

# “Comimos quesadillas y después jugamos tag:” Children’s bilingual/bicultural identity in a U. S. elementary school

“Comimos quesadillas y después jugamos tag:” Desarrollo de la identidad bilingüe / bicultural de los niños en una escuela primaria de EE. UU.

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**Abstract**

... Comimos pizza en la casa de Hugo... Era su cumpleaños... Vimos el movie de Snow White. Era sad porque la mamá de Snow White se murió. El King se casó con otra... (Daniela)<sup>1</sup>.

... Yo y mi primo jugamos "zombie killing mummies", que es un videogame en inglés. Después comimos la rosca de reyes para ver quién iba a ganar el bebé de plástico... (Omar).

This reflexion paper presents findings from a classroom-based ethnographic study conducted for three years in collaboration with children of immigrant Latino families attending an elementary public school in the U. S. The investigation focuses specifically on the analysis of a series of "family journals," which were collectively created by the children and their families, and shared within the space of the classroom. Through the journals, the children's bilingual and bicultural identities became an important source of learning, collaboration and meaningful engagement in the classroom.

**Keywords**

Bilingualism; ethnography; identity; immigrants

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**Resumen**

... Comimos pizza en la casa de Hugo... Era su cumpleaños... Vimos el movie de Snow White. Era sad porque la mamá de Snow White se murió. El King se casó con otra... (Daniela)<sup>2</sup>.

... Yo y mi primo jugamos "zombie killing mummies", que es un videogame en inglés. Después comimos la rosca de reyes para ver quién iba a ganar el bebé de plástico... (Omar).

Este artículo de reflexión presenta los hallazgos de un estudio etnográfico en el aula que se llevó a cabo durante tres años en colaboración con niños de familias inmigrantes estudiantes de primaria, en un colegio público de los Estados Unidos. La investigación se centra en el análisis de una serie de "diarios familiares", que fueron creados de manera colectiva por los niños y sus familias y socializados en el aula de clase. A través de estos diarios las identidades bilingües y biculturales se tornaron en una fuente importante de aprendizaje, colaboración y compromiso significativo en el aula.

**Palabras clave**

Bilingüismo; etnografía; identidad; inmigrante

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1 All names are pseudonyms.

2 Todos los nombres son seudónimos.

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### **Article description / Descripción del artículo**

This reflexion article derives from an ethnographic investigation (*Developing Bilingualism and Biliteracy*) conducted in a bilingual elementary classroom in the U. S. in collaboration with Latino immigrant children. Through a critical discourse analysis of family journals produced by the children, the author reflects on the merging of linguistic and cultural practices from home and school.

## **Theoretical Perspectives**

James Gee introduced the notion of Discourses (with a capital “D”) to describe the ways of behaving, interacting, thinking, and believing “that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities... by particular groups” (Gee, 2012, p. 3). As he explains, Discourses constitute our socially-situated identities. Each Discourse embodies practices that are generally taken-for-granted and accepted as “common sense,” “normal,” or “the right way” to think or behave. In this sense, the concept of Discourse is closely linked to notions of power and privilege in society.

Each of us belongs to many Discourses, and each Discourse is an aspect of our multiple identities. The first Discourse we learn, which is usually focused on our home and families, is our primary Discourse. Additional secondary Discourses are learned through the social institutions (e.g., school, church, work) with which we become affiliated. These multiple Discourses rarely represent congruent and harmonious values. As we navigate through the Discourses that affect our lives, we often face conflicts and tensions. For some people, however, these tensions and conflicts are considerably more drastic than for others.

Children who best succeed in school are those whose homes incorporate aspects of school-based Discourses into their primary socialization. In the United States, this is often the case of European-American, middle class, native-English speaking families (Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo & Collazo, 2004). These children have a significant advantage in their schooling experiences, as there is often a seamless alignment between home-based practices and the academic tasks they are asked to perform at school (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). In contrast, minoritized children in the United States often experience deep and painful conflicts between their primary Discourses and the Discourses of the school. This is particularly true for children from immigrant families who have bilingual and bicultural backgrounds, and who may come from economically disadvantaged

communities. “Indeed, the values of many school-based Discourses treat some minority children as ‘other’ and their social practices as ‘deviant’ and ‘non-standard’” (Gee, 2012, p. 4). Their language and cultural practices become connected with “deficient... models of personhood” (Flores & Rosa, 2019, p. 146) in need of correction and remediation, and regarded as obstacles for learning the legitimized ways of schooling (Alim & Paris, 2017). As a result, these children often become alienated, threatened, and disconnected from school, creating a pattern of academic failure. As Darder (2012) points out, this pattern reflects the essence of conservative educational discourse, which aims to maintain the existing hierarchical order of society. The purpose of conservative educational discourse is to preserve the social and economic status quo, and to “safeguard dominant power structures,” thus perpetuating an ideology that is rooted in values of “uniformity, consensus, and ethnocentrism” (p. 5).

It is important to point out, however, that Gee’s (2012) distinction between primary and secondary Discourses is not meant to be understood as a clear-cut and unproblematic dichotomy. As Gee explains, the boundaries between Discourses are “constantly negotiated and contested in society and history” (p. 166). “Discourses allow for ample room in individual style and human agency” (p. 191). Although there are powerful forces working against change, dominant discourses can be challenged, disrupted, and transformed. Through creative acts of resistance, “people mix [Discourses] and their mixtures get recognized and accepted” (p. 166). New “borderland Discourses” (p. 185) are produced which are more fluid and dynamic, and operate in the spaces between the Discourses of home and school.

In an effort to interrupt the pattern of school alienation and failure, different educational frameworks have been proposed over the last two decades, which have called for the active integration of children’s home-based Discourses into the classroom. Rather than viewing children’s linguistic and cultural practices as deficits to be remedied, these approaches enable children to utilize their own voices and experiences to achieve richer levels of engagement and participation in school (Aukerman, 2007). Children are encouraged to generate new forms of knowledge that resonate with their values and backgrounds, which in turn are used as resources for academic learning (Valenzuela, 2019). They collaborate more fully while participating in activities that affirm their identities (Cummins, Hu, Markus & Montero, 2015), utilizing multiple modalities for enhanced expression and communication (Toohey *et al.*, 2015), and engaging with ideas that are meaningful and relevant to their lives (Kennedy, Oviatt & De Costa, 2019).

These asset-based pedagogical practices derive from influential theoretical constructs that not only call for cultural congruence and sensitivity in schooling practices, but also include a strong critique to society's inequities and a commitment to social justice. They place the knowledges, experiences, and skills of minoritized communities at the center of schooling, "[calling] into question White middle class [monolingual] communities as the standard by which all others are judged" (Yosso, 2005, p. 82). *Research on funds of knowledge* (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005) allows educators to discover the "richly layered knowledge bases that inform the everyday ways of being of students, families and communities" (González, Wyman & O'Connor, 2011, p. 481), and to build curriculum around the cultural capital of the communities they serve. *Culturally sustaining pedagogies* (Paris & Alim, 2017) offer an "expansive vision of schooling" (p. 3) by promoting linguistic and cultural pluralism, honoring and sustaining the historical and longstanding practices of marginalized communities, and also allowing for dynamic shifts in cultural practices to meet young people's current social and political realities. *Community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005) offers a model to focus research and pedagogical practice on the multiple resources that have been historically accumulated by communities of color (i.e., aspirational, social, navigational, linguistic, resistant and familial capital). *A critical translanguaging approach* (Seltzer, 2019) embraces a translanguaging stance towards bilingualism, a concept that implies the enactment of a coherent linguistic repertoire as an integrated system that includes fluid and dynamic features of diverse language varieties. Translanguaging refers to "new language practices that make visible the complexity of language exchanges among people with different histories" (García & Wei, 2014, p. 21). As a pedagogical practice, translanguaging "also includes express critique of racial and linguistic hierarchies for political and cultural transformation" (Poza, 2019, p. 93). Learners' language practices are used as resources to "learn, think, imagine, and develop commanding performances" (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 20).

An important theoretical concept that has greatly influenced the development of asset-based pedagogies is the notion of *third space*. First proposed by Bhabha (1994) based on hybridity theory, third space may be defined as a symbolic or metaphorical space where diverse cultures meet (Combs, González & Moll, 2011). Third space provides the possibility for creative forms of identity, which are "produced on the boundaries of *in-between* forms of difference, in the intersections and overlaps across spheres of class, gender, race, nation, generation, location" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1). Third space theory rejects binary categories such as global vs. local, or academic vs. social, and recognizes that individuals employ a variety

of tools to make sense of the world. The notion of third space aligns with Gee's (2012) concept of "borderland Discourses." In a third space, what seems to be oppositional Discourses can be merged together to generate alternative forms of knowledge (Moje *et al.*, 2004), and to resist "limitations imposed by racist, classist, and other oppressive forces" (Benson, 2010, p. 555). Third space is tentative, flexible and constantly shifting to capture the complexity of individuals' dynamic identities (Gannon, 2010). As Gutierrez (2008) argues, "third space is a transformative space where the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge are heightened" (p. 152).

The present study explored the creation of third space and the enactment of asset-based pedagogies through a particular classroom activity: A family journal written by bilingual first and second grade learners. Through an analysis of their journal narratives, the study sought to understand how the creative merging of home and school discourses, combined with flexible and teaching and learning roles, empowered the children to examine, validate and expand their bilingual and bicultural identities.

## Methods

### Context and Participants

This study was part of a larger ethnographic investigation conducted over three years in a bilingual classroom within an elementary school in a rural community in the U. S. Pacific Northwest, where 63,5% of the students were Latinx, 77,6% were classified as "economically disadvantaged," and 48,1% were learning English as an additional language. The study was a collaboration between myself, a university researcher, Sandra, the classroom teacher, and the children, who were between the ages of six and eight years. During the first and second year of the study, Sandra taught in a 1<sup>st</sup> grade classroom with 15 and 16 students respectively. During the third year, the classroom became a 1st/2nd grade blend with 25 students. All the children were of Latinx backgrounds whose parents held jobs in local tree farms, vineyards, or other businesses such as shops and restaurants.

### Data Sources

Data were gathered through weekly visits to the classroom, with observations and field notes, collection of class artifacts, samples of student work, photographs, and audio recordings of participants' interactions during class activities; as well as formal interviews and informal conversations with teachers, children, parents, administrators, and teacher candidates placed in the school.

## Collaborative Ethnography

Green, Skukauskaite & Douglas (2012) remind us that ethnography is much more than a research method. It is an epistemology, or a way of knowing, that should not be bound by prescribed, pre-defined, or sequenced, methodological steps. As the authors explain, ethnography follows a "non-linear system," and is "guided by an iterative, recursive and adductive logic" (p. 309). Decisions about records to collect, events to observe, and questions to ask emerge during fieldwork, as ethnographers try to understand "what counts as cultural knowledge," (p. 309), and "develop grounded explanations for patterns of practice, or roles and relationships, and other social phenomenon" (p. 310). It is not possible for the ethnographer to formulate research strategies a priori, based on predetermined models to be strictly followed. As Guber (2011) remarks, "just as a game is learned by playing, a culture is learned by living it" (p. 55).

During its three years of duration, the present study evolved and shifted its focus as Sandra and I tried to make sense of the social forces that were affecting the children in this classroom. My initial overarching purpose for the study was to understand and capture situated practices and interactions in the classroom that foster productive learning opportunities for bilingual children. In the beginning of the study, I acted mostly as a participant-observer in Sandra's classroom. Little by little, however, our roles were transformed through our shared experiences with the children, our ongoing dialogues, and our emerging interpretations of those experiences. Slowly, Sandra and I attempted to engage the children in our collaborative ethnography, and the lines between research and praxis gradually became blurred.

Our collaboration became more meaningful as we engaged with the children as co-researchers and interlocutors (Milstein, 2010). Our interactions with the children allowed us to jointly formulate research activities, reflect on experiences, and produce knowledge together (Guerrero, Clemente, Dantas-Whitney & Milstein, 2017). Through integration of fluid linguistic and cultural practices, the children engaged in academic work which incorporated their home cultures and languages within the formal setting of the classroom (Flores & García, 2013). In my weekly visits, as I participated in activities with the children, I came to realize that the development of this productive learning space was mediated by a range of processes that allowed the children to draw from their multiple resources and "funds of knowledge" (González *et al.*, 2005). Gradually, these practices became part of the collective classroom culture. As the study progressed, a more focused research question emerged: How can the children's bilingual and bicultural identities become a source of learning, collaboration and engagement in the classroom?

## Family Journals

During the second year of the study, as Sandra and I continued to reflect on ways to build productive connections between the children's homes and the school, we came up with the idea of creating a family journal for the class. Since the children were studying about birds, we put together a bag with a stuffed animal of the bird they were studying (a toucan) and a notebook (figure 1). The stuffed animal was included not only as a motivating element for the journal writing activity, but also in an attempt to combine literacy practice with ludic experiences, and to expand the children's possibilities for multimodal meaning-making (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006).

Figure 1

*Karen and Luz posing with the bag containing their family journal and the stuffed animal (a toucan named Tomás)*



*Source: Own elaboration*

Each evening, a different child would take the bag home; they were encouraged to play with the animal and write on the journal together with their families. The next morning in class, that child would read to the class what they had written in the journal, and the class would engage in conversation about the topic of the journal entry. Then, the bag would be given to another student to take home that evening. The family journals



became an extremely successful activity, and quite popular among the children and the families. The children waited with anticipation for their turn to take the journals home and were very interested in hearing each other's stories each morning. We started the first journal rotation by asking the children to simply write about the activities of their evenings. Many of the children wrote about meals with their families, and other leisure activities such as playing games, visiting friends, watching TV, and going shopping. During the second journal rotation, we asked the children to write about their plans for future careers and occupations. The children wrote about their dreams of becoming police officers, ballet dancers, soccer coaches, and teachers. Finally, in the third rotation we asked the children to talk to their parents about stories from their childhoods and write about them in the journals. They wrote stories with beautiful illustrations about their parents' favorite games, their close friends, and their daily routines, often contrasting their parents' childhood activities to their own present lives. During my visits to the classroom, I would often pick up the journal, sit down with some of the children, and ask them to read their journal entries to me. The children greatly enjoyed telling me their stories, and would often add elaborated details that had not been included in their written narratives. Their stories reflected their linguistic, social and cultural practices, both real and imagined.

## Findings and Discussion

Pahl & Kelly (2005) argue that family literacy practices can offer significant opportunities for learning, as they provide a third space "where parents can enter the school on different terms and children can re-enter their parents' domain within a school setting, and the two very different discourses can mingle" (p. 92). The family journals in this study became an important vehicle for the children to express their everyday forms of knowledge, to validate the linguistic and cultural capital of their homes and communities, and to transform the official school curriculum into a negotiated, co-constructed curriculum. Through their collaborative process of journal writing with family members, their sharing of narratives with peers, and their joint dialogues in class, the children were able to express, affirm, and develop their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). By sharing their personal stories, the children and their families were able to examine their sociocultural and sociohistorical experiences, through multimodal (e.g., drawings and text) and multilingual narratives, incorporating translanguaging practices in Spanish and English (García & Kleyn, 2016), which offered opportunities for them "to wrestle with, complicate, and express their

emerging identities” (Kennedy *et al.*, 2019, p. 60). The journals became a vehicle for the children to explore the cultural products, symbolic resources, social institutions, practices, relationships and geographies that constituted their funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Through the journals, the children’s lived experiences, their hopes for the future, and their families’ heritage, were brought into the formal space of the school. This enabled them to explore imagined communities, envision imagined identities (Anderson, 1991; Kanno & Norton, 2003), and expand their range of possible selves by making connections with others across time and space. In doing so, they asserted their agency, developed a sense of solidarity, and transformed the classroom curriculum.

### Lived Experiences Embedded in Familial and Social Networks

During the first journal rotation, the children recorded their everyday social practices such as meals, celebrations and games with family and friends at home and in the community, always accompanied by their detailed drawings. My conversations with the children about their journal narratives, referenced in the excerpts that introduce this paper, reflect the children’s assets in familial and social capital. As Yosso (2005) describes, familial capital refers to the multiple kinship ties created within immediate and extended families, which nurture healthy connections to the larger society, build a sense of caring and belonging, and provide emotional and moral consciousness. Social capital refers to additional networks of people, beyond the family, such as peers and other social contacts, who also offer important support and tools for navigating social institutions. The importance of these social networks in the children’s lives is further illustrated by the journal entries below.

Vimos una película que se llama Río... Comimos quesadillas y después jugamos tag y dormimos bien (Julia)<sup>3</sup>.

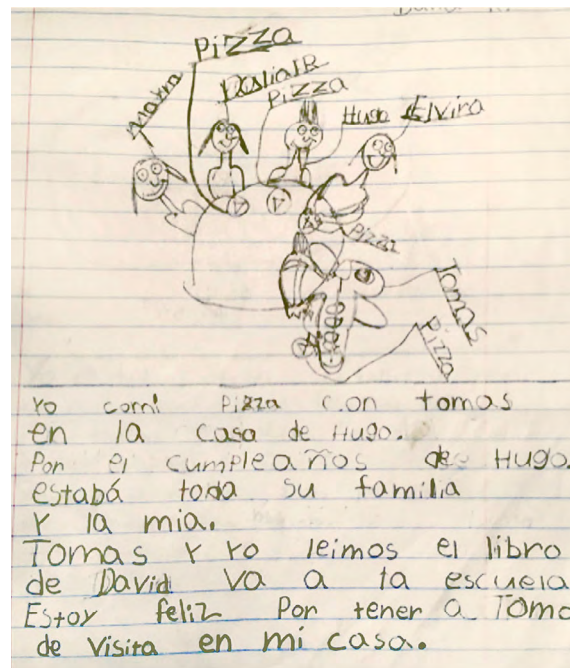
Yo fui a la casa de mi tía. Comimos pozoles y comimos rosca de reyes y jugamos el wii con mis primos y con mi prima Daisy (Omar).

Yo comí pizza con Tomás en la casa de Hugo. Por el cumpleaños de Hugo. Estaba toda su familia y la mía. Tomás y yo leímos el libro de “David va a la escuela.” Estoy feliz por tener a Tomás de visita a mi casa (Daniela) (figure 2).

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3 Minor corrections in spelling and punctuation were made to the children’s journal entries to facilitate reading comprehension.

Figure 2  
Daniela's journal



Source: Own elaboration

These narratives showcase the children's connections to their immediate and extended family members (e.g., tía, primos), as well as other social relationships (e.g., Hugo y su familia) that provide them with emotional sustenance (e.g., Estoy feliz). The journals also demonstrate how the children's identities are distributed and culturally mediated by meaningful practices (e.g., comer, jugar, celebrar, leer), artifacts (e.g., película Río, wii, libro), and resources such as food (e.g., quesadillas, pozoles, rosca de reyes, pizza) (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). When the journals were shared in the classroom, the children's everyday social experiences were validated and celebrated within the academic context. In this way, the journals functioned as "identity texts," by "[holding] a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light" (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 3).

Equally important, the journals reveal the children's tremendous linguistic capital through their translanguaging practices (e.g., jugamos tag; vimos el movie), their ease of communication in both English and Spanish, and their familiarity with tools and concepts reflecting their bicultural identities. Omar, for example, describes how he accesses his bilingual/bicultural assets to play a videogame "en inglés," and then celebrates the Mexican holiday of King's Day by eating the traditional "rosca de reyes" and looking inside for the small plastic doll representing baby Jesus ("el bebé de plástico"). The children's engagement in translanguaging, as well as their

exploration of their transnational identities represents transgressions to the traditional educational structures by crossing discursive borders and destabilizing language hierarchies (García & Wei, 2014; Poza, 2019). In this way, translanguaging practices contributed to the development of third space in this classroom: “A social space for the multilingual language user [that brings] together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance” (Wei, 2011, p. 1223).

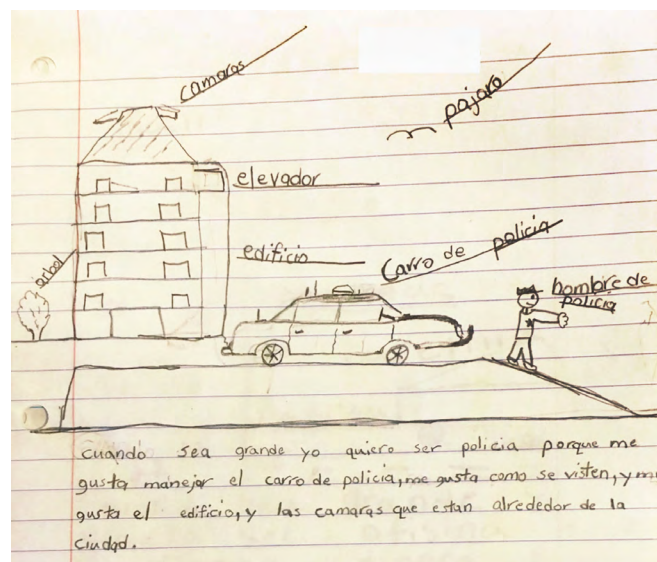
### Future Aspirations through Resilience and Resistance

During the second rotation of the journals, we asked the children to write about their future hopes and dreams. The children wrote about the jobs and occupations they wanted to have when they grew up, envisioning future imagined identities and imagined communities. In doing so, they made connections with others across time and space, and broadened their local sets of relationships (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

Cuando sea grande voy a ser soldado de USA de los marines para defender mi país (César).

Cuando sea grande yo quiero ser policía porque me gusta manejar el carro de policía, me gusta como se visten, y me gusta el edificio, y las cámaras que están alrededor de la ciudad (Héctor) (figure 3).

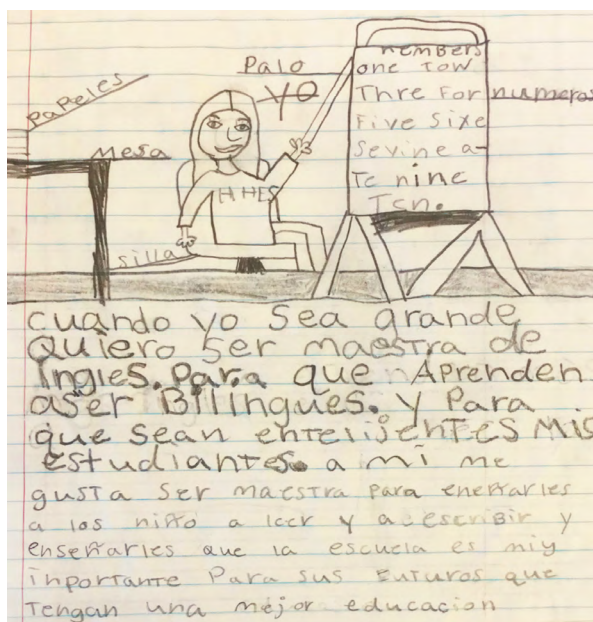
Figure 3  
Héctor's journal



Source: Own elaboration

Cuando sea grande quiero ser maestra de inglés para que aprenden a ser bilingües y para que sean inteligentes mis estudiantes. A mí me gusta ser maestra para enseñarles a los niños a leer y a escribir y enseñarles que la escuela es muy importante para sus futuros que tengan mejor educación (Brenda) (figure 4).

Figure 4  
Brenda's journal



Source: Own elaboration

According to Yosso (2005), aspirational capital refers to the capacity to maintain hopes for the future, even “in the face of structured inequality and often without means to make such dreams a reality” (p. 77). This ability to envision possibilities beyond present circumstances, and despite real and perceived barriers, reflects a strong sense of resilience and resistance that can challenge the status quo and transform structural oppression. This type of aspirational capital is evident in Héctor’s, Cesar’s, and Brenda’s journal entries, as they describe their plans to become a police officer, a marine soldier, and a teacher. Rather than talking about these occupations in the abstract, their narratives reveal a substantial identity investment (Cummins *et al.*, 2015) through their concrete and detailed accounts. Hector, for example, seems to possess significant knowledge about the particular cultural artifacts associated with the job of police officers (e.g., “carro de policía,” “como se visten,” “cámaras”), and the type of work they do in and around the community (i.e., “alrededor de la ciudad”). Cesar is able to counter the current anti-immigrant discourse that would frame him as an outsider, by

proudly describing his dream to become a marine soldier to defend the USA, which he claims as “his country” (“mi país”). Brenda also presents a strong challenge to the dominant discourse, as she announces her hopes to become a teacher of English (“maestra de inglés”) so that her future students can become bilingual and intelligent (“aprenden a ser bilingües y para que sean inteligentes”). By equating bilingualism with intelligence, she dismantles deficit ideologies that aim to subtract children’s linguistic assets in favor of monolingualism (Valenzuela, 1999), and proclaims that bilingual education is a better form of education (“mejor educación”). Through their future aspirations, these children define themselves as strong, intelligent, capable, and respectable individuals, defying societal messages that undermine the self worth of immigrants and people of color.

### History and Memory as Foundation of Community

Yosso (2005) proposed the theory of *community cultural wealth* as an alternative to the traditional Bourdieuean concept of cultural capital. In her view, cultural capital, similar to the notion of income, is “defined by White, middle class values” and relates to “a narrow range of assets and characteristics” (p. 77). Conversely, the concept of wealth denotes a historical context of accumulated resources that are shared by families and communities, more closely reflecting the experiences of people of color.

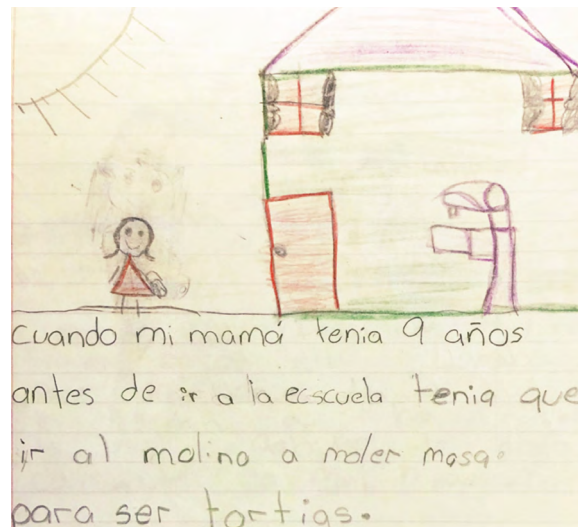
For the third rotation of the journal, the children were asked to interview their parents and relatives about their childhood experiences. This allowed them to actively and jointly explore their families’ accumulated *cultural wealth*. The act of listening to their parents’ childhood stories, writing about those stories in their journals, and then sharing, and often performing those narratives in class with their classmates, enabled the children to strengthen their connections with their heritage, and to redefine and expand their identities through the sociohistorical experiences of their family members, as seen in the narratives below.

Mi mamá dice que cuando ella era niña y vivía en Michoacán era muy divertido porque jugaba en el campo con sus amigos y no necesitaba juguetes ni televisión porque todo lo que hacía era divertido (Carlos).

Mi mamá cuando tenía seis años nunca tenía juguetes como yo. Ella cuidaba a las vacas y las borregas y las chivas... Y mi mamá les daba de comer a las gallinas y a los pavos y a los pollitos. Y ella les limpiaba el corral a los animales (Andrea).

Cuando mi mamá tenía 9 años antes de ir a la escuela tenía que ir al molino a moler masa para hacer tortillas (Emilia) (figure 5).

Figure 5  
*Emilia's journal*



Source: Own elaboration

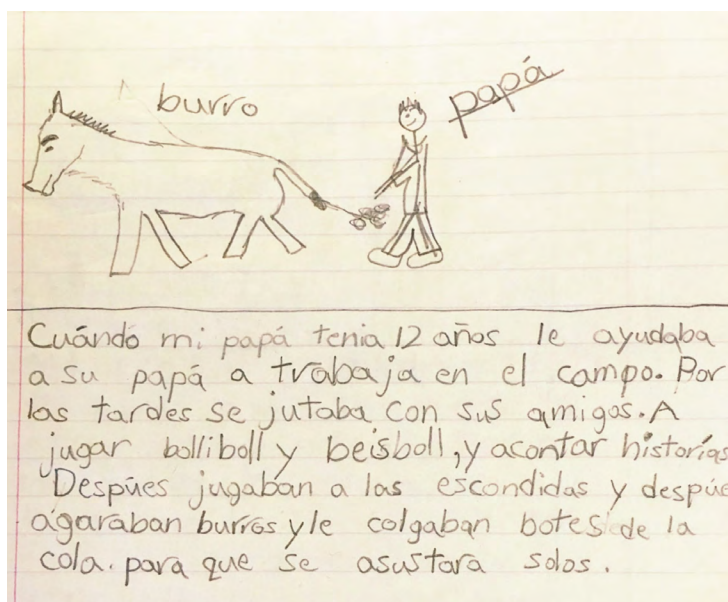
The children narrated stories of their parents' rural life in Mexico close to nature (e.g., "en Michoacán," "en el campo"), and described everyday activities such as engaging alongside family members in different forms of labor ("ir al molino moler masa," "ayudaba a su papá"), caring for animals (e.g., "cuidaba a las vacas y la chivas," "daba de comer a las gallinas y a los pavos y a los pollitos," "limpiaba el corral"), and playing creative games with few resources (e.g., "no necesitaba juguetes ni televisión"). In their narratives, they often compared their parents' past lives with their own current realities (e.g., "nunca tenía juguetes como yo"). Their parents' childhoods, involving manual labor and limited resources, were sharply contrasted with their own daily experiences, narrated in the first journal rotation, which included pastime activities with material possessions such as videogames, movies and books. This exploration of family cultural heritage allowed the children to explore "the tensions and contradictions inherent in cultural differences... and to affirm a bicultural social identity" (Darder, 2012, p. 54). Through the tradition of storytelling, they weaved a tapestry of history and memory as a foundation for their collective vision of community.

The active co-construction of community became evident to me one day when I arrived in the classroom, as Jorge had just read his journal entry to his peers:

Cuando mi papá tenía 12 años le ayudaba a su papá a trabajar en el campo. Por las tardes se juntaba con sus amigos a jugar voleibol y beisbol, y a

contar historias. Después jugaban a las escondidas y después agarraban burros y le colgaban botes en la cola para que se asustara solos (Jorge) (figure 6).

Figure 6  
Jorge's journal



Source: Own elaboration

All the children were paying close attention and greatly enjoying Jorge's dad's story of how he played tricks on donkeys by tying bottles on their tails. Everyone was laughing and asking Jorge many questions about his dad's childhood pranks, while dramatizing and role playing the scenes with physical gestures and sounds, as if acting the parts of Jorge's dad, his friends, and the donkey. As Norton (2011) remarks, this type of audience participation helps create a sense of investment and ownership of the story for everyone. "Members of the audience [are] not passive observers, but [help] to co-construct the meaning of the... texts through vibrant interjections, choral participation, enthusiastic clapping, and ongoing commentary" (p. 127). This is exactly what I observed during Jorge's energetic and dramatic retelling.

At that moment, I sensed that Jorge's dad's story had been appropriated by all the children in the classroom, through their interactive participation, active performances, and clear enjoyment of the tale. The active co-construction of the story contributed to "changing identities of all participants in the dramatic event" (Norton, 2011, p. 128). The story no longer



belonged only to Jorge's family, but it had become part of the *cultural wealth* of the whole classroom community (Yosso, 2005).

## Concluding Thoughts

When classrooms provide a third space by enacting asset-based pedagogies through critical translingual and transcultural practices, significant opportunities for learning and identity affirmation are created. These practices not only integrate children's home and school Discourses (Gee, 2012), but perhaps most importantly, they challenge and reshape both academic and everyday conventions, redefining what counts as valid school knowledge. As we have seen through the journal narratives above, the children were able to transform conflict and difference into rich zones of collaboration and learning (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Tejeda, 1999). They created "a dynamic composite of who [they were] and who [they were] becoming, based on what [they] learned... from both [their] academic and everyday experiences" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 44). Through a collective exploration of history, institutions, practices, relationships, geographies, and imagined futures, the children engaged in a process of self-definition and self-understanding. In this way, the co-creation of third space in this classroom also meant the creation of "hopeful possibilities" for learning (Combs *et al.*, 2011, p. 199).

In my work as a teacher educator, I am constantly witnessing negative teacher perceptions that are influenced by racial and linguistic stereotypes. Children from minoritized backgrounds are often described in relation to, or measured against, Eurocentric middle-class norms. They are blamed for behavioral issues and academic deficiencies, their families are considered indifferent to school success, and their homes are often imagined as places devoid of books and intellectual stimulation. Schools are seen as spaces where minoritized children can gain knowledge, experience and skills that are thought to be lacking in their home communities. These damaging narratives permeate the field of education and the daily work of teachers, and impose serious limitations on children's educational trajectories. In contrast, the journal entries showcased above present a completely different picture of these children's life realities. They reveal the rich social networks and vast array of activities that constitute their daily lives, their relationships, their sources of pride and knowledge, and the immense amount of creativity and joy that they derive from interactions with loved ones. The children's descriptions are centered within their own communities without judgment or apology. In thinking about the sharp contrast presented by these two opposing narratives, I am struck by the children's power to counteract the

negative discourses that affect their lives through their positive portrayals of their ways of being within their journal entries. I am impressed by the children's strong sense of agency and their capacity to share their ideas, express their emotions, and present themselves as competent intellectuals and powerful individuals.

As I reflect on the relationships among the adults and the children in the classroom, I seek to understand the fluid nature of our roles as students, teachers, and co-researchers, and the dynamic shifts of power distribution (and re-distribution) that occurred during our interactions. As the teacher, Sandra had the power to create the family journal project and demand everyone's participation. In a way, the journals were conceived as another class assignment, so the children didn't question Sandra's authority. As another adult in the classroom, I was viewed by the children as Sandra's helper, so I was also afforded some level of authority. However, as researchers, our relationships were more horizontal and our roles less fixed. As researchers, Sandra and I were positioned as learners, with the children as our interlocutors and guides. In this way, the journals transformed power relations and subject positionalities in the classroom (Canagarajah, 2018), and enabled the children "to perform with their own internal norm that [made] them more creative and critical" (García & Wei, 2014, p. 21). This collaborative creation of power (Cummins, 2001) allowed the children to lead us in understanding their cultural ways of thinking and being. The emergence of third space helped to dismantle rigid hierarchical parameters between the adults and the children in the classroom and "to nurture a fluidity that [allowed] for multiple inventions and interpretations" (Taylor & Klein, 2015, p. 2).

I am again reminded of Alim & Paris's (2017) proposal for a *culturally sustaining pedagogy* which centers our students' languages, practices and knowledges within classroom learning, nourishing their sense of identity and agency through connections with their community's past and present histories. Although their proposal is obviously related to education, its fundamental tenets can also be applied by researchers engaged in collaborative ethnography with children. Meaningful collaboration only exists when we respectfully listen to children's voices, register their experiences, and together create generative spaces to sustain "the lifeways of communities" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1).

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