as in the past. This position would be my third choice, if I were to have a choice. I was attracted to the smallness of the school, but I did not think the principal was particularly supportive of ELL education.

The third school was Longwood Elementary. This was a very large elementary school with a very large Latino ELL population; it had the largest elementary ESOL program in Parker County. I interviewed with the assistant principal and the ESOL department chair. This school reminded me of urban schools where I have worked in the past: large, needy, disorganized—the ESOL chair came across as muddled and overwhelmed about upcoming programmatic changes that would require ESOL teachers to do plug-in in the morning and pull-out in the afternoon. When I asked my litmus question of the assistant principal, she said that they “didn’t mind too much” if ELL
students occasionally spoke to each other in Spanish, but that they were here to learn English. This was an ESOL program, not a bilingual program, she said. This school was my last choice. I had suffered through the debate and passage of Proposition 227 in California, the ballot initiative that directed school districts to dismantle their bilingual programs. I do not support total immersion in English. (Nor does the research on the education of language minority students, for that matter (Thomas & Collier, 1996; Ramirez (1992), Rolstead, Mahoney & Glass, 2005.) I particularly feel that one group of people has no right to allow or disallow another group’s use of their mother tongue. I knew that I would be a poor match for this school, and it became my last choice.

The final school, Marysburg Elementary, ended up as the school that I selected for my return to the teaching profession and for my dissertation project. The principal, a White woman, was bilingual and a former ESOL teacher. Before I could even ask The Question, she spoke clearly and directly: “You need to understand something up front. At this school we respect students’ primary language. We believe that it is an important part of their cognitive, academic and future professional development. We are currently investigating the possibility of opening up a two-way immersion program in the Kindergarten.” The principal said that at this school they did a plug-in ESOL program in the morning and a pull-out ESOL program in the afternoon. The school district was requiring this model for all schools this year but Marysburg Elementary had already been implementing it for a year. This became my obvious top choice due to the principal’s high level of awareness of ELL education. Later that afternoon the principal called me at home to offer me the position of 5th grade ESOL teacher. I was thrilled.
Through the interview process, I gained some important insights regarding the education of ELL students in the Parker County Public Schools. Mainly, there is an awareness gap in terms of what school administrators knew about ELL issues. Two of the four school administrators were unaware of the pull-out/plug-in model of ESOL instruction that was to be implemented during the coming school year. The same two principals used the word ‘Hispanic’ to refer to their students’ language, and I honestly found that shocking. They also did not know about bilingual education or primary language. The principal of Mason Elementary asked for an explanation of the difference between ESOL and bilingual education. The principal of Childers Elementary confused primary language instruction with foreign language instruction. I believe that these are basic concepts for understanding how to work with language minority students. On the other hand, the school administrators I interviewed with at Longwood and Marysburg Elementary Schools both seemed to understand the debate surrounding bilingual education and English immersion. Each had come to definitive, though opposing, conclusions. As a proponent of bilingual education looking for a good philosophical match with a new teaching site, I felt that by choosing Marysburg, I made the best choice among the four schools.

3.4.3 The Community

After having spent the previous three years in the predominantly middle class Anglo world of higher education in Maryland, I looked forward to returning to a Latino community. Although I am Anglo, I have come to feel more comfortable in bilingual-bicultural settings. As a high school student, I had spent time in El Salvador as an
exchange student and later I lived in Honduras as a Peace Corps volunteer. I had worked teaching ESOL and coordinating an adult education program in the Salvadoran community in Washington, DC and it was there that I had met my partner of eighteen years who is from El Salvador. Our son by adoption is Mexican-American and we have been pro-active in helping him to stay in touch with his cultural heritage, including enrolling him in a bilingual elementary school. My 10 years in California working with Mexican students as a bilingual teacher also made me feel like I was returning to my adopted ‘roots’ by accepting a job at Marysburg Elementary School.

Marysburg, Maryland is a community of low-rise apartment buildings and small 1940’s detached brick homes located in the inner Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C. Located at the intersection of two major roads, its dense population reveals itself in the heavy pedestrian traffic. Day laborers congregate at the convenience stores and at a nonprofit organization that offers legal, language, employment services primarily to the Spanish-speaking community in the area. Vendors set up on the streets selling juices and pupusas, the thick cheese and pork-stuffed tortillas, the national food of El Salvador. I had enjoyed going to Marysburg in my role as teacher-educator when I arranged home visits and community participation with ESOL teachers-in-training.

According to the 2000 census, Marysburg has a total population of just over 16,000 residents. 75% of the population live in housing structures with 3 or more units. Of the total population, 64 % are identified as “Hispanic or Latino”. An overall 57% of Marysburg’s residents are identified as “Other Hispanic or Latino” meaning not Mexican, Puerto Rican or Cuban. In all likelihood that figure represents overwhelmingly immigrants from El Salvador. 72% of the population of Marysburg report speaking a
language other than English at home; nearly 62% of the community’s population speak Spanish at home; 50% are Spanish speakers who speak English “less than very well” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Newspaper articles on the social issues in the community described several concerns: gang violence, pedestrian safety, immigration, health care, crime, housing, exploitation of day laborers and domestic workers, English instruction, and domestic violence.

3.4.4 The School

The 2004 Maryland Report Card shows that Marysburg Elementary School had 559 students. 79% of the students were Hispanic and 16% were African American. Asians were 3% of the population; Native American and non-Hispanic Whites each made up 1% or less of the student body. 100% of the students were classified as Title 1 eligible. 86% qualified for free or reduced lunch. 48% were classified as English language learners. 42.2% of classes were taught by teachers not considered ‘highly qualified’, meaning that they do not meet the state certification requirements of the federal government’s No Child Left Behind Act.

The 2005 Maryland School Report Card showed that Marysburg Elementary School’s population demonstrates segregation within Maryland based on ethnicity, language proficiency and income. Whereas only about 7% of students enrolled in Maryland schools are Hispanic and 12% of PCPS students are Hispanic, 83% of Marysburg Elementary students are Hispanic. While only about 5% of Maryland elementary school students are designated Limited English Proficient (LEP) and about 8% of the county elementary school students are so designated, 44% of Marysburg’s
students are classified LEP. Free and reduced meals (FARMS), as an indication of poverty, shows that Marysburg is also segregated by economics. 38% of elementary students statewide receive free or reduced meals and 54% of countywide elementary students fall into the FARMS category, but 89% of Marysburg’s students qualify for free or reduced meals (Table 3.1). (2005 Maryland School Report Card.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Hispanic</th>
<th>% LEP</th>
<th>% FARMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Grade Levels</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Schools</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marysburg Elementary School</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This type of segregation has been shown to be associated with low academic achievement in terms of test scores, among other indicators (Gándara, P., Rumberger, R., Maxwell-Jolly, J., & Callahan, R., 2003; Logan, J., Stowell, J., & Oakley, D. 2002; Orfield, G. 2001; Orfield, G., & Lee, C. 2005; Rumberger, R., & Willms, J.D., 1992;).

The results of the 2004 Maryland School Assessment (MSA) (Tables 3.2 and 3.3) showed that the ELL students at Marysburg Elementary School were among the lowest performing students in Maryland. Overall, Parker County was the second lowest performing school system in the state. Marysburg Elementary was one of the lowest performing in Parker County and the ELL students were the lowest performing in the school. Examining the MSA scores also show that the ELL students at the school perform
on the whole below the state and county average compared to other ELL students. The 2004 test results showed that nearly all the ELL students in Grades 3 through 6 scored at the basic level in reading and math. A startling 100% of 4th and 6th graders scored at the “Basic” level (below grade level) in math—not one was able to pass the math portion of the MSA. Reading scores showed that older children’s scores were increasingly more likely to fall into the Basic level—from 71% in Grade 3 to 81% in Grade 4 to approximately 95% in Grades 5 and 6. Statewide performance for Non LEP students, on the other hand, hovered around 30% in the Basic category (except 6th grade math which was approximately 50%). Clearly ELL students at Marysburg Elementary School had failed to demonstrate academic ability on the MSA exams, and this should be a cause for concern. The students in the proposed research study belonged to the 2004 fourth grade class, although at least two of them entered the school after the 2004 administration of the MSA test.
### Table 3.2  2003-04 MSA Results Grades 3 and 4

(A=Advanced;  P=Proficient;  B=Basic)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3 Reading</th>
<th></th>
<th>4 Reading</th>
<th></th>
<th>4 Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School LEP</td>
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<td>28.9</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Non LEP</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District LEP</td>
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<td>35.0</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Non LEP</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State LEP</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Non LEP</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>52.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3.3  2003-04 MSA Results Grades 4 and 5

(A=Advanced;  P=Proficient;  B=Basic)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5 Reading</th>
<th></th>
<th>6 Reading</th>
<th></th>
<th>6 Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School LEP</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Non LEP</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District LEP</td>
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<td>15.3</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Non LEP</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State LEP</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Non LEP</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.5 The Classroom

I was assigned to Marysburg’s fifth grade team to work as the ESOL teacher. During the interview, the principal had explained that there were openings at different grade levels and inquired as to my preference. While I was willing to go where I was needed, I thought that an upper grade would be logical since I had taught several years at the middle school level. She mentioned that the fifth grade was an especially strong team and there was an opening for an ESOL teacher.

The fifth grade has three classrooms. The ELL students who are identified as “ESOL Level 1” and “ESOL Level 2” (Beginning and Intermediate proficiency according to the IPT test) were concentrated in one class along with other students identified by the school as low-performing. This was the group to which I was assigned to work on a daily basis. I would work with small groups in the morning in the language arts classroom supporting the Houghton-Mifflin curriculum that the classroom teacher would implement. In the afternoon I would pull students from their regular classroom to teach ESOL using the required Harcourt curriculum, “Moving Into English”.

There were sixteen students in the class—five girls and eleven boys. Thirteen of the sixteen students were identified as English language learners. Students came from a variety of countries: four U.S.-born (three of these four had Salvadoran immigrant parents), two from Haiti, seven from El Salvador, one from Sierra Leone, one from the Dominican Republic, and one from Uruguay. Of the sixteen students, six had diagnosed special education needs from ADHD to speech-language problems to mental retardation.
3.4.6 The Tests

ELL students in this fifth grade classroom took three different standardized tests during the school year: the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) and MSA Benchmarks, the IDEA Proficiency Test (IPT), and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI).

3.4.6.1 The Maryland School Assessment

The MSA includes multiple choice and constructed response items intended to measure “how well students learned the reading and math skills in the voluntary state curriculum.” The tests take approximately ninety minutes per day for four days in March. (Maryland State Department of Education, 2003). Developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill Company, the test is the TerraNova Survey with customized items designed specifically to test Maryland content standards (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 2003). In addition to the MSA, students in the research site took MSA Benchmark tests three times a year. Benchmark tests are administered identically to the MSA and measure how well students are progressing on the material tested in the MSA. MSA Benchmarks are considered by many to be practice for the MSA.

Scores on the MSA are reported to parents so they can compare their children’s achievement to that of other children in the state and county. Scores are also used for accountability purposes for schools and school systems that receive federal funding under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The state, through its federally approved criteria, considers schools to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) when predetermined, annually increasing percentages of students score at grade level or above on the MSA. The final target is to have 100% of student subgroups score in the “Proficient” range by the 2013-14 school year. The subgroups who must make AYP are American
Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, African American, White, Hispanic, Economically Disadvantaged, Limited English Proficient and Special Education. In addition, attendance, graduation rates and test participation levels must also meet the federally approved required levels for a school to meet AYP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% Proficient in Reading</th>
<th>% Proficient in Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>64.7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) (2003) states that “Maryland will bestow special recognition or monetary awards on schools and school systems that close achievement gaps among subgroups or that exceed AYP in reading or mathematics for at least two consecutive years” (p. 6).

Those that do not meet AYP face progressively greater consequences for their failure. The first stage is the “School Improvement” phase which in the first year requires the school to make and follow an improvement plan and allows parents to transfer their children to a higher performing school. If the school fails to meet AYP the second year the school must provide tutoring to low-income students.

The “Corrective Action” phase happens after a school’s failure to reach AYP after two years in School Improvement status. “…[C]hanges could include replacing school staff, adopting a new curriculum, decreasing school-level management authority, and extending the school day or year.” (MSDE, 2003).

Schools move into “Restructuring” Status if they do not make AYP after one year of Corrective Action. The MSDE website states that “restructuring involves at least one of the following:

- Replacing all or most school staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP.
- Contracting with a management company to operate the school.
- Reopening the school as a public charter school.
- Other majoring restructuring actions that involve significant changes to staffing and governance.

(Maryland State Department of Education, 2003)
NCLB, however, actually makes it impossible for ELL students to achieve proficient levels because the law defines them as low-scoring. Once they are no longer low-scoring, then they are no longer ELLs: “The term ‘limited English proficient…means and individual…whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual…the ability to meet the State’s proficient level of achievement on State assessments…” (NCLB, Title IX, General Provisions, Part A Definitions, Section 9101(25)). So a school with an ELL subgroup (five students in testing grades) will inevitably miss AYP at some point.

3.4.6.2 The Scholastic Reading Inventory

A second standardized test that all students take at the research site is the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). This is a reading comprehension test which gives testers progressively harder reading passages from different trade books. After reading each passage, students answer one multiple choice question with four response choices. There are between 40 and 70 questions depending on the test’s intended grade level.

Students are assigned a “Lexile Score” based on the number of correct responses. Scholastic, Inc. has also assigned a Lexile scores to over 1,200 different trade books so that teachers and parents can match students to books according to a child’s reading ability. A text’s lexile is a difficulty rating based on the length of its sentences and word frequency. Lexile scores range from 0 (Pre-primer) to 1500 (above 12th grade). For example, Clifford and The Big Storm has a lexile rating of 100 which corresponds to first grade; Sarah Plain and Tall has a rating of 520 or third grade; Dear Mr. Henshaw is rated 990 or sixth/seventh grade (Scholastic, Inc., 1999). Students at the research site
take the SRI two times per year. At the site, the SRI score determines into which reading
group a child is to be placed within the language arts class.

3.4.6.3 The IDEA Proficiency Test

A third standardized test, the IDEA Proficiency Test (IPT) is a
“…comprehensive assessment for the initial identification and redesignation of Limited
English Proficient (LEP) students.” The test makers state that the IPT “…measures the
competencies necessary for language minority students to function successfully in the
mainstream classroom.” (Amori, Dalton, & Tighe, 2001, p. 3). The test battery has three
sections: speaking/listening, reading and writing. The test rates students as Non English
Proficient, Limited English Proficient or Fluent English Proficient. At the research site,
teachers look up IPT results from each section on a complex scoring guide (Appendix D)
which assigns an English proficiency level for each student: 1 for Beginning, 2 for
Intermediate and 3 for Advanced. Beyond Advanced is “Independent” or fluent English
proficient. These proficiency levels determine the ESOL class into which the ELL
student will be placed or whether students will no longer be required to receive ESOL
classes. Students take the IPT on entering the school system and then yearly toward the
end of the school until they reach the Independent level.

3.5 Delimitations/Limitations of the Study

The students and parents who participated in the initial stages of the study were
selected from the fifth grade class described above following a typical case sampling
model. The students were identified as English language learners according to the school
district’s criteria. They were all from the same country, in order to examine diversity
within that country. In order to focus solely on ELL issues, I selected participants with no identified special education needs. Because of these criterion, the subset of eligible participants from the class of 16 was reduced to seven boys, five of whom came from El Salvador and two U.S. born of Salvadoran immigrant parents. The students had been in the U.S. varying lengths of time and their parents were willing to collaborate with the study.

Data collection took place during one school year: September 2004 to June 2005. Playing dual roles of teacher and researcher in addition to ethnic and linguistic differences between the participants and me are important themes to address in this research. Although I am not Latino, my prior experiences in the Latino communities in El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Maryland, California and Washington, D.C. have enabled me to adequately interact with the participants in this research. My experience meeting Spanish-speaking parents for the first time is usually to see a look of surprise when they hear me speak their language. That gives me the opportunity to explain that I have lived in Central America, have visited Mexico and have been a teacher of Spanish-speaking students for many years. While a Latin American, native Spanish speaker would probably have had a different experience working with the same participants, my background working in bilingual education programs allowed me to interview the parents and children well enough on the topic of education to understand their perspectives. While I there were some linguistic and/or cultural misunderstandings, I believe they were be minimal. Consultations with Salvadoran informants also helped me to clarify issues. I believe that my ethnicity did not prevent me from working, as Freire (1970) would say “in solidarity” with people in Marysburg community.
In addition, as a new school district employee I was expected to implement policies and procedures as directed. Engaging in critical ethnography with immigrant families whose children are in the school district where I was an employee caused conflicts, but I maintained integrity in all aspects of data collection and interpretation.

3.6 Research Design and Procedures

This study was intended as a participatory critical ethnography. I was involved in the school both as an ESOL teacher and as a researcher. I participated with ELL parents as they explained their reality to me and as we expanded the ways ELL parents have traditionally participated in the school’s standardized testing program. As a school employee I had access to school staff and administration for interviews and participant-observation. All involved were aware of this research project. As part of a dissertation, the project proceeded with committee oversight and approval by the UMBC Institutional Review Board (IRB) and happened with permission of the school principal.

Procedures for this research included literature review on critical ethnography/critical pedagogy, the context of standardized assessment of ELL students including ELL accommodations, parent involvement in the education of ELL students, cultural discontinuities in education, educational programs for ELL students and teachers as allies to marginalized communities (See Chapter 2).

Field notes based on participant-observations, along with semi-structured interviews with parents (including some retrospective questioning), school personnel and children made up the bulk of data collection. I visited parents at home and interviewed them in terms of their immigration experiences, their schooling in El Salvador with
particular emphasis on their experiences with testing and parent involvement. I also explored how they perceive education and standardized testing at their children’s local school. I observed the children during testing whenever possible and interviewed them and their teachers regarding their ongoing experiences with testing and practice tests. As a teacher at the school, I had access to the overall school environment and got a detailed, insider’s understanding of the context of the children’s testing experiences and the effect of the standardized testing program on curriculum and instruction (or washback) at the school. I also interviewed teachers, the principal, testing coordinator and ESOL coordinators in order to get an insider’s view of the school from the staff perspective. From the information I gathered (including primary documents where possible such as memos, schedules, letters to parents, student work, etc.), I intended to help organize parents to address cultural/informational gap between the families and the school and to provide opportunities for the parents and students to learn about their options and exercise their rights as decision-makers in their standardized testing program. I also decided to document my own teaching practices and in order to find ways to include empowering ESOL pedagogy within the confines of the school’s curriculum expectations.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and reviewed. The data from observations, meetings, field notes, primary documents and interviews were analyzed for salient themes. I included brief portraits and compelling quotations from participants in order to present a rich depiction of the participants’ view of their own reality. I worked with the parents and the school to develop an parent involvement model of testing orientation which could be adapted and used by others. I also hoped to provide other ELL parents,
administrators and policy makers with an understanding of the testing of ELL students and what changes should happen to create a more equitable situation for the ELL students.

3.6.1 Interview Questions

Interviews were an important part of the data collection process. I interviewed the seven boys and their parents as well as school personnel. Although I have listed specific questions, my intent was not to stick rigidly to a protocol, but to stimulate conversation around schooling and specifically the testing of ELL students. Interview questions are listed in Appendix A.

3.6.2 Research Schedule

Participant observations and interviews happened mainly during the 2004-2005 school year and took place as I wrote the literature review. I defended the dissertation proposal in late May 2005 while data collection was in process. During summer vacation (mid-June through mid-August 2005) I analyzed the data and identified salient themes related to the testing of ELL students. I developed a presentation of findings to use with ELL parent groups. In the November of 2005 I began to present the findings as part of an ELL parent involvement program through the ESOL parent liaison program in the school district (See Chapter 7). I wrote a final draft of the dissertation and plan to defend it during the Spring 2006 semester. The research schedule can be found in Appendix B.
3.7 Conclusion

For me, this dissertation project was a pulling together of my interests, concerns, values and experiences. While I have been interested in languages and cultures and education, I have also been concerned about the politics of schooling for children of oppressed groups, particularly Latino immigrant communities. I value democracy, truth and fairness. My experience after many years of working as a teacher, instructional specialist, teacher educator, and program coordinator in the field of bilingual and ESOL education has led me to choose to focus my time and energy on creating grass-roots change in the instruction and assessment of English language learners in a Maryland community. While I believe that educational testing has a necessary function in the schooling of all children, their assessment must be valid, useful and remain at a sensible level of importance in a student’s total academic life. Taking a critical ethnographic approach to a project required that I remain flexible and not pre-determine an outcome.

I would like to think that I took the role of what critical theorists call a ‘border crosser,’ someone who understands intimately the reality of two different groups. As a member of the dominant group I wanted to act as an ally and a resource to the ELL parents whose children are subjected to a testing program in which their educational futures are determined by tests administered in a language they do not fully understand. By documenting the washback from the testing program and by describing some of the learning activities I did with students, I also hoped to provide information to the education community about the realities of a high-poverty, high ELL Hispanic school during NCLB. By learning how the parents perceived testing, I was also able to address assumptions that they brought from their own experiences with testing as students in El
Salvador. By explaining how testing is done at their children’s school, the consequences and options, ELL parents had the necessary background to make informed decisions regarding their children’s testing. By accessing the democratic processes open to them, parents may be able to create positive change in their children’s academic lives and enlighten mainstream educators in the process.
CHAPTER 4: Where Edges Meet

4.1 Introduction

In an effort to understand how standardized testing affected particular students at a particular school, I returned to the classroom as a teacher of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for the 2004-05 school year. I accepted a teaching job at Marysburg Elementary School*, in a community inhabited largely by immigrant families from El Salvador. I would observe seven boys in particular who had been classified as English language learners (ELLs) by their school district, Parker County Public Schools (PCPS). I would observe them on a daily basis as they participated in school, interacted with classmates and took tests. I would also visit them at home and interview their families. I would interview the boys themselves in small groups after completing standardized tests. I hoped to get an understanding of the complex relationships at play among the students, school personnel, parents and communities, and to learn how standardized testing was situated within that complex web. Following a critical ethnographic approach, I wanted to use the information I found to benefit the ELL students at the school and in the larger community. I felt that by understanding the school district’s expectations of me as an ESOL teacher on the one hand, and experiencing the children’s reality inside and outside of school, on the other, I could help to bridge gaps between the home and the school, particularly with regard to standardized testing.

* All names of places and people are pseudonyms
As an ESOL teacher I was expected to make sure that my students acquired the English language as quickly as possible. I was expected to learn the requirements of the federal, state and county boards of education through trainings, meetings, memos, emails, official observations and feedback. In the Parker County Public School system, as in the rest of the United States, there is a heavy emphasis on teaching English to immigrant students. Teachers are under pressure to help students meet established standards measured largely by standardized tests. Testing and moving ESOL students quickly into mainstream classes are a priority for teachers and school administrators.

On the other hand, immigrant families come from backgrounds that school personnel often do not understand. Their language, culture, prior formal and informal learning, their immigration experiences are often unknown to many school district employees. For their part, the parents of ELL students often have little or no knowledge about educational policies at their children’s schools. Information on testing, reporting of scores and test policies often does not reach ELL parents.

Anne Fadiman (1997) wrote, “I have always felt that the action most worth watching is not at the center of things but where edges meet. I like shorelines, weather fronts, international borders. There are interesting frictions and incongruities in these places, and often, if you stand at the point of tangency you can see both sides better than if you were in the middle of either one (p. x.).” In this chapter I contrast two worlds: the world of an ESOL teacher from the dominant society with that of Salvadoran immigrant children. In this chapter, I first attempt to shed light on my place as an ESOL teacher in the educational bureaucracy of Parker County Schools by describing the weeks leading
up to the opening of the new school year. Afterwards, I provide descriptive information on the backgrounds of the seven boys and their families which I had gathered through interviews, observations, classroom activities and home visits during the school year. By contrasting the educational bureaucracy to the seven boys’ lives I depict what Anne Fadiman (1997) might describe as the centers of two places whose edges meet. In this way, I began to discover the “interesting frictions and incongruities” that arose in the contact between the Salvadoran immigrant community and the educational bureaucracy at Marysburg Elementary School.

4.2 “AYP!!”

In late July, before I had started my new teaching job, I received a letter in the U.S. mail from Karen Taylor, the principal of Marysburg Elementary School. The letter arrived as part of a mass mailing directed to the school’s teachers. The first paragraph said, “I couldn’t wait to share the news that WE MADE AYP IN EVERY CATEGORY!! Fifty-five schools in Parker County didn’t make AYP this year, but we did!! Congratulations! And Thank You!! I told you we are great!” [Emphasis in the original.] The letter provided my first experience of the importance placed on making AYP or Adequate Yearly Progress, those rising standardized test scores mandated by the federal government’s No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (Table 3.4). It also told me that rising test scores were considered the result of teachers’ efforts and that from the principal’s perspective other schools’ failure made us look good. Her “Thank you!” implied that by achieving AYP, the staff had done something positive for her. Mrs. Taylor’s letter sounded to me like a sigh of relief from an anxious manager. Although I had (and still
have) deep skepticism about AYP and No Child Left Behind, I could not help but feel like I was going to work in a school where academic achievement was proceeding well. In a poor community with a large Salvadoran immigrant population for whom English is a second language, a school making AYP seemed like a good thing. Ms. Taylor’s letter caused me to begin reflecting on my role in helping the school make AYP again. What if we didn’t make it this year? What if my students cause the school to miss this year’s AYP? What if my students’ progress is not measured by the test they take? Mrs. Taylor’s letter immediately placed standardized testing in a priority position in my work whether I agreed with it or not. I immediately joined the ranks of teachers with anxiety about making AYP.

4.3 Training for New ESOL Teachers

During the entire second week of August, I attended the training for Parker County Public Schools’ new ESOL teachers. I was happy to be part of a school district again but thought that it would be more training than I really needed as an experienced teacher. Nevertheless, I did need to learn PCPS procedures and to get acquainted with the ESOL professionals who would monitor my work from the central office. I also needed to start learning about elementary ESOL since my teaching experience had been in secondary schools. Besides the fact that I was going to do my ethnographic research, I had also decided to seriously consider making a career with PCPS and so I intended to be a team player. The personnel office placed me on “Step 14” (14 years experience) and “MA plus 60” (60 credits beyond a Master’s degree) on the salary schedule. This meant my salary would be nearly $65,000 per year, a $15,000 increase over what I had earned
as a university researcher, not counting the eight weeks off in the summer. With health benefits and retirement I felt that the school district had given me a good deal and I did not plan to risk this opportunity by being too contrary if I disagreed with some procedure or philosophy. As a researcher, I wondered if doing critical ethnography would even be possible given such economic ties to the school system.

Our ESOL trainers were three middle-aged White women, experienced elementary ESOL teachers. The trio included Celeste Bartholomew who had originally interviewed me and had recommended my hiring. She worked as the ESOL Mentor Teacher from the PCPS ESOL office assigned to my new school, Marysburg Elementary. She and the other two trainers had decorated the training room with colorful posters including the alphabet, days and months, and numbers, demonstrating how we were expected to decorate our classrooms. We also would need a word wall which would be seen from anywhere the classroom and would provide a readily available, alphabetical reference list of words the children needed for their writing. Ms. Bartholomew provided us with the classroom rules, which the children could sing to the tune of “Frere Jacques”:

Walk in the hallways. Walk in the hallways.

Please sit down. Please sit down.

Listen to the teacher. Listen to the teacher.

Raise your hand. Raise your hand.

Speak in English. Speak in English.

No bad words. No bad words.

Always do your homework. Always do your homework,
Every day. Every day.

We would also be expected to calmly maintain order in the classroom. Ms. Bartholomew demonstrated with us during the training sessions: “One-two-three, eyes on me!” or a purse-lipped “I’ll wait….”

While I felt that the posters and the word wall would benefit my students, I felt uncomfortable with the musical classroom rules, mostly with the message behind “Speak in English”. I certainly wanted to encourage children to use English, but I would not demand that students speak English exclusively. I have always believed that children benefit from using both languages. In addition to what I know from the literature on bilingualism, my own experiences with second language acquisition as a learner, a teacher, and a parent have led me to support use of primary language to learn the target language.

I felt additional discomfort from the possibility of an unstated expectation that learning would be teacher-centered (“One-two-three eyes on me!”) rather than student-centered. The trainers did not talk to us about organizing cooperative groups or implementing hands-on or discovery-type learning activities. Rather we learned how to get children to focus on us and how to implement what Freire (1969) would call a “banking system” of education where teachers were responsible for depositing knowledge into students’ empty heads. I hoped that I could find a way to incorporate critical pedagogical practices without causing myself serious problems with supervisors.
4.3.1 The Plug-In/Pull-Out Program Model for ESOL Instruction

The three ESOL trainers also instructed us in the program model for elementary ESOL in PCPS. We would work more like instructional specialists rather than classroom teachers, targeting lessons to ESOL students placed in mainstream classrooms. The *ESOL Teacher Handbook 2004-2005* published by the school district described the ESOL instructional program as providing students with both “plug in” and “pull out” ESOL instruction. For the “plug in” portion of the day, ESOL teachers would go into the general education classroom and work alongside the classroom teacher during the two-hour language arts block. We would provide small group reading instruction using the Houghton-Mifflin series. For the “pull-out” portion of the day we would work with small groups of ESOL students during the content block outside their regular classroom. We would “use the Harcourt ESL materials to focus on language acquisition and development.”

Our training for the plug-in segment of instruction incorporated a detailed introduction to the language arts curriculum and the associated Houghton-Mifflin instructional materials which the classroom teacher would be responsible for delivering. The language arts curriculum could be accessed online and described in detail, day by day the instruction that the classroom teachers would deliver during the daily 120 minute language arts period throughout the year. All PCPS language arts teachers at the same grade level would cover the same material on the same day. Curriculum specialists had scripted the lesson plans during the summer. The mainstream teacher would deliver the bulk of the four-part lesson plan:

1. whole-class “mini-lesson” (20 minutes)
2. small group reading instruction (60 minutes)

3. “word work” (20 minutes)

4. writing (20 minutes)

ESOL teachers would primarily work within the classroom with reading groups of six to eight students who had been placed in a high, middle or low group according to their score on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). The three reading groups would rotate through our “center” in twenty-minute periods. During the other parts of the language arts block we would be helping the ELL students to access the lessons through modification and small group support. We had to follow this plan because curriculum specialists, administrators and representatives of Houghton Mifflin would come through our classrooms to observe how we implemented it.

For the pull-out part of the day, we also received training in the Harcourt *Moving Into English* Series for ESOL instruction. The pull-out portion of instruction, with the same ELL students as in the plug-in groups, would last forty minutes during a time of the day outside the language arts block. The PCPS trainers provided a “checklist of instructional guidelines” for the ESOL pull-out program rather than a scripted program:

- Instruction should be matched to the student’s level of English proficiency.

- Students should be given daily opportunities to use language and interact with their peers for a variety of purposes.

- Visuals, context, real objects, body language are utilized to increase comprehensibility of concepts and ideas.
Key vocabulary and concepts should be listed on charts, wall or on the overhead.

Grammar and language use should be taught but the emphasis must be on the function of language not grammar drills.

Study skills such as organizing a notebook, using bilingual dictionaries, should be integrated into the ESOL lessons.

The teacher should be familiar with the Curriculum Framework and include the skills/strategies it contains as part of the ESOL lesson whenever appropriate.

The teacher should provide adequate wait time as it may take English language learners more time to process questions and respond to them.

The ESOL teacher will follow the lesson plan format presented in the Standards of Excellence document.

In grades 2-6 ESOL teachers will use the Harcourt ESL materials.

This checklist seemed reasonable to me, and, thankfully, more flexible than the scripted reading program. On the other hand, the Harcourt materials contained lesson plans and pacing guides and we received training on their use. After examining the materials and receiving training in their implementation, I concluded that the *Moving Into English* books could be interesting and appropriate to use at least for students at the intermediate to advanced levels of English proficiency. I decided to implement the program as the trainers had advised us.

PCPS divided elementary English language learners into three levels based on scores on the IDEA Proficiency Test or IPT. Beginners are called ESOL 1’s,
intermediates are ESOL 2’s and advanced, ESOL 3’s. Because the PCPS superintendent had concluded that ESOL 3 students did not require instruction from ESOL teachers, we would focus our attention only on ESOL 1’s and ESOL 2’s. According to the ESOL Teacher Handbook 2004-2005, services for ESOL 3’s were provided by the mainstream classroom teachers:

   Classroom teachers will use differentiated instructional techniques to include the ELLs in their classrooms all day… Training will be offered systemically to all mainstream teachers on ESOL methods… Schools will be provided ELL materials (Houghton Mifflin) for use with the ESOL 3 students.

(Unfortunately, the training did not come to Marysburg Elementary. Ms. Taylor and the other instructional specialists at the school simply informed us that ESOL 3 students would not be receiving ESOL services. The same message was repeated at other schools as well and became a point of controversy in the county, with teachers and parents complaining that ESOL 3 students would be left without much-needed support. While the debate found its way into the local newspapers, the situation did not change during the 2004-05 school year.)

The PCPS training for new ESOL teachers, while very thorough regarding classroom management and teacher-centered ESOL instruction, did not address primary language or cultural issues at all. The instructional program required in PCPS expected an English-only format and had an unstated goal of assimilation and a stated goal of reaching a federally mandated (through NCLB) achievement level on standardized tests. On the other hand, I believed that educating ELL students requires bringing their rich prior knowledge of language, culture and immigration to the classroom. I looked forward
to the challenge of helping my students to connect their diverse knowledge and experiences to the academic curriculum.

### 4.4 Marysburg Elementary School

On Monday of the week following ESOL training for new teachers, I found myself at the first Marysburg Elementary School staff meeting of the 2004-05 school year. We sat at the student cafeteria tables, I with the other six ESOL teachers. On the back wall a newly decorated bulletin board proclaimed with bright construction paper letters, “WE MADE AYP!” Ms. Taylor presented me and the other new teachers to the returning Marysburg Elementary School personnel. She jokingly introduced me as “another one of those White folks that speak Spanish.” I have often wondered how that comment sounded to the sizable portion of Marysburg workers who are classified as Hispanic, Black or Asian. I have found that bilingualism is more respected in a middle class White person than it is in an immigrant of color who is judged by his or her level of English proficiency. Baker’s (2001) description of additive and subtractive bilingualism comes to mind in these situations where I am congratulated for knowing Spanish:

…English-speaking North Americans who learn a second language…will not lose their English but gain another language and some of its attendant culture. The ‘value added’ benefits may not only be linguistic and cultural, but social and economic as well…In contrast, the learning of a majority second language may undermine a person’s minority first language and culture, thus creating a subtractive situation. For example, an immigrant may find pressure to use the dominant language and feel embarrassment in using the home language (p. 58).
Mrs. Taylor did, however, proudly state that Marysburg Elementary now had a Spanish-speaking teacher at every grade level in addition to Spanish speaking staff in the front office, a rare accomplishment in PCPS in her experience.

Because she herself is “one of those White folks that speak Spanish,” I correctly figured that Mrs. Taylor got her name from her husband. She had lived in South America and spoke Spanish nearly as a native. She was a former ESOL teacher in the county.

Calculating from the staff directory distributed at that first meeting, and my own observations of race, the faculty and staff at Marysburg were 51% White, 29% Black (African, African American or Caribbean), 17% Hispanic and 3% Asian. (Table 4.1). As is typical at many elementary schools, personnel were overwhelmingly female at 82%. (Table 4.2).
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\(^a\) Includes counselors, curriculum specialist, reading specialists, speech pathologist, mentor teacher, and testing coordinator.
Table 4.2  2004-05 Marysburg Elementary Staff Gender

<table>
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<td>Administrators(^a)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cafeteria Staff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including special ed staff)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custodial Staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL Teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Instructors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music, PE, computers, library</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialists</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Staff(^b)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Secretaries, parent liaison)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Represents beginning of school year. Midway through the school year, the African American female assistant principal was replaced by an African American male assistant principal.
Whites dominated in the higher status positions requiring more extensive education and training while Latinos and African-Americans formed the majority of employees in jobs requiring manual labor and less formal schooling. The cafeteria staff was 66% Hispanic, with the lone European American in the position of manager. The custodial staff was 100% African-American and the office staff was 100% Latina. On the other hand, the teaching staff was 66% White. The instructional specialists, the elite among teachers, were 78% White. 5 of us ESOL teachers (71%) were White. (Table 4.1).

I had learned from Ms. Taylor’s July letter that test scores were important at Marysburg Elementary. At that first staff meeting, Mrs. Taylor continued stressing its importance by showing bar graphs of student test scores by grade level. She compared last years’ scores by grade level to those of the year before and showed what percentage of children were proficient or better in reading and math according to the Maryland School Assessment (MSA). (Tables 3.2 and 3.3). She also showed the progress of ELL students by grade level on the IPT and how many students had progressed to a higher level. She said lightheartedly, “Last year the ESOL teachers did such a good job that the numbers of ELL students has dropped significantly. Pretty soon they’ll put themselves out of business!” The presentation made me realize that my students’ IPT scores could be subject to public scrutiny in a year’s time. We ESOL teachers were assigned to one grade, so IPT scores could be tied to a particular teacher. I hoped that if my students’ IPT scores were ever shown to the entire faculty and staff that I would have nothing to be ashamed of.
4.4.1 The Fifth Grade at Marysburg Elementary

For the 2004-05 school year, the Parker County Public Schools ESOL supervisor had purposefully overstaffed the ESOL program at Marysburg Elementary in consideration of its large ELL needs, and so Ms. Taylor placed an ESOL teacher at each grade level, a luxury not experienced before or since. I was assigned to the fifth grade team and would work with 16 ESOL students from the fifth grade in addition to four ESOL 1 students from third and fourth grades. My total responsibility of only 20 students was half the usual 40 to 1 student-teacher ratio in the county’s ESOL program.

The five of us teachers on the fifth grade team were White, all of Irish Catholic ancestry. On the other hand, our fifth graders were 81% Hispanic and 17% either African or of African descent. There was one White student in the fifth grade and no Asians (Tables 4.3 and 4.4). 78% of the fifth graders at Marysburg were current or former ESOL students (Table 4.5). The grade was almost evenly divided between girls and boys with 53% and 47% respectively (Table 4.6).
### Table 4.3 Marysburg Fifth Grade Ethnicity
**(Numbers of Students)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Designated Level</th>
<th># Hispanic</th>
<th># Black</th>
<th># Asian</th>
<th># White</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fairbanks</td>
<td>“Low”</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longman</td>
<td>“Middle”</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnold</td>
<td>“High”</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.4 Marysburg Fifth Grade Ethnicity
**(Percentages of Students)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Designated Level</th>
<th>% Hispanic</th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>% Asian</th>
<th>% White</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fairbanks</td>
<td>“Low”</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longman</td>
<td>“Middle”</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnold</td>
<td>“High”</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% of Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.5 Marysburg Fifth Grade ELL Designations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Designated Level</th>
<th>ESOL 1</th>
<th>ESOL 2</th>
<th>ESOL 3</th>
<th>Independent (former ELL)</th>
<th>Never ELL</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fairbanks</td>
<td>“Low”</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longman</td>
<td>“Middle”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnold</td>
<td>“High”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.6 Marysburg Fifth Grade Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Designated Level</th>
<th># Boys</th>
<th># Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%Boys</th>
<th>% Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fairbanks</td>
<td>“Low”</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longman</td>
<td>“Middle”</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnold</td>
<td>“High”</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The fifth grade at Marysburg was divided into three classes. There was one teacher for each of the homeroom classes. Ms. Street and I were also team members, but did not have our own homeroom classes. Ms. Street was a reading specialist whose time was divided among other grades besides fifth. Ms. Street also served as our liaison to the administration so she attended our weekly planning meetings and carried a walkie-talkie to stay in contact with the Instructional Team which led the school.

Ms. Fairbanks taught the language arts-social studies block, trading students with Ms. Longman who taught math-science. Ms. Fairbanks and I would end up spending many hours together during the school year as I would work the first two hours of the school day with her. Although she had been teaching at the school for five years, this would be the first time Ms. Fairbanks would teach language arts. Previously she had been the fourth grade math teacher. Although the language arts curriculum was her responsibility and she handled it adeptly, Ms. Fairbanks said she was glad to have me working with her so she did not to learn the new curriculum completely on her own. Ms. Fairbanks was in her mid-fifties, about ten years older than me. She had grown up in New York City and described herself as a no-nonsense, “tough cookie”. She had been a Peace Corps worker in Brazil for five years during the late 1970’s and maintained contact with Brazilian friends by phone and internet. Ms. Fairbanks had also taught English as a Foreign Language in a Japanese elementary school for five years and she unintentionally used mannerisms that reflected her ties to that culture. During the school year she adeptly managed to teach the children about Brazil and Japan, slipping in examples and anecdotes where possible during our strictly scheduled instructional
program. Mornings before entering the classroom, for example, Ms. Fairbanks had the students bow and say “Ohaiyo guzaima”.

Ms. Longman, the fifth grade math teacher, had been teaching about ten years and had started her career in Washington, D.C public schools. She was tall and thin in her mid thirties. She was quiet and thoughtful and was always concerned about students’ behavior and academic achievement. She taught the math-science block and would take Ms. Fairbanks’s homeroom in the afternoon after they had had lunch, recess and PE or music. I would pull my ESOL groups from Ms. Longman’s afternoon math-science class.

Ms. Arnold, a first year teacher, taught language arts to the third fifth grade class which she switched for a sixth grade language arts group in the afternoon. Her group of fifth graders was the largest of the three classes but had no ESOL students and included the students with the highest reading scores based on the SRI test. On one occasion when I was assigned to spend the day as Ms. Arnold’s substitute teacher, I was startled to see the students actually reading the fifth grade language arts anthology by themselves without any support. (The grade-level anthology was impossibly difficult for Ms. Fairbanks’s homeroom class to read independently.) Although I did not work with her much, Ms. Arnold appeared confident and hard working even though she sometimes struggled with classroom management with her sixth grade group which had students who sometimes vigorously tested their limits.

Ms. Street was the reading specialist. Ms. Street and I would focus our efforts on Ms. Fairbanks’s homeroom students, once our team rearranged the fifth grade so that the 16 lowest performing students were all in her class. Mrs. Taylor, the school principal,
went against school district recommendations for heterogeneous classes and demanded a high, middle and low class at each grade level, including ours. She and Dr. Etienne called this “targeted services.” A third specialist, Mr. Marks, a first year special education teacher, was also assigned to Ms. Fairbanks’s group, but he rarely appeared, although we alerted the administration to the problem.

From the beginning, Ms. Fairbanks’s class was already weighted with what are known at Marysburg as “low students”. During the previous spring, the fourth grade teachers had enrolled in the class English language learners at the beginning and intermediate levels (Level 1 and Level 2) of proficiency according to their scores on the March 2004 IPT test. There were also five students which we would later learn were diagnosed with learning problems from ADHD to speech language problems to mental retardation. We worked with the students from the original class list for two weeks, and once Ms. Arnold came on staff, we followed Mrs. Taylor’s directive to give Ms. Arnold the “high group”, Ms. Longman the “middle group” and Ms. Fairbanks the “low group”. Ms. Fairbanks’s group would have fewer students due to their special needs and would receive small-group instruction from me, Ms. Street and (on paper at least) from Mr. Marks, the special education teacher. Ms. Fairbanks and I identified five of the higher performing students from our class and placed four of them into Ms. Longman’s “middle group” and one in Ms. Arnold’s “high class”. Ms. Fairbanks and I ended up with sixteen students, an unusually small number but with the expectation that our number would grow as newcomer immigrant students arrived during the school year.

Ms. Fairbanks’s homeroom ended up disproportionately male with eleven boys and five girls, 69% male and 31% female (Table 4.5). Twelve of the students were
Hispanic, three classified as Black (one Sierra Leonean, one Haitian and one Haitian-American) and one White of Irish descent. Of the dozen students classified as Hispanic, ten were either from El Salvador or U.S.-born of Salvadoran parents. One was Dominican and one was from Uruguay. Later in the year we would receive two more students, both girls recently arrived from Central America, one from Honduras and one from El Salvador. Thirteen of the sixteen students were classified as English language learners requiring ESOL instruction. A total of six students were diagnosed with learning problems serious enough to require special services. (Table 4.6).
### Table 4.6

**Ms. Fairbanks’s Homeroom by Gender, Ethnicity, ELL Status and Special Needs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ELL and Special Needs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ELL and Diagnosed with</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former ELL Diagnosed with</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL Without Diagnosed Special</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL and a Diagnosed with</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>special Need</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither ELL nor Diagnosed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.4.2 Setting Up the Classroom

Before I could actually begin teaching fifth grade ESOL I had to prepare my classroom. That in itself represented an interesting introduction to how things operated in the school. When I had first visited the Marysburg Elementary for my interview, Ms. Taylor showed me the science storage closet across the hall from Ms. Fairbanks’s room and apologetically told me that that would be my space for pulling small groups from their mainstream classroom for ESOL instruction. She said that by the time I arrived to
work it would be empty and ready to use. Opening one of the double-doors, I saw a drab space with a blackboard on one wall, a teacher’s desk and a few student desks. Shelves loaded down with science books and materials covered the other cinder block walls. There were no windows. On one shelf lay a stack of photocopied ESOL worksheets. Apparently a teacher had been working the previous school year with ESOL students amid all those stacks of books and supplies. Although I felt the room was of an acceptable size for teaching small groups of children, I was determined to convert the space from a dusty storage room into the “Fifth Grade ESOL Headquarters.”

Once school had started, Ms. Taylor explained regretfully that the custodians still had not had a chance to empty the room, but I could still work at the desk and teach students in Ms. Fairbanks’s room. A week after the children had arrived at school, Ms. Taylor told me that I could ask the custodians to empty the closet, but I needed to understand that they were very busy with other things and may not get around to it very soon. I realized finally that for some reason Ms. Taylor could not ask me directly to clean out the closet, but I would have to do it myself if I wanted it done.

Once I began moving the materials to a different storage closet, another dilemma appeared. Ms. Longman came to explain politely though unhappily that she had moved those book and supplies up from a library storage room the year before and considered the space hers. Ms. Taylor had never spoken to her about my using the closet for ESOL. I did not know of any acceptable alternatives, so I insisted on keeping the space since it was what Ms. Taylor had offered when I interviewed for the job. Thankfully, Ms. Longman was gracious and flexible and did not hold a grudge.
I spent the better part of two work days with a hand cart moving boxes of books to the elevator and downstairs to a storage room in the library. Whenever Ms. Fairbanks’s and Ms. Longman’s classes switched rooms, they watched in fascination as the sweaty ESOL teacher gradually emptied and then removed the closet shelves. Once bare and clean, I began to move in ESOL texts and workbooks, a computer (the room had internet access), trade books, posters, supplies and charts. The first sign I hung stayed above the blackboard all year long. On a long sentence strip in black marker I wrote “¡Orgullosos de ser bilingües! Proud to be bilingual!” Of course I put up a word wall, and posters of the numbers, the days and the months. Two of the walls of the bathroom in Ms. Street’s classroom next door formed a right angle into my ESOL room. The walls were metallic and rusty in places and were painted in a sad khaki color. I covered those two walls from floor to ceiling with bright blue butcher paper and a colorful boarder. I decided I could use the magnets that Ms. Bartholomew had given us new ESOL teachers to hang student work there, right at the entrance. With the storage closet nicely converted into a classroom, and my PGCPS new teacher training behind me, I was ready for my students.

4.5 The Students’ Backgrounds

For the purposes of the study I decided to focus on particular students with whom I worked directly as an ESOL teacher. Their families came from the same country in order to examine diversity within that country. To focus solely on ELL issues, I selected children with no identified special education needs. These criterion reduced the subset of eligible participants from the class of sixteen children to seven boys, five from El
Salvador and two U.S.-born of Salvadoran parents. Their parents gave me permission to interview and observe them in class and the boys themselves also agreed to participate. I visited the students at home and interviewed, when possible, their parents in order to have a more complete picture of their lives. All the parents agreed to interviews. All but one parent agreed to my visiting their home.

While the boys in the study all came from Salvadoran families, terms like “Salvadoran” or “Hispanic” obscure their diversity to people outside that community. For example Jaime and Herminio came from rural backgrounds while Omar and Herbert grew up in cities. Consequently, Herminio could explain how to milk a cow, while Herbert could talk about life in Los Angeles and Sacramento. They had different family configurations at home from a blended families (Eddie) to nuclear families (Omar, Herminio and Luis) to extended families (Jaime and Herbert), to a single mom (Carlos). The seven boys had been in the U.S. varying lengths of time. From Herbert and Carlos who were born in this country to Omar and Luis who had arrived only a few weeks before the school year started, the boys consequently had varying degrees of English proficiency. Newcomers Omar, Jaime and Luis, spoke Spanish almost exclusively. Eddie, Herbert and Carlos, the ones who had been in the U.S. the longest, preferred English despite their families’ objections. Herminio, who had been in the U.S. for three years, effortlessly switched between the two languages as needed. They also came to Maryland via different routes. Omar, Jaime, Luis, and Eddie came overland through Guatemala and Mexico, smuggled by “coyotes” into Texas or California. Omar and Herminio had to wait in Los Angeles until their parents had paid for their passages to Maryland. Carlos came in legally by plane to New York while Herbert was born on the
U.S. West Coast. The causes of their families’ immigration vary somewhat, but all relate to the economic difficulties and violence that have plagued El Salvador for decades if not centuries.

Below are descriptive profiles of the students and their families ordered from the most recent arrivals (See also Tables 4.7 and 4.8):

4.5.1 Omar Valdez

Eleven-year-old Omar Valdez came to our classroom late on the first day of school. A nervous smile exposed straight white teeth. When I ask his name, he replied, “No hablo inglés.” His friends in the class eventually nicknamed him ‘Chino’ because of the Asian-looking eyes that graced his clean, handsome face. His dark brown skin and straight, jet-black hair also confirmed his ties to his pre-Columbian ancestors. The white polo shirt and navy blue pants of his school uniform were spotless and fit him perfectly. His hair combed and gelled, he carried his backpack and all his supplies that first day, eager with the newness of everything. He was smaller than the other fifth grade boys, but comfortable with himself and good-humored. He quickly became a favorite among the fifth grade teachers.

The paperwork that came from the PCPS International Student Registration Office, which registers and evaluates the English language proficiency of incoming students from other countries, stated that Omar had completed half of fourth grade in El Salvador and would be placed in Grade 5 due to his age. Omar had arrived in Maryland from El Salvador during the summer and lived with his mother, father and baby sister. They lived in a two-bedroom apartment in a brick two-story 1940s apartment building
across busy Virginia Ave. from the school’s neighborhood. The entire family shared one of the bedrooms and sublet the other to a young man, a laborer from their home country. Their ground-floor apartment was equipped with a sofa, small dining table and chairs and a TV, all second-hand furnishings purchased from the Goodwill store near their home.

Omar’s father, Omar Sr., was a thirty-nine year old plumber and had come to the United States five years earlier. He had decided to leave El Salvador when he got laid off from his job and needed to pay off the money he owed on his house. He took on more debt by bringing his wife Dora, age 38, to Maryland. He borrowed the money for the final leg of her passage from his ‘brothers and sisters’ in his evangelical church. (The money he had paid originally for Dora’s journey from Los Angeles to Washington D.C. had been stolen.) By the time Omar, Jr. had arrived in Maryland, Dora had been here for two years already. She had concluded that immigrating to the United States provided the only possibility to keep her family together and to ensure a stable future for her children. She spoke of achieving family goals and keeping up the battle for success. Dora provided for the family by caring for three neighbor children during the day as well as providing meals and lodging for their boarder.

During the time when his parents were in Maryland, Omar and his younger brother had lived with their aunt and uncle in San Salvador. Although there were close family ties (Dora’s brother was married to Omar Sr.’s sister), Omar nevertheless had to repeat fourth grade in El Salvador. Dora explained: “...la venida mía le ocasionó muchos problemas a él.” and “...la venida mía a él le afectó mucho y se descontroló en materias”. [“...my coming here caused him problems.” … “my coming here affected him a lot and he lost control of his subjects.”] She said that his schoolwork fell apart not only
because her leaving had affected him, but also because his teacher was mean to the children. It was the teacher’s first year working at the elementary level after having moved to that level from high school. Prior to that year Omar had received good grades and had attended school regularly beginning in kindergarten. Omar had repeated part of the fourth grade by the time he left for the United States.

Omar spoke in class of his trip to the United States with the excitement of sharing an amazing adventure story. He traveled by land from El Salvador to Los Angeles with a group of ten children led by a ‘coyota’, a female smuggler, his father had hired. None of his family accompanied him on the journey. They crossed the Guatemala border on horseback and passed into Mexico on foot. They spent several days traveling by bus north across Mexico to the California border. He laughingly spoke of pretending to sleep at a Mexican security check-point, keeping his eyes closed while the soldier poked and tickled him to get him to wake up and show him his travel documents, which he did not have. During his nighttime border-crossing into the U.S., Omar curled up inside a large discarded truck tire while a search light panned the area where he hid. The only time he spoke of fear, however, was when he recalled sitting alone on the Southwest Airlines jet that flew him across the United States to Baltimore and his waiting parents. (Figure 4.1)
Figure 4.1 Omar’s Plane Ride
4.5.2 Luís Guzman

Luís Guzman had also arrived from El Salvador in the weeks before school started. Like Omar, Luís also came to the United States over land, but his ‘coyota’ was a relative. He traveled with his brother Abner who was in the fourth grade. They walked into the United States at a legal crossing point. Luís made us laugh when he told us that the coyota had filled his mouth with chicken tacos as they passed through customs. She needed the immigration authorities to believe they were Mexican so she made sure that they did not say anything that would give them away. Luís and Abner were whisked directly from the Texas-Mexico border to Maryland by two male relatives who took turns driving nonstop to the children’s new home in Marysburg.

Luís lived with his parents, five siblings and a large number of relatives and family friends in a modest red brick 1940’s home they owned a block away from Marysburg Elementary. The family lived on the ground floor and rented out rooms in the basement. Luís was not sure how many people lived at his house. “Like twenty,” he said.

Arriba somos como ocho y abajo están mis tíos, son tres tíos y una tía. Y hay amigos de mi papá que pasaron a vivir allí porque solo en mi familia agarramos dos cuartos arriba y son tres. Y abajo son cuatro. Arriba está un cuarto y pasa otra gente allí y abajo vive bastante gente. En cada cuarto viven dos gentes y llevan bastantes.

[Upstairs there are like eight of us, and downstairs are my aunts and uncles—they are three uncles and one aunt. And there are friends of my dad’s that moved there because my family just took two rooms upstairs and there are three [upstairs]. And downstairs there are four. Upstairs there is a room and other people stay]
there and downstairs there are a lot of people living. In each room there are two people living and there are a lot.]

Luis’ father was a carpenter and was adding two rooms to the house, which they had bought the year before. Knowing the high cost of even modest homes in the area, it was admirable that they managed to purchase at the time and it was undoubtedly difficult to pay the mortgage without renters. Luis always spoke of his father with lots of admiration: he was strong, he had a thousand dollars in cash, he was going to buy him a mini-bike if he passed 5th grade. For a time, his dad was traveling to Ocean City for work and came home on the weekends.

This was a year of change for the family. Four children had arrived from El Salvador and a baby girl was born. Luis missed three days of school when his mother was in the hospital. He had to baby sit his four-year-old sister who was too young to go to school. His mother, Ana, age 32, worked at home. She was quiet and answered interview questions without much conversation or digressions. She complained that the children did not obey her; they only behaved when their father was home.

Luis had chubby, pale cheeks and brown hair. He came to school clean and combed, but his worn-out school clothes often became untucked and disheveled by late morning. Confident with academics, Luis wanted to learn English above all else. He repeated the attitude he had learned from his father: this is the United States, forget Spanish and learn English. Although a fine student, Luis was no bookworm. He was responsible and obeyed Ms. Fairbanks and me, but often neglected his homework. He joined in the boys’ soccer games and always sat with a group of talkative friends, including Omar, during lunch. He stood up to the other boys in the class when necessary;
he was not afraid to argue and swear. Because his English was so limited he tended to spend more time with native Spanish speakers. However, by the time the two girls from Central America entered the class in the spring, Luis had plenty of English to show off to them, which he did constantly, entertaining Ms. Fairbanks and me as we observed the children’s social lives from the sidelines.

4.5.3 Jaime Soto

Quiet, thin with light skin and black hair, Jaime had arrived in the United States midway through the previous school year. We 5th grade teachers thought of him as a newcomer like Oscar and Miguel. There was a counselor who occasionally pulled newcomer children for a support group. They defined “newcomer” as someone who has been in the country less than one year. Technically Jaime didn’t meet the school district’s criterion for ‘newcomer’, but he would slip out of class for the support group anyway when the counselor showed up at our door. Although he was very quiet and unassuming, Jaime had friends in class and he never looked sad or lonely. Jaime had crossed into Texas from Mexico by crossing the Rio Grande at night in a boat with other undocumented immigrants. He walked three days in the desert after crossing into the U.S. His journey included hiding in a tunnel under train tracks while a Border Patrol helicopter circled overhead. An uncle picked him up in Los Angeles and brought him to Maryland by car.

When José spoke Spanish it was with the dialect of uneducated peasants from the northeast of El Salvador. He was shy and had a quiet, high-pitched voice. He understood more English than Omar and Luis, but he progressed slowly. At the
beginning of the school year, Jaime’s written expressions were an indecipherable code. He turned in unpunctuated sentences without spaces between misspelled words.

Jaime completed his homework as requested and obeyed his teachers at all times, but when he spoke of his schooling in El Salvador he laughingly recounted stories of mischief, low grades and getting hit with a ruler for not doing homework. His father’s parents, with whom Jaime lived in El Salvador, sent him to the U.S. to live with his mother after he had been expelled from school for fighting. It was hard to imagine Jaime behaving so roguishly.

I did not visit Jaime at home, though I learned that he lived with his mother, stepfather, an aunt, an uncle and two cousins. His father was apparently out of the picture. Jaime’s mother put off my visit to their home two times until she finally agreed to an interview at the school. She was uncomfortable and gave brief responses when I peppered her with my interview questions. His mother had not continued school after she failed second grade.

4.5.4 Herminio Jimenez

Herminio had dark skin and dimpled cheeks. He laughed at everything. He behaved, did his homework and paid attention in class. Outside, he had lots of friends. When Herminio had arrived in the United States, he was placed in third grade because of his age, but he had not attended school before that. His parents, Maria and Herminio, Sr. had left him with relatives in El Salvador when they immigrated to Maryland. Unfortunately, the relatives did not send him to school. Three years before I had him for ESOL, Herminio could not speak English and did not read or write in any language. At
this point, fifth grade, Herminio was doing well in our “low” class, but still had a long way to go close the academic gap with his U.S. counterparts. He spoke English fluently now but still struggled with grade-level reading and math. Herminio was the only child in the class who was comfortable speaking both English and Spanish so he had friends on both sides of the language barrier. Ms. Fairbanks found Herminio quite handsome and predicted jokingly that he would become a star of a Spanish TV novella one day. Like Luis’ family, Herminio’s owned one of the many brick Cape Cod homes in the neighborhood. Herminio Sr. worked construction and had built a room in the basement, which they rented out.

Herminio came to the U.S. over land with a group of children led by a coyota. When Herminio’s mother, Carla, spoke of his trip to the U.S., she said, “You don’t know the worry of having your child travel alone. No one was with him but God.” Herminio, on the other hand, shared joyfully his adventure in Mexico. He somehow had us laughing hysterically when he recounted an incident from his journey through Mexico. The coyota had told the children in his group to sit quietly on the bus while she went to get them food. She expected the children to be calm and not draw attention to themselves since they were traveling without documents through Mexico. According to Herminio, the other youngsters disregarded the smuggler’s warning and started playing so loudly that a police officer came on the bus to investigate the commotion. Herminio and another boy slipped out the emergency door in the back of the bus and hid while the Mexican police rounded up the other children for deportation to El Salvador. The coyota, Herminio said chuckling, was furious.
Herminio did not like Mexico, though. He said Mexico has a lot of drunk people sleeping in the streets and that the people say a lot of bad words. Since he is from a small town, he was seeing the larger world for the first time. Herminio also remembers waiting at an apartment in Los Angeles for many days waiting for his parents to send the money so he could go to them. For him everything is fun, including his time in Los Angeles. He didn’t have to go to school, and he learned to ride a skateboard while he waited.

Herminio’s father, Herminio, Sr., is deaf. He can hear in one ear only with a hearing aid. His injury is the result of a hand grenade explosion during the civil war in his country. He was a soldier for the “Policía de Hacienda” a government force that was charged with fighting the guerillas. He said he was fighting communists and had to leave the country after the peace accords, fearing retaliation from former rebels. Although his education had been interrupted at times, Herminio Sr. managed to complete seventh grade.

Herminio’s mother Carla had finished fourth grade. She remembers fondly a teacher at her school who recognized her talent for math and paid for her expenses to complete Grade 4. As a child she went to school in the mornings and in the afternoon she worked at home cleaning, doing wash and making charamuscas (frozen sweet milk) to sell. She was one of seven children whose parents were unschooled peasants. Carla came to the United States with her husband ten years previously and had worked for the last seven years in a grocery store in an upscale neighborhood in suburban Maryland. Her American boss spoke Spanish and nicknamed her “Milusos”- One Thousand Uses- because she could do every task in the store (except cashier because of her lack of English proficiency). While she seemed proud of her ability to do many things, Carla
clearly recognized her exploitation. She had one day off per week, no vacation in seven years, no sick leave, no health insurance. She put up with the situation because she felt that because she lacked legal immigration documents and did not speak English, she could not demand better. Her boss changed her schedule frequently and recently had switched her to the 4 pm to midnight shift. Because of the schedule change, she had been unable to stay informed of her children’s affairs. Fortunately her two oldest daughters, both in high school, managed many of the household tasks for her.

4.5.5 Eddie Andrade

Eddie had pale skin and dark brown hair. In class he usually sat slouched in his chair and avoided eye contact. Every day during the cool months of fall and spring he wore the same black zippered sweat shirt with a hood. He liked to put his head down on his desk and pull the hood over his face. When he spoke, it was hesitantly and in a quiet, high-pitched voice. He was often angry. I once saw him cut up his Styrofoam cafeteria tray with his plastic lunch knife taking angry stabs at it until it fell apart. He reddened his knuckles by beating his fists on the edge of the table. He destroyed pencils, threw his backpack, got into fights, skipped school (once), and often refused angrily to do his class work. I felt a strong connection with Eddie because his behavior reminded me of my own son whom we had adopted from the foster care system. When he was calm and attentive in class, Eddie would answer complex questions with unexpected maturity and insight. Although he struggled with literacy, he liked to borrow my son’s old Goosebumps books (children’s horror stories written by R.L. Stein) that I kept in my classroom. He would come in and tell me which chapter he was on and what had
happened in the latest section he had read. He even told me that he had cut out an order form from the back of one book and sent away for an especially compelling title, “Say Cheese and Die”. Like the other boys, Eddie loved TV wrestling and sometimes came in sleepy on Friday after having stayed up late watching “Smack Down”.

Eddie was born in El Salvador and had spent two years with his paternal grandparents before coming to the United States in time to start kindergarten, having traveled through Guatemala and Mexico with a smuggler. Eddie didn’t remember much about the trip other than riding a horse through the desert of Northern Mexico. Now Eddie’s dominant language was English but his reading ability prevented him from passing out of ESOL. He expressed himself well by drawing, which he did often (Figure 4.2). Eddie lived in a two bedroom apartment in the same group of buildings as Omar and Herbert on busy Virginia Avenue. (Virginia Ave. in Marysburg was one of the most deadly streets in the state for pedestrians. Immigrants from rural Central America were regularly run down while crossing the perilous four-lane boulevard.) The outside of Eddie’s four-story apartment building was nicely renovated, but the attractive façade belied the pitiful conditions on the interior. On the cold winter day I visited Eddie’s family, the air in the apartment was as humid and warm as a tropical rain forest; something obviously was wrong with the heating system. Dark brown mold covered huge patches of the white walls. The wood floors were dark brown and warped, looking as if they would soon begin to rot. Later in the year, the tenants of these buildings appeared on the evening news, organized with picket signs demanding that the owners take care of the mold, cockroaches and rats.
Eddie lived with his two baby half-sisters, his mother, stepfather and his high school-aged sister Veronica. Ms. Fairbanks and Ms. Street remembered Veronica from years before when she had attended Marysburg Elementary. She disrupted class, got into fights and skipped school even in those days. Now, according to a conversation that Ms. Street had had with Veronica and repeated to me, Eddie’s sister was soon to become a member of MS13, the violent Salvadoran gang that was beginning to make headlines in the Washington, D.C. area. Veronica had come to Marysburg Elementary, she said, to threaten some sixth graders who were intimidating Eddie at school.

Eddie’s mother Maria was thirty-six years old. She came from a small town in Morazán, where she had grown up on her grandparents’ farm. The rebels had killed her parents. She finished first and second grades as a teenager during the civil war. The rebels had taken over her town and offered elementary classes in the municipal hall. Maria told me with a sly grin and a wink that she lied to Erick and Veronica and told them that she had actually finished the third grade. Her husband, Eddie’s stepfather, worked long hours as a landscaper and came home after the children went to bed at night and left before they got out of bed in the morning. He had never attended school and could not read and write. Neither Maria nor her husband spoke much English. She complained that Eddie spoke to her in English and she did not understand him very well.
Figure 4.2  Eddie's Fire
4.5.6 Carlos Solano

Carlos’s round face and bright eyes made him a favorite of some of the girls in Ms. Longman’s homeroom. He always came to school happy, clean and well dressed. He was kind to others and had many friends.

Carlos had started the school year in Ms. Longman’s class and was subsequently moved to Ms. Arnold’s ‘high’ class because she felt he could handle the more advanced academics. He ended up with Ms. Fairbanks and me in the ‘low’ class when Ms. Ware, the testing coordinator, saw that he was identified as a Level 2 ESOL student. She insisted that he be moved immediately from Ms. Arnold’s ‘high’ class into Ms. Fairbanks’s ‘low’ class with the other ESOL 2’s. Ms. Arnold said he could not read. Had I been more experienced at the school I may have resisted the change. I was not sure who Ms. Ware was at the time and she spoke with such authority I did not think to object. Later I learned that Carlos was identified as ESOL 2 on one list and ESOL 3 on another list. In his early years in a New York school, he had tested at the 80th percentile in reading. The move to Ms. Fairbanks’s class made him feel like a failure and caused the other children to tease him. He was like several other students in my ESOL group: English had become Carlos’ dominant language, but he could not read well enough to pass the IPT and leave the ESOL program. He was painfully aware of his reading struggles. The confusion around Carlos’s academic abilities probably stemmed from an important issue in the education of second language learners, the distinction between social and academic language. Children can learn what ESOL teachers call Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and lag behind in the formal language
necessary for academic success, known as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Cummins (1980) first wrote about this distinction. Partly because of Carlos’ fluency in social language, Ms. Longman felt that he would fit well into a classroom with academically higher performing children. Unfortunately, Carlos’ literacy skills for reading academic text did not match his verbal ability in social settings. Researchers have found that immigrant students without prior schooling who have not had primary language support in school may take as much as seven to ten years to reach grade level academic proficiency (Thomas& Collier, 1997). Carlos still needed more time to close the gap with his peers.

Carlos’ family’s two-bedroom apartment was the cleanest I have ever seen. The wood parquet floor shined. In the kitchen everything was put away and the countertops were spotless. A picture of the Last Supper hung on the wall above the dining table surrounded by Christmas cards with pictures of cardinals in the snow. Family portraits from El Salvador hung on the other wall along with a crucifix.

Carlos shared a room with his brother Roberto, a high school senior. I interviewed the man I thought was Carlos’ father on my first visit. I had arranged to interview his mother, Aida, but she was at her florist job when I arrived. She had not expected to have to work on Saturday morning. She made flower arrangements for sale in grocery stores. She said they only received very large orders. Later she told me, “I go to work at 7 a.m. but I don’t know when I will leave. If an order comes in even after I have cleaned up and am putting on my coat to leave, I have to stay until the order is done.”
Jorge was Carlos’ mother’s live-in boyfriend although ‘boy’ seems a strange title for this man who was probably in his late forties. He had been living with the family for the last three years. It wasn’t until the end of the interview that he realized that I assumed him to be Carlos’ father and he cleared it up. The first thing he wanted to know was if I thought speaking Spanish was a good thing. He wanted Carlos to hear me say that he should speak Spanish and be proud of it. Jorge was the one who went to the school for PTA meetings and for concerns regarding the two boys. Jorge was no longer living with the family the second time I visited Carlos’ house. Aida had discovered that he had a wife and children elsewhere and had had him move out.

Like many undocumented immigrants, Aida lived cautiously in order to avoid deportation. On the day that I interviewed her, she did not want to sign the consent forms until I suggested that her older son Roberto confirm the translation for her. She said, “People want you to sign papers, but who knows what they say.” She also said that she was willing to talk to me because she remembered seeing me on the first day of school when she dropped Carlos off. I was comforting a frightened fifth grade girl, a newcomer from the Dominican Republic.

Aida reported that she left school during second grade after sporadic attendance. She could not speak English and did not read and write Spanish except to sign her name. She agreed to the interview as long as I kept the tape player off. She was especially cautious because she had recently had immigration problems. Roberto had come close to being deported just a few weeks before, after he had been arrested for suspected gang activity. They had to pay a lawyer $4000 to resolve the problems.
Carlos lounged idly in an easy chair watching cartoons as his mother recounted the family’s dilemma. Carlos was born in the U.S., so he was a citizen. He had nothing to worry about. Aida complained with sadness that Carlos rarely spoke to her. She said that he even fixed his own meals so that he would not have to talk to her. When he did speak at home it was in English. When I questioned him about his insistence on speaking English he stated, “It’s because I think if I speak too much Spanish I’m going to forget English.”

Aida had entered the U.S. illegally. She explained that on her first attempt to reach the United States, she and a large group of people from the same town in El Salvador had walked across the entire length of Mexico from the Guatemalan border to Tijuana. To get across the U.S. border, they had stuffed themselves into a tractor-trailer. Aida thanked God that the Mexican authorities had discovered them before they all suffocated. They were all deported to El Salvador. Aida made it to Texas and then New York on her second attempt, which she did by bus. Aida brought Roberto and Carlos to New York from El Salvador after her father, who was caring for the boys, was murdered and stuffed into a well. Carlos was three years old at the time and does not remember.

4.5.7 Herbert Benitez

Herbert was short with dark skin and black hair. He had bright eyes and often flashed a big mischievous grin. At the beginning of the school year he entertained us with his good humor, but as the school year wore on his wit became caustic and annoying. Ms. Fairbanks and Ms. Longman asked me to call his mother on a few occasions to report inappropriate classroom behavior, usually for being mean to
classmates. He had given us the wrong phone number, and once I got around that obstacle, he would sit by the phone and hang up when I called. If he went out with his family, he would check for messages and erase them before his mother could get to them. Once, when I finally did speak to his mother, he sat silently listening on the extension without our knowledge. At school I could get him to admit to his phone shenanigans which he found quite original and hilarious.

Like Carlos, Herbert was U.S. born. His mother, Elsa, immigrated from the department of La Union, El Salvador in 1990 by herself at the age of nineteen. Herbert was born in Los Angeles five years later. When she and Herbert’s father split up, Elsa moved to Marysburg to be close to her family. She and Herbert shared a two bedroom apartment with two of Elsa’s siblings and their spouses. Herbert was the only child in the apartment and slept on the sofa in the crowded living/dining room, his mother’s bed tucked away in the space that is intended for a dining table. Elsa was in the process of buying her own home, closer to the market where she worked. Herbert spoke a lot about the move and I wondered if his change in attitude was somehow related to the impending change of home and school. Elsa had Sundays off, but like Herminio’s and Carlos’ mothers, her schedule was unpredictable. However she often had a weekday off in addition to Sundays. Like Eddie’s and Carlos’s parents, Elsa also worried about her son losing his Spanish. She told me that she wished the school offered classes in Spanish for the children. Although, according to Elsa, Herbert spoke Spanish at home, at school he denied it and refused to use the language. He felt frustrated when people, including me, forgot that he was not actually from El Salvador. “I’m from L.A.!” he reminded us.
Herbert did not want to be in ESOL. On more than one occasion he referred to his being “stuck in ESOL”. Like Carlos and Eddie, Herbert also probably had at least two more years before he could close the gap with his grade level peers. Unfortunately, however, he could conceivably become what Valdés (2001) refers to as an “ESL Lifer”, a student who stays in ESL throughout his education if he does not improve his academic language skills to a level that mainstream educators can accept.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Age at Beginning of the ’04-’05 School Year</th>
<th>Family’s Place Of Origin (Department)</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>San Salvador</td>
<td>Two bedroom rented apartment</td>
<td>Mother, father, baby sister, 1 boarder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>San Vicente</td>
<td>Own home</td>
<td>Mother, father, four siblings, various boarders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Usulután</td>
<td>Rented apartment</td>
<td>Mother, stepfather, uncle, aunt, 2 cousins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herminio</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>La Libertad</td>
<td>Own home</td>
<td>Mother, father, three siblings, one boarder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>La Unión</td>
<td>Two bedroom rented apartment</td>
<td>Mother, brother, stepfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Morazán</td>
<td>Two bedroom rented apartment</td>
<td>Mother, stepfather, three siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>La Unión</td>
<td>Two bedroom rented apartment</td>
<td>Mother, two aunts, two uncles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.8 Student Profiles Continued

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Parents’ Self-Reported Formal Educational Level</th>
<th>Time Registered in U.S. School System by the Beginning of the ’04-’05 School Year</th>
<th>English Proficiency at Beginning of School Year (IPT Level)</th>
<th>Preferred or Dominant Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>8th grade, 8th grade</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Level 1 (Beginning)</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>5th grade, Data not available</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Level 1 (Beginning)</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>2nd grade, N/A</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>Level 1 (Beginning)</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herminio</td>
<td>4th grade, 7th grade</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Level 2 (Intermediate)</td>
<td>Spanish/English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>2nd grade, 9th grade</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Level 2 (Intermediate)</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>2nd grade, None</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Level 2 (Intermediate)</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert</td>
<td>5th grade, N/A</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Level 2 (Intermediate)</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore how large-scale standardized testing was situated in the lives of seven fifth-grade Salvadoran English language learner (ELL) boys
that I worked with as an ESOL teacher. This chapter described the school environment that the children entered and the home environment that they came from.

4.6.1 The School Environment

There were important differences between the school staff and the students they worked with in terms of ethnicity, gender and language. The school staff was diverse but predominantly white, while the students were overwhelmingly Hispanic of Salvadoran origin. The fifth grade staff was 100% white while the fifth grade students were 80% Hispanic. School staff and fifth grade staff were overwhelmingly female and overwhelmingly monolingual English speaking while the students were about half boys and nearly 80% students who were learning or had learned English as a second language. The school had a strong focus on standardized test scores and on making AYP. There were complex policies and curricular expectations which hoped to get ELL students to closing the test score gap. The fifth grade teachers who participated in the study were not that aware of Latino culture, language or immigration issues, but very felt great concern and affection for the students. They appreciation the parents’ attention to their children’s cleanliness and school attendance.

4.6.2 The Home Environment

Although all the student participants in the study were Salvadoran boys, their families were very different from each other. They were all dealing with important common concerns, though: loss of the Spanish language, overcoming or living with economic challenges, immigration challenges, emotional and physical injuries from the
civil war in El Salvador, challenges of maintaining and blending families, housing challenges, and crime risk including gang affiliation. The parents had limited education and little knowledge of specifics at the school. They got information about school from children (their own and others), PTA meetings, neighbors, family members and phone calls from the school. Omar, Luis and Jaime’s parents overnight found themselves parents of children in an upper grade at U.S. public elementary school. They all ensured that the children had clothes, supplies, and were clean and ready for school. All the parents showed love and concern for their children.

We fifth grade teachers were fascinated with our students. When I came back from home visits, Ms. Fairbanks and Ms. Longman eagerly waited to hear what I had learned. Ms. Street, although she had taught at the school for seven years, had never realized that our students had not come to this country by airplane. They had never heard of pupusas (the national food of El Salvador) and did not know the names of any Salvadoran departments. The teachers did not know the details of the painful pasts that our students’ families had left behind in El Salvador, nor their concerns about their children’s loss of Spanish. By visiting my students at home, I was able to learn more about them and help my colleagues in the fifth grade better understand who we were teaching. Because I speak Spanish and had visited the families at home, the teachers felt that they could communicate with the parents through me and often asked me to call home. In the end, I believe that the children benefited from this increased communication. As described in Section 2.5.1 and in projects such as Luis Moll’s Funds of Knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 1992) described in section 2.4.5 “Exemplary Programs in School-Family-Community Relations” teachers, by getting to know their students’
families and communities, teachers can better help them to connect to the academic expectations of the school.

At the same time, the families I visited knew little about what happened in the classroom, much less the meaning of the letter grades on the report cards or the significance of the school documents they signed at their children’s request. More often than not the parents did not even realize when their children were taking tests, and they certainly did not know the amount of assessing that went on or the reasons for the assessments. They did not know what AYP meant and did not remember ever having signed their children’s accommodations form.

The boys in the study experienced both worlds intimately. They are the true border crossers and the ones most effected by the school policies and programs, including the standardized testing program. Standardized testing strongly influenced the school staff, the curriculum and instruction, and the boys’ placements, but the parents had nearly no knowledge of it.

4.6.3 Emergent Themes

Besides learning about standardized testing of ELL students, I also looked for other themes and patterns to emerge from my interviews and participant-observation experiences. J. Thomas (1993) writes that in critical ethnography some of the most interesting questions are revealed after the initial formulation of the research question. I believe that two themes in particular emerged that are worth comment and further study: 1) a shift in parent attitudes toward language learning and language loss as the families stay longer in the U.S. and 2) the role of gender in long-term ELL status.
There is a clear pattern of language loss among the seven boys in the study, as is common in communities where different languages coexist (“language shift” Grosjean, 1982; “subtractive language learning”, Skuttnab-Kangas, 2000). Omar, Luis and Jaime, the three most recent arrivals, were Spanish dominant. Carlos, Eddie and Herbert, the three who had been in the U.S. the longest, were English dominant. Herminio was comfortably bilingual when speaking but only literate in English. This reflects his intermediate length of time in the U.S. (three years) and lack of formal schooling in Spanish. This replacement of Spanish by English, caused concerns for the parents of the English dominant students while the parents of the newcomers only expressed concerns that they learn English. Carlos’ stepfather asked me to speak to Carlos directly about maintaining Spanish even before I had had a chance to begin the interview. Herbert’s mother told me that she would like to see the school offer classes in Spanish for the children. Eddie’s mother expressed her concern that her son spoke to her in English and she did not understand him. Herminio’s mother complained that she had to remind the boys to speak Spanish at home. In interviews I had done with Spanish-speaking parents in rural Pennsylvania for an earlier study, I noticed a difference in parents’ attitudes who had stayed long-term in the United States. Recent arrivals were anxious for their children to learn English. Parents whose children had learned English realized sadly that their children actually give up Spanish despite efforts to maintain it at home and expressed concern about that phenomenon (Monroe, 2004).

A second pattern that presented itself is related to gender and academic achievement of ELL students. Of the sixteen students in Ms. Fairbanks’s ‘low class’, eleven were boys. Of the long-term ESOL students without identified learning
disabilities in the fifth grade, all were boys. There is a growing body of literature on school failure by boys which claims that schools do not meet the specific needs of that population. According to these claims, inadequate learning environments lead to greater proportions of male suspensions, drop out and special education placements (Gurian & Stevens, 2005; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Kipnis, 1999, Viadero, 2006). While it is beyond the scope of the original purpose of this study, it may be interesting to ask specific research questions about ELL males and school failure, for example: Are long-term ELL students disproportionately male? Are there gender-specific reasons for long-term ELL status?
Figure 4.3  MSA Kite No. 1
Marysburg Elementary School
March 2006
CHAPTER 5: Standardized Testing of ELLs at Marysburg Elementary School

“I think the MSA is the wrostes test in the planet earth. If
I passed the MSA God will come down. In conclusion that
is why I whant to pass the MSA.”

-Excerpt from Carlos’ journal

5.1 Introduction

For the 2004-05 school year, I returned to the classroom after nearly three years in
academia. As a teacher of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at
Marysburg Elementary School∗, I would be able to act as a participant-observer in the
academic lives of seven boys from El Salvador who were designated as English language
learners (ELLs) by Parker County Public Schools (PCPS). Given the high prominence of
standardized testing in public schools due to No Child Left Behind Act, I hoped to
document how the testing programs fit into the overall academic lives of the seven boys
whom I worked with nearly every day. Following a critical ethnographic outlook, I
hoped to take that information back to ELL parents so they could make decisions for their
children.

ELL students at Marysburg Elementary School were involved in an extensive
standardized testing program during the 2004-05 school year. They took a variety of
tests which measured reading, math and English language proficiency. (See Chapter 3 for
descriptions of the tests.) This chapter describes assessment-related themes that emerged

∗ All names of places and people are pseudonyms.
though interviews with students and parents as well as my own participant-observations as an ESOL teacher at the school. Topics such as accommodations on standardized tests, emotions related to testing, time spent on testing and families’ understanding of testing figured prominently and are described in detail below.

5.2 MSA Accommodations

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires that ELL students achieve the same high academic standards as mainstream students. Academic achievement is believed to be measurable with standardized tests. Standardized tests designed for native English speakers put ELL students at a distinct disadvantage when attempting to demonstrate what they know and can do. For that reason, NCLB allows variations in testing conditions for ELL students. These variations, called ELL accommodations, attempt to make the test more valid for ELL students without giving them an unfair advantage. (See Chapter 2.)

Organizing the paperwork for ELL accommodations on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) was the first aspect of ELL standardized testing that I became involved with when I began work as an ESOL teacher at Marysburg Elementary School. During the first weeks of the school year I had to go through all the fifth grade ESOL students’ cumulative folders in the locked vault in the main office and make sure that each one had a signed “ELL Accommodations Document” (Appendix C) on file in case the state decided to audit our records. I had to add updated IPT scores on each student’s document and list the students whose folder lacked the form. I would have to obtain the signatures of these students’ parents on the form and file it in the child’s cumulative
folder. Ms. Anderson, the school’s ESOL department chair, explained that the forms had to be up-to-date and accurate in case auditors from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) showed up to audit our program.

Accommodations for English language learners on standardized tests is allowable under the No Child Left Behind Act which states that “…limited English proficient students shall be assessed in a valid and reliable manner and provided reasonable accommodations on assessments …” (NCLB Part A, Subpart 1, Sec 1111, 3 (C) (ix) (III)). State and county expectations were that school personnel would attempt to assign ELL accommodations for the MSA on a case-by-case basis with parental input and permission. In theory, an ELL committee, which could consist of the ESOL teacher, classroom teacher, reading specialist or others who know the child, would meet with the parent and together determine the accommodations best suited to the individual student. The group would check off the assigned accommodations from a list on the ELL Accommodations Document that everyone would sign. Teachers would provide the accommodations during instruction so that the student would be familiar with the modification once testing took place.

5.2.1 Assigning Accommodations at Marysburg Elementary School

At Marysburg Elementary, about fifty students needed an ELL Accommodations Document for the 2004-05 school year (students with previously signed forms did not need new ones). No one at the school organized accommodations meetings as per state and county guidelines, and there was no discussion that I was aware of that the meetings would even happen. The process for assigning accommodations seemed to have been
decided before I began work at the school. The same ELL accommodations were assigned to all ESOL 1 and 2 students without individual variation or parent input. ESOL 3 students did not get test accommodations. Dr. Etienne, the special education coordinator, and member of the school instructional team explained the quandary,

Any given accommodation is probably wonderful for a percentage of kids but it’s not going to be the right answer for everybody. Yet basically because of the way testing is provided we don’t have the personnel to accommodate in smaller groups. So the accommodation becomes a shotgun effort.

We ESOL teachers were given a copy of the ELL Accommodation Document (See Appendix C), previously signed by Ms. Taylor (the principal) and Ms. Anderson (the ESOL department chair) with four of the thirty-eight* allowable accommodations already checked off:

I. Scheduling:

   C. Extra response and processing time.
   
   D. Tests are administered at best time of day for student.

II. Setting:

   B. General education classroom, with adjusted grouping.

IV. Presentation:

   H. Verbatim reading or audiotape of entire reading test.

ESOL teachers were responsible for filling in the student information section and getting parents’ signatures. We were not to provide accommodations to students during testing without a signed accommodations plan, and we were expected to get 100% of the

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* Many of the 38 accommodations were for special education students and not applicable to ELL students (i.e. Braille, large print, etc.).
signatures. In the past, the ESOL teachers at the school sent copies of the form home with their students for signatures, and offered rewards of candy or extra points to those who returned them. When I described Marysburg’s process for assigning accommodations to Ms. Bartholomew, the ESOL instructional specialist from the county administrative offices, she said,

That’s not the way the system is supposed to work. There is supposed to be an ELL committee meeting for each student… The parent is supposed to be in attendance at that meeting to determine the accommodations. The state says that all you have to do is invite the parent to come to that meeting. If they don’t come, the committee can go ahead and make the determination and then send the form home for them to sign. If they’re at the meeting, then they sign it there. If not, they sign it when it gets sent to them. But when they’ve been given the opportunity to attend the meeting. [Bartholomew’s emphasis.] The process that you’ve described is happening in a lot of schools.

Because of my interest in parent involvement in ELL testing, and wanting to at least provide parents an opportunity to provide input, I suggested to Ms. Anderson that we organize an ELL parent session at the school in which we could explain standardized testing, accommodations and get signatures on the accommodation forms. Ms. Anderson agreed and got permission to proceed from Ms. Taylor as well as the county ESOL testing coordinator. We sent bilingual notices home on two consecutive Tuesdays with the approximately fifty children who needed accommodations forms signed. We held a meeting in which about ten families attended, all Spanish speakers. Most of the families were from the third grade which had the largest number of students needing the forms. It
was the first year they would be taking the MSA, so none of the third graders had signed forms. All six ESOL teachers were present, although it was not required of them. I briefly explained the standardized testing program, accommodations and the ELL Accommodations Document to the families in Spanish. We provided the parents with a Spanish version of the form. Since the paper contains the students’ IPT scores and ESOL level, it became a chance for parents to learn more about our ESOL program and introduce the parents to their child’s ESOL teacher. Two of us were able to interpret Spanish and English, so impromptu parent-teacher conferences took place.

My journal from September 22, 2004 described some of the interactions:

One sixth grade mom from Mexico was interested in learning more about the MSA test. She was especially relieved that the test would not affect her son’s grade or placement. She liked the idea that the school was being held accountable for the children’s learning English. She was concerned that she could not help her son with homework….One mom needed help signing her name…She asked the third grade ESOL teacher how her son was doing. The teacher said he was doing great; that she would like to have a whole class of children like [her son]. The mother glowed. The second grade ESOL teacher had only one mom show up. She took the mother to her classroom to show her around.

While the intention of the evening session was to get signatures on the ELL Accommodations Document, clearly there were many other unplanned benefits to the get-together.

Unfortunately none of my fifth grade ESOL students’ families showed up. That week I had to rely on the tried-and-true method of sending the accommodations form
home with my students and reminding them daily until I got them all back. I sent home both the English and the Spanish versions and asked the students to return the English version signed. Every fifth-grade ESOL student had a signed accommodations document in their cumulative folder in time for the second MSA Benchmark test which took place in November.

All seven boys in this study had signed accommodations documents on file. Interestingly, when I discussed the forms with their parents later in the school year, not one recognized the form when I showed it to them or had any idea of what it said. At Marysburg Elementary, the school instructional team all concurred that the parents probably just signed the document and returned it without knowing what it was. Dr. Etienne said, “Some people would say that if they signed it they must have some knowledge of what they signed. But we know better.” Ms. Taylor, the school principal, explained the reasons parents did not understand it. “It’s not a very user-friendly document. It’s very confusing.” Ms. Ware believed that even the translated version was too complex and that parents could not easily read it. This belief is plausible for the families in this study given that the parents’ reported educational attainment averaged 4.2 years of formal schooling (Table 5.4). Dr. Etienne offered a plausible explanation for why parents would sign the form without understanding it: “They sign it because they trust the school and they believe the school is doing things in their child’s best interest, so they sign it. If it’s required, they’ll sign it.”

As demonstrated by the discussion below, Ms. Anderson, the ESOL department chair, also believed that parents signed the form without knowing what it said. As the mother of a child with a learning disability, she had experienced the need to claim
accommodations for her son. Ms. Anderson was a doctor’s wife and a resident of one of the most affluent communities in the region. The discussion brings to light a parent involvement gap based on social class. In Ms. Anderson’s community, it is hard to imagine parents signing an accommodations form without reading it first:

Ryan: Do you think [the ESOL parents] just get this paper and they just sign it without knowing what it is?

Anderson: Oh sure. Oh sure. My hope is for the next generation. That they’ll know more. I can’t imagine even when my grandfather first came to this country from Poland that they had any clue what was going on. I think the first generation they just have to learn the ropes. It’s surviving. That’s how I think these parents are doing. They’re surviving.

R: So accommodations on standardized tests are not a priority?

A: No. No. It can’t be. How could it be?

R: What about for …what about in an upscale suburban neighborhood? Do you think the parents would be involved in accommodations, let’s say, if their kid was in special ed?

A: You bet your bottom dollar! You’d be in at that table and you’d probably have a lawyer with you or an educational consultant with you. Right beside you. [Anderson’s emphasis.] And fighting every inch of the way for exactly that child should receive.

R: How do you know that?

A: First-hand experience. You never walk into a school without an educational consultant even though you know what’s going on and…
R: You know that from…
A: being a mother.
R: You did that for your kid?
A: Oh my gosh, yes. Oh yeah. And also I know all the other parents have done it. Fight for your kid. And some parents are better at it than others.
R: What about if you taught the parents here how to do that?
A: Hmm. Yeah. I think they’d have to learn how to muscle their way in. I’d have to contact some of my other friends who are way better at it that I am. But yeah. They should learn these skills because you have to fight for your kids. As an educator I know those teachers are not always right. [laughing]
R: As a parent you have a lot of knowledge about how to get what you want for your kid.
A: Uh huh [yes] Parents here don’t know that they have that right to go in and fight for their kid.

Parents of ESOL students were not the only ones in the dark about ELL accommodations. Ms. Fairbanks and Ms. Longman, who worked with the students on a daily basis, had never seen or heard of the ELL Accommodations Document before I showed it to them. Ms. Street was aware of the document but did not know the details. When I showed her a copy and asked her if parents of ESOL students knew about it she responded:

Street: No, no, not at all. The staff doesn’t even know. They should have had the accommodation in all their classes and they don’t get it.
Ryan: Have you read the accommodations document?
Street: You mean that thing you’re always chasing them around with? I’ve never looked at it. Just Ms. Anderson always going [funny voice] “Did they bring it back yet?” What accommodations are they supposed to get?

Ms. Street was aware that any accommodations listed on the form had to be provided on a regular basis in the classroom, so teachers should have had that information. We ESOL teachers did not make an effort to inform classroom teachers of the ELL accommodations, however, because the ones that Marysburg provided (verbatim reading, extra time, testing at the best time of day and adjusted grouping) were offered naturally to all students during the course of instruction anyway.

5.2.2 “Verbatim Reading or Audiotape of Entire Test”

The verbatim reading accommodation was the most widely used accommodation in the school as it was provided both to ESOL 1 and 2 students and special education students. Teachers read the tests, the questions, and the response options on both the reading test and the math test. (Interestingly, on the ELL Accommodations Document, the verbatim reading option that was selected allowed the verbatim reading accommodation only for the reading test, not math.) All the boys in the study received the accommodation for the MSA and I observed them all (including Omar, Jaime and Luis who were novice English learners) following along in the test book as Ms. Fairbanks or I read to them.

While the three newcomers claimed to have understood us when we read to them, I observed them choosing almost entirely incorrect responses. Herminio, Herbert and Carlos all agreed that the test would be harder if they had had to read it themselves.
Carlos believed that he got more correct answers than he would have if he had read the test to himself. Carlos said, “It would be more harder. It would be so worser that I wouldn’t even get out of bed.” Herminio said at the beginning of the school year that he liked the verbatim reading accommodation. At the end of the year, however, when I posed the question again, he had changed his mind. He said that sometimes he wanted to take more time with a word and Ms. Fairbanks just continued on. I wondered if the change in opinion meant that Herminio was becoming a more independent reader.

The school personnel I interviewed also had their opinions about the verbatim reading accommodation. Ms. Bartholomew, from the Parker County ESOL office, felt that the verbatim reading accommodation was not appropriate for beginning level students. She had witnessed a small group of newcomers being provided that modification:

Some of those students in the small group were brand new…three or four months in this country. It didn’t matter if you read it in English. It was a fifth grade level test…A three-page story that you read to them in English and then asked questions. It was a waste of everybody’s time. It was ridiculous.

[Bartholomew’s emphasis]

Dr. Etienne, who had a PhD in TESOL and coordinated the Marysbur Elementary School special education program said,

Reading to a kid whose English is limited is probably as effective as trying to boil chicken soup in a sieve…Reading a test is helpful if I’m an auditory learner and I have a fair amount of English language in place. Other than that, we read too fast, the words are too difficult, the questions are too long. God forbid you’ve got answers you [have to] read as well. By the time you’re done, they’ve lost the
question. If they stay attuned visually then they’re fine. But if you don’t know
English that well, following all the questions over the period of an hour of
testing…Ain’t happenin’!

Ms. Street, the reading specialist that worked with the low scoring readers in the fifth
grade, believed that by reading a reading test aloud for students, it no longer tested
reading ability. “It’s a hearing test. I don’t know how useful it is to hear the test.” Ms.
Taylor concurred:

When you do an accommodation, it invalidates the score. What we find is that
students who maybe on the [MSA] Benchmark score at the 3rd grade level might,
on the IPT, score as a complete non-reader because on the [MSA] Benchmark
they didn’t have to read. You just have to be aware of what it is that you’re
getting a measure of, because it is not a measure of reading. It may be a level of
language reasoning but it’s not a measure of reading.

Ms. Ware, the school’s testing coordinator believed that the verbatim reading
accommodation was not appropriate for ESOL 1 students and for some ESOL 2 students.
She felt that verbatim reading is a better accommodation for ESOL 3 and for those ESOL
2 students who are orally fluent but struggling with reading.

One problem with verbatim reading that I observed when I was helping to
accommodate special education students was that the read-aloud option does not provide
a mechanism for students to go back to the text to find an answer. Referring back to
previously read text is an important test-taking strategy that is very difficult to rely on if
the entire class has to stay at the teacher’s reading pace. Also, if a child cannot read the
test independently, then she or he is unlikely to independently refer back to text.
Another interesting development when I accommodated that group of special education students was that the reading instructional specialist with whom I was working, did not share the reading duties, but read the entire test aloud by herself. When I worked with Ms. Fairbanks and Ms. Street, we took turns reading in order to relieve one another’s voices. Ms. Rupert insisted that for the accommodation to be valid the same person had to read the entire test. While that makes sense, the only way to have a truly standardized verbatim reading is if the test came with an audio recording that all students across the state listened to.

Overall the ESOL 2 students in this study accepted the verbatim reading accommodation and grew to expect it. Parents did not know about the accommodation. There is no research that I am familiar with that proves that verbatim reading is a valid ELL accommodation which allows ELL students to demonstrate their knowledge without changing the test’s construct or giving them an unfair advantage. School personnel did not think it was appropriate for all ELL students, but provided it anyway.

What was not commonly stated by anyone at the school, but mentioned in Ms. Taylor’s comments above, is the fact that the verbatim reading accommodation might have artificially raised reading scores. This is a significant reason for school districts, working under pressure from NCLB to raise test scores for different subgroups, to encourage educational personnel to read the reading test to ESOL and special education students. On the other hand, if raising test scores were Marysburg’s motivation for providing the verbatim reading accommodation, then it would make sense to provide the accommodation to the ESOL 3 students as well. Slightly higher reading scores may have pushed the advanced ESOL students more than any other group into the Proficient
category for AYP purposes. Marysburg required ESOL 3 students, however, to take their assessments under standard conditions and so the school did not benefit from the accommodation in terms of meeting NCLB requirements.

The verbatim reading accommodation probably did not provide accurate reading data and it probably did not raise test scores enough to benefit the school’s goal of meeting AYP. The best explanation for providing the verbatim reading accommodation to ESOL 2 and ESOL 1 students at Marysburg was that it allowed these students to participate in the testing event like the rest of the children at the school, without experiencing a sense of total defeat. Verbatim reading may have been a way for the school to implement the testing program in a way that caused less test-anxiety.

5.2.3 “Extra Response and Processing Time”

Another accommodation listed on the ELL Accommodations Document was “Extra response and processing time.” Our testing period for the MSA was ninety minutes long, from 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. The verbatim reading accommodation impacted the extra time accommodation because all the students went through the test at the same pace. We waited for all students to finish answering questions before we moved on to the following item. At the end of the test, we gave students as much time as they needed to review their answers. I observed that all the students finished well within the allotted time. Mysteriously, Herminio and Eddie both said they needed more time, although the other students disagreed. Herminio said that he needed more time to go back and check his answers. He also said that at times he wanted to read more slowly than the pace that Ms. Fairbanks and I set with our verbatim reading. Eddie also said that he needed more
time to check his answers. I observed that both Eddie and Herminio had answered all the questions and had stopped working on the test before the ninety minute testing period had ended, so their saying that they needed more time to check their answers confused me. I assumed that they had stopped working because they were finished. Perhaps they stopped working because they had reached their limit for concentrating on the test.

ESOL Department Chair Anderson may have identified the problem and its solution when she suggested that the testing sessions were too long and that shorter sessions over more days would have better allowed them to demonstrate their abilities:

Really the test should be shorter because they can’t concentrate that long. It’s too hard. You’re working in a second language and the test goes on and on and on. And they’re working at a higher stress level…it’s more taxing. It’s tiring. It’s exhausting. It’s really really exhausting. They need shorter periods each day on the test. I mean to do an hour and a half? It’s too long already so more time is ridiculous. They’ve already shut down. More time isn’t helping.

Regarding the extra time accommodation for the newcomers, all of whom in this study finished within the allotted time, Ms. Bartholomew from the county ESOL office said,

…extra time is probably most useful if you’re talking about a kid that has some literacy skills in English then they’re probably going to be able to do something on the test, like a Level 2 or 3 student. If a student cannot access the test at all in English, no amount of time will be sufficient.
5.2.4 “General Education Classroom with Adjusted Grouping”

Like the extra time accommodation, the “general education classroom with adjusted grouping” accommodation was impacted by the verbatim reading accommodation. It makes sense for ELL students who need extra support to take the test together so that their particular needs can be efficiently addressed during testing. At Marysburg, adjusted grouping meant that the students who needed verbatim reading went to one room, those who received verbatim reading with scripting (an adult writing the student’s dictated answers to constructed response items) went to another room and those who did not get accommodations went to different rooms. Besides these groupings there were no other special groupings, except unofficially with the 5th grade newcomers for the first MSA Benchmark in September. (See Section 5.2.8.)

5.2.5 “Tests are Administered at Best Time of Day for Student”

On the ELL Accommodations Plan, which Ms. Taylor and Ms. Anderson had signed, one accommodation provided to all ESOL students in the school was “Tests are administered at best time of day for student.” While ELL accommodations were supposed to be assigned on a case-by-case basis, this was impossible for a school like Marysburg which had a large contingent of ESOL students at each grade level. Third and fifth grades tested in the morning, fourth and sixth in the afternoon after lunch. This schedule had to do with logistics, not accommodating individual learning styles. Accommodations for special education and ELL students required sufficient staffing to implement them. We ESOL teachers and other specialists dropped our teaching duties and spent test days implementing accommodations during both morning and afternoon
testing sessions. For instance, in the morning I helped with verbatim reading of ESOL 1 and 2 fifth graders and in the afternoon had different duties. For the MSA, I scribed (wrote the students’ answers for them) for special education students in a combined fifth and sixth grade group. Adjusted time for testing was not actually an accommodation that Marysburg Elementary could provide to ELL students according to each child’s individual needs.

Out of curiosity I brought up with Eddie, Carlos, Herminio and Herbert if morning was indeed preferable for MSA testing. I do not believe that the students had thought about it before so there was some discussion and changing of opinions. Only Herminio said that he preferred the morning for testing. Carlos, Eddie and Herbert all said that they felt sleepy first thing in the morning. Herminio said, “It’s better to do it in the morning because in the afternoon you’re all tired and you like wanna go home already.” Herminio also reminded the other boys that on MSA days, they get the afternoon to relax and play after morning testing: “It’s better because in the afternoon we have fun!…In the afternoon we were playing computers and we were painting these cool pictures. And we did wordsearch that was so easy and it was fun.” Herbert replied, “Oh yeah. That’s true.” The students did have some idea of when they felt tired and so consulting with them and their parents may have provided valuable information about when to administer tests according to individual learning style.

In my experience, most teachers know that after lunch students are usually restless and less focused on academics than in the morning. Ms. Fairbanks, Ms. Longman and I all noticed that Ms. Fairbanks’s homeroom students bickered a lot among themselves in the afternoon compared to in the morning. We spent time counseling them
on conflict resolution and management, but lunch, recess and PE usually provided ample
time for the fifth graders to shift their focus from academics to their social situations and
in-fighting. Ms. Longman had constant behavior challenges with Ms. Fairbanks’s
homeroom for the two-hour afternoon math-science block. She complained almost daily
of the students’ poor behavior and often punished them by denying them their recess for
the following day.

While three of the four boys I asked disagreed that morning was the best time of
day for testing, I believe that morning testing was better for them than afternoon. It could
even be argued that they had an unfair advantage over the fourth and sixth graders who
tested in the afternoon. I would concede to the boys in the study, however, that 8:30 a.m.
may be too early, and a later morning start may have been worth arranging.

5.2.6 If the MSA Were in Spanish

I observed Ms. Fairbanks’s students during practice for the math portion of the
MSA on the day before the test. I rarely participated in the math-science block since that
was the time I pulled students for ESOL groups. My March 8, 2004 notes read:

In math they did a practice math MSA. I am not hopeful from what I saw. I
worked with S, Jaime, Y, Omar and R. … Omar did well. He understood the
concepts but did not understand what was being asked. When I explained in
Spanish, he got it and was able to do the work independently. He was smiling and
happy. S. and Jaime were lost even with the L1 support.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 allows for students to be tested in their
native language: “…limited English proficient students shall be assessed in a valid and
reliable manner and provided reasonable accommodations on assessments administered to such students …including, to the extent practicable, assessments in the language and form most likely to yield accurate data on what such students know and can do in academic content areas, until such students have achieved English language proficiency…” (NCLB Part A, Subpart 1, Sec. 1111, 3 (C) (ix) (III)). Maryland has chosen not to test in languages other than English.

Jaime, Omar and Luis spoke sometimes of the fact that in El Salvador their test scores were high. Once, when I asked if they would do better if the MSA were in Spanish, they laughed and Luis and Omar said, “Of course!”

Ryan: Y si en la MSA si hubieran, si les daban la prueba en español?
Omar: ¡La contestábamos en un minuto!
Jaime: Yo me sacaba una A, una A Mr. Monroe!
Luis: Yo me sacaba sólo A. Sólo diez llevaba, porque allá bian fáciles de leer.
Omar: Nueve, diez, nueve diez sacaba.

[Ryan: And if on the MSA if there was… if they gave you the test in Spanish?
Omar: We would answer it in one minute!
Jaime: I would get an A, an A, Mr. Monroe!
Luis: I would get all As. I used to get all 10’s because there they were easy to read.
Omar: Nine, ten, nine, ten I used to get.]

On the other hand, Herminio, Eddie, Carlos and Herbert said that a test in Spanish would not help them. Herminio said, “I know how to read a little bit Spanish but not that much.” Eddie: “It would be even harder in Spanish.” Carlos: “I wouldn’t understand it
because I don’t know that much Spanish…I don’t even know how to read Spanish.”

Herbert: “I don’t even know how to talk Spanish.” (Although his mother told me differently.)

While primary language testing is not the best thing for all ELL students, for newcomers who have been continually educated in their home countries, testing in their native language may be a valid way to find out what they know and can do. I asked Ms. Longman, the children’s math teacher specifically about Omar, an educated newcomer:

Ryan: If you gave Omar a math test in Spanish would you get a better idea of what he knows?”

Ms. Longman: Yes, definitely. Even though it’s a lot of numbers in math, there are a lot of word problems so they don’t have a context for those numbers. They don’t know what operation they’re doing. They just have no clue when it’s a bunch of English. Kids who speak English as their first language have difficulty interpreting what operation they’ll use. So, yes, I think we’ll have a much better understanding.

When asked a similar question Ms. Street replied:

Some of them don’t even read Spanish. They speak Spanish but they don’t read it. I don’t know…maybe if they heard the test in Spanish…. I’m not sure. I mean I could see Jaime and Omar and Luis [the three newcomers] doing better.

Instructional personnel at Marysburg Elementary understood the complexity of testing in languages other than English. Ms. Bartholomew said, “If they’re literate in Spanish and you want to know if they have reading ability…not reading ability in English…but reading ability, then testing them in their native language of course makes
sense.” Dr. Etienne concurred: “… if you really wanted a standardized test that shows what a student really knows including all background knowledge then you’d have to do translation either on paper or translating it to them.” There are several problems that arise with primary language testing, however, and translation is just one of them. Ms. Anderson pointed out that in order to accommodate on the MSA the accommodation has to be part of regular classroom instruction: “Then if we accommodate for the MSA then we have to do that all year long…have translators. Where are we going to get that?”

The other argument that I have heard commonly in Maryland is that with all the different language groups in the state, it is not fair to provide primary language to one and not the other. Ms. Anderson and Dr. Etienne rehashed this line of reasoning. Anderson: “If we provided translation services for one group we would have to have them for all the groups.” Etienne:

> Well in Parker County where you have how many languages, how practical is it to do that? Either you are able to accommodate across the board or technically you’re not accommodating. And the reason that Parker County has historically not done that kind of test translation is because you’re accommodating one group but not the rest.

Finally Dr. Etienne brought up another important complexity in primary language testing, language loss and access to primary language education:

> The kids are losing their (let’s say) Spanish while they’re gaining English so at a certain point the translation of the test is not an advantage either. And the Spanish that they know from home is not academic Spanish so translating to academic Spanish, unless they’ve been schooled, you know they encounter the same
problem that they do with the test when it was in English. The level of language structure of the sentences is too difficult compared to the conversational Spanish that they have.

Primary language assessment, while recognized at Marysburg as a valid way to gain information on what some students know and can do, was not implemented. Ms. Anderson’s reasoning, that it is not part of the regular classroom instruction is the same reasoning provided by the state coordinator of ESOL instruction at the time (Personal communication with MSDE specialist, October, 2003). The argument is that since the students have an English-Only program then testing in other languages is not an available option. This opinion is based on ELL assessment research that has shown that testing should match the language of instruction (Abedi, 2001b). Following that argument, then for recent arrivals in this study, the language of their instruction since kindergarten had been Spanish, not English, so an English assessment could not have been valid.

Since the students do not receive instruction in their native language then language loss takes place, as described by Dr. Etienne and Ms. Street. Some students from Spanish-speaking backgrounds like Eddie, Herbert and Carlos may speak or understand Spanish without being able to read it. They may have conversational knowledge of the language but not academic knowledge. This renders assessment in Spanish less useful as the boys’ comments bear out in this study.

5.2.7 Linguistic Modification of Test Items

It could also be argued that since appropriate English instruction for ELL students contains simplified language with visual clues and other scaffolding, that sheltered
English is an ESOL student’s language of instruction. Giving ELL students a grade level test designed for native English speakers does not match their language of instruction and ignores the research on the linguistic modification as an accommodation for English language learners (See Chapter 2 “Accommodations for ELLs in Large-Scale Assessments”).

In conversations Ms. Bartholomew and Ms. Fairbanks, both advocated for plain language as a valid alternative for content assessments like science and math:

Bartholomew: … Right now we’re still testing language when we give them a math test. For example if you don’t understand [the word] “perimeter” but you could very easily give the perimeter, then you’re sunk. So many of the word problems are so wordy… You couldn’t wade through the several paragraphs of language to get to the fact that you needed to find the perimeter.

Ryan: I think you would advocate for simplified English.

Bartholomew: Absolutely. Plain English version of the math [test] definitely. And plain English directions for the reading [test]. I do think it’s valuable to test reading to see if they can read and to test vocabulary to see if they know the words in English or not… to see what level they’re on. But don’t let the test itself stop them from demonstrating what it is they really do know.

In Ms. Fairbanks’s case she referred to vocabulary items from the fifth grade curriculum interfering with the children’s understand of what was being asked:
Fairbanks: I would like…I don’t want to dumb down the test, but depending on where the kids are…I mean using words like “undulating” or “threshold” you can read that to them, but bottom line is, is that going to test their understanding of, say, electricity? They might have an understanding of electricity but using ‘threshold’ and all those types of words, that to me doesn’t make the point.

Ryan: So plain language?

Fairbanks: Yes. Yeah. Not from the standpoint of it has to be dumbed down.

Ryan: Same concept, simpler language.

Fairbanks: Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!

5.2.8 De Facto Accommodations for Jaime, Omar and Luis

Besides the official accommodations of extra time, verbatim reading, specialized grouping and morning administration, Jaime, Omar and Luis, all received important accommodations on the first MSA Benchmark even though the accommodations were not planned ahead of time or officially sanctioned by means of the ELL Accommodations Document.

Standardized testing started on September 9, 10, 12, and 13, 2004 when students took the first of three Maryland School Assessment (MSA) Benchmark tests. Ms. Taylor, the principal, expected teachers to administer the MSA Benchmark test under the same strict conditions as would be required for the actual MSA in March. Results on the Benchmark are supposed to be used to find areas where students needed extra instruction so teachers could plan accordingly. Students took the language arts tests on the first two mornings and math on the second two. Following standard testing procedures, ELL
students with a signed ELL Accommodations Document (See Appendix C) on file took the test with Ms. Fairbanks and received the approved accommodations: verbatim reading, adjusted grouping, extra time and administration during the best time of day (8:30 a.m. to 10 a.m.). Eddie, Herminio, Carlos, and Herbert took the test with Ms. Fairbanks’s group. Special education students took the test with Ms. Street who provided the same accommodations with the addition of scripting, or writing the students’ answers for them on the brief constructed response (BCR) questions.

The three newcomer students, Jaime, Omar and Luis, had not had their accommodation document signed yet, so technically they had to take the MSA Benchmark under standard conditions. Ms. Ware, the school testing coordinator, should have placed the boys in a class with Ms. Longman’s or Ms. Arnold’s students, who did not get test accommodations. Rather than rigidly following the regulations, however, Ms. Ware instead asked me to administer the test to the three newcomers separately in my classroom without the “verbatim reading” accommodation. (I suppose that Ms. Ware bent the rules for these boys because first, this was not the actual MSA, but a benchmark test and secondly, when the time came to take the actual MSA, as newcomers, they would be exempt from the reading test and their math scores would not count against the school in terms of accountability.) We also agreed that I would explain the instructions to them in Spanish. Of course, by administering the test to the three newcomers, I provided this “non-accommodated” group with de facto accommodations: instructions in the primary language and support from a cultural broker, and a small group setting.

As a cultural broker I was familiar with both languages and cultures so I could help the students to transition to how things were done in their new country. The three
boys had not taken a U.S. standardized test before. Not knowing English, they were unable to read the test and could only guess at the answers. They had no experience answering questions on a separate “bubble sheet”. The testing situations for them would undoubtedly have been more confusing and stressful if they had been placed with Ms. Longman’s or Ms. Arnold unaccommodated groups. In that case, they would have had to get guidance from a Spanish-speaking classmate, which would have been difficult if not impossible given the strict behavior expectations during testing.

On the first day of the practice test, I explained in Spanish the purposes of the MSA testing program. I explained to them the procedures for testing including how to match the questions to the answer sheet and how to fill in the bubbles. I told them that if they felt frustrated they could tell me and I would take the test back. (The ESOL testing coordinator from the Marysburg Public Schools central office had told us ESOL teachers during training that we could not exempt ESOL students from the test, but we could exclude them if the test made them feel too agitated. The excluded students would score “0”, however.) I told the boys that the test was made for English speakers and that we were required to give the test to them in English even though they had not yet learned the language. I told them that they could guess and that their test score would not affect their grades. I told them that the test was practice for the end of year exam. They would be getting a higher score each time as they progressed in their acquisition of English. The tests would prove that they were learning English and the school was doing its job.

The boys’ behavior was quite animated before the test. They joked and laughed enthusiastically. Omar said three times with a smile on his face, “¡Tengo miedo!” (“I’m scared!”) but he was not so frightened that he wanted to turn in his test without finishing
it first. I believe his “miedo” was a mix of fear and excitement, like what youngsters feel before they ride a roller coaster or jump off a high diving board.

The three boys went through the motions of test-taking. They pretended to read the passages and the questions. They matched the questions with the correct spot on the answer sheet, and contentedly filled in bubbles randomly. They worked quietly and diligently, finishing the practice test in about twenty minutes. Afterwards we talked and drew pictures until Dr. Etienne announced on the P.A. system that the Benchmark test was over and students could return to their regular classrooms.

While the administration of the MSA Benchmark for Jaime, Omar and Luis was the least stressful possible and provided them with a lesson in how we do testing in this country, the test did not measure the boys’ reading comprehension or math skills. Only a test in their native language could have done that. While the No Child Left Behind Act allows for students to be tested in the language that best allows them to demonstrate their knowledge, the Maryland State Department of Education, like most states, has chosen to test in English only.

For the next MSA Benchmarks in November, the three boys had signed ELL Accommodations Documents and took the test with the other ELL students to whom Ms. Fairbanks and I took turns reading the test out loud, verbatim, in English. While the three newcomers did not understand much of what we were saying, they could at least look like they were taking the test. By comparison, two newcomers who arrived at Marysburg Elementary in time for the spring administration of the MSA Benchmark did not have the same small group orientation with me and appeared confused and frustrated during their
first experience with U.S. standardized testing. I certainly did not observe the same excitement I had witnessed when Jaime, Omar and Luis took the test for the first time.

5.2.9 Conclusions Regarding ELL Accommodations on the MSA

According to the ELL Accommodations Document, Marysburg Elementary School provided four accommodations for ESOL students on the MSA:

- Verbatim reading of entire reading test.
- Extra response and processing time.
- General education classroom, with adjusted grouping.
- Tests are administered at best time of day for student.

The “Best Time of Day” accommodation was not actually provided. “Adjusted Grouping” and “Extra Time” were simply logistical requirements of the verbatim reading accommodation, not additional accommodations in themselves. Finally, verbatim reading for ELL students has not been documented in the literature to be a valid accommodation for ELL students. In addition, teachers and administrators at Marysburg did not believe that verbatim reading provided valid information on reading skills. While the accommodation probably would raise test scores for some ELL students (though not complete newcomers to the English language), the school did not provide the accommodations to the ESOL 3 students who were the most likely to move into the “Proficient” category and benefit the school’s AYP goals. Parents did not know about accommodations and did not expect them. Although the staff agreed that linguistic modification and tests in Spanish may have provided some accurate assessment information, those accommodations were impossible to implement at the one-school level.
The situation for ELL accommodations at Marysburg Elementary School can only be explained as a school’s attempt to implement requirements from the state and federal levels while doing the least harm to students. NCLB requires that ELL students be included in testing programs and provided with accommodations. The state must monitor for compliance. The ELL Accommodations Documents had accommodations checked off and appropriate signatures. The forms were on file in case of a state audit. It gave the appearance that the school provided four different accommodations. The only actual accommodation, verbatim reading, did not benefit the school in any way other than in its effort to comply with the law. The accommodation did benefit the ESOL students at least a little, however, by allowing them to participate in testing without feeling completely defeated. Marysburg had chosen the verbatim reading accommodation as the best option available to protect students from experiencing total failure while implementing a testing program that had few benefits for the school or the community.

5.3 Emotions Associated with Testing

Throughout the year, I contemplated Omar’s energetic “¡Tengo miedo!” reaction to his first MSA Benchmark test. While I did not think that this first experience with the MSA benchmark harmed Omar in any way, I do think that the testing stress took its toll as the year wore on. As he experienced one test after another it appeared to me that his excitement dissipated while his nervousness remained.
5.3.1 Nervousness

It came as no surprise that nervousness was the most often mentioned emotion when I asked the children and their parents how they felt about testing. For the parents and the children who had experienced testing in El Salvador (Omar, Jaime and Luis), their performance on exams in El Salvador had determined whether or not one was promoted to the next grade. Anxiety at those high stakes consequences seems a natural response. Of all the parents, only Omar’s father felt confident when taking tests, he said because his teachers always let him know that he was doing very well in school.

For the newcomer boys doing tests in the U.S., assessments in English were a challenge that caused them anxiety. In his journal Jaime wrote:

Primero cuando empesamos acer el excame llo me senti mui verbioso por que llo no sabia como enpesar I llo tenia que a dibinar las respuestas porque llo no lentendia al esxame∗ [Translation: When we first started to take the test I felt very nervous because I didn’t know how to begin and I had to guess the answers because I didn’t understand the test.]

The brief constructed response (BCR) items caused the most feelings because of the need to write an answer rather than simply filling in a bubble on the answer sheet. Jaime wrote in his journal:

the test was hard when you have to do the BCA. The test was easy when you have to do las cosas que tiene [the things that has] ABCD you ha to pick one. The test was hard when you has to write in the BCA.

∗ Presented here as originally written, including spelling errors.
Omar said, “Yo me sentí muy nervioso porque en el BCR no hallé qué contestar” [I felt very nervous because in the BCR I couldn’t figure out what to write.] Luís wrote in his journal that he felt proud taking up the challenge: “sentía muy orgulloso porque es muy costoso es muy costoso por de los BCR” [I felt proud because it is very difficult. It’s very difficult because of the BCR.]

In contrast, the boys who had been educated in the U.S. (Eddie, Carlos, Herbert and Herminio) and had not experienced testing in El Salvador had negative feelings about the test, but they did not mention nervousness as much. Boredom was the more likely emotional experience. Herminio wrote: “I think the MSA test was boring because it took to long kids don’t like it. I don’t know why we have to take it.” Eddie’s written reflections included, “I was bored. Kids do not like the MSA. It feel boring to take the MSA.” Like the three newcomers, Carlos’s written reflection (below) also mentioned the BCRs as making the test more difficult. At the same time his use of the phrase “in conclusion” in his final sentence demonstrates he had been trained for writing brief constructed responses: “The MSA was hard. We had like 10 BCRs. I think the MSA is the worstes [‘worstest, i.e. worst] test in the planet earth. If I passed the MSA God will come down. In conclusion that is why I whant to pass the MSA.”

5.3.2 Anger and Defiance

Herbert and Eddie both left sick during the MSA test and had to make up the missed sections. Eddie said,

On Thursday night I didn’t have enough sleep because I was watching wrestling so then at the morning… I didn’t eat and I went to class and I was hungry and I felt like I wanted to throw up and then I had to go home.
I believe that for Eddie, anger played a role in much of his behavior. Ms. Fairbanks had repeatedly told the kids to get plenty of sleep and to eat a big breakfast in order to do their best on the MSA. I couldn’t help but think that Eddie’s behavior was defiant rather than negligent. For me, his behavior was very predictable as he acted so much like my own angry son at his age. At the same time, I noticed how difficult it was for him to complete his writing assignments. I couldn’t help but think that his frustration had to do with his academic struggles.

On the day when we did the EPAS writing test, for example, Eddie did not want to participate. As he was walking into my classroom with the other students, I put my hand on his shoulder blade to gently guide him into the classroom. He pushed back, refusing to go inside. I gave him space and he walked in on his own. He became talkative and began telling the group that he was going to just put down anything on his answer sheet. I asked him to settled down and when he refused, in my frustration, I threatened to put a number on his behavior chart which would cause a negative report to go home. He said, “Go ahead. I like getting numbers. Put down a 9.” When the test started I observed him filling in answers randomly without attempting to read, so I had to send him back to class and invalidate his test.

We also had an angry incident with Eddie during one of the May MSA Benchmark days when Eddie seated himself next to Herminio. Ms. Fairbanks arranged the students, when possible, with at least one empty desk on every side, in a checkerboard pattern. She asked Eddie to move and pointed to the seat in which she wanted him to sit. He moved, but to a different chair next to another student. Ms. Fairbanks confronted his defiance and insisted that he sit where she had indicated. This enraged Eddie and for the
first section of the test he refused to participate and instead spent the time destroying his pencil. I believed he was trying to escalate the situation with this behavior and so I refused Ms. Fairbanks’s request to escort him to the principal’s office. I thought that if we sent him out he may cause more of a scene in the office and perhaps end up suspended. I let him sit undisturbed, breaking his pencil, and eventually he calmed down and started writing. He refused to go back and do the section that he skipped, though.

The incident came up the next day in our ESOL group. Eddie said that he felt that by moving him, Ms. Fairbanks was accusing him of cheating. This caused Herminio to laugh loudly and he reminded us that Eddie had been caught at least twice cheating on spelling tests. Eddie said that while he did cheat on spelling tests, he would not do so on the MSA. I assured him that Ms. Fairbanks didn’t mean for him to take it personally; that she was expected to spread the students out for the test. At the same time, I could not help but consider Eddie’s lack of strong academic language skills in English as an underlying reason for Eddie’s anger and defiance during testing sessions.

5.3.3 Test Boredom and Silence

When I asked Eddie, Herminio, Herbert and Carlos in a small focus group interview what they most wanted people to know about standardized tests, they shouted “THEY’RE BORING!” My own participation as a scribe for special education students confirmed that opinion. For the MSA administration in March, Ms. Ware assigned me to work accommodating a group of special education students in the afternoon after my students had finished their test in the morning. I sat with a group of five fifth- and sixth-grade students and was assigned to scribe for two of them. Scribing is an accommodation
in which an adult writes down verbatim the students’ dictated answers to the BCRs. I sat between two students and scribed for them both as they whispered their answers in my ear so their classmates could not hear. The students also had the test read to them. Ms. Street read the first day and Ms. Rupert, the reading instructional specialist, read the next three days. My job was to sit quietly until it was time to write.

The special education students for whom I scripted were bilingual youngsters who either no longer required ESOL instruction or who received it from Ms. Anderson within their special education program. As I observed the fifth and sixth graders complete their tests, I saw that within ten minutes of the start of the test, they stopped trying to understand the questions that Ms. Rupert read to them and just filled in bubbles randomly on the answer sheet at the appropriate moment. When it came time for me to write answers to their BCRs, the students either had me write sentences unrelated to anything Ms. Rupert had read, or they pointed out random sentences in the reading passages and asked me simply to copy them. Ms. Anderson, who had scribed for this group previously had had the same experience. She said, “Their answers were so bizarre. They were not even close to what the theme asked for.”

To add to the strange monotony, before we could move on to a subsequent question, we all had to sit in silence until each of the five students finished answering each question. One student in particular proceeded through his test questions at an excruciatingly slow pace. I could not help but start to fidget along with two of the sixth grade boys as we all needed some way to entertain ourselves while we waited in silent agony for the test to end. The boy across the round table from me began to keep himself busy by mimicking my movements. I started making movements like crossing my eyes
and or scratching my head just to see if he would copy me. The boy who sat to my left, whom I knew from monitoring morning line-up, suddenly and unexpectedly pulled out his wallet and flipped it open in front of my face. To my great surprise and amusement I saw that he had a white index card with large letters written in pencil saying “FBI”. Next to the letters a rectangle contained a pencil-drawn portrait, presumably of himself. He whispered sternly, “You’re under arrest!” This struck me as hugely amusing at the time and I could barely prevent my laughter from breaking the testing silence.

In every class where I administered tests, students had to wait for every one of students in the school to finish before they could talk or engage in some other activity. Teachers called the office on the P.A. system to let them know when they finished. When all classes called in, an announcement went out that testing was over. The staff was concerned that any noise would distract the children into putting down a wrong answer. We advised the children that they should use their extra time to go back and check their answers. Few students did that. Mostly they sat daydreaming or dozing with heads on their desks or they found some silent game to play alone. On the May MSA Benchmark, for example, I observed Omar playing with the candy wrapper that had covered the peppermint that Ms. Fairbanks had given him. Omar laid his cheek on the desktop and would gently blow the wrinkled plastic wrapper across his desk. It appeared that the object of Omar’s game was to blow the wrinkled plastic square as close as possible to the edge of the desktop without it falling off. Ms. Fairbanks, feeling the need to eliminate distractions, took the wrapper and disposed of it.

Maintaining strict quiet was a top priority on MSA testing days. Each teacher was given a laminated sign to post on the outside of the classroom door that read:
“Testing…Please do not disturb! We want to do our best!” Outdoor recess was cancelled on test days so that playground noise did not interrupt students’ concentration. Classes that were not involved in testing had to engage in activities that did not create any disturbances. Students that had finished their tests were expected to sit silently until everyone in the school was finished with testing. Once during the May MSA Benchmark testing, I was assigned to proctor a fourth grade afternoon test administration. Upstairs, a third grade classroom was moving furniture and making noise. Since the noise happened repeatedly and we did not know which class it was, the testing coordinator had me to go to each third grade classroom and let the teachers know that the noise was disturbing the fourth grade testers. Although none of the teachers admitted to allowing the noise, one of the teachers got defensive.

The total silence policy was not questioned, except by some of the students. I learned from two of my ESOL students that total silence is not always a good thing for everyone. One boy in the class who had been diagnosed with ADHD and did not take medication, said that he could not concentrate because of the silence. He preferred working while it was noisy. Herbert also said that he would have answered more items correctly on the reading portion of the IPT test (in which they did not receive the verbatim reading accommodation) if I hadn’t been walking around shushing them. Herbert reminded me that some kids do not read very well silently and need to whisper the words to themselves while they read:

Ryan: [Discussing the reading comprehension part of the IPT.] So you guys. I wonder…I think you know the answers but I think you have trouble reading this part.
Herbert: Yeaaah. It’s ‘cause…when I was reading it you were like “Shhhhh” and I was like “How can I read it, then?!” Cause I can’t read it in my mind. It’s too much things in my mind…Math, reading.

Carlos: [joking]Your hair.

Herbert: Yeah, my hair.

Ryan: What do you mean? I don’t understand. It’s too quiet?

Carlos: When you read you’re like this. [move eyes and head with lips closed.]

Herbert: I can’t read like that. I can’t read like Carlos is do like. I have to talk!

Ryan: Ohhhh! You mean like…you have to read it out loud…

Herbert: Yeah!

Ryan: …and hear what you say.

Herbert: Yeah! And then I see the answer. Now I get the answer. But it was like huhhhhh?

Ryan: You know, somebody else in class complained that it was too quiet…

Herbert: Yep!

Ryan: …when we take the test. I think it was H. He said, “It’s so quiet I can’t concentrate.”

Carlos: So he needs noise.

Herminio: What? [starts laughing loudly]

Herbert: [loudly] I need noise!

Ryan: So when you read it you need to…

Herminio: You have to hear something.

Ryan: …you need to hear yourself read it.
Herbert: You saw me. I was like this. [pretends to read while whispering]

5.3.4 Peppermint Candy: A Sweet Accommodation for Test Anxiety?

On MSA and MSA Benchmark days, Ms. Fairbanks came to school with peppermints for all the fifth graders. She had heard from a teacher friend that peppermints give the students a burst of energy for the test. I found the idea silly at first, but I saw and heard how the children appreciated the gesture. They would carefully set the peppermint on its opened wrapper on the corner of their desktops. (Ms. Fairbanks did not want the sound of wrapper-opening to distract students during testing, so they opened them beforehand.) Some students would savor the sweet now and then, returning it to the plastic wrapper after sucking it for a few seconds. When it was gone, Ms. Fairbanks would silently pass by and collect the wrapper for disposal. While none of us quite took the peppermint-as-energy theory seriously, I believe the mint may have helped to take the edge off some of the stress. Omar said, “Cuando no hallaba qué decir me comí el dulce y eso me ayudaba un poquito.” [When I couldn’t think of what to say, I ate the candy and that helped me a little bit.] In a focus group interview after the MSA in March, the following silly exchange took place that demonstrates that Carlos associated Ms. Fairbanks’s sweet accommodation with the strength to tackle BCRs:

Herminio: We needed to do like five BCRs!
Carlos: No!…
Herbert: It was so boring!…
Carlos: …We had to do like ten or five.
Herbert: …My hands were shaking!
Herminio: My eyes were popping out! [laughing]
Carlos: But then I ate the mint and I got powered up!

5.4 Brief Constructed Responses (BCRs)

At Marysburg Elementary School, students, teachers and instructional specialists focused tremendous attention on writing BCRs. The *Grade 5 MSA Finish Line*, a practice book for the reading assessment, provided information for students on this type of standardized test item:

There are also questions that ask you for a *brief constructed response*. That means you must write a short answer to a question about the selection you have read. You should always look at the selection again before you write. That way you can be specific in your answer (p. 4). [Italics in original.]

The MSA test and the MSA Benchmarks are peppered with BCRs among the selected response items. Students recognize BCRs when they see a question followed by a rectangle containing several lines where the answer must be written. Students found that answering BCRs was the most difficult part of the state exam and made them feel nervous. (See Table 5.1)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>Yo me sentí muy nervioso porque en el BCR no hallé qué contestar. [I felt very nervous because on the BCR I couldn’t figure out what to write.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>es muy costoso por de los BCR [it’s very difficult because of the BCRs]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>The test was hard when you has to write in the BCA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herminio</td>
<td>The MSA was easy. The only thing that was hard was the BCRs. There was a whole rack of them like thirty of them in just one book. [giggling]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>The MSA on the math and the reading it was easy but the VCR’s I had trouble on them. The VCR is hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>On the MSA the only thing that was hard on them were the BCRs because I didn’t understand them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert</td>
<td>Math MSA was cool and the Reading MSA was boring because in the Reading MSA we had to do lots of BCRs. But in the math MSA we did not have to do lots of BCRs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While selected response items only required filling in a circle, a BCR expects an original, written answer. It requires that they understand the question, and then formulate an appropriate, readable response which provides supporting details from a reading selection.

Ryan: Why is the BCR harder than the other questions?

Carlos: That’s because you have to write. Not color it in…In the BCRs you have to write and you can’t guess.

Jaime wrote in his journal:
the test was hard when you have to do the BCA. The test was easy when you have to do las cosas que tiene [the things that has] ABCD you ha to pick one. The test was hard when you has to write in the BCA.

The boys’ memory of the test exaggerated the number of BCRs they had to do. Carlos said that there were “ten or five” BCRs while Herminio exclaimed jokingly, “there was a whole rack of them like thirty of them in just one book!” [giggling].

We teachers received training on how to teach students to write answers to BCRs. We received, among other things, the following instructions (Fig. 5.1) from Ms. Rupert for students to follow when answering a BCR:

**Figure 5.1 Instructions for Writing a BCR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How to Write in a Box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Your answer must be written only in the box.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. You may write in the space at the bottom of the box.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Restate the prompt as the topic sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Paraphrase two details that were in the text to prove that you read the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Remember that the details must relate directly to the prompt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Don’t ramble. Be specific, brief, and to the point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Your response should make sense.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On three occasions teachers were asked to give students a practice BCR and send the class’ best, worst and an intermediate example of a response to the instructional team.
They said they would evaluate the samples and send back some feedback on how to improve the students’ writing. In my journal of January 7 I wrote about BCR practice:

On Friday they did the BCR (Brief Constructed Response). This was practice for the MSA. It took about thirty minutes plus time the day before to prepare them. They had to read a short descriptive paragraph- a first person account of life on a farm with a couple members of the family away fighting in the American Revolution. They had to explain what the tone of the piece was and provide examples from the text that supported their answer. They were given a choice-funny, serious, sad etc. I read P’s [the top student] answer which was right on and done quickly. I saw H and Luis’s which made no sense and had parts copied [directly from the prompt]. Herminio’s also made no sense but I recall his using the word ‘weird’ several times. Stanley was very upset and said almost in tears, “This is why I hate school!”

Ms. Fairbanks provided her class with the expected BCR instruction and practice, as required. In April, Ms. Fairbanks, Ms. Longman and I discussed BCR practice:

Longman: (jokingly) They all know how to say “in conclusion.”
Ryan, Fairbanks: [laughing]
Fairbanks: “Fairbanks taught us to say ‘in conclusion’ or ‘finally’. ” But it just got to be a joke. It really did.

(On one occasion, when I suggested to the students to write what they thought about the MSA in their journal, Carlos decided to write in BCR format: “I think MSA is the wrostes test in the planet earth. If I pased the MSA God will come down. In conclusion that is why I whant to pass the MSA.”)
Fairbanks: Also all the BCRs that we turned in we never got any kind of feedback on. We’ve never gotten feedback on the lesson plans that supposedly we’re sending in as far as the BCRs. So I had no idea whatsoever if what I was doing with the kids was correct or not. You didn’t get anything back, did you?

Longman: No.

Fairbanks: We interpreted it as “No news is good news” and we were teaching them the correct thing but I don’t know.

Longman: …some type of workshop or feedback or something…

One week before the March MSA we were called to a training on how to write BCRs on “author’s purpose”, an area identified by an earlier MSA Benchmark that our students did not know very well. Ms. Rupert, the reading instructional specialist felt that with an all-out, school wide push on recognizing and writing about “author’s purpose” students would perform better on the MSA. An author’s purpose for writing could be to entertain, to inform or to persuade. Each teacher in the school, including math, ESOL and language arts was to give students practice on how to answer BCRs about author’s purpose within their regular instruction. Everyone was directed to hang a poster on their classroom wall with the three possible purposes. I tied the BCR practice to the reading selections that my ESOL classes were looking at during pull-out instruction. The students learned to successfully answer questions about author’s purpose.

Unfortunately the fifth grade MSA did not contain even one BCR about author’s purpose. When we talked about the test afterwards in ESOL class, Carlos led me to believe that he probably wrote about author’s purpose anyway:
Herbert: …that one thing. If it was to inform or, or, or uhmmm…..

Ryan: Oh! Like persuade….

Herbert: Yeah, yeah! I didn’t know how to write that ‘cause it didn’t say the
arthur’s purpose.

Ryan: Right. You know that’s interesting…

Herminio: I think I got all my BCRs X and X.

[Everybody laughs]

Herminio:…because I didn’t knew what were they talking about. I was just like,

“Huh?”

Ryan: You all practiced author’s purpose…

Herbert, Herminio, Carlos: Yeah!

Ryan: …and there were no questions about that.

Herbert: I know! I didn’t write it but I thought I had to do it!

Ryan: Did you write it anyway?

Herbert: No.

Ryan: I thought you would have to do it, too.

Carlos: So did we have to do it?

Ryan: No.

Carlos: We didn’t? …Oh.

During the MSA administration, I circulated among the students and observed
what they wrote for the BCRs. My notes:

March 3
For BCRs Jaime particularly didn’t seem to know what to write. Eddie was writing but covered his answers whenever I came around so I couldn’t see them. Herminio and Carlos put a general answer down… they are supposed to use examples from the reading to support their answer. They didn’t. Herbert, a notoriously bad speller, wrote “stole” as “SOLD” which totally changed the meaning of his answer.

March 4
Jaime- code switching in first BCR. Carlos, Herbert for BCR summary wrote why they thought it was a good story….Herminio has good answer for BCR summary. Herbert’s second BCR makes no sense. Jaime, makes no sense on second. Carlos covering BCR response. Jaime code-switches on third BCR makes sense but doesn’t answer the question. Herminio ok answer on third BCR. Herbert’s third BCR doesn’t answer the question. Eddie- On the way down to the nurse he said the test was ‘a little easy’ and he did ‘fine’ on the BCRs.

Two weeks after the MSA, Ms. Rupert provided additional training on how students should answer BCRs. This time we had graphic organizers from a nearby school district that had higher scoring students. The main thing our students were missing on the BCRs, said Rupert, was that they did not connect the question to their own experiences. Now with the graphic we could train the students to tie their answers to BCRs to their lived experiences. Ms. Fairbanks complained: “… we found out two weeks after the MSA something we should have included when we were working with the kids.”

In the fall of the following school year I attended a language arts training provided by the supervisor of language arts for the Parker County Public Schools. She said that
schools are trying to train teachers and students to follow a formulaic approach for writing passable BCRs. She told us that what has to really happen for BCR practice in the classroom is first a conversation about the question. Then put the ideas from the conversation into written form that makes sense. The state BCR scorers, she said, do not look for a formulaic answer, and the training that the schools provide has not been helping.

While the students and teachers at Marysburg Elementary School received training in how to answer BCRs, the children in this study nonetheless did not experience success with BCRs on the state assessment. One major problem that they had that was not addressed on our training, was that they did not understand the questions. I believe that if they had understood the questions, perhaps through typical ESOL/bilingual education strategies like linguistic modification, support in primary language or by adding some kind of graphic or scaffolding, they may have been more successful. I do not believe that the test assessed whether or not they understood the passage because the students did not understand what was being asked.

5.5 Selected Response and Guessing

Students in the study often guessed answers on the selected response items. They said they either did not understand the question or they understood the question but did not know the correct answer, so they had to guess. Their giggling and nervous laughter regarding guessing on the tests showed me they didn’t feel comfortable doing that. Omar said that correct answers don’t really count if you have guessed. For example, when we
talked about the questions on the IPT (the English proficiency test), there was one question that no one understood:

Ryan: [Laughing] ¿Y cuando hacían ésto cómo hacían? Tenían que adivinar porque parece que no saben qué dice.

Jaime: Pero yo sólo la adiviné, Mr. Monroe.

Ryan: ¿Sí? Adivinando?

All: [laughter]

Oscar: Adivina, adivinador y cerraba los ojos!

(Ryan: [Laughing] And when you did this one [this particular question], how did you do it? You had to guess because it seems as if you don’t know what it says.

Jaime: But I just guessed, Mr. Monroe.

Ryan: Yeah? Guessing?

All: [laughter]

Oscar: Eeny meeny miney moe and close your eyes!)

Discussing the Math MSA with Jaime:

Jaime: Oh! En el examen de matemáticas yo me sentí muy mal porque era más costoso porque habían las cosas y no nos habían dado ni nada para saber como era la respuesta. Yo solo puse cualquier respuesta que podía.

R: Adivinando.

Jaime: Adivinando.
Jaime: Oh! On the math exam I felt very bad because it was more difficult because there were things and they had not given us. There was no way to know which was the answer. I just put any answer I could.

Ryan: Guessing?

Jaime: Guessing.]

When we talked about the SRI test I also asked the three newcomers how they finished the test if they did not understand.


Omar: [giggling] Adivinando.

All: [laughter]


Omar: [giggling] Guessing.

All: [laughter]]

The boys that knew more English also had to guess and when they talked about it, they also laughed. Herbert thought that I disapproved of guessing, and demonstrated that he thought that guessing might be considered inappropriate by interpreting my facial expression as anger when they told me they were guessing.
Herminio: Filling in the circle is easy because you just have to...sometimes you know the answer and sometimes that you don’t know you just...

Carlos: You just guess.

Herminio: [Laughing loudly] You have to guess! [Laughing]

Herbert: Mr. Monroe is mad! You can see it in his face. [Laughing]

R: No. I’m not mad at all. I just think it’s interesting what you’re saying.

The boys had to take the different tests (with the one exception of Luis and Omar who were exempt from the MSA reading test) even if they didn’t know English well enough. Their choice was between leaving the questions blank or guessing. They chose to guess even though they later felt uncomfortable publicly admitting their actions.

Perhaps their discomfort came from shame at not being able to do the test. Ms. Ware, the testing coordinator believed that much of the testing was inappropriate for ELLs and sent them the wrong message. She said, “We’re teaching them that it’s okay to go ‘so what?,’ and guess on a test and that the results don’t matter. And look at the man-hours spent! The time should be used on instruction.”

5.6 Amount of Time Spent on Testing

During the 2004-05 school year students and staff at Marysburg Elementary School participated in a variety of different activities associated with standardized assessments. The Maryland State Department of Education required students to take the EPAS, the IPT, the MSA and the MSA Benchmarks for the 2004-05 school year. The Marysburg County Public Schools (PCPS) required the SRI test for determining reading groups. (See Section 3.4.6 for descriptions of the MSA, IPT and SRI, and Section 5.7 for
description of the EPAS.) In addition, students spent instructional time on test practice. Staff attended a variety of training sessions in which test scores, logistics for implementing assessments, and methods for raising test scores were discussed. I did not speak to any staff member who did not believe that emphasis on testing at Marysburg Elementary was excessive and detracted from instruction.

Students identified as ELL in Ms. Fairbanks’s class spent 36 hours taking required standardized tests during the academic year (Table 5.2), representing 10% of their annual language arts time and 3% of the school year. They spent 8 additional hours on language proficiency tests that their mainstream counterparts did not have to take. The students’ standardized tests took place on 28 days of the school year; approximately 15% of their school days included taking standardized tests. I spent over 97 hours administering tests or test accommodations throughout the year (Table 5.3). When administering tests, I worked with my own students during their 36 hours of testing and 61 hours administering tests to others.

ESOL teachers at the elementary level in PCPS did not have their own homeroom class. Rather, we worked within other teachers’ classrooms or removed students from classrooms to work with them separately. Because of this, ESOL teachers were often pulled from their duties to administer tests and accommodations which were labor intensive. Pulling ESOL teachers from their teaching duties did not require the cost and complication of hiring a substitute teacher. When I was assigned to other duties, I simply cancelled ESOL classes and students stayed with their assigned teachers. In addition to helping Ms. Fairbanks to administer standardized tests for our students, I was also assigned to administer tests and accommodations with students in other grades, both ELL
students and non-ELLs. When I administered tests to students in other classes, my students did not receive ESOL instruction. During SRI testing, only my morning ESOL instruction was cancelled. The 97 total hours that I devoted to administering standardized tests represents over 61 hours of time taken directly from ESOL instruction or planning. During the course of the year, my students missed 33 days or 18% of their ESOL classes due to my being pulled for duties related to standardized testing. (Table 5.4)

<table>
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<th>Test</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Hours per Student per Day</th>
<th>Total Hours per Student</th>
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<td>VAEL (approx. 1.0 hr) 11.0</td>
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<td>MSA</td>
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<td>Math</td>
<td>March 8, 9</td>
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<td>Speaking/Listening</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Reading</td>
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<td>Reading</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>April 5 writing</td>
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<td>Activity</td>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Hours per day</td>
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<td>7.5</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>November 3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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<td>Reading</td>
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<td>Proctor</td>
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33=TOTAL DAYS
5.6.1 Test Practice

In addition to the actual testing, students spent time practicing for the MSA using a workbook called “MSA Finish Line” (See Section 6.4) which provided practice questions in MSA format as well as explanations of how to determine correct responses. Students spent two hours per week for eight weeks in reading and math (32 hours total) between winter break and the March administration of the MSA doing MSA Finish Line exercises. Besides that, throughout the school year, students practiced writing paragraphs called brief constructed responses (BCRs) in a style that the school believed was expected for the MSA.

5.7 The EPAS Test

PCPS agreed that Marysburg Elementary would serve as one of many field test sites for a new English language proficiency test under development. Our administering the English Proficiency for All Students (EPAS) test resulted from an agreement between the Maryland State Department of Education, Parker County Public Schools, and Educational Testing Services (ETS). ETS is the educational assessment company that makes the SAT, the TOEFL and the PRAXIS among other well-known standardized assessments. ETS was in the process of developing a test of English proficiency to compete with such tests as the IPT and the LAS. PCPS agreed to serve as a field test site, according to a MSDE spokesperson, in exchange for a discount if and when the county decided to purchase the product. Marysburg ESOL students took the test to provide validity data for ETS although no one informed the parents of their children’s
participation and that students would be losing instructional time due to their involvement.

The EPAS test addressed an important concern of the English language proficiency tests currently in use in that the current tests measured social language more than academic language. Different assessment companies were in the process of devising new English proficiency tests that measure the language necessary for academic subjects. Commonly used language proficiency tests such as the IPT and LAS may soon become obsolete as they are replaced by EPAS and ELDA (English Language Development Assessment, in development with American Institutes for Research) and others currently in development.

I estimated that about 50 teachers and specialists attended a training meeting in late September after having been told the day before that our presence was expected and to cancel classes for the next day. At the training meeting when teachers questioned the state representative as to why we needed to change tests and try out the EPAS, he explained that we needed a test like the EPAS that was more aligned to the state ESOL standards. One teacher in the audience correctly pointed out that Maryland had not yet completed its ESOL standards to which an English proficiency test could be aligned.

Omar, Jaime, Luis, Carlos, Herbert, Eddie and Herminio and their ELL classmates spent approximately four and a half hours answering the EPAS questions. I spent a total twenty-four hours administering the test and receiving training on its administration, canceling ESOL classes for nearly a week while I administered the test. There were approximately fifty teachers from throughout PCPS at the original training meeting, all of whom were expected to test students.
I oversaw the testing of fifth grade ELL students as well as others whom I did not
normally teach. The test sections were especially long since ETS needed to try out many
different questions, some of which would be discarded, in order to end up with enough
items for the final versions. The test of listening and speaking alone took ESOL teachers
more than a hundred man-hours as it was individually administer to each ELL student in
the building. During the four days that we worked on EPAS, the other Marysburg ESOL
teachers and I cancelled classes. I asked Ms. Bartholomew from the PCPS ESOL office
how we were able to do this project without informing our students’ parents. I thought
that losing a week of ESOL instruction for a large-scale study like this would have
required parental consent:

Ryan: But what if a parent didn’t want their child to take the EPAS test?

Bartholomew: They didn’t know. It becomes just another educational activity
that goes on in school like a computer exercise or a story map. You could look at
it as bubbling practice [i.e. practice filling in the circles on the answer sheets] if
you want to, which is sometimes what it comes down to.

Marysburg Elementary School and our students never received results from the
test or other acknowledgement of our participation.

5.8 ELL Families and Testing at Marysburg Elementary School

I actually have my own memories of schooling in El Salvador. During the
summer of 1976, as a seventeen year old, I traveled to El Salvador as an American Field
Service exchange student. I was placed with a family in the western town of Chalchuapa
in the department of Santa Ana. The exchange program enrolled me at the local high
school called the *Instituto Nacional de Chalchuapa*. My classmates at the *Instituto* were preparing themselves for university studies in the sciences and engineering. My distant memory of my Salvadoran high school experience is that instruction was mainly lecture format with ardent note-taking. Testing happened at the end of each month. Students memorized their notes and repeated them back for the test. Thankfully, as a foreign guest, I was spared a first-hand experience with Salvadoran assessment, at which I could not have succeeded given my limited Spanish and the difficult math and science content of the courses I took. I enjoyed a week off from school while my Salvadoran classmates spent mornings writing exams and afternoons memorizing lecture notes for the next day’s assessments.

In 2004, nearly thirty years later, as a teacher of Salvadoran students in the U.S. I wondered if my students’ parents had comparable memories of testing in El Salvador and what other information on educational assessment they might provide if I asked them. One of the biggest challenges that teachers of immigrant students face is how to understand the prior knowledge of students who have formed their identities in other cultures and how we can find ways to connect their lived experiences to our formal curriculum. Teachers cannot be experts in all the cultures and languages that come into our classrooms. It is important to find ways to bridge cultural gaps, and our students’ parents can be an important resource for discovering pertinent information not only about their children’s life experiences but also about cultural misunderstandings. I believe that if we are interested in effectively including immigrant students in U.S. testing programs, then we need to communicate with their parents.
To gain an awareness of possible misunderstandings around U.S. standardized testing, I thought it important to discuss with my students’ parents how testing was done in El Salvador. I believed that they may assume that testing programs in the U.S. are similar to what they remember of Salvadoran educational assessment. This may lead to misinformation when they spoke to their children about testing. I believed that there may be important differences with U.S. testing that the parents did not know about. I also wanted to learn what the parents knew about standardized testing at Marysburg Elementary school to see if misunderstandings existed. With this knowledge I thought I could begin to conceptualize a parent involvement process for immigrant parents related to standardized testing.

5.8.1 Testing in El Salvador as Reported by Parents

All the parents in the study said that they had experienced some formal education except for Eddie’s stepfather. Three of the seven boys had substantial experience with schooling in El Salvador including testing in that country. (Table 5.4.) When I interviewed my students’ parents at their homes, I found that they had similar memories of Salvadoran instructional assessment as I did from my high school exchange experience, although none of the parents had attended secondary schools in El Salvador (Table 5.5).
## Table 5.5  Family Members’ Level of Formal Schooling in El Salvador

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Mother’s Highest Grade Completed (Self-reported)</th>
<th>Father/Stepfather’s Highest Grade Completed (Self-reported)</th>
<th>Child’s Formal Schooling in El Salvador?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>K-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>K-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>K-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herminio</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No formal schooling</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>3.4 years</td>
<td>6.5 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They consistently recalled that the subject areas tested were math, science, social studies and language arts. Only Omar’s father remembers another subject of testing: physical education. Some parents recalled monthly exams while others recalled ‘trimester’ assessments. Most parents reported testing taking place during four days when classes were not held. Tests were scored on a ten point scale with intermediate scores such as 8.5 or 7.5 as possibilities.

Some parents said that report cards contained only test scores and marks for behavior. Teachers gave the report cards to parents in person at meetings at the school. Luis’s mother explained that in her experience, the parents looked at the report cards and
returned them to the teacher until the end of the school year. The parents remember
taking final exams at the end of the school year. Most parents reported cumulative finals.
Students who did not receive a score of 6 or better on each of the four subject area tests
had to repeat the grade. Herminio’s father and Jaime’s mother both had to repeat a grade
in elementary school for not passing a test. All the parents had friends or relatives who
had failed tests and had to repeat the grade. Only Carlos’s stepfather reported that
students could make up work during summer school in order to avoid having to repeat a
grade.

The test items evaluated whether the student had learned the information covered in
class. Some parents remembered tests as having only selected response formats. Others
remembered a mix of selected response and constructed response. Some parents said that
the teachers created the tests, others said the tests were standard from the Ministry of
Education, and others believed that there were a mix of questions, some teacher-made
and some standard. Except for Omar’s father who felt confident when he took tests, all
the other parents reported nervousness with testing owing to the tests’ high-stakes nature.
(Failing the final exam meant repeating the grade.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Scheduling</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
<th>Reporting</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Test maker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herminio’s</td>
<td>Math, science, social studies, Language</td>
<td>There were special days for taking tests. At the end of the year there were final exams. We took a whole week of tests.</td>
<td>Final exams determined who passed the grade.</td>
<td>Scores of 0-10</td>
<td>Multiple choice and short answer.</td>
<td>Felt nervous during testing. She ‘crossed her fingers’</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Math, science, social studies and language arts</td>
<td>End of the month Two tests per day for two days Final exams at end of the year</td>
<td>Students who did not pass all four final exams had to repeat the school year</td>
<td>Received the scored test papers to show parents Also there was a day that families went to school to receive certificates for passing the grade. At that time the teacher told the families individually who had not passed and why. Report cards</td>
<td>Wrote answers on an answer sheet.</td>
<td>Felt fine for all tests except math which made him nervous</td>
<td>Some questions came from the ministry of education and some were teacher-made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar’s</td>
<td>Math, science, social studies, language arts</td>
<td>Monthly tests and final exams Monthly tests were at the end</td>
<td>Must pass each of four tests with a score of 6 or higher. There were no</td>
<td>Scale of 0-10</td>
<td>Multiple choice Took two forms of each test and had to</td>
<td>Felt nervous, especially for final exams</td>
<td>Teacher-made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Subjects</td>
<td>Scheduling</td>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Test maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar’s</td>
<td>Math, science, social studies, language arts</td>
<td>Testing done every three months-trimesters</td>
<td>Must pass each test with at least a 6 in order to pass the grade</td>
<td>Scale of 0-10</td>
<td>Twenty questions from each subject</td>
<td>Felt confident in his ability to pass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>and physical education</td>
<td>Last trimester exam cover the entire academic year in each subject</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime’s</td>
<td>Doesn’t remember</td>
<td>Every month and final exam</td>
<td>Must pass with at least a 6 to pass the grade</td>
<td>Scale of 0-10</td>
<td>Reported on report card</td>
<td>Scared, nervous because she didn’t know if she was going to pass or not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert’s</td>
<td>“the four main subjects” not music or P.E.</td>
<td>Every two months and a cumulative final</td>
<td>Must pass with at least a 6 to pass the grade</td>
<td>Scale of 0-10</td>
<td>Selected response</td>
<td>Nervous because she didn’t know if she was doing well or not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos’s</td>
<td>Science,</td>
<td>Every</td>
<td>Failing the test</td>
<td>Exam</td>
<td>Made by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6 Testing in El Salvador as Reported By Parents

- Parent Subjects: Scheduling
- Consequences: reporting format
- Feelings: test maker
- Test maker: pass at least one of the forms. Each form had five questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Scheduling</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
<th>Reporting</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Test maker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omar’s</td>
<td>Math, science, social studies, language arts</td>
<td>Testing done every three months-trimesters</td>
<td>Must pass each test with at least a 6 in order to pass the grade</td>
<td>Scale of 0-10</td>
<td>Twenty questions from each subject</td>
<td>Felt confident in his ability to pass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>and physical education</td>
<td>Last trimester exam cover the entire academic year in each subject</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime’s</td>
<td>Doesn’t remember</td>
<td>Every month and final exam</td>
<td>Must pass with at least a 6 to pass the grade</td>
<td>Scale of 0-10</td>
<td>Reported on report card</td>
<td>Scared, nervous because she didn’t know if she was going to pass or not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert’s</td>
<td>“the four main subjects” not music or P.E.</td>
<td>Every two months and a cumulative final</td>
<td>Must pass with at least a 6 to pass the grade</td>
<td>Scale of 0-10</td>
<td>Selected response</td>
<td>Nervous because she didn’t know if she was doing well or not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos’s</td>
<td>Science,</td>
<td>Every</td>
<td>Failing the test</td>
<td>Exam</td>
<td>Made by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.6 Testing in El Salvador as Reported By Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Scheduling</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
<th>Reporting</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Test Maker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stepfather</td>
<td>math, social studies</td>
<td>trimester</td>
<td>could cause a child to go to summer school or to repeat the grade</td>
<td>grades went on a report card</td>
<td>Received letter grades</td>
<td></td>
<td>ministry of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Had to get 80% to be promoted to the next grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis’ Mom</td>
<td>trimester</td>
<td>trimester</td>
<td>Failing final exams cause a student to have to repeat the grade</td>
<td>Scale of 1-10</td>
<td>Selected response</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher made and ministry of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Report cards had test scores, end of year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>certificate of promotion given out at parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie’s mom</td>
<td>Final exams</td>
<td></td>
<td>Must pass final exam to pass the grade</td>
<td>Constructed response and selected response</td>
<td>Very nervous because passing the grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>depended on passing the test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos’ mom</td>
<td>(attended school irregularly, does not remember)</td>
<td>(attended school irregularly, does not remember)</td>
<td>(attended school irregularly, does not remember)</td>
<td>(attended school irregularly, does not remember)</td>
<td>(attended school irregularly, does not remember)</td>
<td>(attended school irregularly, does not remember)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.8.2 Parents’ Knowledge of Standardized Testing at Marysburg Elementary School

When I interviewed Marysburg Elementary School principal Ms. Taylor, she spoke of ELL parent awareness of standardized testing: “…there’s a very low level of awareness or knowledge or competency in terms of the types of standardized testing that
we do here in the U.S., so it’s really kind of a black hole area…” Ms. Taylor’s assessment of the situation was corroborated in parent interviews. My students’ parents had almost no knowledge of standardized testing at Marysburg Elementary (Table 5.6.) despite attempts that the school district made to inform them. What little the few parents knew of testing they learned from their children who, it should be remembered, were ten-and eleven-year-old boys who struggled with grade level academics in English.

Most notable was the fact that while every one of the children in the research study had a signed ELL Accommodations Document (Appendix C) in their cumulative folder, not one of their parents recognized the form or had any idea of what it said. The parents who knew when tests took place got the information from their children. Carlos’ and Jaime’s parents believed that the standardized test scores were recorded on their children’s report cards. Omar’s parents and Herbert’s mother did not know how standardized test scores were reported. Eddie’s mother believed that her children brought standardized test scores home to share. Omar’s mother thought that the teachers should report test scores at parent meetings at the school, as is the practice in El Salvador. Most of the parents did not know what happened if a child did not do well on a standardized test. Carlos’s stepfather believed that the children have to repeat the grade, as in El Salvador.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Accommodations</th>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Reporting</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
<th>Format/Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herminio’s</td>
<td>Not aware</td>
<td>Doesn’t know unless</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Children pass even though they don’t learn</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td>Herminio tells her</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herminio’s</td>
<td>Not aware</td>
<td>Not aware when testing</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Doesn’t know</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td></td>
<td>happens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar’s</td>
<td>Not aware</td>
<td>Heard from Omar that testing</td>
<td>Not sure. She</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td>started this week</td>
<td>thinks that the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>school should</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>give the parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the test scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>at a parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>meeting but maybe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in this country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>they will give</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the test scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to the child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to take home.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar’s</td>
<td>Not aware.</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assumes Omar doesn’t know enough English to pass. Doesn’t know if Omar</td>
<td>Assumes that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Believes more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>has to pass the test or if they will give him another</td>
<td>there are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>time would be a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>here but he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accommodation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>does not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>know about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>testing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Accommodations</td>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td>Format/Subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime’s Mother</td>
<td>Not aware. Doesn’t remember signing form. Believes that Jaime should get the same test as everyone else</td>
<td>Knew of testing but didn’t say how she knew</td>
<td>Test scores appear on report cards</td>
<td>Doesn’t know what happens if a child does poorly on a test</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert’s Mother</td>
<td>Not aware, doesn’t remember signing accommodations document.</td>
<td>Learns from Herbert when testing takes place. Believes that testing schedule should be announced ahead of time so children have time to study for the tests.</td>
<td>Doesn’t know how test scores are reported</td>
<td>Doesn’t know what happens if a child does poorly on a test</td>
<td>Unaware. Has not received information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos’s Stepfather</td>
<td>Not aware, didn’t recognize form</td>
<td>Not aware</td>
<td>Scores appear on report cards</td>
<td>Students have to repeat the grad if they fail the final exam</td>
<td>Not aware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis’ Mother</td>
<td>Not aware, did not remember signing the accommodations form</td>
<td>Not aware</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Same subjects as in El Salvador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie’s Mother</td>
<td>Not aware, did not recognize the</td>
<td>Learns about tests</td>
<td>Says she sees the</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.7 Parents’ Perceptions of U.S. Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Accommodations</th>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Reporting</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
<th>Format/Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accommodations form</td>
<td>from Eddie. Encourages him to study. He shows her his word lists.</td>
<td>tests when her children bring them home</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos’ Mother</td>
<td>Doesn’t know</td>
<td>Doesn’t know</td>
<td>Test scores appear on report cards</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.8.3 Explaining U.S. Standardized Testing to Parents and Children

During discussions with the seven students in the study and with their parents, I sometimes found it necessary to provide information on standardized testing in response to questions, misunderstandings, curiosity, or in order simply to discuss aspects of testing of which they had no prior knowledge. I attempted at all times to explain things clearly and briefly, in language that made sense to the parents and/or the children. When I developed a parent session on standardized testing, I was guided by these experiences and incorporated many of them into the process.

5.8.3.1 Explanations Provided to the Children

The information I provided to students in dialogs with them was usually in response to questions or misunderstandings. The boys inquired about more detailed
aspects of standardized testing than their parents did. One major misunderstanding that
the boys had was that the MSA determined into which classroom they were place. In
reality, the IPT had determined their placement and to a lesser extend the SRI. The
ESOL 1 students (Omar, Luis and Jaime) had very basic questions such as what sample
items were and how the tests were scored. They also believed that the test scores were
recorded on their report cards and their scores determined if they would have to repeat
fifth grade.

I explained to ESOL 1 students:

• The writing part of the IPT has to be done in English.
• The first questions at the beginning of the IPT reading test are samples. They are
easier than the actual questions and don’t count towards the score.
• The teacher scores the IPT selected response with the scoring template. (I showed
them how it is done.)
• Teachers know the answers to the IPT but the scoring template is a more efficient
way to grade them.
• The ESOL teacher determines ESOL levels based on IPT scores.
• Students will not repeat fifth grade if they fail a standardized test.
• Standardized test scores are not recorded on report cards and do not affect report
card grades.

I explained to ESOL 2 students:

• IPT stands for IDEA Proficiency Test.
• ESOL 2 students need to improve their reading scores on the IPT in order to get
out of ESOL.
• The IPT is the same for fourth, fifth and sixth grades.

• During testing, teachers are expected to seat students with more space between them than normal in order to discourage cheating. If the teacher moves you it does not mean she suspects you of cheating.

• ESOL students were placed in the class because of their IPT score not their MSA score.

• The IPT writing test is scored with a rubric that is explained in a teacher’s guide.

I explained to both ESOL 1 and ESOL 2 groups:

• That the IPT is a language proficiency test for ESOL students and the MSA is a standardized achievement test for all students

• The ESOL levels are ESOL 1, 2 and 3 for beginning, intermediate and advanced. “Independent” means ESOL is no longer required because the student is considered fluent in English

• The students’ own ESOL level

• Test developers create distracters on selected response items to mimic correct answers. [Herminio and Omar both said on separate occasions that test makers try to trick students into choosing the wrong answer.]

• MSA Benchmarks are for practice and for monitoring academic growth during the year.

5.8.3.2 Explanations Provided to the Parents

The parents required general information usually because they had little or no knowledge about standardized testing in the school district. As a researcher, I was
interested in learning more about accommodations and found that they had no knowledge at all about this area and so I needed to provide fundamental information in a brief and understandable way.

I explained to the parents:

- What a standardized test is
- What the purpose of standardized testing is (including AYP)
- Information on the different tests their children take in the fifth grade
  - MSA is a statewide test.
  - MSA Benchmark is a practice test.
  - The schedule for MSA and MSA Benchmarks administration
  - The MSA covers reading and math.
  - IPT assesses language proficiency.
- Accommodations
  - Accommodations in general
  - ELL Accommodations Document
  - Examples of accommodations
  - ELL children have a right to accommodations on the MSA.
- How parents get the test scores
  - Report card grades are not standardized test scores.
  - MSA scores are reported to parents usually the following school year.
- How students fill in the answers on a separate sheet
- Students will not repeat fifth grade if they fail the standardized test.
Overall, the parents had little knowledge about the standardized testing program at their children’s school. The newcomer children had many different questions than the ESOL 2 students, although there were some overlapping issues. Parents and students had very little knowledge of or curiosity about accommodations, though no one objected to them. Although the accommodations document went home in Spanish, parents did not remember signing it and had no idea what it was about. Parents relied mainly on their children to provide information on standardized testing, though parents’ experience in El Salvador were to get test results at school in parent-teacher conferences.

5.9 Conclusions

Marysburg Elementary implemented an extensive program of testing with different instruments assessing reading level (SRI), English proficiency (IPT and ESPAS), the school’s or grade’s overall level of proficiency in reading and math (MSA), and progress toward proficiency (MSA Benchmarks) (See Section 3.4.6). Student’s individual results from the EPAS, the MSA and MSA Benchmarks were not provided to teachers, parents or students during the school year. Students’ individual results on the SRI and the IPT were readily available to teachers and the data was used to make instructional decisions.

The testing programs presented many problems for the students and few benefits given the labor involved. Students spent 36 hours taking tests during the school year with more than 32 additional hours spent in test preparation. Students did not understand many of the questions and often guessed at the answers. Newcomer students in the study felt nervous, proud and excited during testing while the ESOL 2 students in the study felt
bored during testing. The students had negative feelings about brief constructed response items (BCRs). Preparation for answering BCRs did not take into account that the students did not understand what was being asked. Students missed 33 ESOL classes or 18% of their total ESOL instruction while I was shifted from my assigned duties to help administer tests and accommodations elsewhere in the building.

Assigning and implementing accommodations for the MSA and MSA Benchmarks was a major undertaking for the school. The school implemented an accommodations program for ELL students and the ELL accommodations documentation was in order and ready in case of state audit. The verbatim reading accommodation was selected despite the fact that it may have lacked validity as an ELL accommodation for some students (Sireci, Li & Scarpati 2003; Sireci 2004). More research is needed in the area of verbatim reading as an ELL accommodation before is should be allowed as an option for ELL students. Clearly it is not an accommodation that helps newcomers to the English language and, just as obvious, scores from the verbatim reading of a reading test have to questionable in terms of validity. Verbatim reading also impacted the other accommodations that were offered (extra time and alternative grouping). Testing time in a verbatim reading situation depends on the rate that the administrator proceeds through the test. Student grouping is impacted because those students who do not get the accommodations must test in a separate area.

While verbatim reading was offered despite its lack of research on ELL testing, research-based ELL accommodations that may have been valid for some ELL students, such as linguistic modification or assessment in primary language, were impossible to implement at the one-school level as those modifications involved alternative test
development which the Maryland State Department of Education chose not to pursue. Marysburg Elementary School may have selected the verbatim reading accommodation as the best option available to protect ELL students from experiencing total failure while implementing a required testing program that had few benefits for the school or the community.

While testing and testing accommodations had an overwhelming presence at the school, the families of the students in the study had little information on the testing program and had some misconceptions due to their own experiences with testing in El Salvador. Parents relied on their children for information regarding the standardized testing program. Parents were aware that their children took tests at school, but did not know the testing schedule. Some believed that report card grades were test scores as is the practice in El Salvador. They did not know the amount of time spent on testing, which tests were taken, or the purposes of them. Some parents believe that there was a limited set of facts that their children could study in preparation for testing, as was their memory of testing from their own student days. The newcomer children and some of the parents believed that in order to be promoted to the next grade, they had to pass the MSA. While the students had signed Accommodations Documents on file, none of the parents knew of the accommodations. The parents had not been informed that ETS had used their children as test subjects in the development of a new language proficiency test. They did not receive their children’s scores or any acknowledgement of their participation.

5.9.1 ELL Standardized Testing
Standardized tests designed for native English speakers put ELL students at a distinct disadvantage when attempting to demonstrate what they know and can do. For that reason, NCLB allows variations in testing conditions for ELL students. In the case of a population as diverse as English language learners, a one-size-fits-all approach to testing accommodations will not meet their needs. A written assessment in the students’ primary language may work for newcomers well-educated in their mother tongue but not for those with interrupted education or for those undergoing language loss (Butler & Stevens, 1997). Linguistic modification of tests in English would provide valid results for students with some knowledge of the English language but not for novice English learners. Extra time might be valid for some students, while giving the test in smaller chunks may be better for other students. Giving the test at a student’s preferred time of day is an individual variation that would probably help all students, not just ELL students. Some students need silence when taking tests while others prefer noise and still others need to read the test aloud to themselves.

When implementing ELL accommodations plans, staffing needs figure prominently and must be taken into account, particularly regarding the amount of disruption to instruction when school personnel are temporarily re-assigned to testing duties. Testing programs can end up taking considerable time away from the very instruction whose effectiveness they attempt to measure. Test results need to come back immediately and in detail in a format teachers can understand so that they can immediately focus instruction based on student needs. Test anxiety and test boredom on the part of students and their teachers, heavily impacts testing programs as well.
Despite the problems with standardized tests and accommodations for ELL students, teachers and administrators still anxiously awaited test scores and tried diligently to determine their significance for individuals as well as for groups of students. Test results and my own experiences with them are described in Section 7.2. In addition, with the information I learned from the experiences at Marysburg Elementary became incorporated into a parent discussion session around standardized assessment of ELL students (Section 7.5.2) which I took to various schools in the 2005-06 academic year.
Figure 5.2 MSA Kite No. 2
Marysburg Elementary School
March 2006
CHAPTER 6: Effect of Standardized Testing on Curriculum and Instruction at Marysburg Elementary School

“Testers, I realized, were not concerned with how tests were being used after they had been constructed; for testers, the use of tests was irrelevant.” Elana Shohamy (2001)

6.1 Introduction

For the 2004-05 school year, I returned to the classroom after nearly three years in higher education. As a teacher of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at Marysburg Elementary School*, I would act as a participant-observer in the academic lives of seven fifth-grade boys from El Salvador who were designated as English language learners (ELLs) by Parker County Public Schools (PCPS). Given the high prominence of standardized testing in public schools due to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), I hoped to document how the testing programs fit into the overall academic lives of the seven boys with whom I worked nearly every day.

Along the way, I also decided to describe learning activities that ESOL teachers could re-create in their own classrooms. In my work as an ESOL teacher-educator at a nearby college, I often suggested appropriate activities for ELL students only to hear that teachers could not veer from the established curriculum without getting themselves into trouble at their schools. They said that their teaching activities were predetermined, and designed for raising scores on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) because of test

* Names of places and people are pseudonyms
score accountability from NCLB. I hoped that when I returned to teaching ESOL, that I could find unclaimed spaces in the school day that were free of standardized curriculum and create with children meaningful, communicative, empowering ESOL pedagogy. By sharing stories of my work with ELL students I hoped to inspire the teachers in my college courses in the way that Cristina Igoa does when they read her 1995 book *The Inner World of the Immigrant Child*.

### 6.2 MSA Pressures and Curricular Emphasis at Marysburg

The literature on standardized educational assessment documents curriculum changes when high-stakes are attached to test scores. Researchers have shown that low-performing schools have narrowed their curriculum and have excluded or de-emphasized subjects that are not tested. Schools also have been shown to increase their emphasis on the subjects being tested and increase the amount of test preparation (Haladyna, 2002; McNeil, 2000; Popham, 2001).

On returning to the classroom I discovered that Parker County Public Schools was not immune to the pressures of NCLB. In order to raise test scores, the county had adopted a reading program for elementary schools in which every minute of instruction had been mapped out ahead of time by curriculum specialists and the publisher, Houghton-Mifflin. Teachers went online to retrieve their daily lesson plans for each two-hour language arts block. Ms. Fairbanks, who took up the challenge of providing language arts instruction precisely as the county demanded, printed out the class’s daily objectives and hung them on the chalkboard with magnets. She used the reading anthology, the overhead transparencies, cassettes, posters and worksheets as explained in
the teacher’s guides and county curriculum documents. We organized reading groups and did our center rotation according to the required curriculum, I following the publisher’s *ELL Handbook* and Ms. Fairbanks with the leveled readers that were supposed to have matched the children’s reading level. We followed the publishers recommendations for modifying instruction for low performing readers. (The anthology was written at a fifth grade level and our students could read at first and second grade levels in English.) Ms. Fairbanks and I felt great pressure to strictly implement the mandated language arts curriculum because we would be hosting a steady stream of observers during the school year. We (and the other teachers at Marysburg) had the principal, assistant principal, the reading instructional specialist, representatives from the publisher, the county director of the ESOL department, mentor teachers, regional administrators, and student teachers all visit our classroom during the first quarter of the school year to observe our language arts instruction. In November, Ms. Rupert, Marysburg’s reading instructional specialist, informed us that the representative from the publisher said that Marysburg Elementary had the best implementation of the language arts curriculum that she had seen in the county. Adding to the pressure to properly implement the curriculum, Ms. Rupert also notified us that the regional administrator had decided that Ms. Fairbanks’s would be a model language arts classroom and we would soon have teachers from other schools coming to observe our instruction to learn how to implement the new language arts curriculum.

The language arts curriculum was aligned to the state test, so improved MSA scores were expected with its implementation, and Ms. Fairbanks felt personally responsible for making sure her students achieved high scores on the MSA:
Fairbanks: I think that the MSA, for me, I feel the pressure. Like, “Oh my God. If our kids don’t do well, it’s gonna be me.” I feel this way even though Ms. Street says, “Oh no. Don’t think that way.” I feel that if our kids don’t do well then it’s our problem. That we didn’t do what we needed to do. Even though having no material and nothing really for that level of kids.

Ryan: So you’re saying that the MSA holds teachers accountable.

Fairbanks: Yes. Yes. And consequently, the school. And if the school isn’t doing what it’s supposed to do, it becomes branded. “Ah ha! Marysburg you know you’ve heard about Marysburg and you know the teachers over there and blah, blah, blah.” …So I think that if our scores don’t go up there’s this brand that goes on our school. That we have failed. God forbid. The state is going to come in and take over.

Her comment regarding a lack of appropriate materials for her students acknowledges that she felt her students’ academic needs may not have been adequately met with the required reading program. She also expressed concern for the professional reputations of Marysburg personnel if their school is labeled a failure. Both Ms. Longman and Ms. Fairbanks felt they or the school would be unfairly judged as professional failures without acknowledgement of the economic, cultural and linguistic challenges students in the community confront when taking standardized tests:

Longman: I don’t know what caused that switch, if it was [the new superintendent] coming in or NCLB or the switch to MSA or if was the perfect storm of all these things. It seems like right around that point a couple of years
ago I got this sense that it didn’t matter what your needs were, that everybody was accountable for this test.

Fairbanks: It’s NCLB. That’s the bottom line of NCLB.

Longman: And I think to have ESOL and special ed children take the same test that other students are taking and struggling with it’s just very difficult.

Fairbanks: ...and to be graded equally. How can you do that? How can you do that? How can you take a child that’s been in the country two years…

Longman: or less!

Fairbanks: .. or less, and subject them to that, versus students from B-- or M-- [two affluent communities in the county]…you know.

The principal, Ms. Taylor, also felt pressure to get students to perform well on the MSA in order to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as required by NCLB. Ms. Taylor felt personally responsible for raising MSA scores at the school. Like Ms. Fairbanks she was concerned for her professional reputation. She was motivated to raise test scores in part by the professional disgrace that would come if she failed to get the school to meet the targets for AYP (Table 3.4). She said:

AYP is absolutely essential. It is the difference between being a “have” versus a “have-not”. Not making AYP is like being a leper. Honestly—for principals—you either did or you didn’t. There are 36 categories for AYP and if you miss one category you miss it. [The superintendent] has no choice. He’s being threatened with state take-over if the county doesn’t make AYP. Schools will be reconstituted etc., etc., the world will come to an end if you don’t make AYP. So it is a serious issue…AYP really is an accomplishment. It is hard enough that it is
an accomplishment but if you don’t make it you’re nothing. But this year it’s really going to be an issue because the scale has gone up so much. Last year it was 42 and this year it is 58. 42% of the students had to score at proficient or above. In order to meet this year’s expectation we have to go from 42% at or above proficiency to 58%. It’s going to explode!

It was hard for her or anyone else on staff to imagine that, given the challenges, that all the subgroups* at our school would achieve the expected average scores on the MSA for the coming year.

MSA pressure, in addition leading to a scripted reading program, had also changed fifth grade math instruction according to Ms. Longman:

They’ve done a lot with the curriculum and the direction it’s going is more and more planned out. More and more specific… You were supposed to cover the twelve chapters in the book and you were supposed to pace it so you would do like one chapter every three weeks in order. Beyond that, you were free to go as quickly or slowly within that chapter. Now it’s week by week. I don’t think they’re going to go back to anything looser…

When I asked Ms. Street if things had changed since making AYP became so important, she also mentioned the proscriptive curriculum and explained:

… teachers had more freedom. Everything wasn’t so proscribed. Here’s what you’re doing today…here’s what you’re doing tomorrow and here are the BCRs. Here’s your test-taking book…MSA causes things to be more proscribed. It’s so proscribed because Parker county has so many new teachers. They don’t want to

* American Indian, Asian, African American, White, Hispanic, Free and Reduced Meal Students, Special Education, Limited English Proficient
leave anything to chance. They don’t trust the teachers to do what they need to do on their own…

Ms. Taylor felt that the changes to the curriculum may have been an improvement, but she may have had doubts about how well the new curriculums prepared students for the MSA: “And I even think that the mandatory language arts and math curriculums have in some ways helped to improve instruction.”

6.3 Curricular De-Emphasis due to Test Accountability Policies

As predicted by the literature on high-stakes testing, unassessed curriculum areas at Marysburg Elementary such as science, social studies and art were de-emphasized or eliminated from the curriculum. Most notable of the curriculum narrowing at Marysburg was the lack of formal social studies instruction and the near elimination of science from the school day. For Ms. Fairbanks’s homeroom, morning had a two-hour period officially called a “language arts-social studies block”. During this time the two subjects would, in theory, be integrated. In the afternoon, Ms. Longman would supposedly combine math and science in a two-hour time period. Ms. Taylor, however, told classroom teachers that one block was for reading instruction and the other for math. There was no formal science or social studies curriculum or any expectation from the instructional leadership team at the school for teachers to teach those subjects. Ms. Taylor told the faculty that when doing report cards to give the same grade for social studies as the student earned in reading and to give the same grade in science that they got in math.
The Houghton-Mifflin language arts curriculum contained a variety of reading selections, both fiction and non-fiction. The readings did incorporate topics that highlighted themes typically found in an American history curriculum such as the American Revolution, life on the prairie, or World War II. The curriculum emphasized reading, however. It was not a formal social studies curriculum with in-depth historical analysis or a sequential, chronological orientation.

Fairbanks: Well, in social studies if I recall, Mr. Monroe, we have gone from WWII to Colonial times and then back to Prehistoric times and then we bounce up to the 20th century,

Ryan: Life on the prairie…

Fairbanks: Life on the prairie, back to World War II.

Longman: They asked the kids something about history [during the art museum field trip] and they said “Where are you in American history?” and how it related to a painting and it was just, “Duhhh…” you could hear a pin drop.

Fairbanks: How can they understand timelines and sequence of events in history if they’re popping around here and there?

Regarding science instruction at Marysburg, Ms. Longman said:

I do some science. Not as much as I planned at the beginning of the year, but I do some each quarter…But it’s not focused on. But at the meetings we’ve had not only do they say that science and social studies aren’t focused on but they admitted in our SPMT meeting this past Wednesday that math hasn’t been looked at either. It’s been all about reading this year.
In an interview with Ms. Taylor, she acknowledged that even county administrators de-emphasized science and social studies instruction because they were not covered on the MSA:

Ryan: Are science and social studies integrated?
Taylor: Not at all. Some teachers take the initiative but most don’t and [the superintendent] doesn’t care.
Ryan: So you can get away without teaching a formal social studies curriculum or science curriculum.
Taylor: That’s not an accurate statement. It’s much beyond that. There is no formal social studies or science and we have been told that there are X number of minutes for this and X minutes for that and science and social studies are on the back burner. That’s the party line.
Ryan: Why do you think they’re on the back burner?
Taylor: Because they’re not tested. When they came in at the beginning of the year they wanted to see every teacher’s schedule. They wanted to see how many minutes of language arts and how many minutes of math. They did not even ask about science and social studies. That’s all they cared about.

6.4 Test Preparation

Like other children who are under pressure to raise test scores, students in Parker County Schools had to undertake practice activities to prepare them for the MSA. Ms. Bartholomew, the ESOL mentor teacher from the PCPS central office, knew from visiting other schools that ESOL teachers sometime had to devote their entire teaching
time to test preparation activities. They had to target their instruction to students whose MSA scores were most likely to move them into the “Proficient” category.

Ryan: Do you think in the classroom there’s a lot of preparation for the MSA?
Bartholomew: There sure is! I have seen with some of the ESOL teachers I work with. They’re told (and this started a number of weeks ago) that “from now [January] to the administration of the MSA [March], this is what you will do: You will be doing MSA prep during your ESOL class time.

Ryan: We are not getting it that much here [at Marysburg]. But during the plug-in we’re doing MSA prep but not during the pull-out.
Bartholomew: It all depends on which kind of students you have. Schools are looking at which students have a reasonable possibility of doing well on the test. Which students are close to making grade level, to making AYP? And those are the students that you want to put a lot of effort into. This is what some schools are doing. The ones on level get full-time MSA prep. The ones that are ESOL 1 or lower level maybe you’re still servicing them with ESOL.

As an ESOL teacher at Marysburg, I did not spend the amount of time on MSA preparation that Ms. Bartholomew spoke about. At Marysburg, students spent time practicing for the MSA using a workbook called “MSA Finish Line” which provided practice questions in MSA format as well as explanations of how to determine correct responses. The workbook prepared students for test questions about vocabulary, reading comprehension and types of texts. Students spent two hours per week for eight weeks (16 hours total) between winter break and the March administration of the MSA doing MSA Finish Line workbook exercises. There was also an MSA Finish Line for math that
Ms. Longman used with the children in her afternoon class for another 16 hours. During the language arts period on Thursdays, all activities for the two hours came from the MSA Finish Line. My focus on Thursdays was on the reading selection, which I would make sure students understood before they moved on to Ms. Fairbanks’s table to read it and answer the questions. I would discuss background knowledge necessary to understand the passage as well as explain key vocabulary and pronunciation. With the group of newcomers, I previewed in Spanish. On one occasion the groups had to read what I thought at first was a ridiculous article about a statue of a boll weevil in a small town in Alabama. I had thought that the information contained in the article was irrelevant and unrelated to my students’ lives. When I began to preview the article with the group of newcomers from Central America, Luis and Omar surprised me when they identified the insect pictured. They shared their prior knowledge of boll weevils and cotton farming. Herminio also knew about the pest from experiences growing up in El Salvador. I believe the article was probably intended for practice reading non-fiction about something that students were not likely to know about. For once the newcomers may have had a slight advantage.

During the last twenty minutes of Thursday MSA preparation, Ms. Fairbanks would go over a reading selection with the entire class using the overhead projector. Selected response questions followed, and students in the class would give answers. Ms. Fairbanks revealed the correct answers and if correct, the children would shout “Yes!” and yank their arm in a pulling motion. Herbert said when I asked about the MSA Finish Line, “It was fun guessing the answers when it was on the projector.” The answers were given on the page along with an explanation for why the answer was correct and why the
other answer choices were incorrect. Students expressed surprise and disappointment when I informed them that the explanation part of the MSA Finish Line was not going to appear on the actual MSA.

Ms. Street’s experience with the test preparation book was less positive.

Street: I attend the 6th grade team meetings and some of the sixth grade kids are saying “We’re not doing this any more. We’re sick of it.” Rebelling.

Ryan: What about the teachers?

Street: Well, they’re sick of it too. The answers were on the same page as the questions so the kids were like ….ehhhhhh? And they were trying to plow through it. They were giving out candy…bribery, all kinds of things because she knew she had to do it.

6.5 A Positive Effect from Accountability for ELL Test Scores

In order to meet AYP, schools and school districts have to reach required test score averages not just for the populations as a whole, but for subgroups within the populations. “Limited English Proficient” students are one of the subgroups. This requirement has drawn interest among researchers, administrators and teachers as they rise to the challenge of learning how to make curriculum accessible to these students and cause their standardized test scores to climb. Ms. Taylor felt that the focus on raising standardized test scores for ELL students has shifted the ESOL program’s focus from a counseling perspective to an academic emphasis:

The accountability level for the ESOL program has never been the same as for the regular academic programs. And ESOL has tended on the side of being a
nurturing program and not the academic program. ESOL was not even under
Instruction [in the county’s organizational structure]. It was not even considered
an instructional program. It’s only been this year that it has become an
instructional program.

Ms. Bartholomew, from the ESOL office, had mixed feelings about the testing
program for ELLs, but felt that there were some positive effects from the pressure to raise
ELL students’ test scores.

Where it has helped instruction is that it was very easy to ignore ELL students in
the past because they weren’t going to be tested … Now suddenly if we’re going
to test ELL students and that subgroup has to make AYP then those students
become important and so instructing them becomes more important…It raises the
visibility of our students. It has made them more important instructionally in the
classrooms.

6.6 Matching Curriculum and ELL Students in Marysburg’s Fifth Grade

While the teachers I worked with at the college ESOL certification program
complained about the lack of flexibility in their schools, Ms. Fairbanks and I were able to
find ways to adjust the mandated language arts curriculum to better meet the needs of the
group we worked with (once we realized that observers were not actually going to show
up at our “model classroom”). For example, even the easiest books of the Houghton-
Mifflin leveled readers were too difficult for the group of students that we worked with.
Ms. Street provided Ms. Fairbanks a reading series from a different publisher to use
during her small group reading instruction. The series (Cougars) was at a useful
instructional level for our students and was interesting to them. Ms. Fairbanks also made writing a daily center activity supported twice a week by Ms. Street, and increased the amount of time spent at each center. We gave different numbers of spelling words to different students, taking into account their abilities and their ambitions. I provided preview and review in Spanish for the newcomers, a strategy that has been shown to be effective with ELL students (Freeman & Freeman, 1998). I would preview the selections from the anthology during the week prior to Ms. Fairbanks’s moving through the required learning activities. (The PCPS-provided lesson plans required same-day preview.) During the preview I could explain vocabulary, build background knowledge, expose students to the text and prepare them for the types of activities they would be doing with Ms. Fairbanks. By using an appropriate mix of Spanish and English, the newcomer students could understand instruction and access the curriculum better. Although we did not provide content instruction in Spanish, the language was viewed as a strength and a tool for accessing the curriculum and experiencing some success in the mainstream curriculum.

6.6.1 A Strategy for Winning Spelling Cookies

Ms. Fairbanks and I also modified my ESOL plug-in instruction by using the time to show students how to prepare for spelling tests. We found that literacy in Spanish gave the newcomer students an advantage over classmates more proficient in English.

Once a week, just before lining up to go to lunch, Ms. Fairbanks would give out “spelling cookies” for students who had scored a 90% or better on their spelling test. The children anxiously waited to hear if their names would be called. The winners would
assemble in front of the class for their reward and for public recognition of their accomplishment. They would gently carry their individually wrapped cookie to the cafetera and once there, would lay the treat on their lunch tray for all to see. Usually they would slowly nibble it after their meal as a special dessert. A contented fifth grader can savor a spelling cookie for a surprising length of time--having it, displaying it, tasting it.

Students did not perform well on the spelling tests at first, but once Ms. Fairbanks and I decided to incorporate spelling practice into my ESOL group work, scores began to rise. I showed them how to quiz one another and then I gave practice tests so they could see which words they had mastered and which ones they needed to study more. After a few weeks, the students became fairly independent, so the time I spent on spelling review became minimal.

The newcomer students, Omar, Jaime and Luis quickly began using a strategy that many ESOL teachers of Spanish-literate students have witnessed. The children had two pronunciations for each word--the standard pronunciation and what could be called the “spelling pronunciation”. For the spelling pronunciation, the children sounded out their vocabulary words, syllable by syllable, as if they were Spanish, whose orthography has a very close sound-symbol correspondence. For example, the spelling pronunciation of “favorite” would be /fah-vo-dee-tay/. This technique provided the children a simple way to accurately recall the confusing spellings of many English words. Learning the words’ syllables is much more efficient than reciting the name of each letter in English or Spanish. Igoa (1995) documented the spelling pronunciation strategy among her Spanish-literate students and recognized that by phoneticizing words as they had been
taught to do in Spanish especially helped the children to remember which vowels to use. English has as many as sixteen distinct vowel sounds, each with several possibilities for spelling (See Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams 2003, p. 265) while Spanish is much more straightforward with five vowel sounds represented consistently with only one of five letters.

The newcomer boys could appreciate the joke I had learned from my adult ESOL students years before that plays on spelling pronunciations:

Speaker 1: ¿Cómo se escribe “naríz” en inglés? [How do you spell “nose” in English?]

Speaker 2: No sé. [I don’t know.]

Speaker 1: ¡Muy bien! [Very good!]

Although cookies and public recognition rewarded students who had good strategies for learning orthography, those who did not win looked disappointed and envious during the spelling cookie ceremony. Carlos, Eddie, Herminio and Herbert did not often score high enough to win the prize; they could not read and write Spanish and had to memorize each word’s spelling letter by letter. Eddie, who on more than one occasion had been caught with a cheat sheet, exclaimed his resentment one day, “How come they always get cookies? They don’t even know English!” A look at Ms. Fairbanks’s spelling gradebook from the last eight spelling tests of the school year clearly demonstrates that the newcomers outperformed the other boys in this study who knew English better, but could not read and write Spanish (Table 6.1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.1  Scores for Last Eight Spelling Tests of the School Year</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not use spelling pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herminio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used spelling pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg.=3.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Peregoy & Boyle (2001) cites studies in which literacy skills in an ELL student’s primary language have been shown to transfer to literacy tasks in English. Omar, Jaime and Luis’s spelling pronunciation as a test-taking strategy demonstrated that literacy skills in Spanish can be a tool for learning English spelling. Some ESOL teachers may discourage the spelling pronunciation strategy fearing that purposely mispronouncing words will cause students problems later. However, I never observed Omar, Luis or Jaime confuse the spelling pronunciation with the standard pronunciation. I believe that

<sup>a</sup> * A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, E=0, Abs=Absent
the tactic further benefited them by helping them to remember their vocabulary words and so made learning word meanings that much easier.

The newcomer children also profited from the strategy simply by experiencing success in English. They could not participate successfully on the many tests they attempted during the school year. Spelling tests, however, provided a specific, limited body of knowledge to learn. The task afforded an achievable challenge in English in which the newcomer students’ prior knowledge gave them a rare advantage over the fluent English speakers.

6.6.2 Flexibility in ESOL Pull-Out

In the afternoon, I worked with ESOL students in a separate space and pulled them from their afternoon class for forty minute periods. While at first I believed that I had to follow the requisite ESOL books that the county had provided, I learned during the year that there was a great deal of leeway provided to ESOL teachers during pull out instruction. With the ESOL 2 group that consisted of Herminio, Eddie, Herbert, Carlos and two other boys I found that veering from the expected curriculum could provide meaningful activities that strengthened academics. We used ESOL time to organize fundraisers, write our own multiple choice test, organize a petition drive, and read Goosebumps books.

6.6.2.1 Natural Disasters

The fifth graders did a unit in the Houghton-Mifflin language arts curriculum about natural disasters during the time that the Hurricanes Ivan and Jeanne were hitting
Florida. The topic of hurricanes held even more interest for them because we had
experienced Hurricane Isabel in Maryland the year before. I had my ESOL 2 groups
begin an email exchange with a friend of mine in Florida who had gone through two
hurricanes that season. Through their correspondence, the children learned about a
program where schools outside Florida would be partnered with a Florida school that had
been damaged. Students were having penny drives to raise money for their partner
school. Spurred by Herminio’s infectious enthusiasm, my ESOL students decided to
participate in the program and my friend in Florida helped to connect us to a school in her
city.

We began a long series of connected activities that required reading, writing, math
and leadership. The children dictated to me a letter to our principal asking permission to
do the penny drive. They made a sign asking students to put money in a large water
bottle they placed in the school cafeteria. They wrote announcements that they read in
the P.A. system mornings and afternoons. They made additional announcements in the
cafeteria on a microphone. They counted the coins (a valuable activity for Omar and
Luis, the newcomers, who needed to get familiar with American money) and they kept
track of the amount of money collected. They read and filed the receipts from the office
as we deposited the money each afternoon with the school secretary. They examined the
check and the envelope we sent to the school in Florida. At the end we got a gracious
letter from the principal of the Florida school thanking us for our efforts. Eddie, who
usually did not cooperate much in academics, participated in reading morning
announcements and counting money, which he did after school voluntarily. While it
started as an ESOL project, other students became involved in reading announcements as well.

As a summarizing activity we made a large poster on butcher paper with copies of all the documents we had created and received, and the students wrote labels for each document. For example, “This is a copy of the morning announcement” or “This is the letter we got from the school in Florida” or “This is a copy of the receipt we got from Ms. Lopez, the school secretary.” We hung the poster in the hallway and other students and teachers read about the project. It was a rich activity and much of it took place before and after school and at lunch so it did not interfere greatly with the required curriculum, and in fact enhanced it. It was directly tied to the natural disasters unit so it would have been simple to defend if I had to. Clearly the literacy and math activities could be justified with standards found in the state curriculum. As it turned out, when Ms. Bartholomew, the ESOL specialist from the central office, saw the poster, she made suggestions that made me realize that veering from the required Harcourt ESOL materials was not a problem and I could have used even more class time for the project if I had wanted to. I did not forget that flexibility as my students and I generated other alternative activities during the school year.

The students did not actually raise much money for the Florida school--$35 total. When Ms. Taylor, the school principal, first said that she would not allow the penny drive, I explained that the aim was not to raise a large amount of money, but to use academic skills in a real-life setting and to problem-solve. She was concerned because she believed that in a prior fundraiser, a teacher had pressured students to donate money that their impoverished parents could not spare. I contended that the children do not
consider themselves poor and in many ways saw themselves more fortunate than others, especially those who had suffered through more than one hurricane in a matter of weeks. I also reminded Ms. Taylor that most of their parents set an example of generosity by sending money home to relatives in Central America. Besides, I argued, the children were asking for pennies not large sums of money. It was first and foremost an educational activity that had a limited timeframe (two weeks) with a clear beginning and end. Ms. Taylor relented, I believe, much to the benefit of the children.

Later in the year, when the tsunami devastated South Asia, our now-experienced fifth grade ESOL students jumped to action and quickly raised $125 for the American Red Cross. I noticed that the penny collection for the tsunami victims became an important activity for other classes in the school as I saw even children in first and second grades anxiously walk up to the water bottle in the cafeteria and drop in their pennies and nickels and dimes. These fund-raising activities brought together many different skills for the ESOL students to learn and to practice, but for me the important lesson is that students have power to organize themselves and make a difference. Children, even those with little English, can take on leadership roles in the school.

6.6.2.2 Reading for Pleasure

I learned the pleasure of recreational reading as a child from my family. I had been raised in a middle class family with college educated parents. We had books and magazines and newspapers throughout our house. Our family shared with one another what we were reading. I remember fondly poems and stories my mother read to my siblings and me before I could read by myself. Trips to the public library were as routine
as going to the mailbox or bringing in the morning newspaper. When I became a parent, I read to my adoptive son and took him to the library. While my son struggled in many aspects of his schooling, he never fell behind in reading. He especially liked the children’s horror stories, the Goosebumps series, by R. L. Stein. I had been at a training* in which Stephen Krashen had encouraged us teachers to get students interested in reading series such as Babysitters Club or Goosebumps. I read Goosebumps books to my son starting in first grade when he began asking about the series. By second grade he could read them on his own. When we moved from California to Maryland, my son, who had attended a bilingual school, was reading at grade level in both English and Spanish in spite of his other academic problems. While his teachers made sure he could decode print, I credit R. L. Stein for teaching him to read.

Stephen Krashen (2005) promotes free voluntary reading as a way of improving reading skills. He cites research showing that access to quality books through the school library, the public library and bookstores makes a difference for students. There are no bookstores in the Marysburg community. The public library is not an easy place to get to from the neighborhood where my students lived. Surprisingly, students were not allowed to borrow books from the school library due to lack of funds for replacing lost materials. Many teachers at the school, Ms. Fairbanks included, did not allow students to borrow any of the one hundred titles of Scholastic, Inc. books in their PCPS-provided classroom library because the superintendent had repeatedly announced that the cost of any lost books would be deducted from teachers’ paychecks. Aside from that issue, many of the books in the classroom library were too far beyond our students’ current reading ability to be that enjoyable.

* Multi-district Training for Trainers Institute, Modesto, California, 1995
At Marysburg Elementary, I attempted to alleviate my students’ lack of access to books by providing them with trade books that I borrowed from the Marysburg Elementary ESOL department, along with used children’s books that the speech teacher kindly collected and left for us in the staff lounge, as well as my son’s assortment of old Goosebumps books. My Level 2 ESOL group that included Eddie, Carlos, Herminio, and Herbert got hooked on Goosebumps when I read *Welcome to Dead House*. I shelved the *Moving Into English* materials temporarily. I would read to the boys every day for the entire 40 minute ESOL period until we finished the book. I would pause briefly to question them about words they needed to know, and to practice some of the reading comprehension skills they were learning with Ms. Fairbanks: inferring, summarizing, and predicting. Goosebumps books lend themselves to the practice of predicting because the author leaves the reader hanging at the end of each short chapter. The boys eagerly predicted what they thought would happen next and then shouted excitedly for me to hurry up and read so they could find out what the next chapter would bring. They summarized to remind the group what we had read the day before or to get a student caught up who had been absent. Inferring was a more subtle skill to practice, but I was able to draw their attention to finding clues from the text that explained events in the story: the gathering of dark clouds set a mood that meant that something sinister was about to happen.

One day Carlos asked if he could sit on the floor in the corner of the classroom rather than sit at the table to hear the story. I gave him permission to do so and the other boys decided to follow suit. Soon they were all laying on the floor, heads on backpacks or a friend’s stomach, like a heap of happy puppy dogs. I noticed one day Eddie, one of
the angriest kids in the fifth grade, sucking his thumb as I read to them from my seat at
the table. What had hooked my son also hooked Eddie and the other boys. Eddie began
to take home other Goosebumps books and in the morning would tell me which chapter
he was on and what had happened in the story. He even sent away for a title with an
order form from the back of the book. The other boys started to borrow books as well
and soon I began to overhear them in the morning before class talking about their stories
and arranging to trade each other when they finished. Other students noticed their
interest and started to borrow the books, too.

6.6.2.3 The RIP Test

The boys in this study liked wrestling, soccer and video games more than school.
Herminio got an X-Box from his parents during the school year. He began coming to
school sleepy and said to us in the ESOL group that he would get up at night while his
family slept and play video games. I alerted his mother to the problem when I
interviewed her at their home. They also stayed up until 11 p.m. watching Smack Down,
their favorite TV wrestling program on Thursday nights. Friday mornings the boys
would sometimes be a little sleepy. Since we had to start class at 8 a.m., they really
needed to get to bed earlier than 11 p.m. in order to get a good night's sleep.
Figure 6.1 Wrestling Match
They knew their TV wrestling quite well, though. The boys would talk about wrestling, write about it and draw pictures of matches (Figure 6.1). They imitated their wrestling heroes during unstructured time if they could get away with it. One day during ESOL pull-out group, Herbert mentioned that there was a website about wrestling and I decided that we would visit it. They enjoyed exploring the site and read the content. We stumbled across a trivia quiz in multiple choice format. Working together, the boys scored 90%. They were well-versed in the subject of wrestling and did a fine job reading the test without much help. Herbert proved to be the most knowledgeable of them all.

Inspired by their success with the wrestling trivia quiz, in late May we decided to create a multiple choice test that the boys would do well on that teachers would most likely fail. We would identify what knowledge they had that was not tested at school. The assessment they designed was called the R.I.P. test for “Restling in Pain”. (Because of their experience with the SRI, MSA and IPT, they felt that tests should have a three-letter acronym, so they found Herminio’s suggestion, R.I.P. test, a hilarious name for an assessment.) They included wrestling trivia questions with along with items relating to cultural knowledge about El Salvador, soccer, American football and Goosebumps. [The R.I.P. test is presented below (Appendix E) as they wrote it, including the font they selected. The names of the students, which they liked to use as distracters, have been changed to their pseudonyms.]

The experience writing a multiple choice test of their own caused us to focus on writing distracters, among other things. Herminio became especially animated when he shared his realization to the group that test-writers try to trick you by purposefully offering plausible but incorrect answers. They distributed the test to a few favorite
teachers with the hope of getting them back and scoring them. Unfortunately they did not come back to them before the end of the school year. I did show the test to Ms. Fairbanks and Ms. Longman, who thoroughly enjoyed the test although they both failed it miserably. The boys’ interpretation of test results demonstrated their intuitive understanding of the gate-keeping aspects of tests: “If you score 70%-100% you are one of us.” They also offered suggestions for remediation based on test scores: “If you score 60% or less you will have to watch more wrestling.”

I believe that having the boys write their own test that valued their knowledge empowered them and gave them important insights into test-making, the purposes of standardized tests, and the power of those who make them. The activity may be a powerful form of test preparation to augment or possibly replace the type usually provided students which emphasizes test-taking strategies, practice and helpful tips.

6.6.3 Field Trips

Field trips had some unexpected benefits for our students on the MSA. These real-life experiences built background knowledge that happened to appeared on the state assessment. In the fall, the fifth and sixth graders spent two days and a night at an environmental education camp. We teachers went along as chaperones and activity leaders. Ms. Fairbanks and I organized the nature walk which followed a trail through the woods. A booklet explained where to stop and what to explain to the students at each stop. We spoke mainly about trees and forest growth. The first stop on the nature walk was at a wild persimmon tree and none of the students were familiar with this type of tree or its fruit, which was lying on the wet ground. Coincidentally, on the Spring MSA
Benchmark, the students had to read a fiction selection in which persimmon trees figured prominently.

In the spring of the year we took two days to go to the Smithsonian National Gallery of Art. Ms. Anderson had written a grant for the trip which provided lesson plans, a visit to our school from museum docents prior to the trip, two days of the museum visit including lunch, hands-on art activities and a guided tour of masterpieces on display. At one point during the museum visit, students stopped to watch an artist, complete with easel, canvas, oil paints and brushes reproducing one of the museum masterpieces. The artist kindly explained what she was doing and why. The children were fascinated and impressed. Weeks later on the MSA Benchmark test, students had to read a selection in which an artist, sick in the hospital, passed the time reproducing works by a renowned painter. Many students recalled the art museum trip. Eddie actually remembered paintings by the artist mentioned in the exam’s reading passage.

Reading selections make more sense when students have the background knowledge required for making meaning of text. Building background knowledge is one of the important strategies for supporting immigrant students’ academic development (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001; Chamot & O’Malley, 1994). Fortunately, Marysburg Elementary saw the benefit of field trips and children acquired background knowledge that served them for standardized testing, and surely in other areas as well.

6.7 Tracking Students by SRI and IPT

The students in the study had many challenges to overcome at school. I hoped by guiding them in empowering activities and valuing the knowledge, interests and skills
they brought with them, they could learn to rise above their many obstacles. They raised
money for hurricane and tsunami victims; they used their Spanish to learn English
spelling lists; they created their own test that valued the knowledge they had learned in
non-formal settings; they learned to value recreational reading. Unfortunately the
practice of tracking in the fifth grade seriously impacted the boys’ self esteem and was a
practice that proved impossible to completely overcome.

At the beginning of the school year the principal directed Ms. Fairbanks, Ms.
Longman and me to divide the students in the fifth grade at Marysburg Elementary
School into a "high", "middle" and a "low" class. The divisions were based on IPT scores
and SRI scores. The ‘high’ class had no ESOL students, the ‘middle’ class had Level 3
(advanced) ESOL students who were not to receive ESOL instruction, and the ‘low’ class
had Level 2 and Level 1 (intermediate and beginning) ESOL students. Non-ESOL
students were placed in classes based primarily on Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)
scores along with some teacher judgment. The ‘low’ class (Ms. Fairbanks’s) included
students who had scored between 330 and 495 on the SRI. These scores represented first
and second grade reading levels. Several of the students in the class received special
education services or were in the process of diagnosis. (See Table 4.6)

An educational purpose for dividing children based on reading ability is to match
students to texts for appropriate reading instruction (See, for example, Fountas & Pinnell,
1996). For that reason, within each of the three fifth grade classes, the students were
further divided into ‘high’, ‘middle’ and ‘low’ reading groups based on SRI scores. The
expectation was that during the 60-minute small group reading instruction, students
would read books at the appropriate challenge level.
School personnel had different explanations for the grouping. Ms. Street felt ambivalent about the practice. She said that the goal was to put the most needy students together and then give them extra support, but it also caused a lack of academically proficient role models for low performing students:

Well it’s a practice at our school to put special ed., ESOL and low performing students all in one class, so you’re immediately stacking one class to be the most challenged. And the way it’s set up is thinking you have an ESOL teacher, and you have your classroom teacher, and, I don’t know if our kids are really getting special ed at all, but thinking that if we throw all these people at these kids that it will be helpful for them. I think that [Ms. Fairbanks’s] class is so challenging and has so many challenges because there are no higher performing role models in the class...We’ve set that class up to have more challenges, but I also think that we’ve brought them a really long way since the beginning of the school year.

Dr. Etienne explained that the beginning and intermediate level ESOL students were kept with the low performing students so that they would not be marginalized by high performing students:

…we group them on language acquisition as opposed to heterogeneous grouping. The reason being was that if you group these kids randomly so to speak, you get the good kids controlling the language acquisition in the room and you hope that your lowest kids would get the opportunity to speak based on the fact that the teacher would call on them and remember to call on them, or they would know the answer or the kids are going to raise their hand. Traditionally that is disastrous for an ESOL 1 or and ESOL 2. Okay? It just widens the gap. So what
we’ve done in the past is we’ve grouped the kids based on their language acquisition which impacts their reading level. We gave the greatest support to the classes that had ESOL 1’s and/or 2’s…

She also said that the grouping was flexible in that students could change classrooms if their English proficiency improved enough so they could succeed in a class with more academically advanced instruction without extra support. Ms. Taylor confirmed Dr. Etienne’s program description:

We do originally allocate students according to level. That’s so we can maximize the support for the students that need it. Typically the lowest class is the smallest and they’re provided with two teachers for most of the day. Whereas the higher classes we allow to go higher in size. The doors are always open every quarter…If a student is floundering they can be moved down. If a student is doing well they can be moved up. There’s no tracking per se like once you’re on this track you can’t get out of it. It’s a flexible dynamic situation… We do that at every grade and ESOL is a part of that.

When I asked if I could move a particular student from our ‘low’ class to Ms. Longman’s ‘intermediate’ class, however, Ms. Taylor did not encourage the change:

Ryan: We have a student who’s ESOL 2 from South America and well educated and we think he can do well in the middle class. Can we just move him?

Taylor: You’re still required to give him services if he’s ESOL 2. If you think he’s ESOL 3 you can test him and show he’s ESOL 3 and you don’t have to provide services. But to move an ESOL 2 into a class without support? Because
Special Ed and ESOL get double support from Special Ed and ESOL, so it’s a weighty decision. You have to be careful.

When I asked Ms. Taylor about parents’ input about placement, she acknowledged that they did not usually tell them about it:

Ryan: What about the parents? Do they ever come in and say, I want my kid in this other, higher class?

Taylor: Sometimes we get complaints about teacher attitudes. Sometime they don’t like teacher’s attitudes…

Ryan: So the parents are not so much concerned with “My child is not in the high class,” but with the teacher.

Taylor: We don’t tell them that…We have very few parents that question the placement of their children. And most of the time if they do, they’re wrong.

There was an unspoken understanding that we would not acknowledge the class groupings with the students or the parents. Ms. Anderson and I, however, experienced that students were aware of the class levels, though she spoke almost as if someone had divulged a secret:

Ryan: Do you think the kids know what level they’re in?

Anderson: Yeah. I even heard it in my class. They’ve been told. I don’t know who told them but they’ve been told that they’re the dummies.

Ryan: Some of the kids that I work with have said that they’re in the retarded class.

Anderson: Exactly. Actually the kids heard that from the kid that was moved in there. They said, “He doesn’t want to come into our dummy class. He said he’s
smarter than we are.” They sling the insults at each other all the time. They know.

Although we never discussed the grouping with the students or their parents, Eddie, Herbert, Herminio and Carlos recognized the leveling and believed the classes were divided by intelligence. I learned from a conversation after the MSAs (transcript below) that because of their placement, they perceived themselves to be less intelligent than students in the other classes. Carlos especially felt hurt because he had been moved first “up” from Ms. Longman’s “intermediate” to Ms. Arnold’s “high” class. Ms. Ware later had us move Carlos from Ms. Arnold’s class into our “low” class because on her student list he was identified as ESOL 2. Ms. Arnold also felt that Ms. Longman had mistakenly placed Carlos because she observed that he could not read near the level of the other students in her class.

Herminio: …when you get to high school and then you have high points, good points, they really put you in smart classes…in hard classes.
Herbert: Yeah ‘cause like Ms. Arnold.
Carlos: [sad voice] Yeah I’m supposed to be there.
Herbert: He got Leapfrog! [Kindergarten computer-based literacy system i.e. Carlos needs kindergarten activities]
Carlos: I don’t care that I got out ‘cause you’re still there! Ahaa!
Herminio: Okay! Be quiet! Like my sister is so smart and they invited her to this big concert and she won $2000.
Carlos: At least I went up! Y’all didn’t even went up!
Eddie: Yeah you went down!
Ryan: Okay, what are you guys talking about?

Herbert: We were talking about Ms. Arnold’s class…

Eddie: They are the smartest class…

Herbert: They are the smartest class.

Eddie: …in the 5th grade.

Herbert: Yeah because they have a lot of the students in there that are really smart like G, a lot of the girls, and Carlos used to be there but I told him that he was too retarded to be in that class. [giggling]

Herminio: [giggling]

Carlos: That’s not funny. I don’t get it.

Herbert: And he came back to our class.

Carlos: At least I wasn’t retarded before because you still there. Ahhhaa!

Herbert: because…because…

Carlos: You’re a retard! You’re a retard! And I moved up! So how do you like that?!!

Herbert: [Pause, then deep voice] But you went down…[giggles]

Carlos: You don’t even know, man.

Ryan: So you think Ms. Arnold’s is the best class?

Carlos, Herbert: Yes!

Herminio: No!

Herbert: ‘Cause they have smarter students like E,…

Carlos: Yeah!
Herbert: G,…

Carlos: Yeah!

Herbert: former Carlos, W…

Carlos: Uhm uhm. Me!

Herbert: L! That dude’s smart!

Ryan: L is smart?

Herbert: Yeah, dude! He knows everything!

Ryan: What about Ms. Longman’s class?

Eddie: That’s second smart and we’re last smart.

Herbert, Herminio: [giggling]

Herminio: Yeah ‘cause we’re the best. We’re the coolest.

Ryan: Why do you guys think you’re not as smart?

Carlos: Because we suck.

Herminio: Because we’re only cool.

Herbert: Because every single time we lose recess!

Herminio: I know! That’s true! That’s true. That’s true.

Ryan: You think they don’t lose recess?

All: Nooo!

Ryan: They never lose recess?

Herbert, Herminio: Nooo!

Eddie: Yes! Ms. Longman’s, yes.

Herbert: Ms. Longman’s mean.

Herminio: I know.
Herbert: She always makes us lose recess.

Ryan: Ms. Longman?

Herbert: Yeah she keeps making us lose recess.

Ryan: Let’s say you’re right and there’s a smart class and a medium class and a
dumb class. How do you get to move from one class to the next class?

Eddie:: You have to do good in your MSA. You have to get like the highest
scores in the MSA and then you get like the highest scores you get to be in the
smart class.

Herbert: One word. Behavior.

Ryan: Behavior? You think it’s behavior?

Herminio: Noooo.

Ryan: So if you behave they put you in a better class?

Herminio: No. I behave good and they don’t put me in a better class.

[Everybody laughs, especially Herminio.]

Eddie: It’s not about behavior.

Herminio: It’s about being smart.

Eddie: Yeah. It’s about you have to know how to read, you have to know all your
math. You have to know everything.

Ryan: I think you’re all smart.

Carlos: We’re not smart! We’re stupid.

Ryan: What do you mean you’re not smart?

Herbert: We’re stupid!

Carlos: Thank you, Herbert.
All: [laughing]

Herbert: No. We’re just fooling around. We think we’re smart.

Carlos: No we don’t.

In this exchange, Herbert teased Carlos about his supposed lack of intelligence that had been made public when Carlos was moved to the low status class. Carlos reminded Herbert that he (Herbert) had been in the “low” class since the beginning so should not be pointing fingers. After this exchange, Carlos looked sad and put his head down on the table and stopped participating. Eddie, usually very quiet during our taped conversations, participated in this discussion and showed astute awareness of the tracking situation. He believed that students were placed in the classes according to reading and math abilities.

Because the group usually misbehaved for Ms. Longman in the afternoon math class, she frequently took away their recess privilege. In their discussion, the boys referred to how the shame of being in the low class was compounded by the public humiliation of losing recess and having to regularly stand against the school wall while the children in the other two fifth grade classes played.

The boys recognized Ms. Arnold’s group as the top one because they observed that students they identified as smart and a disproportionate number of girls were in that class. From a prior discussion, I also learned that the fact that Ms. Arnold’s class went to the sixth grade teacher for math further solidified the children’s perception that her class was more advanced. Their low status class, in addition to having a majority of boys, also had students with serious and obvious learning and behavior problems. Eddie probably
said Ms. Longman’s class was the intermediate group because no one stood out to him as particularly talented or disabled.

Students stayed with their groups all day, even during math, music and P.E. classes. (See Valdés, 2001 for similar findings.) I felt that the students in our class, especially the novice English learners would benefit from learning situations where they participated with fluent English speakers in low anxiety situations like music or P.E. I suggested we mix the groups for those subjects. Ms. Fairbanks, Ms. Arnold and Ms. Taylor said that it would be too complicated and would require the music and P.E. teachers to create new class rosters and grade books. While they understood the logic for mixing the students, they did not want to be involved with that complication. They said if I wanted to take the project on myself, they would not stand in my way. I did not think it wise to proceed with that change without help or buy-in, so I did not pursue the idea of de-tracking music and P.E. In the end we decided to keep the students in these groups because it was more efficient for record-keeping and for moving students to different classrooms, not because of any academic benefits from the grouping.

6.7.1 Tracking in the Lunchroom

Another unintended consequence of this tracking was that IPT and the SRI scores ended up determining at which cafeteria table the students sat. The three classes sat in different sections of the lunchroom. Ms. Arnold’s class (the ‘high’ group) sat at a row of four tables closest to the entrance. A small group of special education students sat at the next row, occupying two tables. Ms. Longman’s ‘middle’ group sat at the next row of four tables, and finally, Ms. Fairbanks’s class sat at three tables that formed a row closest
to the food line and the trash cans. The ‘low’ students and the ‘high’ students sat at opposite ends of the cafeteria with two classes in-between.

As a language teacher I would like to have seen the administration view lunch as a time for English speakers and Spanish speakers to mingle and develop their oral language abilities through informal communication. As it was, the students at the beginning levels of English proficiency had little opportunity during the school day even for casual talk with academically high performing native English speaking peers. Likewise, students outside Ms. Fairbanks’s class had little opportunity to speak Spanish with Spanish-dominant peers.

As cafeteria monitor I circulated among the fifth grade tables every day along with a rotating assortment of adult teacher aides. I chatted with the students and pestered them about displaying good table manners, selecting green vegetables from their lunch choices, and keeping their voices at a conversational level. I was also expected to ensure that they stay seated at their assigned tables. This last demand weighed on me, especially when Carlos was switched to Ms. Fairbanks’s class. He wanted to continue to sit with his former classmates in Ms. Arnold’s class. Another student who changed classes at the same time also wanted to continue to eat lunch with his friends from his original homeroom. I allowed it. As soon other students noticed that I was permitting some students to sit outside their classes, they began asking permission to change tables. I consulted with the other cafeteria monitors and we decided to allow it as long as they did not draw undo attention to themselves.

Not long afterwards and for unrelated reasons, the cafeteria manager complained to the principal that students in the fifth grade were too loud in the lunchroom.
(Appropriate cafeteria noise level was a regular topic of debate and disagreement in the Marysburg staff lounge.) Ms. Taylor sent Ms. Ware to observe fifth grade lunch. The practice of allowing students to sit with friends in other classes was immediately put to a stop. In fact, I was told to seat students by class and alternate them boy-girl-boy-girl. I followed my orders as best as I could given the gender imbalance in the classes, and when the children were no longer eating lunch with friends, the lunchroom indeed became almost noise-free. They did not talk to each other and the possibility of mealtime as an opportunity for informal language learning disappeared.

Naturally, the children complained about their assigned seats. In the ESOL 2 class in which we had organized fundraisers for the hurricane and the tsunami victims, I brought up the possibility of a petition to change cafeteria seating policy. The students got excited by the story of my middle school students in California who successfully circulated a petition to make morning announcements in Spanish, and decided to follow their example. Herminio, Eddie and Carlos typed up a petition on the computer that read:

Dear Ms. Taylor,

We would like to sit in any 5th grade table at lunch time if we get all the 5th grade classes to sign the petition.

Thank you.

They announced the plan in the cafeteria on the microphone. Each of the three boys took on responsibility for collecting signatures from a different class and began their petition drive during lunch, recess and morning line-up. After Carlos’s petition got ripped on the playground, the boys requested clip boards to better collect signatures. I saw it as an important activity to promote the ESOL students’ oral language development
as well as their awareness of democratic processes. They had to explain clearly to small groups and individual classmates what the petition was for and how petitions work. Like the fundraising projects, this activity grabbed Eddie’s interest. One of the most difficult of my ESOL 2 students, Eddie participated enthusiastically in this effort.

I explained the project to the fifth grade teachers and they had no objections to a change in cafeteria seating, especially considering that they were not directly responsible for supervising the students during lunch hour.

Once Herminio, Eddie and Carlos had gotten every fifth grade student to sign the petition, I went to the office to discuss the seating policy with Ms. Taylor. The students were anxiously waiting for her response. Ms. Taylor was not there that Thursday or Friday, and since we were about to leave for Spring Break, I took the signatures to Mr. Moore, the new assistant principal, for a decision. He congratulated me on the project and agreed to announce the new seating policy that day at lunch.*

After the students were seated, he told the fifth grade how proud he was that they found a responsible way to make a change in their environment and he said a sentence or two about the importance of petitions for democracy. He announced that students would be able to sit where they wanted starting on the Monday we came back from Spring Break. The students cheered and whistled joyfully… and then loudly and exaggeratedly as eleven-year-olds sometimes do. As Mr. Moore and I quieted them down, I circulated among the tables and heard new petition plans. After this success they would next start petitions to end homework and uniforms. I had to explain how different policies come

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* If I were to do this project again I would have the children make their own case to their teachers and administrators so that they could have the practice of making a formal presentation in English.
from decisions at different levels and that some changes would be more difficult to achieve than others.

Unfortunately, on the Monday morning after Spring Break, Ms. Taylor let me know that she was going to reverse Mr. Moore’s decision. She said that at the middle school level students may not sit where they want during lunch and that the elementary school children could not have more freedom than middle school students. She also told me that seating students by class is also more efficient for clean up and moving students on to recess.  I was shocked and disappointed.  It had not occurred to me that the principal would object to the new seating policy.  I asked her to inform the students herself of the decision at lunch, which she did without hesitation.

The majority of students, while disappointed, accepted their fate. Only Carlos expressed anger with the turn of events. “After all that work and we got nothing!” At lunch that day, Ms. Taylor congratulated the students on the project and said it was an excellent way to let her know of their concerns. She said that they could sit with whomever they pleased within their assigned classes. They no longer had to sit boy-girl-boy-girl in designated seats. However, to enjoy the privilege of open seating they would have to wait until high school. After the announcement, Ms. Taylor circulated around the cafeteria chatting with the children and giving hugs.

In ESOL group that afternoon, I explained that although they did not get what they had petitioned for, they had made some progress. They got Ms. Taylor to talk to them in the cafeteria and they had won back permission to sit with their friends within the class. Overall, they seemed to take it in stride. The children had bonded with the people in their class, had accepted their status positions and had become comfortable with them.
When student placement came up in meetings, however, I would make a point to express my disagreement with tracking of students by test scores. I explained that my ESOL students recognized the plan and that they felt that they were in a ‘retarded class’. In the late spring when it came time to recommend student placements for the 2005-06 school year I lobbied for mixing students for whole class activities and use flexible, homogeneous grouping for reading and ESOL instruction. Ms. Taylor and Dr. Etienne decided to continue to separate the classes by reading and English proficiency, but would not place ESOL students in the ‘low’ class if they had had consistent schooling in their native language prior to coming to this country or if they otherwise showed academic potential. We were able then to place four of the ESOL students from Ms. Fairbanks’s class, including Eddie and Omar, into the ‘higher’ of the two 6th grade classrooms.

6.7.2 “ESOL-and-Special-Education”

Educational personnel in Marysburg Elementary and in Parker County Schools in general, seemed to speak quite often about ESOL and Special Education together as if in their minds they were a pair, like “math and science” or “salt and pepper”. Below are some typical examples, among many, of people speaking of the two areas in the same breath:

Ms. Longman: “Also you have to look at the composition of the classes because some classes have more ESOL and Special Ed than another grade level.”

Ms. Longman: “And I think to have ESOL and special ed children take the same test that other students are taking and struggling with is just very difficult.”
Ms. Taylor on the new superintendent: “He’s changed the curriculum. He’s changed the ESOL program. He’s changed the special education department. He’s made a lot of changes.”

Ms. Taylor on AYP: “There are a lot of schools that did not make AYP because of the ESOL students and/or the special ed students.”

The ELL Accommodations Document provided another window into the “ESOL-and-Special-Ed” pair. That form had so many special education accommodations, such as “Braille” and “large print” on it that it seemed almost as if a state bureaucrat had taken a special education document and simply changed the title. Ms. Bartholomew, a PCPS ESOL specialist noticed the same thing:

Bartholomew: A lot of these [accommodations] are written especially for special education students first and then they are also on here and we could use them.

Ryan: What about “Other proposed by local accountability coordinator”? Has anyone ever done that? Has anyone ever come up with a new accommodation?

Bartholomew: Not to my knowledge. I don’t know of any. Again even though it says special ed and ESOL together, this might be more applicable to a child who has some sort of disability that you could come up with something. I think they added this for special ed but then said, “Oh, also for ELL!”.

Dr. Etienne herself provided an interesting example of the crossover between the two fields. Her doctorate was in TESOL but she coordinated the special education program.

Putting the students in one class together because of low scores on standardized tests caused the ESOL Levels 1 and 2 students to be placed with students who had
learning disabilities. While the two fields of education may have seemed a logical pair to some educators at Marysburg, partnering the two distinct groups of students without providing support and guidance to us teachers presented problems. The ESOL students themselves recognized that their classmates had serious learning issues and it caused them to think poorly of themselves as demonstrated by the conversation above. (Section 6.7). Ms. Anderson viewed the special education group as low status and not appropriate for second language learners. “I think it’s sometimes an insult. As a language learner if I was to go to a foreign country and they put me in with the special ed kids, I’d be truly insulted.” Ms. Longman also noticed important differences between the ESOL students and the special education students when she spoke about Omar and Jaime: “If you compare them to the special ed kids in the same class, there are such different needs. They’re showing signs of natural progression and growth academically and socially that you don’t see in the special ed students.”

Some ESOL students mistreated special education students, I believe partly because of their resentment over being placed in the low status classroom. I had to speak with Herbert and Eddie in particular on several occasions about their mistreatment of classmates with learning problems. I contacted Herbert’s mother twice about his harassment of one of the girls in the class who struggled with her academics due to brain damage from complications during birth.

It is also possible that some of the students feared that they may have been placed in the class because they had learning problems themselves.

Ryan: I wanted to ask you, how do you get out of ESOL?
Carlos: By passing the thingy.

Herminio: By passing the test that you said.

Eddie: the ESOL test…

…Herbert: I was retarded that’s why I didn’t pass. I was retarded.

I also noticed that Omar and Luis were distracted by some of their special education classmates’ inappropriate behaviors. During Ms. Fairbanks’s whole-class instruction, I noticed that they often found it easier to tune out the lesson and focus their attention on Stanley, who was in their group and sat opposite Omar. Stanley had been diagnosed by his family neurologist as having microcephaly (a cause of mental retardation) and attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder. Omar’s first spontaneous words in English were directed at the boy: “Stop it, Stanley!” Eddie once admitted to me that he purposefully manipulated Stanley into over-excitement in order to cause distractions.

Referring to students newly arrived to the United States, Ms. Anderson said, “What happens is that they end up with kids with a lot of discipline problems.. they don’t end up with a lot of role models.”

On the other hand, one non-ESOL special education student wanted to go to ESOL with me in the afternoon and felt left out because I did not take her. I spoke to her about it, and with help from her mother she began to understand why I didn’t take her for ESOL pull-out, even though she participated in the morning plug-in ESOL.

Students who took ESOL class who also had been diagnosed with learning problems received either no additional specialized services besides ESOL or, in the case of one girl, had an occasional lesson from a speech pathologist in lieu of ESOL pull-out.
The special education teacher assigned to our grade did not provide services despite our requests for help and our complaints to the administration. It fell on Ms. Fairbanks, Ms. Longman and me to work with the special education students without additional training or support. Stanley, mentioned above, in particular, caused constant disruptions and required close one-on-one supervision which I provided much of the time I was in the room. He was the center of a very stressful power struggle over his placement that Ms. Fairbanks and I had been unwillingly pulled into. ESOL Department Chair Anderson, who was opposed to Marysburg’s placing all the lowest scoring students together in one class, let me know that we ESOL teachers did double-duty as special education teachers, and it was an intentional use of ESOL teachers, not accidental:

Ryan: What about the argument that in the so-called low class there’s not as many students and then you have a mainstream teacher and an ESOL teacher working together?

Anderson: The ESOL teacher always ends up doing special ed…

Ryan: I wanted to see if that was just my perception or what.

Anderson: Oh no, no, no, no, no. You’re doing special ed.

During the two-hour language arts block I provided support and small group reading instruction for all the students in the class whether or not they had been designated as requiring ESOL services. Too often I felt that my attention and energy went to providing for the needs of the special education students, and that I neglected the ELL students. I was involved with parent meetings for non-ESOL students. When I was assigned to provide testing accommodations for special education students I had to abandon my ESOL classes. I devoted additional planning and instructional time to non-
ESOL special education students and often felt overwhelmed and unprepared to deal with the needs I saw that they had. On the other hand, I could not access their files in the main office and did not get information on their specific needs, training on instructional strategies or materials from the special education program.

### 6.7.3 Progressing Through the ESOL Levels

ESOL levels are determined by a chart from the PCPS ESOL office (Appendix D) and are based on scores on the three sections of the IPT test: speaking/listening, reading and writing (See Chapter 3). Twenty three students in Marysburg Elementary School’s fifth grade had exited ESOL before the start of the school year. By the end of the year another nine had exited for a total of thirty-two students labeled “Independent” out of a total student enrollment of fifty-eight.

In conversations before taking the April IPT that would determine their ESOL placement for sixth grade, Carlos, Herminio and Herbert expressed negative attitudes about the results of their test from the previous school year and their desire to leave the ESOL program.

Herbert: I was retarded that’s why I didn’t pass. I was retarded.

Carlos: I was retarded that’s why I didn’t pass it.

Herminio: This year I’m gonna pass it.

Carlos: I wanna pass it! I don’t wanna be here!

After they took the test in April, Herminio, Carlos and Herbert had all scored high enough to move from ESOL 2 to ESOL 3. When I told them of their accomplishment, I hoped they might be happy, but that was not the case:
Ryan: … You guys passed into Level 3.

Herbert: Ahhhhhhh. [Expressing angry disappointment]

Carlos: So we are third grade?

Herbert: I want to get out of ESOL! I’ve been here still for five years!

Carlos: [laughing] I’ve been here, too…

Eddie: Yeah, me too.

It was common knowledge among ESOL teachers in PCPS that some students were unable to score high enough on the IPT to get beyond ESOL 2. Only Eddie remained in ESOL 2, missing the ESOL 3 designation by just a few points. While their ESOL levels may not have gone up yearly, all seven students in this study had gotten higher scores on the individual sections IPT over the time they had spent in ESOL. Of the boys in the study only Eddie was actually “stuck in ESOL 2” for the fourth year. By the end of the year, Omar, Jaime and Luis had entered the lower end of the ESOL 2 scale and for sixth grade would be in the same ESOL level as Eddie who had been in ESOL since Kindergarten. Herbert and Carlos finally moved to ESOL 3, but it was not good news to them. They wanted to be out of ESOL completely. (See Table 7.2 for scores and levels.)

Studies have shown that it may take students between five and ten years to reach academic proficiency, with students who have experienced interrupted schooling taking up to ten years (Thomas & Collier, 1997; Valdez-Pierce, 2003). The ESOL data from Marysburg’s fifth grade did not seem to contradict those studies (Table 4.4). By the end of fifth grade 32 students had been re-designated as Independent and no longer considered ELL. Because the majority of students with the ESOL 1 and ESOL 2 label
had arrived in the U.S. in the previous three years at the most, the numbers make sense for the end of fifth grade. Most students were leaving ESOL services by the end of six years. Erick, Carlos and Herbert, although still in ESOL after six years, were still within the range of expected progress, although at the slow end of the spectrum. Carlos’s and Herbert’s comments about being “retarded” because of their ESOL placement does not reflect reality but the attitudes they have learned in their school environment.

6.7.4 Gender and Long-Term ELL Status

When I was in the first phases of this research project, I was concerned that all the children in the study were boys. I thought I may have been demonstrating gender bias in the selection of research participants. However, I wanted to include students who I worked with every day, so that condition immediately reduced the possibilities to the children in Ms. Fairbanks’s homeroom, which, with eleven boys and five girls, was disproportionately male. By eliminating students with diagnosed learning problems from the study, I was left with eight boys and only one girl. If there was a gender bias, it was probably not mine, but in the environment.

While this study did not set out to address gender issues, a pattern emerged that is worth considering. At Marysburg Elementary School, 82% of staff members were female and 18% male. Males were in traditional roles: four of the five custodians, the computer teacher, the P.E. teacher and (for part of the school year) the assistant principal. On the other hand, only four of twenty-five classroom teachers and two of the seven ESOL teachers were male. Not one member of the school’s instructional leadership team was male (Table 4.2).
In contrast to the staff, our class of low-scoring students was composed disproportionately of boys. 69% were male while in the 5th grade there was a slightly smaller proportion of males at 47%. Ms. Arnold’s “high” class and Ms. Longman’s “middle” class were both majority female at 60% (Table 4.5).

Subtracting out newly-arrived immigrants and those with a diagnosed learning disability from the numbers in Ms. Fairbanks’s “low” class, there were six boys and one girl who had been unsuccessful in school for other unknown reasons (Table 4.6). Students who had been in ESOL since Kindergarten and who did not have a diagnosed learning disability were all boys: Herbert, Eddie, and Carlos.

My year at Marysburg was my first experience working full-time as part of an elementary school staff, and I could not help on occasion but feel that I was seen not as a co-worker, but as a male co-worker. In this case “male” is what sociologists would call the “marked category” at this workplace. There was one category called “teachers” and another called “male teachers”. I had frequent comments made to me that my being a male teacher was a good thing for the boys at the school. It was commonly believed that the boys lacked male role models and somehow benefited from that.

There is a growing body of research on boys and school failure which cites higher suspension rates, low grades, higher incidence of reading problems, greater drop-out rates and decreasing rates of college attendance as a cause for concern and as evidence of that schools are not adequately meeting the needs of boys (Gurian & Stevens, 2005: Kipnis, 1999; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000, Viadero, 2006). While I did not actively pursue information related to gender issues for this study, a connection between gender and long-term ELL status might be worth investigating.
6.8 Conclusions

Standardized assessment played a central role in curriculum and instruction for ELL students at Marysburg Elementary School. The principal and the teachers felt personally responsible for making sure that students did sufficiently well on the MSA that they would avoid the professional stigma of being labeled ‘failing’ as per NCLB. Test score accountability had both positive and negative effects. On one hand, the language arts and math curriculums were more consistent and aligned across the grades. Teachers received training in their implementation and all teachers were expected to follow the curriculum. On the other hand, Ms. Fairbanks and others felt that it was too scripted and did not do a good job of taking into account the needs of ELL students or the teacher’s creative role in matching the curriculum to the students’ individual needs. Another negative effect of test score accountability policy was that areas not tested were de-emphasized or eliminated. Hence, very limited science and no formal social studies instruction took place. Art instruction happened on one day all year.

The more flexible ESOL program, with its small class sizes allowed for finding ways to meet the students where they were instructionally and to integrate art, science and social studies. For example, the newcomers in the study learned to use their literacy skills in Spanish to outperform native English speakers on spelling tests. ESOL 2 students learned to tie reading skills from their language arts program to the newly discovered enjoyment of recreational reading. Raising funds for hurricane and tsunami victims allowed ELL students to develop academic and leadership skills which were tied to their unit on natural disasters in the language arts class. By running a petition drive, students
experienced that they could organize to make a change in their school. All the students
experienced growth on their IPT scores even though I deviated from the ESOL
curriculum. By making their own multiple choice test that privileged their knowledge,
students learned about test development and the gate-keeping aspects of tests. Many
educational researchers and theorists encourage this kind of empowering pedagogy with
marginalized students as a way of supporting their academic, emotional and cognitive
growth (Cummins 2001; Freire, 1970; Igoa, 1995).

Unfortunately, the practice of tracking by IPT and SRI score, while well-
tentioned, had harmful effects on the students’ self esteem. The children were aware of
their placement in the low-status class even though we adults had kept that information to
ourselves. Because the students stayed with their classes all day, the IPT and SRI scores
were actually determining groupings for PE, music class, and lunch. This practice
undermines the consequential validity of the two tests (See Section 6.8.1).

The unexamined practice at the school of equating ESOL and special education
casted ELL students to be seen and to see themselves as less than others despite their
unique gifts of being bilingual and bicultural. Grouping special education students with
beginning and intermediate level ESOL students caused the ESOL teacher to become a
de facto special education teacher as well. Without providing the ESOL teacher with
adequate training and materials for special education instruction, the special education
students were not well served while at the same the ESOL students did not get their full
services, either.

Clearly, the tracking situation at Marysburg Elementary demonstrates a deficit
approach to the schooling of ELL students. In an enrichment approach, bilingual
students would be seen as a resource, as having special language and cultural knowledge that they could build upon and also share with others. In a program where dual language acquisition and cross-cultural competency was valued as part of academic achievement, immigrant students would not end up in low status situations. There would be high expectations for their learning, not simply the expectation that they show growth on tests of English while allowing their native language talents to atrophy. At the same time, students with learning differences would get the support they needed from qualified instructors who have the skills and resources to make their learning meaningful and to help them to be welcomed in a mixed-ability classroom.

6.8.1 Consequential Validity

It cannot be said that the Marysburg Elementary School and NCLB were meeting these boys’ learning needs beyond basic math, ESOL and English reading. Because of curriculum narrowing caused by the school’s testing program, the boys received virtually no formal instruction in social studies, science and art. Likewise, they did not receive instruction in Spanish despite the fact that the boys were losing their ability to communicate in that language and in spite of their parents wishes for them to maintain it.

*Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* state that “Consequences resulting from the uses of the test, both intended and unintended, should …be examined by the test user” (AERA, APA, NCME, 1999). This recommendation speaks directly to test developers’ obligations to ensure the validity of their products. Brauldi, (1999) defines test validity as “…the degree with which the inferences based on test scores are meaningful, useful and appropriate…[it] is a characteristic of a test when it is administered to a particular population.” An aspect of assessment validity, known as
consequential validity, “…is concerned with a tests’ impact on individuals, institutions and society, and with the use that is made of test results” (Weir, 2005, p. 1). Messick, (1989) includes consequential validity in a unified definition of validity stating that "Validity is an integrated evaluative judgment of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on test scores or other modes of assessment" (p. 13). He further states that “The questions are whether the potential and actual social consequences of test interpretation and use are not only supportive of the intended testing purposes, but at the same time are consistent with other social values” (Messick, 1989).

Clearly there were serious problems with the consequential validity of the testing done at Marysburg Elementary school. One use of the IPT test scores was to place beginning and intermediate level ESOL students into one class. The students in each class were required to stay together throughout the day even during lunch.Temporarily grouping students and targeting instruction to meet their needs is a valid consequence of the IPT; segregated lunch tables is not. The practice of keeping these students together throughout the day prevented them from gaining access to more proficient peers and so probably impacted their progress in English acquisition (See Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Dropping untested subjects such as science, social studies and art was another consequence of the state testing program and renders the assessment consequentially invalid owing to the fact that it is not “consistent with other social values” (Messick, 1989) such as providing a full education for all students. It can also be argued that overall, the NCLB requirement of labeling of schools failing, restructuring or privatizing them based on ELL test scores are not valid consequences because the scores come from
assessments that are not developed for or normed on ELL students. Federal, state and local education officials should consider *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (1999) that “It is the responsibility of those who mandate the use of tests to monitor their impact and to identify and minimize potential negative consequences.” [Emphasis added].
Figure 6.2  MSA Kite No. 3
Marysburg Elementary School
March 2006
CHAPTER 7: Test Scores and Parent Dialogues

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe how standardized assessment was situated in the lives of seven fifth-grade boys of Salvadoran immigrant families who had been identified by their school district as English language learners (ELLs). By returning to the classroom as a teacher of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) during the 2004-05 school year, I hoped to learn, through participant-observation and interviews, how the school’s standardized testing program affected the boys’ education and ways in which the school and the families understood standardized testing. I hoped to critically examine relationships of power and use democratic processes to improve educational practices and policies in the community that I researched. Because I have lived and worked for many years in Spanish-speaking environments, I am comfortable with both the dominant and the immigrant languages and cultures represented in the study.

Hypothesizing that I would find areas of disconnect between the families and the schools, I expected to position my self as an advocate for my students and their families to improve the educational services being offered to them, particularly regarding standardized testing. As a final outcome, I implemented a discussion session for parents of ELL students regarding standardized assessment that built on what I had learned from my year of interviews and observations.

During the school year, I also concluded that it would be important to document empowering ESOL pedagogy during a time when teachers were complaining that school
principals restricted their teaching practice with scripted instructional programs. By describing my own practice, I intended to demonstrate to the ESOL teachers-in-training with whom I work at the university how teachers can act as allies to their students and their families and work within and against the constraints of NCLB.

In the previous three chapters, I chronicled my year as an ESOL teacher in Marysburg Elementary School and shared the insights and perspectives of my coworkers, supervisors, students and my students’ parents. In doing so, I present an emic or insider’s view of the reality of standardized testing at a school with a large Latino ELL population.

The following section describes some end-of-year results with a focus on standardized test scores for the fifth graders at Marysburg as a whole, for the ELL students within the fifth grade, and for the seven boys who participated in the study. Following that is a description of the parent discussion sessions that I facilitated at seven different elementary schools in the county.

I have been hesitant to include our students’ test scores for different reasons: 1) our students’ standardized test scores are low and some people inappropriately judge teachers and their methods or the children’s intelligence based on the students’ one time performance; 2) I fear that the test scores may distract some readers of this document from the many pages of description and lead them to pore over these test scores looking for cause-and-effect relationships; 3) and finally, while I am not opposed to standardized tests per se, I am also hesitant to include test scores here for the reason that Alfie Kohn (2003) asserts: “It’s easy for critics to be dismissed with a ‘sour grapes’ argument: You're just opposed to standardized testing because it makes you look bad.” Despite
these misgivings, the next sections describe student test results including Marysburg fifth graders as a whole, Marysburg 5th grade ELL scores and tests scores of the seven boys who participated in this study.

7.2 End-of-Year Test Results

After I spent a school year teaching, and teaching to tests, and testing, the preliminary results of the Maryland School Assessments (MSA) arrived. On our last day at work before summer vacation, the staff and faculty of Marysburg Elementary assembled in the cafeteria for Principal Taylor’s presentation of the outcomes. She explained that test scores for individual students were not available; only general scores for the entire school, by grade, had been sent to us. Ms. Taylor displayed graphs showing higher test scores for third and fourth graders compared to the previous year’s third and fourth graders. The faculty applauded enthusiastically at the rising test scores. When the fifth grade scores showed up on the screen, my fifth grade teammates and I saw to our horror that they were the lowest in the school. Ms. Taylor described these preliminary results as a 10% drop from the previous year’s fifth grade performance. Ms. Rupert, the reading instructional specialist, informed us that the fifth grade scores were so low that they would probably cause the school to miss “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP), the mandated rise in standardized test scores required by NCLB (Table 3.4). Not achieving AYP would label the school “failing” and bring increased scrutiny to us.

When the meeting ended, Ms. Fairbanks, one of the two fifth grade language arts teachers, was in tears. After the hard work of learning the complex new curriculum, trying to make it accessible to a group of students nearly all of whom had begun the year
reading at first or second grade levels, this presentation on the last workday of the school year simply added insult to injury. After the meeting, Ms. Fairbanks gave me a heartfelt hug and thanked me for my support during the school year.

Ms. Arnold also came to say her good-byes. She said that, while her first year of teaching had been rewarding, she had also felt frustrated with the detailed, restrictive language arts curriculum, and so was leaving to teach sixth grade at a private school in Virginia. Her students would be children from middle class families who did not have the kinds of academic challenges that Marysburg students struggled with. She told me that she had searched out a teaching position where she would be allowed to integrate language arts and social studies in creative ways. She would no longer have to live with the micromanagement inherent in a scripted reading program or the stress of the unrealistic expectations of NCLB test score accountability she had experienced at Marysburg.

Ms. Arnold’s and Ms. Fairbanks’s reactions were not unusual among teachers who work in low performing schools under the pressure of high-stakes tests (Wright 2002; Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Wiley & Wright, 2004). For my part, I continued to feel confused and annoyed about the test score presentation and the results of our fifth graders’ MSA tests. I remembered Ms. Rupert telling us that we had one of the best implementations of the curriculum in the county; at one point Ms. Fairbanks’s classroom had been selected to be a model for teachers at other schools. I remembered after the second MSA Benchmark administration that the combined fifth grade scores were the highest in the school.
I also told myself that the drop in scores could not have been not my fault. I had only worked with 16 of the approximately 60 students. Maybe it was Ms. Arnold’s fault because she was a new teacher and had the largest class. Maybe it was my fault for pulling students from math class for ESOL. Maybe I should have ignored the superintendent and worked with the ESOL 3 students. I knew logically that blaming was counterproductive, but the scenario made this kind of finger-pointing and self-doubt inevitable.

Ms. Longman, always the calm and logical math teacher, rolled her eyes at the our reactions and said, “You cannot compare data from two different groups of students. This does not mean anything.” For comparisons, it makes more sense to me to look at individual student progress and to look at the progress of cohorts of students. There was no individual or cohort data presented at our end-of-year meeting, rather the principal compared test scores for the same grade level but from different years rather than the progress of individuals or groups of students through the school year.

7.2.1 Standardized Test Scores by Group

Several months later, I began to search the Maryland State Department of Education website for our school’s test scores. While I understood that our students’ test scores were significantly below grade level, I could not help but continue to feel the sting of being told that the fifth graders’ test scores had dropped 10%, and the implication that our efforts as teachers had been 10% less effective than efforts of the previous year’s teachers. I thought perhaps that it would be more meaningful to compare our fifth grade scores to the fourth grade scores from the year before. When I looked up the final (rather
than preliminary) fourth grade reading scores from 2003-04 school year on the Maryland Department of Education’s website I discovered that 35% had scored proficient or better. 37% of the 2004-05 fifth graders had scored proficient or better in reading. While they are not entirely the same students, it cannot be argued, as Ms. Taylor had done, that our students’ low test scores represented a 10% decline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7.1 Comparisons of MSA Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A=Advanced; P=Proficient; B=Basic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2004-05 5th Grade is the Study Group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04 4th grade by % (N=68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05 5th grade by % (N=62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04 5th grade by % (N=72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04 4th grade (N=27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05 5th grade (N=24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04 5th grade (N=21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.2.1.1 Comparing the 2005 5th Graders *

In reading, the 2004-05 5th grade had 2% more children in the Advanced category and 2% fewer in the Basic category than the 2003-04 4th graders. The 2004-05 5th grade had 5% more students in the Proficient category in math than the 2003-04 4th graders.

The 2004-05 5th grade did not do as well as the previous year’s 5th graders since in math there were 11% more students in the Basic category in 2004-05. In reading the 2004-05 5th grade had 1% more students above the Basic level than the previous year’s 5th grade.

7.2.1.2 Comparing the 2005 5th Grade ELL Students **

The ELL students in 2004-05 fifth grade had 6% more students in the Basic category for reading than the 2003-04 4th graders. The 2004-05 ELL fifth graders had 8% more students in the Proficient category in reading than the previous year’s ELL fifth graders did. In math, the 2004-05 5th grade had 13% more students in the Proficient category than the 2003-04 4th graders and 8% more than the previous year’s fifth graders.

| Table 7.2 MSA Score Differences |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|
|                                | Reading| Math   |
| All 2004-05 5th Grade Scores Compared to 2003-04 4th Grade Scores | +2%    | +5%    |
| 2004-05 5th Grade ELL Scores Compared to 2003-04 4th Grade Scores | -6%    | +8%    |
| All 2004-05 5th Grade Scores Compared to 2003-04 5th Grade Scores | +1%    | -11%   |
| 2004-05 5th Grade ELL Scores Compared to 2003-04 5th Grade ELL Scores | +13    | +8%    |

* There were 62 fifth graders tested in 2004-05 and 72 fifth graders tested in 2003-04. There were 68 fourth graders tested in 2003-04.

** There were 24 ELL fifth graders tested in 2004-05 and 21 ELL fifth graders tested in 2003-04. There were 27 ELL fourth graders tested in 2003-04.
7.2.1.3 Problems with Analysis of Test Performance

By comparing the same grade’s performance from two different years it is only revealed that there were better scoring students in one year than in the other year. One cannot make conclusions about student progress since they are entirely different students. By comparing the group’s scores to their last year’s performance one can only determine the group’s progress or lack thereof if they are all the same students. In this case they are many of the same students, but not entirely. The ELL subgroup especially is more mobile than the whole since immigrants tend to move more (See Bratt & Sunderman, 2005). Also, ELL students leave the subgroup two years after their IPT test scores reach the “Independent” level (Section 8.6.4). It certainly cannot be concluded, as Marysburg staff had concluded on that last day of the 2004-05 school year, that there had been a “rising” or a “falling” of test scores directly tied to teachers’ efforts.

We clearly needed a more sophisticated understanding of the performance data in order to appreciate what the standardized test scores were telling us about our students. We had been presented with a simple snapshot of student performance or a “current status indicator”. This told us nothing more than how our students performed on a given test. Drury & Doran (2003) of the National School Boards Association write that “current-status indicators are invalid and potentially misleading… and unfairly stack the deck against schools that serve disproportionately high numbers of disadvantaged students.” They recommend instead a “value-added” statistical analysis which “focuses on the achievement gains of individual students over time” through yearly testing, common scale scores, and the tracking of individual students’ performance. At Marysburg’s end-of-year staff meeting and on the Maryland State Department of
Education website, current status achievement data as presented leads people to incorrectly presume that the numbers represent improving or deteriorating student performance that is tied to teacher and school effectiveness. Value-added analysis of performance data, say Drury and Doran, can “separate out the influence of non-school-related variables…on academic growth.”

All my studying and re-analyzing test score data, however, did not change one important, basic fact that cannot be ignored: a significant portion of our students scored below their expected grade levels. For the 2004-05 school year, Marysburg’s overall target scores for making AYP under NCLB were 55% proficient or better in reading and 44% proficient or better in math. To make AYP the school had to reach these targets for every subgroup as well as for the entire school. Marysburg met AYP for its Asian/Pacific Islander group and its African American group in both math and reading (Table 7.3). It reached its target for Hispanics only in mathematics. Because we did not reach AYP for each subgroup in both subjects, we did not make AYP at all.
### Table 7.3 Marysburg Elementary School AYP Results

**2004-05 School Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>Met</td>
<td>Met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Met</td>
<td>Met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (not of Hispanic origin)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>Met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free and Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
<td>Not Met</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To achieve AYP for the 2005-06 school year, Marysburg will have to reach 68% proficient in reading and 48% proficient in math in every subgroup, a truly ambitious goal.

#### 7.2.2 Individual Standardized Test Scores for the Seven Boys in the Study

The seven boys in this study had taken the IPT, MSA, EPAS and SRI (See Chapter 3.4.6 for descriptions of these tests). Their scores for the tests are provided below with the exception of the EPAS scores which were not available.

---

* Indicates too few students. AYP rules do not apply.
7.2.2.1 The Boys’ IPT Scores

IPT measures language proficiency and provided data from up to four years (Table 7.4). PCPS began using the IPT in 2002 when the state, following NCLB requirements, required all Maryland school districts to use the same test. Incoming international students in Parker County Public Schools (PCPS) are tested with the IPT when they first enter the school district. They repeat the test every spring and their scores for listening/speaking, reading and writing of English are recorded in their cumulative folders. All the boys showed increases in reading and writing scores during the school year. All the boys but Eddie moved up one ESOL level (Table 7.5), though their scores had not increased to the point of testing out of ESOL classes as some of the boys had hoped to accomplish. (See Appendix D for the IPT leveling chart.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Listening/Speaking (Scale A-F)</th>
<th>Reading (Scale 0-51)</th>
<th>Writing (Scale 0-9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herminio</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7.5 The Boys’ ESOL Levels Based on IPT Scores

(1=Beginning; 2=Intermediate; 3=Advanced)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herminio</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.2.2.2 The Boys’ SRI Scores

Some of the boys’ Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) scores over the course of the school year seemed to fluctuate greatly (Table 7.6). When I questioned Ms. Taylor about SRI scores, she said, “If they’re reading under 3rd grade level we have to do a DRA [Directed Reading Activity] because the SRI below 3rd grade level is not terribly valid.” As it turned out we had not known to do a DRA test on our students as Ms. Taylor required. Dr. Etienne also felt that the SRI was not a valid measure of reading for ELL students. She said,

The SRI is … highly linguistically impacted, so if I don’t know one or two words, I’m dead. It’s a test of vocabulary and syntax. The problem is that what we say
we’re testing is not really what we’re testing. SRI is really a test of vocabulary and syntax. It’s not a reading test. It is a test of reading and inference if I understand the vocabulary. I could figure out what the end of the sentence will be but that is not reading. That’s vocabulary. [Emphasis in original.]

Ms. Taylor agreed, saying “SRI tests comprehensive knowledge. For ELL students there is a lapse in score because of lack in vocabulary.”

Dr. Etienne also noticed that many students in the school (not just Omar, Luis and Herbert) scored lower on the May 2005 test than they did on the January 2005 test. She speculated that by May they were so tired of taking standardized tests that they did not make an effort to succeed at the SRI.

Another explanation for Herbert’s and Omar’s higher January scores is the possibility that they may have cheated in January. Their scores represented the second highest and third highest scores in the class respectively. They were both sitting near the highest scoring student during testing. While I did not witness any cheating, my own estimation of relative reading levels did not placed Omar and Herbert among the top readers in the class. Omar especially had only been in the U.S. five months when he took that test. Hebert had already established himself in my mind as trickster (Section 4.5.7). The May scores coincided better with my own judgment as their teacher.

Whatever the problem, it is easier to believe that there was some problem with the SRI than it is to believe that our students’ actual reading ability significantly deteriorated between January and May.
### Table 7.6 The Boys’ SRI Scores and Approximate Grade Level Equivalent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>May 2004</th>
<th>January 2005</th>
<th>May 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Approx. Grade Level</td>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>Pre-primer</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herminio</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>Second</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>610</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 7.2.2.3 The Boys’ MSA Scores

As a teacher I assumed that I would eventually be given all my students’ MSA scores. I was surprised that I had to track down the boys’ individual MSA scores by looking through their cumulative folders in the school’s main office and by consulting with school district testing personnel. Benchmark scores (from the three practice MSA tests) were not available.
The MSA is scored on a scale of 240 as the lowest possible score and 650 as the highest possible score. The range is divided into three categories: Basic (below grade level), Proficient (at grade level), Advanced (above grade level). The tests had different “cut scores” that divided the categories depending on the grade level and test (Table 7.7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Lowest Possible</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>Highest Possible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade Reading</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Grade Math</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Grade Reading</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Grade Math</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the exception of Carlos’ scores and Herminio’s 5th grade reading score, all the boys scored in the Basic range, meaning they performed below grade level on the MSA in all areas (Table 7.8). All the scores, including Herminio’s and Carlos’ “Proficient” reading scores, it should be remembered, are accommodated scores because Ms. Fairbanks and I read the tests aloud to them. While Carlos is shown to be able to perform at grade level, his IPT and SRI scores show him below grade level. Omar and Luis were exempt from the reading tests as newcomers in their first year in the U.S. Jaime had been exempt the year before. Their various scores of 240 in math indicate that they did not provide any correct answers on those sections of the test. Herminio, Eddie and Herbert all showed improved test scores. Eddie in particular showed strong increases
in math scores from the previous year. Carlos, while performing within the Proficient range had decreasing test scores in five of seven categories.

Table 7.8 The Boys’ MSA Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Informational Reading Processes (Scale 240-650)</th>
<th>Literary Reading Processes (Scale 240-650)</th>
<th>Algebra/Patterns (Scale 240-650)</th>
<th>Geometry/Measure (Scale 240-650)</th>
<th>Statistics/Probability (Scale 240-650)</th>
<th>Number Concepts/Computation (Scale 240-650)</th>
<th>Processes of Math (Scale 240-650)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCPS Median</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>327*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>327*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herminio</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>384*</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>384*</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>376*</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>376*</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>388*</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>388*</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>361*</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>361*</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.2.2.4 Obstacles to Using the Boys’ Test Scores to Guide Classroom Instruction

Presumably teachers use the scores from standardized tests to guide instruction.

* 2005 MSA Reading Scores were reported in the students’ cumulative folders as one score while 2004 scores were reported as two separate scores. In this table, I place the 2005 score next to the 2004 score though it is unclear if the scores are comparable.
Test scores can show teachers what knowledge and skills their students need to acquire and they can design lessons accordingly (Haladyna, 2002). Unfortunately, we teachers never received individual student scores from any of the three MSA Benchmark tests that our students took. MSA Benchmarks document students’ progress toward proficiency as measure by the actual MSA. Because teachers did not get the scores, we did not know which specific knowledge our particular students needed in order to achieve success on the MSA. While individual scores from the actual MSA were available the following school year, they were difficult to access. I found my former students’ MSA scores by searching their cumulative folders in the vault in the school’s main office and by visiting the ESOL testing coordinator in the school district’s central office. Teachers at Marysburg did not engage in this type of investigation so remained unaware of their students’ individual performances on the MSA. In addition, while I collected MSA data on the seven boys in this study, I had difficulty comparing their reading test performance from one year to the next. The 2005 MSA reading cores were reported in the students’ cumulative folders as one score while 2004 reading scores were reported as two separate scores. It is unclear if the reading scores are comparable or not. Furthermore, the scores came from a reading test that Ms. Fairbanks and I had read aloud to the students, so it is doubtful if their performance represents their true ability.

Like the MSA Benchmark, scores from Educational Testing Service’s pilot test, the EPAS, were never provided to us or our students. Our school’s participation in this pilot test provided no benefit to Marysburg students or teachers.

Individual SRI scores were reported to us in a timely manner. Unfortunately some of our students’ SRI test scores fluctuated greatly across the three administrations
and some scores deviated significantly from what we teachers believed to be their correct reading levels based on our daily work with the students. There is no information provided as to whether the SRI is valid for ELL students, but it is possible that Marysburg administrators were correct in saying that the scores are not valid for ELL students or for students with reading levels below third grade.

My ESOL coworkers at Marysburg properly criticized the IPT for focusing more strongly on conversational English than on academic English and for the fact that a lack of cultural knowledge can sometime cause students to answer incorrectly. However, I have much more confidence in the accuracy of those scores that those from the SRI or MSA since English language proficiency tests are developed for and normed on ELL students. In addition, I could easily access my students most recent the scores via the school district ESOL department website or from the ESOL department chair at the school. The students had test scores for up to four years, so I could see evidence of the boys’ progress in acquiring English language skills. I could use the information to help students to set and achieve their goals of moving up an ESOL level or of getting out of ESOL.

Overall, however, the standardized testing program at Marysburg Elementary provided very little useable information from a classroom teacher’s perspective, given the amount of effort involved. One has to consider the possibility that Shohamy (2001) may be right when she says that tests are “only a means, an excuse for other agendas.” Whatever the “unofficial story” (Shohamy’s words) about testing, one inescapable fact remained about our students’ performance on tests, that a considerable number of them were scoring significantly below their expected grade levels.
7.3 Segregation and Linguistic Isolation

Marysburg Elementary fifth-graders’ low test scores might be considered in light of research on school segregation. Schools in the United States have become increasingly segregated over the last two decades due to policy changes that have reversed school desegregation plans of earlier years (Logan et al., 2002; Kozol, 2005). Orfield (2001) writes that segregation is no longer a phenomenon confined to central cities, but has moved into the suburbs as well. He found that Hispanic students are the most likely ethnic group to be segregated by ethnicity, language and poverty, and claims that “one of the least studied and perhaps most important transformations in the nation’s schools in recent decades has been the steadily increasing isolation of Latino students” (p. 14).

Consentino de Cohen, Deterding, & Clewell (2005) found that nationally, ELL students tend to be concentrated in a few schools. 70% of ELL students are in 10% of the nation’s schools. Marysburg falls into what they classify as a “High-LEP” school, one of the 10% or 5000 schools nationwide with more than 25% ELL students. Given that nationally 80% of ELL students speak Spanish as their primary language (Kindler, 2002), it follows that linguistic isolation occurs in tandem with Latino segregation. Because segregation by ethnicity is also associated with poverty, Marysburg Elementary School fits a profile increasingly more common in the United States: a high-Latino, high-ELL, high-poverty school located in a segregated suburban community.

Marysburg Elementary School’s population data demonstrates segregation within Maryland based on ethnicity, language proficiency and income. Whereas only about 7%
of students enrolled in Maryland schools are Hispanic and 12% of PCPS students are Hispanic, 83% of Marysburg Elementary students are Hispanic. While only about 5% of Maryland elementary school students are designated Limited English Proficient (LEP) and about 8% of the county elementary school students are so designated, 44% of Marysburg’s students are classified LEP. Free and reduced meals (FARMS), as an indication of poverty, shows that Marysburg is also segregated by economics. 38% of elementary students statewide receive free or reduced meals and 54% of countywide elementary students fall into the FARMS category, but 89% of Marysburg’s students qualify for free or reduced meals (Table 7.9). (2005 Maryland School Report Card.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Hispanic</th>
<th>% LEP</th>
<th>% FARMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Grade Levels</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Schools</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marysburg Elementary School</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Segregation as described in Marysburg Elementary is associated with low academic achievement in terms of test scores, dropout rates and college attendance (Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003; Logan, Stowell & Oakley, 2002; Orfield, 2001; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Rumberger & Willms, 1992). Schools such as Marysburg Elementary tend to disproportionately be labeled “failing” under the No Child
Left Behind law (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Gándara et al. (2003) explain poor ELL academic achievement by citing Hornberger and Fillmore who have found that …a more immediate impact of linguistic isolation is the lack of appropriate English language models, which can result in both reduced opportunities to hear and interact with the language, and fewer opportunities to understand the ways in which the language is actually used in social and academic contexts (p. 34). In addition Gándara et al., regarding school segregation in California, write, The education achievement of English learners is also hurt by their segregation because they are less likely than other students to be surrounded by peers who excel in school…classrooms with high concentrations of English learners also have a higher number of students who are below grade level in reading and math than classrooms with low concentrations of English learners. Research has shown that the academic achievement of peers influences students’ own academic achievement in part because students learn from each other. Thus, the concentration of English learners in California’s schools and classrooms not only makes it more difficult for them to learn English, it also makes it more difficult for them to achieve academically (p. 34).

7.4 Changes for the 2005-06 School Year

Over the summer I decided to take on new challenges and leave Marysburg Elementary School for a teacher-trainer position in the PCPS ESOL office. I was assigned to support ESOL programs at 25 elementary schools. In that role I made occasional visits to Marysburg Elementary and kept in touch with Ms. Fairbanks, Ms.
Anderson and the other ESOL teachers who continued on at the school. I liked going to Marysburg and getting hugs and smiles from my former students, now sixth graders. They imagined that I was still upstairs with Ms. Fairbanks and once Jaime even asked if he could go back to fifth grade with Ms. Fairbanks and me. Carlos and Herbert had moved on to other schools. The school testing coordinator, Ms. Ware, always in need of people to help with test administration, signed me up seven months ahead of time to help accommodate ELL students for four days of March 2006 MSA testing.

Ms. Taylor, Marysburg Elementary School principal, told me that because the school did not make AYP, the associate superintendent disbanded their fledgling Spanish-English dual immersion program that would have been in Kindergarten and first grade for ‘05-‘06. Although those grades are not tested and none of Marysburg’s low-scoring students had been in bilingual programs, doing away with bilingual education was one of the first changes to take place. It is commonly believed that bilingual education programs prevent students from learning English and academic content when in fact that is not the case (Crawford, 2004a; Krashen, 1999; Rolstad, Mahoney & Glass, 2005 Thomas & Collier, 1997;). The decision-makers overlooked the fact that a school just one mile away that had a two-way immersion program had made AYP.

Marysburg Elementary became the target of increased instructional support and supervision for the 2005-06 school year owing to its failure to achieve AYP. Specialists from the county administrative offices began demonstrating to Ms. Fairbanks in her classroom how to teach the curriculum. Greatly satisfying Ms. Fairbanks’s sense of the absurd, she had to teach the specialist assigned to her room how to set up projectors and demonstrate how to communicate with students who are learning English. On the other
hand, Ms. Fairbanks found some of the extra help beneficial for the children. She said that a retired teacher had been rehired to work at the school and was reading with small groups of Ms. Fairbanks’s students for thirty minutes per day and improving their reading ability through a commercially available reading program called *Soar to Success*.

7.5 Outcomes of Testing Discussions with the Parents

During the 2005-06 school year I began facilitating dialogues with groups of parents of elementary age ESOL students in other Parker County schools. These dialogues were outgrowths of the conversations I had had during home visits with my students’ parents, and similar to the ELL family testing meeting I had done at Marysburg the previous year (Section 5.1.1). My intention from the beginning of this dissertation project was to present the research findings to parents of ELL students for their own empowerment. I found that the Salvadoran parents and children in the study had often made inaccurate assumptions about standardized testing based on their experiences with testing in their home country. They had also been missing some basic information about testing at Marysburg Elementary. Based on these dialogues, I was able to develop discussion sessions for other Mexican and Central American families more suited to their needs than the usual testing tips advice that PCPS schools provided to parents.

7.5.1 Study Participant Parents’ Understandings of Standardized Tests

I had learned through home visits that the boys’ parents assumed that testing in the United States had similar purposes and reporting processes. Most of the parents remembered that in El Salvador they took tests on a monthly or trimester basis in four
subject areas: math, science, language arts and social studies. The parents said that in El Salvador students had to pass all four final exams in order to be promoted to the next grade. My students’ parents told me that in El Salvador, parents went to the schools to pick up their children’s report cards which contained only the exam scores on a ten-point scale. Parents assumed that the children had to pass the Maryland School Assessment in order to advance to the next grade and their children’s report cards contained the students’ MSA scores. Like their parents, the children in the study believed not only that they had to pass the MSA for promotion, but also that it determined their ESOL level. The children also believed that their standardized test scores were part of their report card grades.

What parents did not know caused me some concern. The parents did not know about accommodations even though they had signed the ELL Accommodations Document in Spanish. They had no idea that their children spent an enormous amount of time preparing for and taking test throughout the year, nor that science and social studies were not taught because they were not tested subjects. They did not know that their children were placed in a “low” class with students with learning disabilities. They did not know that their children’s ESOL class was often cancelled while I attended to my testing duties, nor that their children had participated in a pilot test from Educational Testing Services.

7.5.2 Dialogue Sessions with Parents of ESOL Students

Schools in Parker County with large ELL populations had bilingual-bicultural parent liaisons whose job was to facilitate communication between their assigned school
and the parents of ESOL students. I had explained my research and the findings related to standardized testing to the supervisor of the parent liaisons. She agreed to my being available as a “guest speaker” to the liaisons who were required to organize one parent meeting per month. She asked me to provide ELL parents with parenting tips to help their children to do well on the MSA.

Communication from PCPS schools to homes regarding MSA generally involved informing parents of the testing dates and providing “testing tips”. The testing tips usually include getting a good night’s sleep before testing days, eating a nutritious breakfast, and arriving on time to school on testing days. Using the search engine on the school district’s website, I was able to find the following examples of testing tips from different PCPS school websites (original fonts and text types):

Example 7.1:

**MSA TESTING TIPS**

*The Maryland School Assessment (MSA) is right around the corner. As a parent, you can help your child be successful on the MSA by preparing them before the test. Students should get a good night’s sleep, eat a healthy breakfast, and be on time to school. Check the section called *A Look Ahead* to see the exact testing dates.*
Example 7.2:

**MSA Test Taking Strategies/Tips**
1. Make sure your child is well rested on school days and especially on the day of the test.
2. Provide a nutritious breakfast on the morning of the test.
3. Be sure your child arrives on time to school each day and attends regularly. Tests reflect overall achievement, so regular attendance is important.
4. Encourage your child to do his/her best instead of emphasizing the importance of test results.
5. Don’t judge your child on the basis of a single test score. It’s more important to focus on progress over a marking period than on the results of one test.
6. Contact the teacher whenever you have questions about school progress, including test results.

Example 7.3:

It’s hard to believe that after months of preparation, the MSA is here! The assessment, which will be given on March 14 and 15 (math) and March 21 and 22 (reading), is going to require a lot of stamina, determination, and effort on the part of your child. Please continue to encourage him/her at home – this can be a very stressful time for your child, and any support you can give is very much appreciated! Ensuring that you child goes to bed early on the nights before the test, that he/she arrives to school by 8:45 am, and that he/she has a healthy breakfast on the day of the test are small ways you can make a difference for your child. Be reminded – this test is required under No Child Left Behind. If your child is absent on the day of the test, he/she will have to take it on a make-up day. Do know, however, that on the actual test days the entire school will be testing, which will be a more conducive environment for success than on make-up days. While we know that emergencies do occur, please avoid making medical and other appointments on the days of the test; if they cannot be avoided, please try to schedule them after 1:00 pm.
Example 7.4:

MSA Test Taking Tips

Get a minimum 8 hours sleep the night before testing

Eat a nutritious breakfast

Avoid sugars

Arrive to school on time 9:00 a.m.

Avoid wearing distracting jewelry/clothing

Keep positive thoughts

Relax

Do Your Best

Example 7.5:

This week, our students had their last practice session for the MSA test. This test is scheduled to begin next week (March 15-16) and the following week (March 21-22).

It is very important that the students taking the test (grade 3-6) get a good night's rest and they are here on time. If at all possible, please arrange
appointments after the test.

Example 7.6:

- Get a good nights rest and eat a nutritious breakfast.
- Arrive early and take a moment to relax and reduce your anxiety. This brief time period will boost your confidence and give you time to think positive thoughts and focus your mind.
- Listen attentively to instructions given by the teacher.
- If there is a question that you do not understand move to the next question and come back to the unanswered question.

The tips provide information on what parents can do to make sure that children obtain the highest score that they can, which was in the best interest of the school. I felt, however, that providing children with a good night’s sleep, proper nutrition, and consistent school attendance is already understood by parents to be their job.

The practice of depositing test-taking tips to parents (“banking system”- see Freire (1970)) does little to bring about real transformation in educational practice. Following Freire’s (1973) practice, I went into the community and began dialoguing with my Marysburg students’ parents about education and testing. When we talked about testing, the parents remembered their own experiences and I shared how the testing experience plays out for their children at their school.
7.5.2.1 Format of Parent Sessions

Those early dialogues formed the basis of the simple “parent presentation” I carried out in different elementary schools for parents of ELL students and described below:

When the session begins, I explain that one of the main purposes of the meeting is for the participants to get to know other immigrant parents whose children are in ESOL. It is important to begin to develop a network of ESOL parents in order to make sure the children can get the best education possible. I then explain that we will be talking with each other about schools and especially testing. I ask the parents to introduce themselves to the other parents in their group. I suggest that they share their names, country of origin and the grade their child is in.

With PowerPoint and an LCD projector I present two pictures side by side: one of a classroom in a school in El Salvador and the other a photograph taken from the school’s website where the presentation takes place. Above the two pictures are the words “Comparisons = Comparaciones”. This could be considered a “codification” in a Freirean framework, a pictorial representation of a social issue to elicit a discussion.

Following the two pictures are discussion questions in English and Spanish (Appendix F) that ask the participants to compare the school of their childhood with their own child’s school. I say something like, “Remember the school in your hometown. Think about the building and the name of the school. If you had the privilege of attending school, remember the teachers, the books and school supplies, the other children.” Each parent shares their memories in turn within the small group. Next I ask them to compare the school in their hometown with their children’s U.S. school. After the groups are finished discussing, I invite individuals to share out to the entire audience
aspects of their group’s dialogue. Usually one or two participants agree to talk to the whole group, perhaps emerging as a leader.

The next slide asks parents to explain testing as they remember it (if they attended school as a child). I ask some guiding questions like, “How often did you have tests? What subjects were tested? How did you find out your scores? What was the grading scale? What happened if students did not pass the tests? How did you feel taking them?” The participants dialogue with each other following the same procedure as described in the previous paragraph.

After a whole-group discussion of their memories of testing in their countries of origin, I explain some major differences with testing in this country, usually beginning by saying, “In the U.S. testing is very different from what you have just described. There is some important information you should know…” I explain the following information:

- Report cards do not have MSA test scores. Report card grades are averages of class work, teacher-made tests and homework. Scores are A, B, C, D, and E. A is 90% or better and is like getting a 9 or 10 in El Salvador, etc. Sometimes children tell their parents that E means excellent. It’s not true! (This causes a lot of laughter.)

- MSA test scores do not determine if your child passes the grade at the elementary level. (High school is different!) Students are not held back because of their English proficiency. It is not that common for a child to repeat a grade in PCPS. High school students will soon have to pass exams to graduate.

- The children spend a lot of time taking tests and practicing for them at school.

- The children have to take the tests in English even if they don’t know much English. They can have accommodations which are special conditions provided for ESOL
students such as extra time or having the teacher read the test to the students. You probably have already signed an accommodations document. (I show a sample. Sometimes parents fill one out after the meeting.)

- The testing is for school accountability. The school test scores have to go up every year and it is to prove that the school is improving. (I explain NCLB consequences.)

- Because principals and teachers are very concerned about the students’ test scores, sometimes they do not teach social studies and science because those subjects are not tested.

- Because it takes a lot of people to administer tests, sometimes ESOL teachers have to cancel class to administer tests.

- Last year hundreds of ESOL students participated in a company’s pilot test without their parents’ knowledge or permission.

- Stay in touch with your child and other parents of ESOL students to make sure your children are receiving ESOL, science, and social studies class every day.

- If you are not satisfied with something, you can bring it up to the parent liaison, the principal, school board, PTA, etc. PCPS has a complaint line now, too. The number is....

After this information section, I give them a few review questions on the PowerPoint slideshow, saying, “Now I have for a test for you!” (Parents laugh.). This test has three selected response questions like the MSA format and two true-false questions:

1. How many hours did Mr. Monroe’s students spend testing last year? (36)
2. How many different tests did Mr. Monroe’s students take last year? (9)
3. True or False: In Maryland the report card shows test scores. (False)
4. True or False: In Maryland your child has to pass the MSA to pass the grade. 
   (False)

5. Which of the following accommodations can an ESOL student have on 
   standardized tests? (extra time verbatim reading, best time of day, others)

   I ask the participants to discuss the questions first and then raise their hand if they 
   think “A” is correct or if “B” is correct, etc. Parents and the children like talking among 
   themselves and trying to figure out the right answer. At the end of the meeting there is 
   time for questions and comments and I leave my contact information.

   I have facilitated these session at seven different elementary schools, including at 
   Marysburg Elementary. The discussions took place in the evenings at the school and 
   were arranged by the parent liaisons. Attendance varied from 2 to about 20 parents per 
   session. The sessions lasted from forty-five to about sixty minutes.

7.5.3 Findings Related to the Parent Discussion Sessions on Standardized Testing

   One aspect of this study was to document a teacher-as-ally approach to research 
   and education. I wanted to use my position as teacher to collect information on ELL 
   standardized assessment and take the findings back to the community for their benefit. I 
   wanted to develop discussion sessions in the spirit of Freirian critical pedagogy. 
   Dialogue in this model leads to action and then reflection on the action or praxis. In this 
   section I reflect on my own actions (facilitating parent dialogue sessions) and plan the 
   next action.

   I imagined at the beginning that ELL parents might organize themselves to resist 
   standardized testing in some way, like the parents in Florida who organized to “take back
the summer” when state education officials decided to bring students back to school at the beginning of August in order to raise test scores (Whoriskey, 2006). At the same time, I thought it would be important not to directly organize parents myself, but to inform them of the problems related to washback from ELL testing and, allow them to decide if the situation was worth organizing over. I wanted the problem to motivate them, not my presentation.

In the end, no organizing has taken place that I am aware of. There are many reasons why that did not happen. I learned from the ELL parents who participated in the dialogues, that they are grateful for their children’s school and the attention their children receive there; the cafeteria with its free meals, books, English classes, lack of corporal punishment, clean bathrooms with indoor plumbing, and special education have all been mentioned. Ogbu (1987) recognized that for immigrants, their point of reference is their home country, and U.S. schooling is in many (though not all) ways superior than what they experienced in their countries.

I learned from some of the Central American parents at the sessions who had little formal schooling, that their schooling happened so long ago that they do not always remember clearly how it was and are unsure how their children’s education should be. One father shared that he was not sure that 36 hours of testing is excessive; he did not really know what is the right amount of time to spend on assessment. A Salvadoran mother did not find lack of social studies instruction worrisome. She considered it an interesting cultural difference with her country.

When I spoke with my students’ parents I learned that their jobs have unpredictable schedules, their families have their own goals, and they trusted the teachers
and principal to do the right thing. In the overall scheme of their lives, the problems of NCLB test score accountability are not a priority.

Although I explained to parents my experiences with testing at Marysburg, the situation may be very different at the schools where I presented. Because I am not involved with the school, I have no way of knowing with certainty if they experience the same problems I found at Marysburg Elementary. Also, my sessions were one-time only, not ongoing. Exemplary parent involvement programs are long-term (See Section 2.4.5). A truly empowering parent involvement program would have ongoing meetings and information-gathering with dialogues to discuss the direction of continuing efforts. In this one-time presentation I could simply alert parents to the possible problems: that their child may miss ESOL class when their teacher is called to proctor standardized tests; the children may be spending too much time in test practice; they may not be receiving adequate accommodations; that they may not be receiving instruction in all the required subjects. I recommended that parents stay in touch with their children and with one another and make sure the children are getting ESOL, science and social studies class every day and to speak to parent liaison, the teacher or principal if they have a concern. In many ways, these one-time meetings simply turned out to be information sessions ending with parenting tips. I can only hope that they strengthened ELL parent networks and raised awareness of potential problems.

As an employee of the school district it is impossible for me to take an entirely critical approach to ELL parent involvement in standardized testing. I learned that it is difficult for me to organize parents to make changes without causing myself problems with the school district. In fact, my colleagues at Marysburg were uncomfortable with
the session when I presented there and they told me afterwards that I should not have told the parents about the negative effects of testing on the school. I believe they did not want to get in trouble with the principal and they did not want to get embroiled in conflicts with parents. I realized then that if the sessions became too controversial, I would likely be prevented from presenting. It became clear that I could make some changes from the inside, but true grass-roots organizing with substantial change has to come from outside.

Kalmar (2001) writes that in order for immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, to truly empower themselves for social change, they must start from a place outside the influence of the dominant culture’s authorities. When immigrant parents meet at a public school under the direction of a school official such as I, the situation is not likely to lead to substantial transformation in educational policy or practice. For that reason, I believe that community-based advocacy organizations must play a leading role in making a change for ELL students and their testing. At this point, however, survival concerns probably have to take on more importance in the work of community advocates; safety, economic survival, and immigration issues have more immediate urgency than standardized testing of elementary ELL students. (New immigration legislation pending in Congress has community-based organizations involved in logistics of protests and other political advocacy activities.)

Although I am not sure they could take on these issues, I would like to take these ideas to the immigrant advocacy organization in Marysburg’s community so that leaders can reflect on these issues. Perhaps they could see links to the other issues that they are working on and with parents, students and school personnel organize actions.
If I did discuss the parents session with a community-based advocate, I would recommend that they make the sessions more “problem posing” (Freire, 1970) in format and take place in a venue removed from the school system. The session should end with a problem for the parents such as: “Are your children receiving all their ESOL, science and social studies at school? How can we find out? What do we do if we find they are not?” Or perhaps, “Do you think that your children should be tested in Spanish? If so, what can we do to advocate for that?” Parents could take the question back to their children and their school for investigation and at follow-up meetings, participants could discuss the finding and plan further actions.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented results of standardized tests from the fifth grade at Marysburg Elementary school and the seven boys in the study. Afterwards, I described the parent dialogue sessions that I facilitated based on my year of participant observations and interviews on standardized assessment of ELL students.

7.6.1 Student Achievement Data

I felt hesitant to share my students’ test scores and other data on test performance in the first section of this chapter because some readers might inappropriately use them as evidence of poor teaching on the part of my colleagues and me, or as an indication of some deficit on the part of my students. My anxiety is not unusual for teachers working under the accountability of NCLB (Wright 2002; Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Wiley & Wright, 2004). My coworkers felt the stress along with me, and it eventually contributed
to one teacher’s decision to pursue work in a private school which did not have to follow NCLB.

The way in which student test performance data was presented caused unnecessary anxiety. We had been presented with a simple snapshot of student performance or a “current status indicator”. Because the data were presented side-by-side with data from the previous year’s class, the school staff presumed that the numbers indicated a rising or falling of performance directly tied to teacher and school effectiveness. Drury & Doran (2003) of the National School Boards Association write that “current-status indicators are invalid and potentially misleading… and unfairly stack the deck against schools that serve disproportionately high numbers of disadvantaged students.” They recommend instead a “value-added” statistical analysis which “focuses on the achievement gains of individual students over time” by means of yearly testing, common scale scores, and the tracking of individual student performance. Value-added analysis of performance data, say Drury and Doran, can “separate out the influence of non-school-related variables…on academic growth.”

Overall, the scores did not really tell my colleagues and me much that we did not already know from working with the children every day: a significant portion of our students read and did math at levels far below what is expected for children at their grade level. My coworkers, my students, and I spent inordinate amounts of time and emotional energy on tests which, except perhaps for the IPT, were probably not valid for ELL students. (See Rivera as cited in Wiley and Wright, 2004). Besides that, the scores for the many of the tests our students took were either not available or difficult to access. IPT scores were accessible, more valid than the others, could be used longitudinally and
tied to individual students, so I could used them to help students to set goals and gage student progress.

Our fifth graders’ low achievement data is predicted by the literature on school segregation. Marysburg Elementary School at 84% Hispanic certainly comes to mind as an example when reading Orfield (2001) who states that “one of the least studied and perhaps most important transformations in the nation’s schools in recent decades has been the steadily increasing isolation of Latino students” (p. 14). The school is one of the 5000 U.S. schools that Consentino de Cohen, Deterding, & Clewell (2005) define as High-LEP owing to the fact that 44% of its students are English language learners. Snow and Hornberger as cited in Gándara (2003) found that such linguistic isolation produces a “lack of appropriate English language models” which interferes with children’s English language acquisition. Orfield (2001) found that Hispanic students are segregated by poverty as well, and Marysburg fits that description with its 89% free and reduced meal students as a measure of poverty. These school have also been shown to have fewer qualified teachers (Rumberger and Willms, 1992). (42% of Marysburg’s teachers were not considered “highly qualified” as per NCLB.) All these factors are associated with low student performance. Gándara (2003) found in California schools with this type of segregation not only limited children’s exposure to English language models, but also to student models of general academic success.

7.6.2 Parent Dialogue Sessions

In terms of the parent sessions, I was able to clear up some misunderstandings around standardized testing for a number of Spanish-speaking families, and alert
participants to possible problems inherent in the schools’ testing program. I have no
doubt that they benefited from the dialogues, but I would be very surprised if they
organized a testing boycott or complained to anyone about their children’s testing
program. The presentations, while helpful, did not lead to real transformation in
educational practices due in part to my own close ties to the very institutions that cause
the standardized testing problems.

On the other hand, there was one participant who attended a parent session who
understood more clearly than any other participant the points I was trying to make about
standardized testing of ELL students. He was a Salvadoran-American boy in tenth grade
who attended the session with his mother. At the end of the meeting he stood up and
spoke shyly to the group of parents in English-accented Spanish. He told the participants
that what I was telling them about testing was true. He explained that he and his
classmates spend so much time practicing for tests that they do not seem to have time for
learning their academic subjects. He said that the class that follows his (the ninth graders
at the time) will be the first class to have to pass the High School assessments in order to
graduate, and he did not think his ELL classmates would be able to pass. He told us that
he felt it was unfair that his classmates would not graduate from high school simply
because they could not understand the language of the tests.

This spring of 2006 as the U.S. Congress debates immigration reform, I watch the
Latino students on the news walking out of a local high school. Like the teenagers in Los
Angeles, they are protesting the possibility that undocumented immigrants could be
charged with felonies for crossing into the United States without immigration papers. I
wonder how those young people will respond to the high school graduation tests.
Figure 7.1  MSA Kite No. 4
Marysburg Elementary School
March 2006
CHAPTER 8: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe how standardized assessment was situated in the lives of seven fifth-grade boys of Salvadoran immigrant families who had been identified by their school district as English language learners (ELLs). The research took place at Marysburg Elementary School*, located in a majority Hispanic, high ELL, high poverty immigrant community in suburban Maryland. By returning to the classroom as a teacher of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) during the 2004-05 school year, I hoped to learn, through participant-observation and interviews, how the school’s standardized testing program affected the boys’ education. I hoped to learn how parents remembered testing in El Salvador and if those experiences affected how the families understood standardized testing. As a teacher familiar with both the dominant and the immigrant languages and cultures I also set out to critically examine relationships of power and use democratic processes to advocate for my students and their families to improve the educational services being offered to them, particularly regarding standardized testing. In the end, I developed a discussion session for parents of ELL students regarding standardized assessment that built on what I had learned from my year of interviews and observations.

In addition to researching standardized testing, I also decided to document empowering ESOL pedagogy during a time when washback from No Child Left Behind

* Names of places and people are pseudonyms.
(NCLB) testing policies included a narrowing of curriculum that did not take into account the unique talents and perspectives of immigrant English learners. Through the documentation of my own teaching I intended to demonstrate to the ESOL teachers-in-training with whom I work at the university how ESOL teachers can act as allies to their students and their families and work within and against the constraints of NCLB.

8.2 Effect of Standardized Testing on Marysburg Elementary School

In order to provide information to parent discussion groups and other community members, I documented the washback effects of standardized test score uses at Marysburg Elementary School. Standardized assessment played a central role in curriculum and instruction for ELL students at the school. The principal and the teachers felt great personal responsibility for making sure that students did sufficiently well on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) to prevent the school and staff from being labeled “failing” as per NCLB. The accountability had both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, the language arts and math curriculums were more consistent and aligned across the grades. Teachers received training in their implementation and were expected to follow the them. On the other hand, my co-workers felt that the language arts curriculum was too scripted and did not take into account the needs of ELL students or the teacher’s creative role in connecting the curriculum to the students’ unique talents. (At the end of the school year, one co-worker actually left public school teaching for that reason.)

Another negative effect of testing accountability policy was that areas not tested were de-emphasized as McNeil, (2001), Haladyna (2002), and Wright (2002) might
predict. Hence, little to no science and social studies instruction took place. Art instruction happened on one day all year. Also, the fledgling Spanish immersion program was dropped once the school was found to have missed its AYP goals. It is commonly believed that bilingual education programs prevent students from learning English and academic content when in fact that is not the case (Crawford, 2004a; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Rolstad, Mahoney & Glass, 2005).

Conversely, English for Speakers of Other Languages in some ways was given greater importance. The school provided small classes for beginning and intermediate level ESOL students with both in-class ESOL instruction during language arts in addition to pull-out instruction with appropriate curriculum and materials. The county superintendent, however, had decided that ESOL teachers would teach students at the beginning and intermediate levels of English proficiency only and that advanced ESOL students would not attend ESOL classes.

I found greater flexibility in the Parker County ESOL instructional program than in the reading/language arts program and used that opportunity to find ways to meet the students where they were instructionally and to integrate art, science and social studies. For example, the newcomers I worked with learned to use their literacy skills in Spanish to outperform native English speakers on spelling tests. My ESOL 2 students learned to tie reading skills from their language arts program to the enjoyment of recreational reading via the Goosebumps series. Raising funds for hurricane and tsunami victims allowed my students to develop academic and leadership skills in a way that was tied to the curriculum. By running a petition drive, my students experienced that they could organize to make a change in their school. Writing their own multiple choice test that
they could pass but their teachers could not, helped them to understand not only test development but how tests can be written to privilege certain groups’ knowledge. Field trips serendipitously exposed students to background knowledge that appeared on standardized tests.

For standardized assessments, Marysburg Elementary implemented an extensive program of testing with different instruments assessing reading level (SRI), English proficiency (IPT and EPAS), the school’s or grade’s overall level of proficiency in reading and math (MSA), and progress toward proficiency (MSA Benchmarks) (See Section 3.4.6 for descriptions of tests). Students took nine different standardized tests over 28 days of the school year, during which time teachers attempted to maintain an atmosphere of total silence in the school. Student’s individual results from the EPAS, the MSA and MSA Benchmarks were not provided to teachers, parents or students during the school year. MSA scores became available but were difficult to access and the reading scores from one year to the next may not have been comparable. Student achievement data were presented to staff, who were untrained in their analysis, in a way that led to inaccurate assumptions about rising and falling student achievement. Like the MSA, the SRI test may not have been valid for ELL students and students below the third grade reading level. Students’ individual results on the SRI and the IPT, were readily available to teachers and the data was used to make instructional decisions. An unfortunate use of SRI and IPT scores was to isolate ESOL 1 and ESOL 2 students into classes with special education students throughout the school day including during lunch, music and P.E. classes. This gave them limited access to the benefits of interaction with more capable
peers and so probably prevented them from achieving their full academic potential (See Gándara et al, 2003; Fillmore & Snow, 2000).

The testing programs presented many problems for the students in the study and provided few benefits given the labor involved. Students spent 36 hours taking tests during 28 days of the school year with over 32 additional hours spent in test preparation and practice. My students also missed nearly 20% of their ESOL classes when I was obligated to cancel classes to administer tests in other grades. Students in the study did not understand many of the questions on the MSA and MSA Benchmark tests and often guessed at the answers. Newcomer students in the study felt nervous, proud and excited during testing while the ESOL 2 students in the study felt bored. Both groups may have felt ashamed about having to guess at their answers. The students had negative feelings about brief constructed response items (BCRs). Preparation for answering BCR questions did not take into account the fact that the ELL students did not understand what was being asked. One area of intense test practice, writing BCRs on “author’s purpose”, ended up untested and actually caused students to submit incorrect responses to test items.

Students took all tests in English, even if their grasp of the language was minimal. School personnel, however, implemented accommodations for ELL students which is required by NCLB and the Maryland State Department of Education with the expectation that the accommodations would increase test validity for ELL students.
8.3 Findings Related to Testing Accommodations for ELL Students

Assigning and implementing accommodations for the MSA and MSA Benchmarks was a major, labor-intensive undertaking for the school. However, it is unclear exactly what purposes the accommodations program really served, since the accommodations were either not actually implemented, were simply logistical outcomes of another accommodation or were not thought to help provide valid data on ELL students’ knowledge and skills. At the same time, accommodations that were believed to be valid were not implemented.

According to the ELL Accommodations Document (Appendix C), Marysburg Elementary School selected four of the state-approved accommodations for ESOL students on the MSA:

- “Verbatim reading of entire test.”
- “Extra response and processing time.”
- “General education classroom, with adjusted grouping.”
- “Tests are administered at best time of day for student.”

The “Best Time of Day” accommodation was not actually provided. Some grades tested in the morning and the other grades tested in the afternoon. This was a function of staff availability, not a function of the best time of day for individual students. “Adjusted Grouping” and “Extra Time” were simply logistical requirements of the verbatim reading accommodation, not additional accommodations in themselves. “Adjusted Grouping” meant that students who were assigned the verbatim reading accommodation were grouped in a separate classroom from those students who had to read the test independently. The “Extra Time” accommodation was necessary because of the pace of
verbatim reading. Finally, verbatim reading for ELL students has not been documented in the literature to be a valid accommodation for ELL students, although it could be valid for some ELL students on some tests. Sireci, Li & Scarpati (2003) in their review of the literature on ELL accommodations did not cite any research on verbatim reading for ELLs among the twenty studies they reviewed. Sireci (2004) also concluded that verbatim reading as an accommodation for students with disabilities is “likely to alter the construct measured.” Moreover, teachers and administrators at Marysburg did not think that verbatim reading of the reading test provided valid information on reading skills for ELL students.

Additionally, accommodations that the staff thought might have been valid for some ELL students were not implemented. The staff agreed that linguistic modification and tests in Spanish may have provided some accurate assessment information for some ELL students. Those accommodations, however, were impossible to implement at an individual school because modification of that type would have to happen during test development, not during the actual administration of the test at the school site.

So it remains to be understood why the school implemented ELL accommodations on the MSA and MSA Benchmarks. Some teachers believed that the verbatim reading accommodation was used as a way of artificially raising test scores in order to reach Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals required by NCLB (Table 3.4). This explanation is probably untrue because, while the verbatim reading accommodation may have raised test scores, the school did not provide the accommodation to the ESOL 3 students who were the ones most likely to move into the “Proficient” category and benefit the school’s AYP goals.
Moreover, it could not be claimed that the ELL accommodations were implemented to placate parents. The ELL parents I interviewed did not know about accommodations and did not expect them although the school had gotten their signatures on the ELL Accommodations Document.

The situation for ELL accommodations at Marysburg Elementary School might possibly be explained as a school’s attempt to appear to implement requirements from the state and federal levels while trying to buffer ELL students from the anxiety of taking a test they were likely to fail. NCLB requires that ELL students be included in testing programs and provided with accommodations (NCLB Part A, Subpart 1, Sec 1111, 3 (C) (ix) (III)). The state monitors for compliance through on-site audits of ELL Accommodations Documents. Each child’s ELL Accommodations Document had accommodations checked off and appropriate signatures at the bottom of the page. The forms were on file in the students’ cumulative folders in case of a state audit. The documentation gave the appearance that the school provided four different accommodations. However, the only actual accommodation, verbatim reading, did not benefit the school in any way other than in its effort to comply with the NCLB law. I believe the accommodation may have benefited the ESOL students, however, by allowing them to participate in testing without feeling completely defeated. Marysburg administration may have chosen the verbatim reading accommodation as the best option available to protect students from experiencing test anxiety caused by participating in an assessment intended for native English-speaking students, even though they believed the accommodation did not provide valid data for instructional purposes.
8.4 Academic Isolation at Marysburg Elementary School

Despite Marysburg’s providing fifth grade ELL students with small group instruction with qualified teachers with adequate curriculum and materials, and despite the labor-intensive accommodations program on the MSA, the seven boys in this study demonstrated only modest gains in their test scores and did not move into grade-level proficiency. This lack of progress is predicted by the literature on residential segregation.

Marysburg Elementary School’s population demonstrates segregation within Maryland based on ethnicity, language proficiency and income. Whereas only about 7% of students enrolled in Maryland schools are Hispanic and 12% of PCPS students are Hispanic, 83% of Marysburg Elementary students are Hispanic. While only about 5% of Maryland elementary school students are designated Limited English Proficient (LEP) and about 8% of the county elementary school students are so designated, 44% of Marysburg’s students are classified LEP. Free and reduced meals (FARMS), as an indication of poverty, shows that Marysburg is also segregated by economics. 38% of elementary students statewide receive free or reduced meals and 54% of countywide elementary students fall into the FARMS category, but 89% of Marysburg’s students qualify for free or reduced meals (Table 7.9). (2005 Maryland School Report Card.)
Marysburg Elementary School fits a profile increasingly more common in the United States: a high-Latino, high-ELL, high-poverty school located in a segregated suburban community. Segregation by race, poverty and language have been shown to be associated with low student achievement (Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003; Logan, Stowell & Oakley, 2002; Orfield, 2001; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Rumberger & Willms, 1992). Table 8.1 clearly shows that students at Marysburg have limited access to high performing, middle class, native English-speaking peers within their instructional program and this has been shown to affect academic achievement among minority students (Gándara et al, 2002).

Students like the seven boys in this study were even further isolated because of the school’s practice of tracking children by performance level on standardized tests. The boys in the study were all placed into a class of low performing students which included students with learning disabilities. They stayed with the group all day throughout the school year including during music class and lunch. They therefore had limited access to more proficient peers even within their grade. Within the class they were further divided

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into three different, inflexible groups based on reading level. Fillmore and Snow (2000) write that English learners…

…must interact directly and frequently with people who know the language well enough to reveal how it works and how it can be used…The acquisition process can go awry when…learners greatly outnumber people who know the language…The outcome is “learnerese”, an interlanguage pidgin that can deviate considerably from Standard English (p. 24).

Compounding those obstacles, the boys’ parents had limited formal schooling (Table 5.5), which has also been shown to highly correlate with poor academic achievement (Rumberger & Willms, 1992). Their parents spoke very little English and often had unpredictable work schedules that interfered with their parenting responsibilities. In addition, there are no bookstores in the community, the public library was not easily accessible, and school and classroom libraries did not lend books. Access to books has also been shown to correlate closely with reading ability (Krashen 2002, 2005). At Marysburg, the administration pinned all hopes for academic progress for the boys on transmission of curriculum from teacher to student in small groups setting: leveled ESOL groups, writing groups, and reading groups with small student-teacher ratios. This philosophy of learning puts less emphasis on sociocultural theories of learning such as distributed cognitions (Salomon, 1993) and legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) or critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) which posit that social interaction with more knowledgeable peers, rich environmental resources and empowering, problem-posing education are crucial aspects of human cognitive development.
While the boys’ standardized test scores showed some modest improvement over the year, they still remained below grade level. Carlos, Herbert and Eddie began their seventh year in ESOL classes despite a rise in their IPT scores. These boys were, as Herbert said, ‘stuck in ESOL’ (Valdés (2001) calls them “ESL lifers”) because their reading and writing scores on the IPT test were too low for them to be considered “fluent English proficient.” While they were fluent in oral English and earned scores within that range on the IPT, their literacy in academic registers of English remained at a level of proficiency that kept them in the ELL category. (See Conversational/Academic Language Proficiency, Cummins, 2001.)

8.5 Parents’ Understandings of Standardized Tests

I learned through conversations during home visits that the boys’ parents assumed that testing in the United States had similar purposes and reporting processes as in El Salvador. Most of the parents remembered that in El Salvador they took tests on a monthly or trimester basis in four subject areas: math, science, language arts and social studies. The parents said that in El Salvador students had to pass all four final exams in order to be promoted to the next grade. My students’ parents told me that in El Salvador, parents went to the schools to pick up their children’s report cards which contained only the exam scores on a ten-point scale. Parents assumed that their children’s report cards in the U.S. contained the students’ standardized test scores. Some assumed that the children had to pass the MSA in order to advance to the next grade. The children in the study believed not only that they had to pass the MSA for grade promotion, but also that it
determined their ESOL level. Like their parents, the children believed that their standardized test scores were part of their report card grades.

What parents did not know was a cause of some concern. They did not know about accommodations even though they had signed the ELL Accommodations Document in Spanish. They had no idea that their children spent an enormous amount of time preparing for and taking test throughout the year, nor that science and social studies were virtually eliminated from the school day because they were not tested subjects. They did not know that their children were placed in a “low” class with students with learning disabilities. They did not know that their children’s ESOL class was often cancelled while I attended to testing duties with other students, nor that their children had participated in a pilot test from Educational Testing Services.

Communication from PCPS schools to homes regarding MSA generally involved informing parents of the testing dates and providing “testing tips”. The testing tips usually included getting a good night’s sleep before testing days, eating a nutritious breakfast, and arriving on time to school on testing days. Parents in this study did not receive any specific information directly from the school regarding the four standardized tests that their children took besides the MSA; much of the information they did receive came through children (their own and others) as well as other parents.

8.5.1 The ELL Parent Meetings

The early dialogues I had with my students’ parents formed the basis of the simple discussion sessions about standardized testing that I carried out in the fall and winter of the 2005-06 school year in different elementary schools for parents of ELL students. I
saw one of the main purposes of the meeting as providing an opportunity for participants to connect to a network of ESOL parents and to discuss testing with other immigrant parents. Another purpose was to explain explicitly to parents how testing is done in this country following Cummins (1995), Gándara et al. (2006), hooks (1994) and Lee, J. (2002) who promote the idea that members of dominant culture should explicitly explain their culture to members of dominated groups.

The meetings began with parents introducing themselves to each other and then sharing in small groups their experiences (if any) with schools and testing in their country of origin. I shared information on testing in this country and clarified misunderstandings and information gaps described in Section 8.6 above, most of which revealed themselves during the parents’ small-group discussions.

I imagined at the beginning of this research that ELL parents might organize themselves to resist standardized testing in some way, like the parents in Florida who organized to “take back the summer” when state education officials decided to bring students back to school at the beginning of August in order to raise test scores (Whoriskey, 2006). At the same time, I thought it would be important not to directly organize parents myself, but to inform them of the problems with washback from ELL testing and allow them to decide if the situation was worth organizing over. I wanted the problem to motivate them, not my presentation.

In the end, no organizing has taken place that I am aware of. There are many reasons why that did not happen. I learned from the ELL parents who participated in the dialogues, that they are grateful for their children’s school and the attention their children receive there: the cafeteria with its free meals, books, English classes, lack of corporal
punishment, clean bathrooms with indoor plumbing, and special education have all been mentioned. Ogbu (1987) recognized that for immigrants, their point of reference is their home country, and U.S. schooling is in many (though not all) ways superior to what they experienced in their countries.

I learned from some of the Central American parents at the sessions who had little formal schooling, that their schooling happened so long ago that they do not always remember clearly how it was and are unsure how their children’s education should be.

A further obstacle to the parents’ getting involved in resisting testing is that the problems of NCLB test score accountability are not a top priority for the parents. Their jobs have unpredictable schedules and the families have their own goals, so they rely on the schools to do the right thing.

Another reason that parents may not have organized was that the sessions were one-time only, not ongoing. Exemplary parent involvement programs are long-term (See Section 2.4.5). A truly empowering parent involvement program would have ongoing meetings and information gathering with dialogues to discuss the direction of continuing efforts. Community-building and organizing takes time and commitment, so in this situation I could simply alert parents to possible problems: that their child may miss ESOL class when their teacher is called to proctor standardized tests; the children may be spending too much time in test practice; they may not be receiving adequate accommodations; that they may not be receiving instruction in all the required subjects. I recommended that parents stay in touch with their children and with one another and make sure the children are getting ESOL, science and social studies class every day and
to speak to parent liaison, the teacher or principal if they have a concern. I left my
contact information but to date I have not heard from anyone.

Kalmar (2001) writes that in order for immigrants, especially undocumented
immigrants, to truly empower themselves for social change, they must start from a place
outside the influence of the dominant culture’s authorities. When immigrant parents
meet at a public school under the direction of a school official such as I, the situation is
not likely to lead to substantial transformation in educational policy or practice.

As an employee of the school district it is impossible for me to take an entirely critical
approach to parent involvement in standardized testing. It was difficult for me to
organize parents to make changes without causing myself problems with school district
officials who could have prevented me from continuing with the presentation had they
caused too much controversy. The presentations, while helpful, did not lead to real
transformation in educational practices due in part to my own close ties to the very
institutions that cause the standardized testing problems.

While I may be able to make some changes from the inside, true grass-roots
organizing with substantial change has to come from outside the school system. I believe
that community-based advocacy organizations could play a role in making a change for
ELL students and their testing. At this point, however, immigrants’ basic survival
concerns probably have to take on more importance in the work of community advocates;
safety, economic survival, and immigration issues have more immediate urgency than
standardized testing of elementary ELL students.
8.6 Recommendations

I offer below four general recommendations based on my investigations of the education and standardized assessment of ELL students, including my year of participant-observation and interviews at Marysburg Elementary School and the surrounding community:

1. All aspects of standardized testing of ELL students should be fair and valid and should focus first and foremost on the unique needs and abilities of these students.
2. Schools must foster open lines of communication between school personnel and parents, among ELL children and their parents, and among ELL parents themselves.
3. Educators, ELL students and families should become engaged in work that develops new knowledge and empowers them to become border-crossers and advocates for fair educational opportunities.
4. Elected officials must, at a minimum, change the NCLB law as it pertains to ELL students.

8.6.1 Recommendation 1

All aspects of standardized testing of ELL should be fair and valid and should focus first and foremost on the unique needs and abilities of ELL students.

Appropriate schooling designed to meet the needs of K-12 students who are learning the English language have four components: 1) instruction for English language development, 2) instruction and support in the student’s primary language, 3) sheltered academic content, and 4) empowering forms of multicultural education (California State Department of Education, 1995; Freeman & Freeman, 1998; Skuttnab-Kangas, 2000;
Ramirez, 2002; Banks, 1998). Assessment of ELL students’ academic progress should measure their knowledge and skills in each aspect of the framework, and should be fair, valid and used to support students’ progress toward their goals.

ELL assessments should be designed for and normed on ELL students from the beginning as English language proficiency tests are. Rather than calling for a moratorium on testing as Valdés & Figueroa (1994) do, scores from the reading portion of ELL students’ language proficiency test should be substituted for the state reading test until the students are re-designated as fluent in English. The reading portion of a language proficiency test could be developed from the beginning to be an alternative state reading test for ELL students, or the language proficiency test scores should be correlated to the state test. In this way, ELL students, like their mainstream counterparts, would only have to take one state-mandated reading test. Since language proficiency tests are developed for and normed on ELL students, accommodations for the state reading test, which are labor-intensive and pull school personnel away from instruction, would become unnecessary.

Administrators and test developers should look for less labor-intensive ways to administer tests and accommodations, such as online testing, so that ESOL teachers and other instructional specialists will not be taken from their instructional groups in order to provide manpower for test administration. It is incumbent on test developers, policy makers and administrators to consider ways to test that are less intrusive to academic instruction.
In addition, teachers should receive training on how to properly interpret test performance data and such data should be presented in such a way that it can provide meaningful guidance to planning appropriate instruction.

8.6.1.1 ELL Accommodations

ELL accommodations are retro-fits of assessments designed for use with other populations and their necessity indicates the lack of validity of the test for the population which receives the accommodation. If accommodations must be provided to ELL students, they should be those accommodations that have been established by research to allow ELL students to accurately demonstrate their abilities without giving them an unfair advantage. Linguistic modifications, extra time, bilingual word lists and customized dictionaries have shown promise in allowing ELL students to show what they know and can do (Abedi, 2001a; Abedi 2001b; Sireci, Li & Scarpati , 2003). Verbatim reading has not been shown to be a valid ELL accommodation (Sireci, Li & Scarpati, 2003; Sireci, 2004), although it could be valid for some ELL students on some tests.

Researchers have also found that the language of standardized tests of content should match the students’ language of instruction (Abedi, 2001b). A linguistically modified test should be considered a language match for ELL students who are receiving appropriate instruction and a primary language test should be considered a linguistic match for newcomers. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 allows for students to be tested in their native language when it decrees:

…limited English proficient students shall be assessed in a valid and reliable manner and provided reasonable accommodations on assessments administered to
such students …including, to the extent practicable, assessments in the language and form most likely to yield accurate data on what such students know and can do in academic content areas, until such students have achieved English language proficiency…” (NCLB Part A, Subpart 1, Sec. 1111, 3 (C) (ix) (III)).

In Maryland, denying primary language testing has been justified by the fact that all instruction is in English, so primary language testing would be a mismatch (Personal communication with MSDE specialist, October, 2003). In this way research on accommodations has been used to prop up state education policy. Using the same line of logic, however, it could be argued that for ELL students who receive sheltered content instruction, a linguistically modified form of the state test would match the language of instruction. For recently-arriving ELL students, it is necessary to assess them in their primary language whenever possible, as that has been their most recent language of instruction. Standardized tests have been developed in Spanish and would meet the needs of the majority* of newcomer students until there is evidence that they are able to access a linguistically modified test in English.

If accommodations are to be used, then a large-scale, consistent approach for assigning appropriate accommodations to ELL students should be implemented to ensure standard conditions. (Koran, Kopriva, Emick, Monroe & Garavaglia, 2006). The Taxonomy for Testing English Language Learners (TTELL) shows promise in assigning valid and appropriate ELL accommodations in a systematic way taking into consideration individual differences of ELL students. (Center for the Study of Assessment Validity and Evaluation, 2005).

*Spanish is the primary language of approximately 60% of ELL students in Maryland (OELA, 2001) and 80% nationwide (Kindler, 2002).
8.6.1.2 Consequential Validity

Educational personnel should routinely examine the consequential validity of the decisions they make based on standardized test scores. Practices such as grouping students by test scores may inadvertently cause grouping in areas unrelated to the test, such as in elective courses or lunch, because of scheduling logistics. In addition, students and parents should know which decisions result from which test scores and have the opportunity to appeal the decisions and/or set achievement goals. Dropping subjects from the school day is also not a valid consequence of testing. School districts must provide quality, accessible instruction in all subject areas, even those which are not held to test score accountability regulations.

Brauldi, (1999) defines test validity as “…the degree with which the inferences based on test scores are meaningful, useful and appropriate…[It] is a characteristic of a test when it is administered to a particular population.” Messick, (1989) posited that tester should ensure that “actual social consequences of test interpretation and use are not only supportive of the intended testing purposes, but at the same time are consistent with other social values.” Brauldi (1999) writes that to validate standardized tests means to lay out “empirical data and logical arguments to show that the inferences are indeed appropriate.”

Test developers should, therefore, consider Shohamy’s (2001) admonition that they…

…assume an active role in following the consequences and uses of tests, help to guard against misuses and offer assessment models which are more educational, democratic, ethical, yet at the same time valid….Testers must realize that much of
the strength of tests lies not only their technical quality but in their use in social and political dimensions. Studies of the use of tests, as part of test validation on an ongoing basis, are essential for the integrity of the [assessment] profession (p. 162).

Test developers must seriously consider their professional and moral obligations when government and education officials invalidate the tests that they produce by imposing inappropriate consequences. For example, the NCLB law makes invalid inferences when it designates schools “failing” based on ELL students’ performance on tests intended for native speakers. To levy sanctions against a school for such reasons is also an invalid use of test results.

In addition to ensuring consequential validity, testing companies should abide by a code of conduct such as the International Language Testing Association (ILTA) Code of Ethics (2000) which states that testers “should engage in a thorough evaluation of the likely consequences and, where those consequences are in their view professionally unacceptable, withdraw their services.” In addition, the ILTA Code of Ethics guides its adherents to obtain a subject’s consent before testing happens. Testing companies, therefore, who need to administer pilot tests with children, should obtain parents’ permission for their child’s participation. They should inform parents of the amount of lost instructional time that will be incurred as well as other potential consequences. Parents should receive their child’s results from the pilot test and an explanation of the scores. Parents should receive at least a letter of gratitude if not compensation for allowing their children to participate.
8.6.2 Recommendation 2

Schools must foster open lines of communication between the school and parents, among ELL children and their parents, and among ELL parents themselves.

Parent involvement programs have different structures with varying degrees of effectiveness. (See section 2.4.3). The most effective are those that take a partnership perspective over a training perspective (Valdés, 1996; McCaleb 1997; Ada & Campoy, 1998). In terms of standardized testing programs, communication from schools to families should be honest and helpful and provide accurate information about effects of standardized testing on the school, including curriculum changes, amount of time spent on testing and test preparation, how scores are reported and the meaning and uses of the test scores. Parents should also be aware of their rights and understand how to advocate for their children, including their right to withdraw their child from testing if they choose and to appeal decisions made on test scores.

Communication between home and school should be two-way as personnel should also rely on immigrant parents as resources on the language and culture of the students’ home countries. For example Luis Moll in his teacher education program demonstrates how, by conducting field research in their students’ communities, teachers tapped into Mexican origin parents’ funds of knowledge to make classroom learning more meaningful (Gonzalez et al., 1993). Likewise, Nancy Jean Smith (2001) organized her Mexican origin students’ families to tie their knowledge of folk dancing to her Kindergarten curriculum. By applying the same principals to academic assessment, learning about ELL families’ prior schooling and testing experiences (if any), schools can better learn to meet the children’s academic and testing needs. For example, schools with
families from El Salvador might consider organizing parent meetings to give out the children’s report cards and test scores as is the custom in that country.

I found in this study, through family interviews at my students’ homes, that the parents often got their information about the school’s standardized testing program verbally from children, their own and others. It is therefore incumbent upon educators to ensure that students have accurate though age-appropriate information about testing programs and that lines of communication remain open at home. This means children should not be expected to drop their heritage language, and in fact it should be nurtured at school. (See Fillmore, 1991 and 2000).

Parent meetings at the school are important even if attendance is low and children should be welcomed there. But in addition to formal school-based sessions, it is also essential to nurture informal ways in which parents can access the social network at school and create their own roles rather than accept only participation that schools assign to parents. (Calabrese Barton et al, 2004). In that way parents can share information and concerns with one another, and find ways to work together to meet their children’s academic needs.

8.6.3 Recommendation 3

*Educators, ELL students and families should become engaged in work that develops new knowledge and empowers them to become border-crossers and advocates for fair educational opportunities.*

School personnel should adapt enrichment approaches when working with ELL students. Enrichment approaches build on the unique strengths and prior knowledge of students. Immigrant ELL students’ strengths and prior knowledge include their primary
language and culture and their immigration experiences, which teachers must learn to connect to curriculum (Igoa, 1995; Freeman & Freeman, 1998). In an enrichment approach, bilingual students would be seen as a resource, as having special language and cultural knowledge that they could build upon and also share with others (Cummins, 1996). School personnel from the dominant culture, working as ethnographic researchers should become border-crossers or cultural brokers in order to appreciate ELL students’ full humanity and better meet their academic needs (Bartolome, 2002; Shor, 1987; Tatum 1997; Smith, 2001; Gonzalez, 1993). School personnel should participate in their school’s community, learn their students’ languages and visit their countries of origin. They should provide their students with opportunities to connect their language(s), culture(s), funds of knowledge and immigration experiences to the curriculum (Ada & Campoy, 1998; Bartolome, 2002; Gonzalez et al., 1993).

In a school where dual language acquisition and cross-cultural competency were valued as part of academic achievement, immigrant students would not be relegated to low status academic placements as were the boys in Marysburg Elementary School. School personnel must not use test scores (or any other type of assessment evidence) to place students into inflexible, homogeneous, low-status groups that prevent access to more English-proficient peers (Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Administrators should especially avoid isolating special education students and ELL students together in one class as each of these groups have different needs. Bringing students together temporarily for targeted instruction on specific objectives can, however, be an appropriate use of testing data (Gándara et al, 2003; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).
Because segregated schools have been shown to result in low levels of academic achievement for poor and minority students (Orfield, 2001), school districts should consider implementing two-way immersion programs as an alternative to transitional ESOL programs. At a school like Marysburg Elementary which is ethnically, economically, and linguistically isolated, it would be valuable to implement a two-way immersion program open to families from outside the community. Implemented as magnet programs, they could attract middle class, English-speaking families and help to end the linguistic and economic isolation of high-ELL schools. English-speaking families would see an opportunity for their children to learn Spanish at the same time would provide the school with more native English speaking models. Two-way immersion would also allow ELL parents to become more involved in the school’s academic programs since they would understand the language of their children’s instruction (Ramirez, 1992). Neighborhood parents would come into contact with middle class parents and “learn the ropes” from mainstream parents about how to advocate for their children Mainstream parents would improve learning communities for all students as they use their expertise in advocating for their own children (Gándara et al 2003; See also Ms. Anderson’s comments in Section 5.1.1). In this view, two-way immersion program would have the potential to integrate the school without reproducing the society’s inequalities within the building.

ESOL teachers and other teachers of ELL students should look for ways to address the political dimensions of their work in addition to the linguistic or purely academic dimensions (Giroux 1988; Valdés, 1996). Teachers working as advocates and as cultural brokers, empowering themselves and their students, end coercive relationships
of power which inhibit students’ academic achievement (Bartolome, 2002; Cummins, 1996). For example, rather than traditional test practice, educators should consider having students write their own achievement tests that privilege their own knowledge and use the exercise to talk about relationships of power and how tests act as gatekeepers. By understanding schools as Giroux (1988) encourages, as “democratic public spheres [that] are constructed around forms of critical inquiry that dignify meaningful dialogue and human agency” teachers, students and parents together can access democratic processes and push for changes in federal state and local policies and school practices that produce harmful affects on children.

8.6.4 Recommendation 4

_Elected officials must, at a minimum, change the NCLB law as it pertains to ELL students._

NCLB actually makes it impossible for ELL students to achieve proficient levels because the law defines them as low-scoring. Once they are no longer low-scoring, then they are no longer ELLs. NCLB defines ELLs thus: “The term ‘limited English proficient…means an individual…whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual…the ability to meet the State’s proficient level of achievement on State assessments…”(NCLB, Title IX, General Provisions, Part A Definitions, Section 9101(25)).

In addition, the law expects 100% of students in each subgroup, including LEP, to be proficient or better in reading and math by 2014 (NCLB, Title I, Sec. 1111(1)(F)) yet by definition they do not reach such levels. Also, immigrants new to the English
language who arrive to the U.S. nearer the 2014 deadline will be unable to reach proficiency quickly enough to meet the NCLB AYP requirements.

If NCLB continues as it is, however, there must enforcement of the provisions that require tests of ELL students to be valid (Section 8.1 above). Tests developed for native English speakers are not valid for ELL students, so by law the practice should stop.

Because we live in a democracy, then political action is necessary to spur lawmakers into changing laws. NCLB’s sanctions on “failing” schools end with turning schools over to charter school personnel or to private companies. If the law remains in place as is, it will, through its definition of LEP and the 100% proficiency requirement, dismantle the public school system. Therefore, grass-roots immigrant advocacy organizations, teachers’ unions, and other groups should consider challenging NCLB in the courts or at the ballot box. One way to start is through organizing students, teachers and parents of ELL students to learn the effects of standardized testing, understand their rights, and begin to take action.

8.7 Questions for Further Research

Educational researchers should consider these questions for further research:

- To what extent are the effects of NCLB test score accountability that were documented in this small-scale study happening on a state-wide or nationwide scale? Are the effects happening to other ethnic groups besides Salvadoran elementary students?
• How do other ethnic groups beside Salvadoran immigrants perceive academic assessment? To what extent do these perceptions impact their children’s schooling and academic assessment programs?

• Is verbatim reading a valid testing accommodation for ELL students? Is it valid for some types of tests but not for others? Is it more valid for some ELL students than for others?

• What are the common characteristics of long-term ELL students? Who are the students most likely to become as Valdés (2001) calls, “ESOL Lifers”? Is there a gender link to long-term ELL status? Do different or similar factors keep boys and girls in ELL status for long periods? Are students of one gender more likely to remain in ESOL longer than the other? If so, why?

8.8 Closing Reflections

“I’m stuck in ESOL!” I will always be haunted by Herbert’s angry exclamation when I told him the results of his language proficiency test. I am troubled because I can also hear his inner words: “Someone has stuck me in ESOL. This world has placed me against my will in a lesser position.” That is the “real story” that Shohamy (2001) refers to when she writes about how people use standardized tests at a particular place.

When we trap students in segregated academic tracks, they get left behind. However well-intentioned we may be, when we teach ESOL we do more than transmit words and grammar to our students. We who work educating immigrant students must learn to recognize the political in our practice and share that ability with our students and
their families. As allies, we must, as Valdés (1996) concludes, accompany our students and their families on their journey.

I also felt some hope from my students during one brief scene I witnessed during an October 2006 visit to Marysburg Elementary School: Omar and Eddie, both placed in the “high” sixth grade class because of our team’s advocacy the year before, appeared together at Ms. Fairbanks’s classroom during their lunch hour. They came to borrow Goosebumps books. Difficult, angry Eddie was recommending reading material to Omar, the former newcomer. In this way, I witnessed my students’ success as learners in a way that no standardized test score could ever have documented.

But I cannot deny the fact that working alone I only made a small difference for some students and families. To truly transform our immigrant students’ education will require larger efforts of organized groups of people. On April 10, 2006 I marched with my family and friends on the National Mall, joining tens of thousands of Latino immigrants as they demonstrated for their rights. The Washington Post headline the next day read, “‘We Decided Not to Be Invisible Anymore’”. The United States is on the verge of significant change which at some point must transform Latino immigrant students’ education.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interview Questions

Questions for Parents/Guardians

Family’s Immigration

1. What part of El Salvador do you come from?
2. Why did you decide to leave El Salvador?
3. Can you tell me about your immigration experience?
4. Why did you choose to live in this particular community in Maryland?
5. How long have you lived in the U.S.?

Parents’ Schooling and Testing Experiences in El Salvador

1. How long did you attend school in El Salvador?
2. How would you describe the school you attended in El Salvador?
3. How would you describe your family’s involvement in your education?
4. What do you recall about testing in your schools in El Salvador?
5. Did you take national or international standardized tests that you know of?
6. What do you remember about them?
7. What were the consequences of doing well/poorly on tests when you were in school? How do you feel when you think about taking tests?

Child’s Schooling and Testing

1. What has been your child’s experience with schooling in El Salvador?
2. What has been your child’s experience with schooling in the United States?
3. What are some of the major differences between schooling in El Salvador and schooling in the United States?
4. What has been your child’s experience with testing in El Salvador?
5. What has been your child’s experience with testing in the United States?
6. Have you ever talked about testing with your child? What do you tell him/her?
7. What do you know about standardized testing at your child’s school now?
8. What are the consequences of doing well/poorly on standardized testing here in the U.S.?
9. What do you think would help your child to do well on standardized tests in this country?
10. What do you understand about the ELL Accommodations document that you signed for your child?
11. Do you think that the accommodations on that form help your child?
12. What other accommodations do you think would help him/her?
13. Have you ever talked with school personnel or other parents about the school standardized testing program?

Questions for Children

(to take place shortly after a standardized test or practice test)
1. What test did you take?
2. How do you think you did?
3. What was hard/easy about the test?
4. What do you think the test is for?
5. Did you understand the questions?
6. Did you understand the reading selections?
7. What did you do when you did not know the answer?
8. What will happen if you do well/poorly on this test?
9. Is there something that would help you do better on the test such as using a dictionary?
10. Did you have enough time?
11. Did [name of specific accommodation] help you do better on the test?

Questions for Teachers

1. Do you think that parent involvement is important? Why/Why not?
2. What has been your experience with standardized testing and ELL students?
3. Do you think the tests are helpful? Do you think they are fair for ELL students?
4. How do you use the results?
5. What accommodations, if any, do the ELL students receive when you give the tests?
6. Do you think that those accommodations make the test more valid?
7. Do the accommodations give the student an unfair advantage?
8. Are there other accommodations do you think would be helpful in finding out what ELL students know and can do?
9. How are accommodations decided?
10. What are the consequences of a students’ doing well/poorly on standardized tests?
11. Do you think the accommodations were well implemented?
12. Did the right students get the right accommodations?
Questions for the School Principal, Testing Coordinator, ESOL Coordinator and Teachers

1. Do you think that parent involvement is important? Why/Why not?
2. What special programs does the school have for students who are learning English? What has been your experience with standardized testing and ELL students?
3. Do you think the tests are valid and fair for ELL students?
4. How do you involve ELL parents in the testing program at the school?
5. What accommodations do ELL students receive?
6. How are those accommodations decided upon?
7. Can parents choose other accommodations?
8. Are other parents (special education) involved in the assessment program?
9. Can parents choose to exempt their children from testing?
10. Do you think the ELL accommodations are well implemented? What would you change?
APPENDIX B: Projected Time Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complete</th>
<th>In Process</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>August-September 2004</td>
<td>Select school, begin working as a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>August 2004-June 2004</td>
<td>Journaling and field notes from participant-observation; collect primary documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>September-October 2004</td>
<td>Orientation to teaching job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>November 2004</td>
<td>IRB approval; finalize dissertation committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>December 2004</td>
<td>Recruit families and conduct background interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>December 2004</td>
<td>Student background interviews and post MSA∗ Benchmarks (including VAEL accommodations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>January-April 2005</td>
<td>Conduct interviews with school personnel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>January-May 2005</td>
<td>Expand literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>March 2005</td>
<td>Interviews with selected school personnel post MSA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>March 2005</td>
<td>Student interviews post MSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>April 2005</td>
<td>Interviews with selected school personnel post IPT**.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>April 2005</td>
<td>Student post-IPT interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>April-May 2004</td>
<td>Finalize Dissertation proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>May 2005</td>
<td>Defend dissertation proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2005</td>
<td>Data analysis and write-up of preliminary findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sept 2005-March 2006</td>
<td>Parent Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Winter 2005-06</td>
<td>Dissertation write-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>Dissertation defense</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* * Maryland School Assessment

** IDEA Proficiency Test
APPENDIX C: Accommodations Document

Maryland State Department of Education Accommodations Documentation For English Language Learner (ELL) Students

(next two pages)
ACCOMMODATIONS DOCUMENTATION FOR
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER (ELL) STUDENTS

GUIDELINES: Some ELL students require specific accommodations during assessment. Implementation of the accommodation(s) requires a recommendation from the ELL Committee and the signature of the committee chair, parent, and principal. Questions regarding the proposed accommodation(s) should be directed to the Local Accountability Coordinator (LAC) and/or School Test Coordinator.

Student ____________________________________________________________ School _________________________________________________ Grade ______

Assessment for which accommodation(s) is/are being proposed____________________________________________________________________________

Last IPT assessment date___________________ Scores:  Oral ________________  Reading ________________  Writing _________________
Proficiency level ______________________

Assessment Accommodations below reflect accommodations also used in daily instruction.

ACCOMMODATION(S) PROVIDED (Check where appropriate):

Scheduling

- A. Supervised breaks during test session.
- B. Tests given regularly within a single day/session may be administered over multiple days without exceeding total time allowances. Tests must be given within the constraints of test administration procedures.
- C. Extra response and processing time.
- D. Tests are administered at best time of day for student.
- E. Other—proposed by Local Accountability Coordinator; Section 504, Special Education, or ELL staff; and approved by MSDE Assessment Office and MSDE Special Education or ELL staff.

II. Setting

- A. General education classroom, with special seating (front of room, carrel, etc.).
- B. General education classroom, with adjusted grouping.
- C. General education classroom, with additional school support (instructional assistant, guidance, etc.). Support person is not to help student read or respond to items.
- D. General education classroom, with special education or ELL staff as support. Support person is not to help student read or respond to items.
- E. Small group setting.
- F. Small group setting with special education or ELL teacher as examiner.
- G. Individual administration within the school building
- H. Individual administration outside school (home, hospital, etc.).
- I. Other—proposed by Local Accountability Coordinator; Section 504, Special Education, or ELL staff; and approved by MSDE Assessment Office and MSDE Special Education or ELL staff.

III. Equipment

- A. Large print test materials.
- B. Braille test materials.
- C. Calculator for mathematics testing for special education or Section 504 students only.
- D. Use of electronic devices (e.g., mechanical speller, computer, augmented communication device, etc.).
- E. Use of electronic devices (e.g., mechanical speller, computer, augmented communication device, brailling device, etc.) with spell and grammar checkers blocked as certified by LAC.
- F. Published or electronic bilingual dictionary (a synonym dictionary, without definitions, in the student’s native language).
- G. Other—proposed by Local Accountability Coordinator; Section 504, Special Education, or ELL staff; and approved by MSDE Assessment Office and MSDE Special Education or ELL staff.

(Copy to be filed in student’s cumulative record)
(Copy to be filed in student’s cumulative record)
IV. Presentation
- A. Verbatim repetition of scripted directions, as needed.
- B. Written copies of orally presented materials that are found only in examiner’s manual.
- C. Accessibility to closed caption or video materials.
- D. Sign language interpreter, amplification, or visual display required for test directions/examiner-led activities.
- E. Verbatim audiotape of directions.
- F. Verbatim reading or audiotape of entire test for content areas other than reading.
- G. Verbatim reading of selected sections of test or vocabulary for content areas other than reading.
- H. Verbatim reading or audiotape of entire reading test.
- I. Verbatim reading of selected vocabulary words or sections of reading test.
- J. Other—proposed by Local Accountability Coordinator; Section 504, Special Education, or ELL staff; and approved by MSDE Assessment Office and MSDE Special Education or ELL staff.

V. Response
- A. For machine-scored tests, student marks answers in test booklet.
   (Transfer to answer sheet completed by school personnel.)
- B. For selected response items, student indicates answers by pointing or other method.
- C. For constructed response (brief or extended) items, student tapes response for later verbatim transcription by school personnel.
- D. School personnel may check student’s transferred responses (alignment and completeness of hand-filled bubbles).
- E. For constructed response (brief or extended) items, student dictates response to examiner for verbatim transcription by school personnel.
- F. For constructed response (brief or extended) items or oral presentation, student signs response to interpreter of the deaf/hearing impaired for transcription.
- G. Other—proposed by Local Accountability Coordinator; Section 504, Special Education, or ELL staff; and approved by MSDE Assessment Office and MSDE Special Education or ELL staff.

Additional Comments, if any.

Recommended by the following members of the ELL Committee: (Check where appropriate)

_____ ELL Tchr.  _____ Classrm. Tchr.  _____ Rdg. Specialist  _____ Ell Contact Personnel

_____ Other (Please describe)___________________________________________________________

Committee Chair’s Signature __________________________ Name printed ______________________

Principal’s Signature __________________________ Name printed ______________________

Parent’s Signature: __________________________ Name printed ______________________

(Copy to be filed in student’s cumulative record)
APPENDIX D: IPT Levels

Grades 3 through 6 Chart to Determine ESOL Levels Based on the IPT Oral, Reading and Writing Assessments

(Next page)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORAL RESULT</th>
<th>READING RESULT</th>
<th>WRITING RESULT</th>
<th>ESOL LEVEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>N (A)</td>
<td>N (automatically)</td>
<td>N (automatically)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (B)</td>
<td>N (0-27)</td>
<td>N = 0-3 total for Write a Story (both parts) &amp; Write Your Own Story</td>
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<tr>
<td>N (C) L (D,E)</td>
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<td>N = 0-3 total for Write a Story (both parts) &amp; Write Your Own Story</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>N (B,C) L (D,E)</td>
<td>C (41-51)</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>C (F)</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (B,C) L (D,E)</td>
<td>C (41-51)</td>
<td>L = 4-6 total for Write a Story (both parts) &amp; Write Your Own Story</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>N (0-27)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>C (41-51)</td>
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<td>C (F)</td>
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<td>C = 7-9 total for Write a Story (both parts) &amp; Write Your Own Story</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E: ‘RIP TEST”

‘Resting In Pain (rip) test

This is a fun educational test from some students in Mr. Monroe’s ESOL class. The students are Carlos, Eddie, Herminio, and Herbert. After you finish the test, give it to Mr. Monroe and we will grade it and we will give you the score.

1. Who did John Cena beat to win the WWE title?
   a. Eddie Guerrero
   b. Undertaker
   c. J.B.L.
   d. Batista
   e. Herbert Benitez

2. Who were the tag-team champions before the MNM?
   a. Eddie Guerrero and Rey Misterio
   b. Hardcore Holly & Charlie Haas
   c. Bashin’ brothers
   d. The Dudley brothers
   e. Herminio & his brothers

3. What do you put in pupusas that makes it taste good?
   a. Chocolate
   b. Loroco
   c. Pollo
   d. Sugar

4. What word is a synonym of “chucho”?
   a. Lagartija
b. perro  
c. conejo  
d. gato

5. who won the world cup in 2004?  
a. CARLOS SOLANO  
b. argentina  
c. united states  
d. brazil

6. who is currently the best soccer player in the world?  
A. ronaldo  
B. El fish  
C. blanco  
D. El pollo

7. Complete the title of this famous r. l. stine novel: “the girl who cried_______”  
a. wolf  
b. monster  
c. zombie  
d. mummy

8. what do people say to eddie guerrero?  
a. you can't see me!  
b. I am the game!  
c. You're a wrestling god, eddie!  
d. Why, eddie, why?!!!

9. true or false: heindrich won the raw title. ________

10. TRUE OR FALSE:
THE PATRIOTS WON THE 2004 SUPER BOWL

If you score 70%-100% you are one of us.

If you score 60% or less you will have to watch more wrestling.
APPENDIX F: PowerPoint Slides From Parent Sessions

(Next pages)


Dikongue, E. (2001). My grandmother is the bravest woman I know. Unpublished manuscript, Silver Spring International Middle School, Silver Spring Maryland: Author.


No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. (P.L. 107-110), United States Statutes at Large.


