

# GENERATION 1.5 READERS IN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

by

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(Under the Direction of Linda Harklau)

## ABSTRACT

This is a one year multiple case study investigating the high school to college transition of three bilingual language minority students and their understandings of academic reading tasks in both contexts. High school study sites included three schools in one county in a semi-rural southeastern state; college sites included a nearby community college and a large urban university in the same state. Study data included interviews with participants and their teachers and instructors, class observations, and collection of printed course artifacts. The study found that discontinuities between high school and college literacy tasks hindered bilingual language minority participants' learning in their transition from the former to the latter contexts. The investigation also found that institutional differences in literacy expectations for bilingual language minority students affected participants' adaptation to and academic progress in college. The study demonstrated that post-secondary academic challenges these students may face can be mitigated if the colleges they attend provide appropriate and accessible instructional scaffolding that accommodates their linguistic and strategic needs. This research reconfirmed that language minority learners are ill-served when they are conflated into a unitary subset assumed to possess the same linguistic and learning characteristics. Pedagogical implications include a need to

consider high school ESOL classes as unexploited sites of opportunity for preparing and equipping bilingual language minority students for post-secondary literacy tasks.

**INDEX WORDS:** Bilingual language minorities, Generation 1.5, Reading comprehension, 2 year colleges, 4 year colleges, English as a second language, Learning support, Social constructivist, Self-efficacy, Literacy tasks

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Ralph Lyon Allison (deceased) and Nelle Turner Allison; my grandmother, Harriett Melinda Turner (deceased); and my uncles, Carl E. Waits (deceased) and J. Luther Allison (deceased). These individuals, each in her and his own way, supported and encouraged me to continue learning throughout my life. I owe them more than I can express.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	11
Theoretical Perspective .....	11
Generation 1.5 and Bilingual Language Minority Students.....	31
Adolescent and Adult L1 Literacy Research.....	35
Adolescent and Adult L2 Literacy Research.....	42
3 METHODOLOGY .....	55
Research Questions .....	55
Case Studies .....	56
Subjectivity of Researcher.....	61
Study Sites .....	62
Participants .....	66
Data Collection.....	74
Data Analysis .....	83
What Follows .....	86
4 DISCONTINUITIES IN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE LITERACY	
TASKS .....	87
Overview .....	87



Scaffolded Learning .....	89
Reading Comprehension .....	91
Course Content Sources .....	94
Reading Tasks Management .....	111
Reading Strategies .....	114
Quantity of Assigned Reading .....	116
Vocabulary Issues.....	118
Analysis of Self-Generated Writing.....	125
Discussion .....	134
Conclusion.....	142
5 INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENCES IN LITERACY EXPECTATIONS .....	144
Overview .....	144
Background .....	145
Contrasts in Institutional Missions.....	146
Participants' High-School-to-College Transition Experiences .....	152
Participants' Interactions with High School and College Faculty .....	171
Participants' End of Semester Reflections .....	172
Discussion .....	174
Conclusion.....	178
6 IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH .....	180
REFERENCES .....	187
APPENDICES .....	207
A INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	207

B	TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS .....	212
C	COUNTY AND SCHOOL SYSTEMS STATISTICS .....	213
D	DATA CODING KEY .....	214
E	H.S. COURSES, TEACHERS, INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS .....	215
F	COLLEGE COURSES, PROFESSORS, INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS.....	217

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: County and City School Systems Statistics .....	212
Table 2: Data Coding Key .....	213
Table 3: Participants' High School Courses, Teachers, Interviews, and Observations .....	214
Table 4: Participants' College Courses, Professors, Interviews, and Observations .....	214

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Jia’s American Government worksheet .....	99
Figure 2: Sonia’s Banking and Finance worksheet.....	101

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

My interest in U.S.-educated language minority students and their academic reading practices and competencies comes directly from the classroom, or rather, classrooms in which I have been the instructor. For more than 15 years, I taught post-secondary level English as a Second Language (ESL) courses in a number of two and four year colleges in a southern U.S. state. Similar to many other college ESL instructors, my graduate TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) program had focused on pedagogy for adult language minority learners educated outside the United States. However, over a three year period (1998 to 2000), I noticed that the typical profile of students I was teaching had changed from the international language minority English learners my graduate work had prepared me to teach to a very different group, students who were quite wonderful and exciting to work with but who also had very different literacy skills and learning styles. In addition, their approaches to learning were unfamiliar and at times baffling to my teaching colleagues and me.

In 1998, more than 90% of the language minority students at the southeastern U.S. community college where I taught were F-1 visa students who had completed high school outside the United States and were in this country for post-secondary studies; within three years, as the college's language minority enrollment rapidly increased from 16 to 160 students, the number of foreign-educated students remained the same, while my classes were now 90% U.S.-educated language minority learners who were graduates of area high schools.

Although many of the newer students “sounded American” and were comparatively better acquainted with U.S. culture than their international classmates, their literacy and learning skills were markedly different and in many ways less well-developed and sophisticated. Simultaneously, their writing/reading practices and issues, while superficially resembling those of their English-only peers, revealed second language concerns related to factors including academic vocabulary and writing/reading fluency. It was clear to my colleagues and me that our customary teaching approaches, methods, and materials were not as successful as they needed to be, for these U.S.-educated language minorities were not progressing at the rate they hoped for and we thought possible.

Searching academic sources for useful pedagogical information was not productive, however, for I discovered that little research exists on the acquisition of academic writing and reading skills of these language minority learners, sometimes called “Generation 1.5” students (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988, p. 1), and even less that examines their experiences as they negotiate the transition from secondary school to college (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999). Additionally, much of the scant existing research has been done in settings where language minority students have constituted a significant presence for longer periods of time (Harklau, 2004). In contrast, the language minority learners in my classes were newcomers in school systems accustomed to teaching English-only students. Consequently, their teachers, while well-intentioned, were most often unfamiliar with language minority learner characteristics; moreover, relatively few teachers possessed even the minimalist state requirements for teacher preparation for English to Speakers of

Other Languages (ESOL) consisting of only three 3 semester hour courses: Intercultural Communication, Methods and Materials for ESOL, and Introduction to Second Language Acquisition.

Despite these language teaching and learning circumstances, increasing numbers of the area's language minority students earn high school diplomas and apply to college. Unfortunately, as they move along the K16 pipeline, some are encountering problems at the high school to college transition point (ACT, 2005; *Hispanic Americans by the Numbers*, 2007). Although they successfully complete high school—many with outstanding GPAs—in some instances higher education literacy demands prove to be, at the very least, challenging (R. Fry, 2004). Moreover, when they encounter the additional ESL Learning Support courses mandated by placement test scores, they experience increases in tuition costs and time in school, yet typically these classes award no credit toward graduation (Gandara & Maxwell-Jolly, 1999; *Tomorrow's jobs: Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-9 Edition*, 2007).

These circumstances raised questions about how we college instructors could better address their literacy learning needs and help them move through their ESL course requirements as efficiently and effectively as possible. As a college instructor, I had become familiar with their post-matriculation literacy activities and skills, but my knowledge about their previous educational experiences was incomplete. The point of beginning, I felt, was to gain a better understanding of what their high school literacy experiences and preparation had been and then to observe their progression from there to college. Thus, I constructed my dissertation research around addressing selected language

minority students' perceptions of their literacy experiences in high school to college, and the effects these experiences had on their transition from the former learning environment to the latter.

That said, the need to understand more about language minorities' literacy competencies is of importance to more than a community college ESL faculty concerned for their students' wellbeing. To be sure, improving their prospects for post-secondary learning is beneficial not only for them but also for U.S. society as a whole (*Tomorrow's jobs: Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-9 Edition, 2007*). As the baby boomer generation moves toward retirement, the major occupations needing replacement and new workers—service, professional and related, office, sales, and management (business and financial)—require more educated individuals than do the shrinking job categories—transportation, production, construction, farming, fishing, and forestry (*Tomorrow's jobs: Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-9 Edition, 2007*). For example, 12 of the 20 occupations predicted to show the most significant growth between 2006 and 2016 require at a minimum an associate's degree, with bachelor's and higher degrees needed for the majority of these jobs (*Tomorrow's jobs: Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-9 Edition, 2007*). At the same time, as more occupations in the United States require post-secondary education, numerous educators, educational policy makers, and business groups are expressing considerable concern about current U.S. high school graduates' readiness for college reading tasks (Achieve, 2005; ACT, 2005; Patterson, 2006).

While these occupational changes are taking place, U.S. population shifts reflect continuing decreases in numbers of white, U.S.-born workers and simultaneous increases



in numbers of immigrants and their children, both foreign and U.S. born, who will presumably be the sources of needed workers (Capps et al., 2005). This trend has even more implications for public education and higher learning when we consider that one in five children is a member of an immigrant family (*Hispanic Americans by the Numbers*, 2007).

Hispanics, the largest proportion of these new bilingual language minority students, are part of the fastest growing minority group in the US, now accounting for more than 15% of the population (*Hispanic Americans by the Numbers*, 2007); the U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by 2050, that percentage will grow to 24% (R. Fry, 2004). Yet, U.S. high school dropout rates among Hispanic students are significantly higher than those of white students, and Hispanic high school graduates' success getting into and graduating from college is less than that of Caucasian, African American, or Asian students (*Hispanic Americans by the Numbers*, 2007). For example, while 55.7% of U.S. native born residents have attended some college or earned a bachelor's or higher degree, the numbers of U.S. residents from Mexico who have education beyond high school is 15.3%; similarly, 25.9% of those from Central America residing in the United States pursued post-secondary education beyond an associate's degree (*Hispanics: A People in Motion*, 2005).

Twelve of the 20 U.S. occupations projected to increase most rapidly by 2016 require at least an associate's degree, and the remaining eight call for at least a high school diploma. At the same time, as the work force ages and non-Hispanic white workers decrease in share of overall percentages from 69.1% in 2006 to 64.6% in 2016,

minority representation is projected to increase from 29.5% to 34% by 2016 (*Tomorrow's jobs: Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-9 Edition*, 2007). Comparing present and future needs for an educated work force with the numbers of U.S. language minority students who continue beyond secondary education, it is clear that insufficient numbers of the larger sub-groups are doing so at rates that will result in the numbers of educated residents the U.S. economy and society will need.

The numbers of Asian Americans living in the United States have also dramatically increased over the past thirty years (*America becoming: The growing complexity of America's racial mosaic*, 2008). After 1970, the 1.5 million Asian Americans grew to almost 12 million by 2000, and they are expected to number 20 million by 2020. For many years most Asian Americans were U.S.-born descendents of Japanese and Chinese immigrants; however, around 1970 after the 1924 immigration laws were changed, individuals from many other Asian countries such as Vietnam, Korea, American Samoa, India, Thailand, the Philippines, and China moved to the United States. As a group, from 1990 to 2000 Asian Americans experienced the highest rate of growth of any subgroup in the United States, and as a group more Asian Americans have earned bachelors degrees (44%) than in the U.S. population as a whole (24.4%) (Reeves & Bennett, 2004).

Researchers have investigated language minority college enrollment and persistence rates, often focusing on non-pedagogical factors such as family and work responsibilities (*Hispanics: A People in Motion*, 2005). Other studies have examined all students' readiness for college literacy and learning (ACT, 2005). However, as critical as

reading is to college learning (Carson, Chase, Gibson, & Hargrove, 1992), relatively little research thus far has focused on language minority learners' literacy and study skills learning and acquisition of and their roles in the literacy transition of language minority students to the academic environment of college (Harklau, 2004). Research is especially lacking that looks cross-institutionally at high school to college across different types of post-secondary institutions. Studies that include learners' viewpoints about their understandings of and meanings of literacy activities in context are also rare.

This dissertation fills some of these gaps, focusing on how language minority students' high school literacy preparation corresponds with their success in college reading/writing tasks.

The research question guiding the inquiry was

- What is the experience of bilingual language minority students in their transition from high school to college reading tasks?

Sub-questions included

- How do these bilingual language minority students describe their high school and college reading tasks?
- What information and insights do their teachers and instructors offer on the academic tasks these students have in high school and in college?
- What similarities and differences do these students perceive in literacy demands of secondary and post-secondary education?
- How does the specific post-secondary institutional structure and context affect bilingual language minority students' transition experience?

The study used a social constructivist theoretical framework to consider the individual and the understandings he or she constructs as the person acts and is acted on within a particular social, cultural, and historical setting (Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978; Vygotskiæi & Kozulin, 1986; Wertsch, 1991). This framework is particularly useful for research with language minority students and their reflections on their academic literacy learning and practices (van Lier, 1996).

Vygotsky's sociohistorical theories of learning and development facilitate an inquiry into how secondary and tertiary school students, in this case, language minority learners, understand and develop academic reading. First, he places all learning and development activities within social, cultural, and historical situations unique to the participants and events (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Second, he articulates a theory of learning and development within academic settings that describes the roles of the learner, teachers, and "more capable peers" and language as a mediating tool (Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978, p. 86) in learning events (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978).

In this perspective, individual learning is stimulated by and occurs through social interaction, which is structured by social and cultural practices developed historically by members of the group. These customs are dynamic and are changed by the practitioners according to the group's needs at appropriate and necessary times. Neither entity—individual or the sociocultural group—is solely agent or recipient of an action or response; rather, they work in concert. Rogoff describes it in the following:

It is important to be clear about the relationship between the efforts and development of the individual and the arrangements and history of the sociocultural world....[for] individual effort and sociocultural activity are mutually embedded, as are the forest and the trees, and that it is essential to understand how they constitute each other. (1990, p. 25)

For these reasons, although I investigated how language minority students understood and accomplished reading assignments in high school and college by asking questions about individual learning activities, I assumed their efforts, actions, and learning were socially and culturally embedded in the learning situations in which they were working. A social constructivist theoretical perspective informed by sociocultural theory framed this examination of an individual as he or she learned and acquired academic reading literacy in an additional language within a unique and influencing social and cultural environment.

This study has significance for a number of reasons. First, it concentrates on a growing subset of U.S. students who, as adults, will be important members of the work force and society whose educational advancement lags behind other subgroups in the US. Second, it contributes to an understanding of how the focal group, bilingual language minority students, accomplish academic reading tasks across institutional boundaries. Results of the study call attention to significant aspects of these bilingual language minority students' secondary education that impact their progress with college literacy and learning. Third, the study brings to light settings and conditions that enhanced or hindered these students' academic progress as they began their studies in higher education.

Succeeding chapters are as follows:

- Chapter 2 reviews literature relevant to the study's theoretical perspective; a definition of the focal group, U.S.-educated bilingual language minority students; first language and second language reading research; aspects of comprehension that affect reading in a second language.
- Chapter 3 describes the study's methodology, research design, and study implementation.
- Chapter 4 presents participants' perceptions of discontinuities in high school and college literacy tasks.
- Chapter 5 presents how institutional differences in literacy expectations influenced participants' approaches to and success with college reading tasks.
- Chapter 6 comprises the study's implications and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Theoretical Perspective

Bilingual language minority learners constitute a growing sub-group of the k-12 student population (Blumenthal, 2002; Ferris, 1999). Although some areas of the United States have significant experience working with these students, other sections, such as semi-rural and suburban parts of the southeastern states, do not (Massey, 2008; Wortham, Enrique G. Murillo, & Hamann, 2002). In addition, frequently many of the school systems experiencing the most rapid growth are unfamiliar with bilingual language minority learners' needs and characteristics, and are unaccustomed to providing effective teaching for such students (Phelps & North Central Regional Educational Lab, 2005). Yet, even as numbers of bilingual language minority students enrolled in public schools continue to increase and more teachers add ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) endorsements to their state-mandated certifications, existing research on second language acquisition does not adequately inform educators about how to provide effective pedagogy for these learners (2005). One area of concern for which little research-based information exists is how these students understand and accomplish school literacy tasks reading assignments in secondary settings (Moje, 2002); even less is known about how those bilingual language minority students who graduate from high school and enroll in college navigate the transition from one academic setting to another, different one (Harklau, 2004; Moje, 2002).

In order to design appropriate pedagogy and effectively train teachers to address bilingual language minority students' learning requirements, a broader understanding of how these students perceive and accomplish literacy tasks across both high school and college is needed. However, research undertaken to address this concern must encompass both focal bilingual language minority students and the contexts within which they are learning, for individuals do not learn in isolation. Rather, human learning is inextricably embedded in social, historical, and cultural contexts and cannot be genuinely grasped without recognition of the interconnectedness of the elements that combine to form its nature.

For a study focusing on understanding and describing bilingual language minority learners as they engage in a process—accomplishing school reading assignments—in the socially and culturally situated environment where this process naturally occurs, a social constructivist perspective allows a naturalistic observation of learners in context, not separated from their social, cultural and physical surroundings. Within this framework, knowledge is regarded as dynamic and individually constructed, not fixed and universally perceived. Spivey (1997) describes a researcher who examines the relation between a focus on individual as “constructive agent” (p. 24) as he or she constructs meaning and knowledge with the specific social and cultural setting for this activity in the following:

Despite viewing the individual as constructive agent, this constructivist would be cognizant of social factors, viewing readers as social beings with a great deal of knowledge acquired socially, which includes not only knowledge of the topic but also knowledge of social matters, such as the conventions of discourse. He or she might be interested in the relationship between readers' membership, in particular



disciplinary or theoretical groups and the nature of meanings they construct. Also potentially interesting might be co-constructive activity, as, for instance, when readers' understandings of the text are influenced by what others have to say about it. (p. 24)

A primary assumption underlying choice of this perspective is that readers, in this instance, bilingual language minority students, learn to perform reading tasks through their engagement with other involved participants and according to social, cultural, and historical factors and forces present in and unique to each learning situation. The reasons for approaching the question from this orientation include the following assumptions.

- The meaning of, and purpose for, a specific literacy task is determined by the sociocultural circumstances within which the task occurs and it evolves according to the goals and interests of participants (Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978). Thus, the individual participant, in this instance an academic reader, constructs her or his reality according to personal understandings developed through interactive social processes among those in the classroom setting (Spivey, 1997).
- Readers are active, not passive, when they read, thus having agency when they engage with texts and learning from texts (Spivey, 1989).
- The manner in which readers perform reading tasks is determined by reader characteristics and the sociocultural situation in which the labor is performed; all reading efforts are not necessarily the same but are distinct depending on the situations in which they occur and the individuals engaging in the literacy activity (Spivey, 1997, 1989; Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978).

Therefore, a social constructivist framework is appropriate for studies that focus on the understandings selected members of a bilingual language minority student subset assemble from the assignments, activities, assessments, and messages, both implicit and explicit, they receive from their teachers and peers.

In shaping a theoretical framework for research on this topic, I also drew on the sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky (Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978). For purposes of this discussion I explore aspects of sociocultural theory as articulated and developed by Vygotsky (1978), Wertsch (1991) and others including Rogoff (1990), Johnson (2004), Kozulin (1998), and van Lier (1996), concentrating on three key notions from Vygotsky on learning. By enlisting major concepts from this scholar, I was able to bring into sharper focus bilingual language minority students' experiences of academic reading in English in high school and college. They include the socially initiated embedded nature of learning; language as the means, or tool, for learning; and the idea of a Zone of Proximal Development for learning (Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978).

This discussion begins by defining social constructivism as a theoretical perspective within a constructionist epistemology and then situates social constructivism in relation to social constructionism. It continues by explicating the relevance of sociocultural theory to a discussion on bilingual language minority learners' reading in high school and college.

### *Social Constructivism*

Defining social constructivism is problematic because of differences among theorists and educators in their interpretations of the term's meaning (Crotty, 1998; Hruby, 2001, 2002; M. Johnson, 2004; Patton, 2002; Shunk, 1996). Additionally,

scholars (Crotty, 1998; Hruby, 2001, 2002; M. Johnson, 2004; Patton, 2002; Shunk, 1996) writing on theoretical foundations of research assert that at times there has been a lack of clarity by some who claim to be working within the paradigm. However, it is not within the scope of this dissertation to attempt to resolve these differences. This discussion examines a rationale for employing social constructivism as a framework in research investigating development of learners' understandings as they engage in academic literacy activities in settings using dissimilar social and discourse practices. To address the question I examine the roots of social constructivism as grounded in a constructionist epistemological orientation, its interpretation and continued development by proponents, and its use in social science research, particularly in the field of education and second language acquisition.

It is generally accepted that social constructivism as a theoretical framework is situated in a constructionist theory of knowledge (Crotty, 1998) within the sub-category of constructivism. Although neither Crotty (1998) nor Patton (2002) use the term "social constructivism," they address their individual conceptualizations of the differences between social constructionism and constructivism (1998).

According to Crotty, the interpretive paradigm of constructionism differs from an objective stance in the following manner:

There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. (1998, p. 8)

Thus, for Crotty constructionism is a human-centered epistemology in which individuals as social, communicative creatures create meaning between and among themselves. It assumes that the knowledge humans construct comes from their experiences, not from their unearthing of universal truths or uncovering the nature of an objective reality.

He also delineates his understanding of the primary difference between constructionism and constructivism.

It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term *constructivism*, for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on the ‘meaning-making activity of the individual mind’ and to use *constructionism* where the focus includes ‘the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning’. (1998, p. 58, emphasis in the original)

His distinction is important to this research study in that the purpose of the study was to focus primarily on individual case studies and their meaning-making in social context rather than on the communal creation of meaning among interested parties.

Although Crotty admits to the complexity of these constructs due to the occasionally indistinct boundaries between them, with this definition he makes explicit his notion of their marked differences, with constructivism concerning itself with “the unique experience of each of us” (1998, p. 58) and constructionism emphasizing “the hold our culture has on us” (1998, p. 58). In an obliquely critical comment, Crotty observes that constructivism “suggests that each one’s way of making sense in the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other, thereby tending to scotch any hint of a critical spirit” (1998, p. 58).

Patton (2002), in his discussion of social construction and constructivism, enlists Crotty's explanations and includes extensive quotations in an examination of theoretical orientations in qualitative inquiry. However, he does not support Crotty's view that a constructivist epistemological stance is incompatible with critical objectives, for he includes an example of how investigators with a social justice perspective might enlist constructivism to support such an objective (2002). Patton devotes his attention to a description of constructivism that includes Guba and Lincoln's depiction of the constructivist framework "as being ontologically relativist, epistemologically subjectivist, and methodologically hermeneutic and dialectic" (2002, p. 98). Thus Patton's discussion extends the range of description from Crotty's comparatively restricted definition to Guba and Lincoln's more unrestrained one. In summary, he states that the perspective's focus is on "the socially constructed nature of reality as distinguishing the study of human beings from the study of other natural phenomena" (2002, pp. 98-99).

Similarly, Shunk (1996) begins his discussion by stating that a constructivist perspective underscores the involvement of the individual—always within a context—in the process of learning and making meaning. He describes this view as a shift from previous notions of thinking as restricted to the mind apart from social interactions, as the same for all humans, and as coming from abilities developed through schooling or other formal situations (1996). Shunk notes that constructivism is "not a unified perspective" (p. 209) and examines some of the interpretations that fall under the constructivist umbrella. For Shunk, what these perspectives hold in common is that they "emphasize the importance of the individual's social interactions in the acquisition of skills and knowledge" (1996, p. 208).

*Social Constructivism and Cognitive Constructivism*

Although this discussion focuses on the form of constructivism termed *social constructivism*, a distinction needs to be made between it and the form referred to as *cognitive constructivism*. The cognitive interpretation is frequently associated with the theories of Piaget (Hruby, 2001, 2002; M. Johnson, 2004; Kozulin, 1998; Panofsky, John-Steiner, & Blackwell, 1990; Rogoff, 1990; Shunk, 1996; van Lier, 2000), while the sociocultural is associated with Vygotsky (Hruby, 2001, 2002; M. Johnson, 2004; Kozulin, 1998; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Panofsky et al., 1990; Rogoff, 1990; Shunk, 1996; van Lier, 2000; Wertsch, 1991). Although Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories are both complex and writers have compared and contrasted many of their individual assertions, the discussion here focuses on where they separately locate the initiating impetus for human learning. According to Rogoff, "For Piaget, development moves from the individual to the social, and for Vygotsky, development moves from the social to the individual" (1990, p. 144).

Vygotsky (1986) explains their differences in terms of social and egocentric speech:

The development of thought is, to Piaget, a story of the gradual socialization of deeply intimate, personal, autistic mental states. Even social speech is represented as following, not preceding, egocentric speech. The hypothesis we propose reverses this course....We consider that the total development runs as follows: The primary function of speech, in both children and adults, is communication, social contact. The earliest speech of the child is therefore essentially social. (pp. 34-35)

In other words, for Vygotsky human speech, thought, and development are a result of social contact, not the opposite.<sup>1</sup>

To continue toward a definition of social constructivism, in a comprehensive discussion of the concept as used in literacy education, Hruby states that, broadly speaking, “learning is both social and constructed” (2002, p. 584). In this article, he explores a range of interpretations of social constructivism while raising questions pertinent to the concept’s application in educational research. He dates serious interest in this perspective for learning research as coming after cognitive constructivism, a framework that, although an improvement on transmission models, is limited by its concentration on the individual learner devoid of contextual considerations (2002).

According to Hruby, social constructivism emphasizes

...that human beings are inherently social and that therefore learning is a social process of developing understandings such that they reflect the knowledge and forms of knowing that are held or privileged within one’s community. (2002, p. 587)

In his discussion, he refers to the range of positions taken on the question of balance between a focus that stresses the social and cultural aspect of learning and development, and one that leans more toward the role of the individual. However, he acknowledges a “middle ground” (2002, p. 584) that views personal agency and social interactivity as both having roles in constructing meaning and knowledge. Hruby also observes that

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<sup>1</sup> Although I have focused on commonly perceived dissimilarities in Vygotsky’s and Piaget’s conceptualization of the relation between the individual and social/cultural/historical contexts, others—most notably Cole and Wertsch (2006)—state that these disagreements cannot be reduced to an individual vs. social choice. Rather, they assert that the fundamental differences are “their views concerning the importance of culture, in particular, the role of mediation of action through artifacts, on the development of mind” (p. 1).

social constructivism's position on the importance of language is especially relevant to research on second language acquisition and language minority learners: "Social constructivists note that private thought is always articulated in a particular language drawn from a community" (2002, p. 586).

In further discussion, Hruby identifies problematic issues that detract from its effectiveness as a theoretical framework for research and for developing pedagogy (2002). These include (a) defining the concept so simply and broadly that it loses its usefulness as a distinct and understandable viewpoint, and (b) borrowing interpretations from psychology, sociology, and/or philosophy without sufficient consideration of the unique lines of thought and developed meanings that have evolved within each discipline (2002).

#### *Social constructivism and social constructionism*

Hruby (2002) also refers to a related issue he has explored in more detail in other writings (see Hruby, 2001): the question of whether a social constructivism or social constructionism perspective is more appropriate for literacy studies. However, to address this issue, he suggests that interested parties should come to an understanding of what is meant by *social constructionism*, for while the field of literacy education research has a relatively well agreed upon understanding of constructivism, both cognitive and social forms, the same is not true for social constructionism.

In his argument in support of social constructionism in literacy research, he critiques the notion of knowledge construction in its present form for an implied yet not articulated "constructor" (Hruby, 2001, p. 48). He states that much of what we know has been acquired without our being aware of it, the things we have learned through



“nonconscious processes” (p. 48), which leads to the following question: *Who* constructed this kind of knowledge?

With this question he critiques social constructivism’s failure to adequately account for an individual, an agent, of construction. Hruby’s concern is with the metaphor of the “willful constructor” (2001, p. 48) of knowledge, and of knowledge constructed absent deliberate intention, or the learning that occurs as a result of daily living that is not an outcome of purposeful effort (2001).

But most learning or comprehension would seem to be consciously effortless or automatic, and the understanding that emerges as a result of presumed nonconscious processes thus seems to be received rather than constructed. Who then is the willful constructor? (2001, p. 48)

He continues by asserting that, in these cases, the lack of a designated conscious constructor renders the social constructivist contention that knowledge takes place in the minds of individuals a “piecemeal version of a transmission model of learning” (2001, p. 48). As a framework for literacy research, Hruby (2001) proposes a social construction model in which examinations of the formation of knowledge focus on social forces and activities outside the individual and among concerned participants of a particular community of practice. However, he allows that “we may well wonder how we can conceive of reading comprehension as external to the student in a fashion that could prove useful in promoting students’ literacy development” (p. 58).

Although I see value in literacy research investigating factors external to the individual, I too cannot envision reading comprehension as existing outside the reader in such a manner that contributes to her or his progress with reading and writing. In

addition, I ask the following: Is it likely that bilingual language minority learners, while they are acquiring the linguistic code and social practices of academia, can be full participants, or “agents in congress” (Hruby, 2001, p. 51), in the deliberate construction of “shared understandings and narratives” (p. 51)? In other words, how likely is it that learners, whose first language is not the socially and culturally dominant code, can function—or be accepted as—actors working together with other actors to construct commonly held knowledge?

In response to Hruby’s contentions, I propose that literacy research with bilingual language minority learners is concerned in large part with learning or knowledge deliberately constructed by focal students. Additionally, although it is also assumed that these individuals will acquire at least some knowledge without conscious effort, Hruby puts forth no model for inquiry in which acquisition of literacy is situated outside the developing individuals and within the learning community. Thus, instead of a social constructionist paradigm in which knowledge construction occurs and is examined outside the minds of the constructors, I suggest a social constructivist paradigm articulated through a sociocultural theory of human development within which the learner, situated in a social and cultural context and responding to others in that setting, actively constructs meaning. Knowing more about the social, cultural, and historical forces acting on bilingual language minority students and affecting their literacy development is important in understanding positive and negative conditions for advancing reading comprehension; however, the reader, in this instance, a bilingual language minority learner, and her or his acts must be foregrounded in research that seeks to understand how he or she constructs her or his learning.

### *Sociocultural Theory*

Drawing on theories of Vygotsky, Wertsch (1991) states that “The basic goal of a sociocultural approach to mind is to create an account of human mental processes that recognizes the essential relationship between these processes and their cultural, historical, and institutional settings” (p. 6). By connecting human mental processes with the contextual aspects in which they take place, he views human development as “sociocultural specific” (p. 7), not “ahistorical and universal” (p. 7). In addition, he identifies human *action*, not the results of actions, as the unit of analysis for study. Wertsch further specifies action as *mediated* in that “human action typically employs ‘mediational means’ such as tools and language, and that these mediational means shape the action in essential ways” (1991, p. 12). As tools and language are constructed by people, their existence and use are unique to and determined by a particular social group; thus, actions are embedded within the social/cultural/historical situation that produced them.

For studies concerned with bilingual language minority learners, a sociocultural approach provides a natural acknowledgement of the uniqueness of each learning experience, thereby allowing the particularities of the learners and the context to become apparent as the focus of investigation. A second reason for applying sociocultural theory to bilingual language minority learners is that this approach “offers the field of second language acquisition a unique opportunity to ‘heal’ the schism that currently separates the learner’s social environment from his or her mental functioning” (M. Johnson, 2004). Instead of continuing to view learners as having “*general* language ability” (2004, p. 172, emphasis in the original), applying sociocultural theory to second language acquisition

research shifts the perspective to an examination of how effectively individuals communicate within particular situations (2004).

...language use does not take place in a vacuum or in an imaginary social context but in a real and discernible social context. Social contexts create language, and language creates social contexts: one constitutes the other. These contexts are *not* universal. They are highly localized, and therefore language ability is also locally bound: it reflects all the characteristics of a well-defined sociocultural and institutional context. (M. Johnson, 2004, p. 172)

Rogoff (1990) describes the holistic nature of the perspective and her interpretation as:

Rather than viewing individuals, their social partners, and the sociocultural context as independent “influences” or factors of development, I argue that they represent differing angles of analysis of an integrated process. (p. 26)

She continues with a caution that while it may be expedient to view the process from one point rather than as a whole, an undesirable and artificial division of a complex whole can occur (1990). At all times the “integrated nature of the developmental process” (p. 26) must be kept in mind.

Rogoff (1990) proposes framing research efforts that concentrate on focal individuals *as they engage in problem-solving in their customary contexts*. Thus, although the angle of approach is not primarily directed toward social and cultural settings, observations of study participants and their actions will include the environments in which they typically occur (1990). Similarly, my proposal to investigate how language minority students understand and accomplish school reading tasks, while it

concentrates on participants engaged in literacy activities, situates the inquiry within the social and cultural environments in which they are engaged.

### *Vygotskian Concepts*

*Mediated learning.* A fundamental principle of Vygotsky (1978) is that human development does not appear and develop solely within the individual, nor is knowledge taken in by a passive individual from external sources. Rather, it is initiated by and mediated through interpersonal means between an individual and others around her or him, and/or with or through historically and culturally produced artifacts. The knowledge, or meaning constructed, is then incorporated intrapersonally by the person into her or his individually available knowledge as learning (Kozulin, 1998; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). This movement of learning from the interpersonal plane to the intrapersonal Vygotsky (1978) labeled *internalization*. “We call the internal reconstruction of an external operation *internalization*” (1978, p. 56, emphasis in the original). Vygotsky also asserted that this process of internalization “of socially rooted and historically developed activities is the distinguishing feature of human psychology...” (1978, p. 57).

The concept of mediation provides a framework uniquely suited to studying bilingual language minority learners because it provides a natural perspective for observing them in the context of the authentic classroom setting *as they engage with the artifacts and other participants present in the learning situation*. Thus, the research focus shifts away from solitary learners to one of students engaged in interactions with others and using tools typically available to them.

A topic related to the preceding discussion is the question of how, within Vygotsky's theoretical construct and for purposes of clarity in research, to delimit the mind's boundaries. Wertsch (1991) illustrates the issue with his use of Bateson's description of a blind man walking with the aid of a cane. Bateson asks the question of where his psychological self begins: Is the boundary of his mind his skin, or the handle of his cane, or the cane's tip? He then states that these are silly questions, for the real place to set such limits is at a point that leaves out nothing essential to understanding the phenomenon being examined. Wertsch (1991) uses this example to emphasize the notion of "the individual or individuals *acting in conjunction with mediational means*" (p. 33, emphasis in the original), that the construct, while focusing on a person or persons engaged in processes, at all times includes *mediation* and the *means of mediation*.

*Tools as mediational means.* An additional precept of Vygotskian thought (1978) pertinent to research with bilingual language minority learners is that human activity is mediated by the use of tools, both material and psychological. Tools are historically and socially constructed, thereby inexorably intertwining humans and culture and distributing learning across a culture's history and its everyday existence (M. Johnson, 2004; Kozulin, 1998; Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Humans develop and use material tools to control and alter their surroundings, i.e., a hammer and nails to join pieces of wood (Kozulin, 1998; Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). In contrast, psychological tools, while similar to material tools in that they facilitate human activity, serve to "master the natural behavioral and cognitive processes of the individual" (Kozulin, 1998, p. 14). Accordingly, individuals use material tools to work on external things, while efforts with psychological tools are directed toward the inner person,

thereby changing personal psychological processes into higher mental functions (Kozulin, 1998; Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978; Wertsch, 1991).

Vygotsky (Kozulin, 1998; 1978; Wertsch, 1991) identified language, socially and historically constructed, as the primary mediational psychological tool for development of higher mental functions.

The logical consequence of the recognition of the primary importance of the use of signs in the history of the development of higher psychological functions, (sic) is the inclusion of external symbolic forms of activity (speech, reading, writing, counting, and drawing) into the system of psychological categories. (Vygotsky & Luria, 1994, pp. 136-137)

Thus, Vygotsky accords reading, writing, and other forms of graphic representation central roles in human development. It follows, then, that in an inquiry concerned with bilingual language minority learning in an academic setting, observation of learners' use of tools will be an important element. In particular, the assortment of available tools, the focal students' selections (or lack of selection) among the possibilities, the nature of their tool use, and their perceptions about the effectiveness of various tools will be of interest to the study's goals.

*Zone of proximal development.* Vygotsky's third construct relevant to studies with bilingual language minority learners is his *zone of proximal development (ZPD)*, through which Vygotsky explained his theory of how learners, both children and adults, learn through assistance from a more knowledgeable adult or peers more skilled than he or she. In such an arrangement, the learner is assisted by another or others to accomplish tasks and functions beyond what he or she can complete alone but can achieve as a result of the

participation of the more skilled other or others (Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978). Bruner (1976) extends this concept especially for the field of education and refer to the activity as *scaffolding*<sup>2</sup>, or the providing of assistance sufficient only until a learner can perform a task alone.

Vygotsky (1978) is careful to specify the importance of an assisting adult's (e.g., a teacher) knowing and understanding the parameters of what a learner can do alone and what he or she can accomplish with help, for he asserts that encouraging or expecting a learner to work outside her or his ZPD will not result in learning. As support for his assertion, he first states that

... recently psychologists have shown that a person can imitate only that which is within her developmental level. For example, if a child is having difficulty with a problem in arithmetic and the teacher solves it on the blackboard, the child may grasp the solution in an instant (1978, p. 88).

In like manner, if a teacher presents a student with a task at a level he or she has previously mastered, that student is merely repeating a known action and not developing new capacities. Such a task “does not aim for a new stage of the developmental process but rather lags behind this process” (1978, p. 89).

The notion of learners having and working within a ZPD is relevant to research with bilingual language minority learners in academic settings, for these situations include the learner, her or his peers, and an instructor, thus creating opportunities for individuals to work with more capable others in solving learning or linguistic challenges. It is especially pertinent for determining whether a purported learning event or

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<sup>2</sup> Vygotsky's ZPD model is sometimes incorrectly referred to as *scaffolding*; however, he did not use that term to describe his conceptualization of the assistance provided learners by more capable others.



opportunity is designed to advance the study's focal students' learning or simply transmit information students are to absorb for later assessment (Scheurman, 1998; Straits & Wilke, 2007). In addition to looking at the assistance participants receive from their instructors, another line of inquiry is observing whether and under what circumstances focal students receive assistance from peers, both in and outside the classroom. Related to this question is another that inquires about the characteristics of those peers focal participant learners turn to for tutoring and how—or whether—these individuals assist focal learners to work within their ZPD.

In summary, in this dissertation social constructivism is grounded in a constructionist epistemological orientation (Crotty, 1998; Hruby, 2001, 2002; M. Johnson, 2004; Patton, 2002; Shunk, 1996). As such, it is human-centered: meaning is constructed locally by and among individuals within a socially and culturally interconnected group. Although researchers and theorists differ about where a social constructivist perspective places learning and development along an individual-to-social-group continuum, for purposes of this investigation the following interpretation applies.

- Knowledge is *individually* constructed and *dynamic*, not universally perceived and fixed
- Individual learning occurs within the person and is prompted by social interactions; these interactions are constructed within and determined by social and cultural practices developed by members of the group.
- These sociocultural practices are not static but change according to group needs at a particular time.

- Neither individual nor the associated group acts as sole agent or recipient of an action or response; on the contrary, they work in concert and act on each other.

In addition, for research with bilingual language minority learners as they carry out reading assignments, social constructivism is a more suitable theoretical framework than that of social constructionism because the activity of reading—and thus the construction of meaning—takes place intrapersonally. And, given that social constructionism as defined by Hruby (2001) focuses attention on meaning construction as accomplished by a social group, the actions, internalizations, and subsequent expressions of learning by individuals are rendered unobservable. Thus, interrogating individual bilingual language minority learners remains a route to developing an understanding of how these students perceive their school reading assignments.

Key constructs of Vygotskian sociocultural theory provided useful frameworks for viewing bilingual language minority learners as they engage in reading activities. In this dissertation, these included the concepts of individuals-acting-with-mediational-means; language, or speech, as a necessary part of development; and learners' zones of proximal development.

This choice of perspective was especially pertinent as the two school settings, despite a shared focus of formal schooling and academic literacy, differed significantly. Study participants moved from one learning context to another, bringing with them the ideas, understandings, and skills they acquired in the first setting into the second. Thus, a perspective that incorporated both learners and sociocultural setting was fundamental to the inquiry.

### Generation 1.5 and Language Minority Students

The study's participants are bilingual linguistic minority adult students, speaking at least one language other than English. The term "linguistic minority" is taken from the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (*Fact Sheet No. 18 (Rev. 1), Minority Rights*, 1998) which grants all linguistic minority individuals the right, among others,

to participate in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life (art. 2.2);

[and]to participate in decisions which affect them on the national and regional levels (art. 2.3);

and to protect linguistic minorities by enacting procedures that will

allow their participation in economic progress and development (art. 4.5); [and]

consider legitimate interests of minorities in developing national policies and programmes, as well as in planning and implementing programmes of cooperation and assistance (art. 5)... (1998)

For the purpose of this study, the bilingual language minority study participants are further described as U.S.-educated adults sharing these characteristics: home language other than English; immigrant or U.S. native by birth; some or all k-12 education completed in U.S. schools; and placement in ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) classes at some point while in middle or high school. Study participants are also referred to by many educators and policy makers as Generation 1.5. Although the title of this work refers to Generation 1.5 readers, this dissertation will not use the term to describe or designate them. This decision recognizes that, over time, the term has become increasingly contested regarding its appropriateness for describing a broad range of

students who cannot truly be conflated into a single category. However, a brief interrogation of the origin and disputed nature of the label can contribute to an understanding of the unique and diverse learning backgrounds and characteristics of bilingual language minority students, and of the complexity of their situation in education. Rumbaut and Ima (1988), in their report for the United States Office of Refugee Resettlement on the adaptation of Southeast Asian youths in California, first coined the phrase to capture the in-between quality of their social, cultural, and linguistic positions in the US.

These respondents are what we will call the “1.5” generation; that is, they are neither part of the “first” generation of their parents, the responsible adults who were formed in the homeland, who made the fateful decision to leave it and to flee as refugees to an uncertain exile in the United States, and who are thus defined by the consequences of that decision and by the need to justify it; nor are these youths part of the “second generation” who are born in the United States and for whom the homeland mainly exists as a representation consisting of parental memories and memorabilia, even though their ethnicity may remain well defined. Rather, the refugee youths in our study constitute a distinctive cohort; they are those young people who were born in their countries of origin but formed in the United States (that is, they are completing their education in the United States during the key formative years of adolescence and early adulthood); ...they are marginal to both worlds and in a position which they occupy as “1.5ers”—in the interstices, as it were, of two societies and cultures, between first and second

generations, between being “refugees” and being “ethnics” (or hyphenated Americans). (pp. 1-2)

In the past 20 years, Generation 1.5 has been applied to non-refugee immigrant and U.S.-born individuals for whom English is a second or additional language.

However, the term’s use is problematic, in part, in that it can become “reified” (Harklau in Matsuda, Canagarajah, Harklau, Hyland, & Warschauer, 2003, pp. 156-157) to designate individuals who are no longer English learners. Indeed, the term has become contested; many educators maintain that it essentializes a group of students with a one-size-fits-all list of characteristics that ignore important differences among them, constructs them as unlike other students, and contributes to a notion of deficiency, or a discourse of “need” (Schwartz, 2004). Moreover, a single term lacks the potential to convey the profound diversity of individuals who share some or all of the descriptive characteristics (Harklau, 2007).

To further appreciate the possible diversity represented in the focal group it is important to consider that they may vary widely in their prior education and literacy development in both first and second languages. If they migrated to the United States from another country, they may or may not have experienced interruptions in their formal schooling or have had limited formal schooling (LFS) either in their home country or in the United States (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2002). Still others may have lived in the United States all their lives, attended U.S. public schools, and speak unaccented English, yet have limited proficiency in English (LEP) (2002). These learners are described as long-term English learners because they have attended school continuously since first grade but have not developed grade-level literacy skills in their first or second

language (2002). These factors demonstrate some of the variety in learner characteristics that can be represented in one class of bilingual language minority students (J. M. Reid, 1997).

Although U.S.-educated bilingual language minority students possess many outward features such as mainstream cultural knowledge and unaccented English speech that align them with their traditional English-only classmates, there are additional issues affecting their acquisition and use of literacy. A central element is the fact that these students have acquired English language for the most part as ‘ear learners’ as opposed to the text and grammar-based methods of traditional, internationally educated ESL/EFL students (1997). While they share this learning characteristic with native English-only classmates, their experience is markedly different: they have not ‘heard’ English spoken all their lives, nor is it the language they hear at home. Thus, an inquiry into the academic practices and strategies of bilingual language minority students, some of whom are still learning English, cannot assume that the processes they use are the same as those employed by English-only students and must consider the influence of their first language and culture on both memory and meaning (Bernhardt, 2003). Yet, as a significant portion of existing literacy research on students attending high school or college in the United States has relied on a typical profile of the traditional, English-only American student (2003).

In truth, the bilingual language minority participants of this dissertation share with many others now enrolling in U.S. colleges and universities an extraordinary diversity in learning characteristics, academic skills, cultural backgrounds, and pathways to residence in the United States (Blumenthal, 2002; Miele, 2003; Peterman, 2002; Schwartz, 2004).

This circumstance, while perhaps familiar to higher education institutions with more extensive experience educating bilingual language minority students, is new to many others; indeed, many community colleges where they frequently matriculate are only just beginning to comprehend how distinct these students can be when compared with more traditional entering undergraduates (Schwartz, 2004). Accordingly, as bilingual language minority students become more numerous in post-secondary classrooms, the need for research that contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of their literacy practices, in particular their approaches to and strategies for accomplishing reading tasks formed in prior schooling, becomes more important (Harklau, 2007; Schwartz, 2004). For that reason, naturalistic studies of individual students' school literacy learning designed to address this gap must begin with theories and research pertinent to secondary and tertiary school reading.

Theories and foundational research on bilingual language minority adult students have been developed in first language and second language scholarship (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Therefore, I will review studies and findings from both fields pertinent to reading comprehension in high school and post-secondary education, focusing on factors essential to comprehension.

#### Adolescent and Adult L1 Reading Research

First language (L1) research investigating topics from emergent literacy to academic reading in higher education have often informed second language (L2) reading studies (Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 2001b). This review of literature looks at aspects of L1 reading research that L2 research efforts have used in developing L2 reading and literacy theory, along with L1 studies informing aspects of L2 literacy issues. The concentration,

therefore, is primarily on studies from the areas of secondary school reading for academic purposes, a subfield recognized in the United States since the 1940s (Alvermann & Moore, 1991), and also college reading and study skills, an additional subfield with an established body of literature dating back more than 100 years (N. A. Stahl & King, 2000). Although this dissertation presents a qualitative investigation, both quantitative and qualitative studies will be included in this review, for qualitative, quantitative, and multiple methodology research has contributed to reading theory and pedagogy. That said, this discussion examines studies on L1 and L2 reading, with a concentration on investigations examining high school and college reading issues.

Over the past two decades, scholarly conceptualizations of adolescent reading have shifted from a comparatively decontextualized, cognitively-oriented perspective giving moderate attention to social and cultural factors to one that includes these issues in educational research (Bean, 2000). From the early 1900s to the mid-1990s, reading and learning from informational text in schools was typically referred to as *content area reading*, a phrase that changed to *content area literacy* to reflect the interconnectedness of reading and writing (2000). More recently, when the focus is on high school reading, the term more frequently used has become *adolescent literacy*, a reconceptualization that reflects a recognition of two factors: (a) the significant and meaningful engagement adolescent students may have with out of school literacies, not only school-related reading and writing activities, and (b) the sociocultural aspects of the environments within which adolescent literacies are enacted (Alvermann & Eakle, 2003).

The shift seen in the evolution in terms also reflects changes in how reading, or text, comprehension, is understood. As late as 1998, content area literacy was defined as



“The level of reading and writing skill necessary to read, comprehend, and react to appropriate instructional materials in a given subject area” (Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1998, p. 4). However, in the decade preceding 2000, this description was modified as content area literacy research transitioned from mostly experimental and quasi-experimental studies evaluating teaching and learning effectiveness to a greater number of qualitative studies that included social and cultural aspects of school learning (Bean, 2000). A primary factor influencing this shift has been the increasing use of social constructivist theory in literacy research that “places the experiences and views of participants in a social context at the forefront” (p. 631). This sociocultural turn is evident in the broadening of reading comprehension literacy research to include social, cultural, and historical aspects, along with group and individual affective factors (2000).

Evidence of the effect a sociocultural perspective has had on literacy research is seen in the RAND Reading Study Group (RRSG) report’s (2002) description of reading comprehension when it connects “the process of simultaneously *extracting* and *constructing* meaning” (p. 1) with three necessary considerations—reader, text, and activity—surrounded by a sociocultural context that dynamically affects and is affected by these factors. This change broadens the factors researchers consider when investigating literacy. Alvermann and Eakles (2003) further expand this definition in the following: “Constructing meaning requires readers to set purposes for what they read and to actively monitor whether or not those purposes are being met. This implies a strategic effort on the reader’s part...” (p. 14). Put another way, reasons *for* reading affect *how* a reader creates her or his meaning of the text. This broadening of the range of factors

deemed relevant to understanding reading comprehension support research designed to examine the subject from a social constructivist/sociocultural perspective.

The reconceptualization of reading issues includes asking how students and teachers view classroom texts: as fonts of all knowledge or “*tools* for learning and constructing new knowledge” (2003, p. 24). This perspective on adolescent school reading introduces a useful contrast between a transmission model of teaching and learning and a participatory one: in the former the teacher and text are central, with students more or less passive receivers of wisdom and information, while in the latter, teachers gradually and deliberately pass control of classroom learning (and teaching) to students (Wade & Moje, 2000). The latter approach, in which students are more active participants in the learning event with greater choices about what and how they read, increases student interest and understanding (Alvermann & Eakle, 2003). Alvermann and Eakles (2003) also comment on additional factors. For example, they note that teaching students to read strategically is not enough if the goal is for them to assess what they read critically, especially in light of the increasing availability and use of digitally presented text. In addition, they observe that reading comprehension includes affective factors such as motivation for reading in and out of school; for example, unmotivated readers are less likely to exert themselves to comprehend challenging text (2003). Furthermore, they point out that reading comprehension is improved when students are provided with vocabulary instruction; when readers are taught methods for addressing unknown lexical items they may encounter, their ability to comprehend texts is enhanced (2003).

The enlistment of social constructivism and sociocultural theory has provided other opportunities for understanding adolescent literacy issues. A review of adolescent

literacy research from 1994 to 2004 demonstrates an increase in research projects examining the development of adolescents' literate identities and abilities (Phelps & North Central Regional Educational Lab, 2005). This includes explorations of student identity development through new digital literacies including zines and other online activities (e.g., Finders, 1996a, 1996b). For example, based on a study of teen identity construction through classroom literacy activities, Finders (1996b) found that the classroom is not by definition a safe place for all students to express themselves, nor is it an environment in which their literacy preferences will automatically be recognized and respected. This notion is especially relevant for bilingual language minority students in that they are not typically members of the dominant social group. Similarly, Guzzetti and Williams (1996) found that some classrooms, in this instance physics, were especially insecure environments for girls to express themselves and to participate fully in classroom activities and dialogue.

L1 research on the connection between students' sense of self-efficacy and reading is also particularly relevant to bilingual language minority students' learning. For example, Alvermann's (2003) discussion of self-efficacy related to engagement with school literacy highlights the effect a student's perception of her or his capability as a reader has on the willingness he or she has to take part in school literacy activities.

A note of possibility and optimism can be seen in Athanases's (1998) ethnography of classrooms with linguistically and culturally diverse students; his study demonstrated the benefits of introducing fiction and non-fiction texts representing ethnicities and languages of class members and of using these texts to "help these students rethink stereotypes about culture and diversity" (Phelps & North Central

Regional Educational Lab, 2005, p. 9). The classroom atmosphere described in this study stands in contrast to learning contexts focusing primarily on the literature and culture of the dominant group and is of importance for understanding the value of school spaces that enhance all students' learning.

Adolescents' multiple and out of school literacies have also been investigated, with implications for using non-traditional texts to engage struggling and self-described non-readers with school literacy practices (e.g., Alvermann et al., 2007; Alvermann, Hagood, & Williams, 2001; Lloyd, 2003). Pajares (1996) points out that low self-efficacy has a greater influence on a student's willingness to engage in a task or with a discipline than her or his actual capacities and skills in that area. He adds that teachers could gain helpful insights about particular students if they took students' self-efficacy into consideration and used that information to assist these learners.

L1 studies of academic vocabulary issues also have particular relevance for U.S.-educated bilingual language minority students (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). In the context of reading comprehension assessment Stahl and Hiebert (2006) identify numerous word level factors impacting readers' ready understanding of texts. They include such features as knowledge of word meanings, word recognition accuracy, reading rate, fluency, and background knowledge of the text topic, all factors of particular significance for L2 readers' comprehension.

Although L1 literature on vocabulary development spans all age groups, research that can be applied to adult learners in academic settings is especially pertinent to this study. Carver (2000) found a strong correlation between reading comprehension and word recognition, contending that this connection holds for high school students as well

as young readers. He also comments on the significance of word meaning knowledge for reading comprehension, indicating that correlations between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are dependably high. Carver adds that words familiar to a reader are more rapidly and accurately recognized, thereby increasing the rate at which he or she reads.

Qian (2002) investigates the topic of depth and breadth in vocabulary knowledge for ESL students in university settings. He concludes that “depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge are closely and positively related not only with each other but also with the performance on reading tasks for basic comprehension” (p. 532). Thus, assisting bilingual language minority students to develop the depth and breadth of their academic vocabulary is important for increasing their capacity to comprehend printed course content. However, Francis and Simpson (2003) found that college freshmen, no matter whether they are proficient or less proficient readers, tend to regard sufficient vocabulary acquisition as simply memorizing dictionary-type definitions and that their notion of really knowing a word was typically surface-level knowledge. Based on their findings, they stated that traditional vocabulary instruction was not as successful as instructors assumed it to be and that students’ beliefs about vocabulary knowledge needed to be confronted.

In all, then, scholarship on L1 vocabulary for academic purposes in adolescents and adults suggests that lexical knowledge is a critical factor in students’ reading comprehension. However, as “ear learners” of English, it cannot be assumed that bilingual language minority students will have developed vocabularies as extensive as their mono-lingual classmates, who have been immersed in their primary language all

their lives. Consequently, language minority students may not read with the same fluency and understanding as their non-bilingual peers do.

#### Adolescent and Adult L2 Literacy Research

According to Bernhardt (2003), reading in a second or additional language is not the same as reading in one's primary language.

[T]he mere existence of a *first*-language (regardless of whether it is only oral, or oral and literate) renders the *second*-language reading process considerably different from the first-language reading process because of the nature of information stored in memory....Second-language readers come to the process of second-language reading with representations in memory that possess varying degrees of usefulness and relatedness for cognitive processing. (pp. 112-113)

That said, the field of second language acquisition (SLA) has based much of its theory formation and research on work done by first language acquisition scholars (Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 2001b). By the latter part of the 1970s, L1 theories of reading were moving away from a binary characterization of the writing/reading relationship of writing as active and reading as passive (Eskey, 2005). This conceptualization, however, has changed so that

... reading is now generally understood to be an active, purposeful, and creative mental process in which the reader engages in the construction of meaning from a text, partly on the basis of new information provided by that text but also partly on the basis of whatever relevant prior knowledge, feelings, and opinions that reader brings to the task of making sense of the words on the page. (2005, p. 564)

Thus, prevailing models of successful reading are neither *bottom-up* nor *top-down* but rather interactive processes that involve “a balanced interaction” (2005, p. 565) between the two views of reading. L2 literacy research has drawn on this model and applied it profitably to investigations of L2 reading (Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 2001b).

However, readers, no matter how fluent they are in their L2, read more slowly in their second language than they do in their L1 and make more errors in comprehension (Weber, 1996). Consequently, L1 reading research, although useful when considering what fluent readers do in their L1 (Block, 1992; Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 2001b), is of limited usefulness for understanding the experiences of bilingual language minority students as they read in high school and college.

Reading in a L2 encompasses many variables that individually and collectively impact the ease with which a person reads and understands a text (Eskey, 2005). The following discussion, based in part on a psycholinguistic analysis, examines these factors as interconnected elements necessary for comprehending written text: language competence, vocabulary proficiency, syntactical knowledge, text structure recognition, automaticity, and background knowledge (Alfassi, 2004; Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 2001a, 2001b; Jackson, 2005; Tierney & Pearson, 1983). These factors operate together to produce or impede readers’ understanding of printed text (Birch, 2002; Eskey, 2005). Consequently, proficiency with these aspects of reading may affect bilingual language minority students’ success in high school or college.

Research has established that proficiency in an L2 is the most important factor for successful reading in that language (Eskey, 2005; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Discussions of

L2 reading frequently include the topics of transfer and threshold. Birch (2002) states that as the

...languages of the world have different writing systems and each reader's knowledge base contains, at first, only that knowledge that is relevant to his or her own language and writing system, [i]t is logical to think that exposure to any given writing system will cause L1 readers to develop different low-level reading strategies to deal with the exigencies of their writing systems. These L1 strategies, when the reader begins to read English, may transfer to the L2. It is true that transfer may facilitate reading in the L2, but it is equally true that it might interfere. (p. 10)

Birch goes on to point out that a positive facilitation is likely only if the two writing systems are sufficiently similar to permit transfer.

Although some linguistics scholars have asserted that readers simply apply, or transfer, L1 reading skills to reading in a L2 (see, e.g., Cummins, 1984), Eskey maintains that reading "begins with decoding of language; and reading comprehension, although it involves both bottom-up and top-down processing, begins with, and so depends on, rapid and accurate decoding of the text" (2005, p. 566). According to this hypothesis, successful reading in a L2 is contingent on a reader's having attained a sufficient proficiency or "threshold" in that language so that he or she decodes quickly and correctly enough to comprehend a text (Alderson, 2000; Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995; Clarke, 1980). Thus, no matter how well a person can read in her or his L1, reading strategies he or she has developed in that L1 cannot benefit L2 reading until he or she is proficient enough in that L2 to comprehend L2 text.



In a study that addressed the transfer vs. threshold question, Bernhardt and Kamil (1995) found that, depending on the individual reader's L1 literacy skills and L2 proficiency, both hypotheses hold: Individuals who are competent readers in their L1 apply those literacy skills to reading in their second *if* they have sufficient knowledge of the additional language. However, L1 reading skills are of little use when reading in an L2 if the reader lacks adequate lexical and syntactical knowledge of the second (Gelderen, Schoonen, Stoel, & Glopper, 2007). For U.S.-educated bilingual language minority students, there is a third consideration: Although they may have learned a language other than English and use that L1 at home, they may not read in their L1 with significant fluency or at all. Thus, for the transfer hypothesis to have an enhancing effect on participants' reading comprehension, readers must have a level of academic literacy in their L1 that can usefully be transferred to reading in an additional language (E. Fry, 1981; Huckin, Haynes, & Coady, 1993; Laufer, 1997; Nation, 2002), a skill not all U.S.-educated bilingual language minority students possess.

Vocabulary knowledge affects, and is affected by, reading comprehension, no matter whether in a first or L2 (E. Fry, 1981). Fry (1981) maintains that readers' efforts at fluent reading are hindered if they encounter as few as two or more unknown words in every twenty. Thus, readers can become more fluent and efficient by increasing their lexical store. Extended reading, despite presenting readers with something of a paradox, is an important way to increase vocabulary (Eskey, 2005).

It is now well understood that the best (some would argue the only) way to acquire the extensive vocabulary required for reading widely in a L2 is reading

itself, and it is equally well understood that a prerequisite for such reading is an extensive vocabulary—a classic chicken and egg situation. (p. 567)

That said, extended reading improves adult readers' ability to automatically recognize words, which in turn contributes to fluency and comprehension (Segalowitz, Segalowitz, & Wood, 1998).

However, reading widely by itself will not necessarily increase readers' lexical knowledge (Laufer, 1997). Indeed, until language learners have developed a basic vocabulary of 3,000+ of the most commonly occurring words (e.g., words found on the General Service List) and another 800+ (e.g., the University Word List and the Academic Word List) that together comprise 95% of the lexicon of general college texts, they will have significant difficulty reading school assignments (Xue & Nation, 1984). Laufer (1997) points out that vocabulary development strategies found to be effective with L1 readers will not necessarily help L2 readers comprehend texts with unfamiliar vocabulary items. Although L1 readers are often encouraged to guess word meanings from context, that method is frequently unproductive and confusing for bilingual language minority students (Nation, 2002). Clues are frequently embedded in a culturally specific context unfamiliar to bilingual language minority learners; therefore, telling them to guess word meanings from context is unlikely to produce the desired result. To address this conundrum, Nation (2002) states that direct instruction in vocabulary and in purposeful word acquisition strategies are necessary for language learners to develop word knowledge and recognition skills.

Block (1992) recommends that language minority learners should not be pre-taught all unfamiliar vocabulary before reading a given passage, for doing so robs them

of opportunities to develop strategies for tackling texts that present lexical challenges to comprehension. In a study comparing L1 and L2 comprehension monitoring strategies, she found that for both groups, a successful reading process is not always a smooth and effortless one (1992). Indeed, a portion of proficient L1 and L2 readers' capability is the ability to know which word and structural difficulties they must address, which they can disregard, and how they can solve key lexical issues. Less proficient readers in the two groups not only did not recognize the source of their comprehension problems but also lacked the knowledge and will to remedy the situation (1992).

Eskey (2005) considers knowledge of grammar to be important for reading comprehension; however, he states that it is difficult to evaluate its effect because it is so closely interconnected with other reading components such as vocabulary. That said, grammatical knowledge contributes to vocabulary acquisition and understanding (Carlo, August, & McLaughlin, 2004; Gelderen et al., 2007; Hinkel, 2004). For example, L2 readers who lack a clear understanding of present and past participial adjective constructions can misinterpret the meaning of sentences such as "Are you bored?" because they are unaware of or unsure about how participial adjectives change their meanings according to -ing or -ed endings. For individuals in earlier stages of L2 acquisition, the sentence could also be interpreted as meaning "Are you boring?"

Knowing the characteristic text structure, or organization, for a particular discourse helps readers comprehend what they are reading (Carrell, 1992; Sandefur, Watson, & Johnston, 2007; Tang, 1992). Similar to the importance of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, this awareness is significant for all readers, but it is especially so for bilingual language minority students, who need all the help they can get (Eskey, 2005;

Grabe & Stoller, 2002). When a reader can discern the organizational pattern in a particular reading, he or she is more able to anticipate the author's intent (2005).

One's reading rate—how rapidly a reader can decode and comprehend text—is dependent on a reader's fluency, or *automaticity*, in recognizing and understanding the meaning of individual words and the groups of words with which they are associated without having to concentrate on language interpretation issues (Stevick, 1976). Indeed, according to Grabe (2001b), "...the careful reading of a short text, as a problem-solving skill, is less important than fluent reading for basic comprehension" (p. 36). This fluency factor is especially important for bilingual language minority students in their college reading because of the volume, lexicon, complexity, and abstract language characteristic of academic texts (Coxhead, 2000; Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 2001b; Xue & Nation, 1984). Thus, given the quantity of text participants have to read in college, the rate at which they can read and comprehend is critical (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). However, increasing one's reading rate of academic material requires practice in reading representative texts (Grabe, 2001a; Laufer, 1997).

Although a proficient reader must be able to decode text fluently, that expertise alone is insufficient for reading comprehension. "Every written text provides information for the reader, but the meaning of the text must be determined by a reader who can relate that information to some relevant body of knowledge" (Eskey, 2005, p. 569). Put another way, successful comprehension requires that the reader must connect what he or she reads to a particular discourse of which she or he has knowledge, and the greater a reader's familiarity with that discourse, the more easily and rapidly he or she can read and understand the text (Murphy & Alexander, 2002).

Given that a reader's prior knowledge (schema) is vital for efficient and effective comprehension, the question arises of how much of the necessary domain-specific schema has been provided culturally and how much must be acquired through classroom learning (Bernhardt, 2003). Added to this condition is the expectation of most writers to assume that readers possess a degree of familiarity with the topic at hand (Nist & Holschuh, 2002). For example, Nist and Holschuh (2002) note that even with well-written texts, authors want and expect readers to make inferences; consequently, authors do not include all pieces of information required for text comprehension as if the reader knows absolutely nothing about the topic, that is, they do not fill in every detail. Thus, successful reading comprehension in college is dependent in part on the background knowledge about a subject or discourse, knowledge bilingual language minority students may not have acquired in high school (Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

A final reading factor is reading one's own writing.

Revisers must read the text as an input to revision, but it is important to think of reading as a metaphor for **represent to oneself**. [emphasis in the original] The reader in this sense is constructing his or her own internal, mental representation of the text. Revisers read not only the surface written text but also unwritten text in their heads. (Flower, Hayes, Carey, Schriver, & Stratman, 1986, p. 28)

While we know what successful L2 readers need to be able to do, we know far less about how they accomplish literacy tasks, especially from their perspective (Harklau, 2001). Harklau (2004) noted that there was a preponderance of L2 studies from an *etic* perspective that do not investigate authentic high school literacy practices from the student, or *emic*, point of view. This condition is consistent with the state of L1 literacy

research until the 1990s when L1 reading research began to shift away from decontextualized experimental and quasi-experimental toward studies that examine why and how teachers and students employ literacy in a variety of contexts (Bean, 2000). Ten years earlier, in a comprehensive review of L1 reading research, Alvermann and Moore (1991) noted that teachers are not usually included in designing high school reading studies, and no secondary school reading studies mentioned the inclusion of student perspectives and reflections as data sources for research.

An additional concern is that much of the existing research has been carried out using quasi-experimental situations and not under typical, realistic classroom settings and conditions (Alvermann & Moore, 1991). As a result, the focus has been on an individual divorced from cultural/historical forces executing a series of cognitive acts rather than a reader conceptualized as performing within and influenced by her or his cultural and historical milieu (Heath, 1996). Such research agenda have resulted in a situation in which “we know more about *what* needs to be done in order to learn from text than *how* teachers and students approach that learning” (Alvermann & Moore, 1991, p. 974). However, if the objective is to understand bilingual language minority students’ actual literacy experiences and practices, then research needs to focus on their perceptions and voices in the setting in which they engage with literacy tasks (Harklau, 2008). In other words,

the purpose is to tie language acquisition and production to the contexts in which they took place, and thus to show the effects of context in shaping the process of language acquisition and the nature of language proficiency that is ultimately attained. (p. 114)

Accordingly, if educators can gain a better understanding of what and how the school literacy of bilingual language minority learners does and does not develop, they can more effectively devise pedagogy that improves bilingual language minority students' literacy and study skills and ultimately their prospects for educational success.

The field of SLA has contributed significantly to research (e.g., Fillmore, 1976; Hakuta, 1986; Sato, 1990), yet most of its efforts have focused on spoken language, with reading receiving little attention or investigation (Weber, 1996). An additional factor that limits the usefulness of SLA research is that most studies have been done with participants having important characteristics different from this study's participants. While this study's students are U.S.-educated bilingual language minority learners, SLA has concentrated on international bilingual language minority students whose secondary education was completed outside the United States and are considered English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) students (Harklau, 2007; Reid, 1997; Weber, 1996). Such students are typically familiar with the literacies of higher education, have an explicit knowledge of the structure of the English language (grammar), are fully literate in an L1 that is not English, and have acquired written English skills simultaneous with or ahead of oral skills, characteristics atypical of students still learning English while being educated in part in U.S. primary and secondary schools (Reid, 1997). In addition, not only are foreign-educated study participants typically fully literate in their L1, they have also had different secondary school experiences (Bernhardt, 2003; Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995; Weber, 1996). In contrast, U.S.-educated bilingual language minority learners may have full, partial, or no literacy skills in their L1, a condition that confounds efforts to apply research results across the board to U.S.-educated bilingual language minority

students, yet they are frequently grouped with foreign-educated bilingual language minority learners in literacy studies (Leki, 2007).

This practice can be seen in an examination of Grabe and Stoller's volume (2002) on research and practice in L2 reading pedagogy. Generally speaking, in this compilation bilingual language minority students are considered as a cohesive group, the members of which most resemble EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Whereas bilingual learners are occasionally included in listings of discussed in this volume, there is no explicit mention or examination of the group of bilingual language minority students referred to as Generation 1.5 or U.S.-educated.

The authors do acknowledge the complexities involved in conducting research on L2 readers, and they assert that "We actually know relatively little about how people become good L2 readers, but we do know that there are significant differences between learning to read in L1 and L2 settings" (2002, p. 2). They go on to state that because of the vast range of contexts in which L2 reading is taught, it is impossible to apply routinely results from one study to all other learning situations; consequently, they recommend that teachers actively engage in action research in their classrooms (2002). Thus, they direct the locus of inquiry to those involved in the learning process. Following Grabe and Stoller's assertions, the direction taken by Harklau (2001) provides a valuable and instructive approach to bilingual language minority students' literacy practices as they move from secondary school to college studies. One assertion is that these students did not find the differences between the two educational contexts to be as dramatic as claimed by research set in a developmental perspective.



While Harklau's study provides a valuable *emic* perspective on Generation 1.5 students as they actually practice academic literacy, it focuses more on their writing tasks and activities and less on how they accomplish reading tasks. Yet educators have long acknowledged the importance of the reading/writing interaction in literacy acquisition (Carson & Leki, 1993; Hedgcock, 2004; Leki, 2001), for reading and writing are considered to be inextricably intertwined halves of literacy practice (Carson & Leki, 1993).

Another factor highlighting a need for research situated in the student's viewpoint is that the high school reading and writing activities are not uniformly taught in high schools across the United States (Callahan, 2005; Garcia, 2003; Harklau, 2004). In fact, instruction provided for language minority students in the American South where such students are relatively new may well be quite different from what students in California or New York experience (Alvermann & Eakle, 2003; Faltis, 1999). In addition, until recently, high school and college literacy patterns of language minority students have not been the focus of research (Garcia, 2003; Harklau, 2007). Consequently, research is needed that draws on the perspectives of U.S.-educated bilingual language minority students concerning their perceptions of academic reading as they move from high school to college.

Getting these students into and through college successfully is perhaps the most urgent issue in higher education today. Yet surprisingly enough, we still know so little about English learners' experience in college with writing and other literacy demands. In fact, we don't have much on their experiences period. After the brief spate of work in the 90s, most notably reports by the Rand Corporation, there has

been a disappointingly small amount of research on language minority students in higher education. (Harklau, 2007)

It is clear we need to know more about how to facilitate language minority students' success with academic reading and writing tasks, yet too little research has been done that contributes to an understanding of how to accomplish this objective (Alvermann & Eakle, 2003). To address this situation, I undertook a naturalistic case study of U.S.-educated bilingual language minority students in their literacy transition from high school to college.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Questions

To restate the questions guiding this research:

##### Guiding question

- What is the experience of bilingual language minority students in their transition from high school to college reading tasks?

##### Sub-questions

- How do bilingual language minority students describe their high school and college reading tasks?
- What information and insights do their teachers and instructors offer on the academic tasks these students have in high school and in college?
- What similarities and differences do students perceive in literacy demands of secondary and post-secondary education?
- How does the specific post-secondary institutional structure and context affect bilingual language minority students' transition experience?

These analyses were informed by a social constructivist perspective and based on these premises:

- The meaning of and purpose for a specific literacy task is determined by the perceptions, goals, and interests of participants and by the sociocultural circumstances within which the task occurs and evolves. Thus, the individual participant, in this instance an academic reader, constructs her or his reality

according to personal understandings developed through interactive social processes among those in the classroom setting.

- Readers are active, not passive, when they read, thus having agency when they engage with texts and learning from texts.
- The manner in which readers perform reading tasks is determined by individual reader characteristics and the sociocultural situation in which the labor is performed; therefore, all reading efforts are not necessarily the same, but are unique depending on the situation in which they occur and the individuals engaging in the literacy activity.

### *Case Studies*

According to Patton (2002), case study, a long revered methodology in interpretive inquiries, is central to qualitative studies. Case study is especially germane to social constructivist research, for “Knowledge is socially constructed, we constructivist believe..., and, in their experiential and contextual accounts, case study researchers assist readers in the construction of knowledge” (Stake, 2000, p. 442). Data sources for case studies typically include: (a) interviews, (b) observations, and (c) printed artifacts (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Interviews with focal participants and others provide first person accounts of participants’ perceptions and understandings about a topic or activity, thereby providing a window into participants’ thinking and learning (Stake, 2000). Observations of participants situate their accounts in relation to the environments in which they act (2000). Printed artifacts used or produced by participants further contribute to an understanding of participants’ perceptions and the social, cultural, and historical elements related to their understandings (2000). A second important

characteristic of case study is its potential for observing and describing individuals' perceptions over time (Merriam, 1998) to gain insight into how (and in some instances why) they develop their notions of accomplishing academic reading tasks.

According to Vygotskian sociocultural theory, language is the mediating tool that enables humans to interact with each other for the purpose of accomplishing a goal or task (Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978; Vygotskiæi & Kozulin, 1986). Put another way, language makes possible construction and exchange of meaning between and among individuals (Hymes, 1964). In addition, social constructivism as articulated through sociocultural theory views acts of communication as contextually situated and affected by the social and physical setting and by the participants engaged in the performance (Hymes, 1964; M. Johnson, 2004; van Lier, 1996). Similarly, acquiring (and using) another language, especially in reading, is an ongoing, complex, in part unobservable activity comprised of and affected by numerous factors particular to each reader (e.g., language proficiency, background knowledge of text content, vocabulary, available reading strategies, individual learning characteristics, and reading fluency), and is embedded in a specific context, a context that both provides the setting for the communicative act and structures many of its fundamental aspects (Duff, 2008; D. M. Johnson, 1991; Nunan, 1992; van Lier, 2005). Thus, research that seeks to understand perceptions of bilingual language minority students as they learn through reading must use a methodology capable of engaging in a naturalistic manner with individuals or groups involved in a multifaceted process occurring over time within a particular, influencing context (Duff, 2008; Nunan, 1992; van Lier, 2005).

In order to understand more about a learner as he or she acquires advanced literacy skills—in this case, academic reading in a second (or third) language, a researcher must (a) obtain access to the inner world of an individual as he or she accomplishes reading activities and (b) do so within her or his customary environment for these acts, for academic reading is a socially and culturally embedded, individually accomplished task (Duff, 2008; Nunan, 1992). A social constructivist perspective encompasses both stipulations with its focus on individual “human mental processes” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 6) functioning and learning within the social, cultural, and historical setting that acts on and is acted on by the individuals concerned.

I had four objectives in mind as I selected a methodology to direct this study’s data collection. I wanted to use an approach that would (a) enable me to address the research questions, (b) allow me to employ an emic perspective, (c) correspond with a social constructivist theoretical perspective, and (d) permit an openness for noticing and exploring possible themes within the data. Thus, for inquiries of this nature—a naturalistic investigation of academic reading practices of selected individual language learners as they progress from high school to college, case study is an appropriate and effective methodology.

Stake describes case study as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (1995, p. xi). He continues with “We study a case when it itself is of very special interest” (p. xi). In education, cases that interest researchers are most often people and programs.

Each one is similar to other persons and programs in many ways and unique in many ways. We are interested in them for both their uniqueness and commonality.

We seek to understand them. We would like to hear their stories. (p. 1)

Case study has been used as a research methodology by disciplines as diverse as sociology, foreign policy, and education, producing classic works such as Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943/1955), Allison and Zelikow's *Essence of decision: Explaining the Cuban missile crisis* (1999), and Wolcott's *The man in the principal's office* (2003). They have been used as pedagogical tools in business, medicine, and education, along with the use of case records and case management in the fields of medicine, business, law, psychology, and social work (Duff, 2008; Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000; Merriam, 1998; van Lier, 2005). However, although the terms "case study" and "cases" are employed in various ways by many professions and disciplines, in this instance the focus is on case study as a methodology for research with L2 learners of English.

The field of second language acquisition has also made use of case studies to illuminate questions of interest and concern, and to formulate theories that guide the discipline today (Duff, 2008; Harklau, 2008; D. M. Johnson, 1991; Nunan, 1992; van Lier, 2005). From the perspective of research in second language acquisition, van Lier (2005) describes case studies as "contextual forms of research" (p. 197) that "focus on context, change over time, and specific learners or groups" (p. 196) and provide "a valuable tool to examine educational reality" (p. 197). Examples of significant case studies in second language acquisition of children and adults include Hakuta's investigation of a five year old Japanese speaker learning English (Hakuta, 1986), Sato's

study of two Vietnamese brothers living with an English-speaking family (1990), and Fillmore's research on L2 development of five Latino children (1976).

As reading is a complex individually performed phenomenon in unique interaction with sociocultural context having variables that cannot be specified in advance of interviews with or observations of individual participants, the questions guiding the study focused on participants' perceptions of how they carried out specific actions and activities. Thus, participants were requested to describe their reading activities. As the study progressed, participant responses and threads of inquiry pursued informed understandings that in turn guided analyses in the final report. For these purposes, case study was an appropriate tool.

The research design for this study is a multiple-case study. This methodology was selected because the subject of inquiry—bilingual language minority students learning to read for academic purposes—is an example of a study focused on “complex phenomena in real-life situations” (Barone, 2004, p. 14). The study was *multiple* in that I investigated ten high school and three bilingual language minority college students engaged in acquisition of academic reading skills and strategies. According to Duff (2008), this design is preferable because studying more than one instance makes the research stronger and allows for cross-case analyses. Other useful features of a multiple case study are that generalizability is increased and observation of results across numerous cases highlights the localness of conditions, thereby enhancing descriptions and explanations that may come from the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By working with multiple cases I hoped to discern patterns and experiences involving reading that the participants may have had in common. The study is *instrumental* in that I was looking for insight into how



these students coped with the task of learning to read for academic purposes in different environments. The participants *per se* were not the focus of this inquiry; rather, the research made use of their perceptions and descriptions to illuminate an understanding of how they carried out literacy tasks in high school and college in a second or additional language. In addition, interviews with multiple participants and observations of representative classroom settings made it possible to identify themes, patterns, and/or variations that appeared in the descriptions of more than one individual or situation.

### *Subjectivity of Researcher*

Over a 15 year period and prior to undertaking this study, I was involved with both higher education institutional settings included in this research, first at the urban university as a graduate student, student instructor in the university's English as a Second Language (ESL), and adjunct instructor, and later at the community college. I completed an MS in Applied Linguistics/TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) at the university. From 1991 until 1997, I taught a variety of ESL courses at the university. Although the school's ESL curriculum has changed in structure and focus since I taught there, I continue to be familiar with the perspectives and practices of the program. At the time I taught at the university, most of the program's students were matriculated US-educated bilingual language minority students, with a small number of non-matriculated foreign-educated international students in the United States to learn English. Although program enrollees were mostly bilingual language minority students, the curriculum was designed for foreign-educated bilingual language minority students unfamiliar with U.S. culture and customs. In the late 1990s, the program changed to an Intensive English Program (IEP) of non-matriculated bilingual language minority students. The graduate

program and the IEP have maintained their original orientation by continuing to focus on developing ESL teachers who will most likely teach EFL (English as a Foreign Language) outside the US, or, if remaining in this country, teach foreign-educated bilingual language minority students. In this respect, it differs from the orientation of the community college where I later taught.

I began adjunct teaching at the community college in the winter of 1998; in the fall of 1998, I joined the faculty as a full time tenure-track ESL/English instructor. I directed the ESL program and taught there until fall of 2005, at which time I began full time doctoral studies. During my years at the community college, I designed and developed the college's ESL program, devising and proposing the curriculum as it is currently constituted. In addition, I was instrumental in locating and hiring the two fulltime ESL instructors who are participants in this study. Thus, I am familiar with the school's bilingual language minority profile and the ESL program's objectives and challenges.

### *Study Sites*

The four high school sites selected for this study are in a semi-rural county in a southern state that, until the 1990s, had a relatively homogenous student population with few minority language English learners. However, the language minority population in the county has increased dramatically over the last fifteen years so that bilingual language minority students now make up 19% of the county schools and 29% of the city system. Three elementary schools now have 95% student enrollments whose home language is not English, and one third of the students at two high schools speak a home language other than English. These high schools now enroll significant numbers of bilingual

language minority students who have learned both English and secondary school course content in systems without a long tradition of teaching bilingual language minority learner. Thus, these systems have more recently had to develop pedagogy appropriate and effective for these students. Three of the school sites are a part of the county school system, and the fourth is a city school system within the county.

Three of the focal high schools were selected from a list of county system schools with a bilingual language minority representation of more than 10%. My criterion for including a school was the number of potential study participants, as well as proximity to a community college that serves many immigrant students in the area. The fourth school, in the city system, was also chosen because of the number of bilingual language minority students enrolled. Appendix C, Table 1, includes data on factors such as student body composition, school size, and socioeconomic makeup of each school's service area.

The two post-secondary sites included a community college serving the area and a large university situated in the state capitol some 50 miles away. The community college is non-residential, with an enrollment of 7473 on two campuses and four small satellite sites; fulltime enrollment is 65%. The ethnic/racial student body composition in 2006 was 86.8% white, 3.6% black, 5.2% Hispanic, and 2.5% Asian. Although minority enrollment has remained at approximately 10.3% for three years, the actual numbers of minority students, especially Hispanic, have more than doubled during this period because the overall enrollment increased from 4500 to 7473.

At the university site fall 2007 enrollment was 27,137, of which 2552 were first semester freshmen. Although the university has traditionally been a commuter school, by fall 2007 2,500 students were living in campus housing. The student population is 34%

white, 29% black, 10% Asian, 4% Hispanic/Latino, 3% multiracial, 0.3% American Indian, 2% other, 3% non-resident aliens, and 14% not reported. As recently as 1993, the school was 70% white, 20% black, and Asian and Hispanic/Latino less than 4 % each.

*My Relationships with High School and Post-Secondary Sites.* From 1998 through spring semester 2005, in my capacity as ESL coordinator and director of the Steps-to-College summer high school ESOL program I had worked with various faculty, counselors, and administrators at the four high school sites in this study. In addition to directing the two programs, I also visited the high schools recruiting students for the college and assisting prospective students in completing applications and finding financial aid. As a result, I was able to connect directly with at least one person at each school with whom I had a working relationship, thereby somewhat facilitating my efforts initially to gain research access to these sites and later to locate potential participants. This prior experience also providing me with some knowledge and understanding of the demographic and cultural differences among the four schools. I also had worked with and taught students from the four schools in the high school summer program and my ESL classes in the college.

I also have working relationships with the two higher education institutions. I earned a masters in Applied Linguistics/TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) at the urban university, graduating in December 1992. Continuously from winter quarter 1992 through fall quarter 1996, I taught at least one course in the ESL program. As a result, I was familiar with the pedagogical orientation of the graduate program and of the student profile during that period. Briefly, we graduate students were being prepared to teach English learners who were near to fully literate in a first language and who had

been educated outside the United States. The curriculum was designed based on an assumption that we would be teaching adults in Intensive English Programs (IEPs) in the United States or in other countries, not U.S.-educated students, and that a large part of the curriculum would include cultural information about living and studying in the United States.

The profile of students in the classes we taught, however, were not exclusively foreign-educated English learners. In reality, most students at the Intermediate through Advanced levels were graduates of local high schools, with many having little experience with or knowledge of home country cultural practices. They had applied to the university as regular freshmen; however, according to their scores on a school-specific standardized English proficiency test, they were required to take selected ESL classes before they could enroll in core curriculum courses. Moreover, there was a writing exit exam they had to pass before they could proceed. Consequently, as instructors we needed to adapt the approaches we had been taught to different methods and approaches that would accommodate the learning characteristics of the actual students we saw everyday in class and enable them to move on to the regular curriculum. These circumstances were complicated by the disconnect between the graduate program's language learner profile and the realities of the students in our classes.

After 1998, as the state university system moved learning support programs out of the research universities into the two year schools, the urban university's ESL program became a true IEP, admitting mostly foreign-educated learners on student visas for the purpose of learning English. The remaining connection the ESL program had with U.S.-educated bilingual language minority students was in English 1101 sections designated

and designed for freshman for whom English is an additional language. Students in these classes are a combination of U.S.-educated and foreign educated learners. Based on informal conversations with instructors of the English 1101 ESL sections, in my opinion the pedagogical focus continues to concentrate on learning issues and characteristics of the latter which have implications for the former.

### *Participants*

In the first phase in high school, ten bilingual language minority students and ten of their teachers participated. In the second phase in college, three of the original ten students who enrolled in area colleges and 11 of their instructors were included in the research. In all, 31 participants were interviewed at least once each. Pseudonyms are used to refer to all participants in the study.

The ten high school bilingual language minority participants were born in Mexico (6), El Salvador (1), Hong Kong (1), Texas (1), and Georgia (1). Their ages ranged from 17 to 20; five were female and five male. Home languages included Spanish (eight), Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese bilingual), and Vietnamese (Spanish and Vietnamese bilingual). The initial participants were representative of the ethnic and linguistic population in the target area. In the college phase of the study, one male and two females matriculated; they were born in Mexico, Hong Kong, and Georgia. Although I conducted interviews with ten high school participants, this dissertation focuses primarily on data pertaining to the three who matriculated fall semester 2007.

The ten high school teachers who participated in the study ranged in age from 24 to 64. Five were male and five female. The home language of all the high school teachers

was English. The 11 college instructor participants' ages were from 28 to 54. Ten professors' home language was English, while one professor's home language was Urdu.

*Selection of student participants.* Although I anticipated that finding participants at the high schools would not be easy, actually identifying them was unexpectedly challenging. I first contacted ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) lead teachers at the four target high schools, explained the purpose of the study, and provided the profile of bilingual language minority students I was seeking: (a) graduating seniors who (b) had had ESOL instruction while in public school and (c) who had expressed an intention to attend college. I also contacted counselors at the four schools requesting the same information. Although the ESOL teachers could identify students who had had ESOL in high school, for the most part, they had no definitive information on the students' ESOL instruction before ninth grade. School counselors were able to identify students who met the first two criteria; however, they did not know which of these students might be applying to college.

In lieu of this information, counselors at three high schools provided lists of Hispanic students they knew had applied to at least one college. While these proved to be outstanding students, none of them had ever been in ESOL classes at any time. Indeed, most of them spoke only basic social Spanish, if any at all. I then asked to speak with seniors who were former ESOL students to determine which ones were applying to college. In all, I met with 52 students at four high schools. Although I requested one-on-one meetings, for the most part, counselors arranged for me to talk with five to 15 students at a time, a method that proved to be less than satisfactory. Frequently, students appeared to be reluctant to go against an apparent group ethos of resistance and identify

themselves as individuals aspiring to attend college. From this group, I identified five bilingual language minority students whose profiles met all three criteria and who were willing to participate. At one of the high schools, the Counseling administrative assistant offered to help me find likely bilingual language minority college applicants and identified one student who fit the profile. Of these six, the student suggested by the administrative assistant was the only one who matriculated the following fall.<sup>3</sup>

At the fourth high school, I contacted the lead ESOL teacher and the counseling director, both of whom suggested I speak with the graduation coach. Within 15 minutes he identified three students who met the study's criteria and arranged for me to interview them one at a time. All three agreed to participate; one enrolled in college fall semester.

I located the tenth participant in a more unorthodox manner. While visiting one of the high schools at which I had been unable to locate likely participants, I asked a student for directions to the ESOL teacher's office. She told me where the teacher's room was located and offered to show me the way. As we walked through the halls, in response to a question from her, I explained the study. I also told her I was trying to locate participants who met the three criteria and asked her if she knew anyone who fit that description. She replied that she would be happy to help me find bilingual language minority participants and that (1) she was a senior, (2) had had ESOL for two years in middle school, and (3) was applying to college. She became the tenth participant and one of three who matriculated fall 2007.

I included ten bilingual language minority students in the purposive (Merriam, 1998) case study sample, with an expectation that five or more would likely begin college

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<sup>3</sup> I found it interesting and instructive that the school personnel who was able to identify college-bound students was neither a teacher nor a counselor. In this instance, it was the administrative assistant in the counseling office.



in the fall. However, as can be seen, only three followed through with enrollment. An unexpected factor discouraging at least three of the original ten participants from matriculating in the fall semester of the study period was the increasingly contentious tenor of the public debate on illegal immigration. This circumstance had an especially powerful effect in the focal area because the county and city were the center of strident public discussion that culminated in an open meeting on illegal immigration and undocumented individuals held on the campus of the local community college. Preceding this forum, local and state newspapers and talk radio commentators had concentrated on the topic, with a significant amount of negative opinion widely expressed. Although most, if not all, participants are either resident aliens or U.S. citizens, three of this group chose to continue working instead of beginning post-secondary studies. One who decided to forego college at that time commented that “You don’t know what’s going to happen. My friends, we think we work fulltime right now.” After fall semester when public focus on the subject had diminished, one more bilingual language minority participant matriculated but could not be included in the study.

One of the students who eventually enrolled in college was **Jia**, a Chinese female from Hong Kong with U.S. resident alien status. She and her younger sister had attended a large urban high school in one of New York’s boroughs for six months in the year before she moved to the target area two years before her graduation. However, she left that school because of her perception of the potential for violence at that school. After moving from New York, she lived with a family friend and worked after school at a local Chinese restaurant. She was unclear with me about where her parents were living. At any rate, she did not live with her mother or father in the United States but was a “parachute

kid.” That is, as is the practice of a number of families from outside the United States, her parents sent her to this country to attend high school and then enter a U.S. college. While she was in high school, they arranged for her to live with a relative or close friend. For the two years she attended West High, she was in ESOL language arts. She applied to the local community college and a large urban university and was accepted at both. She chose the latter because she was more accustomed to living in urban settings with a more diverse population. In addition, she wanted to live on campus so that she would be able to socialize with other Asian students, for she had been one of a very few Asian students at her high school and the only Chinese person there. Her declared major was hospitality and tourism.

Another student who eventually went to college was **Diego**. Born in Mexico, he had lived in Texas from the age of one until he was nine, at which time the family moved back to Mexico. Although he learned some English during that period, he said he forgot most of it after they returned to their hometown. His family returned to the US, settling in the study area when he was in tenth grade and he entered Hill High. His education in Mexico was continuous, and he described it as “good.” While there, his coursework included all the subjects he later studied in the US. However, he preferred U.S. teachers’ approaches because he “learned” instead of simply taking in facts, characterizing Mexican teachers’ attitudes toward discussion and questions as “strict” and closed to student inquiries.

[I]n Mexico..., I learned how to edit and how to read, but I didn’t know how to study. I didn’t learn how to study cause what they teach you there is kinda like, it’s strict, but it’s kinda like, they’ll put it, they won’t let you grab it, they’ll put it

in and it's kinda like, you have to learn it, you have to do it....you're absorbing it....But you don't learn it; you forget it.

While enrolled at Hill, he was in ESOL-only classes for one year, and an ESOL language arts class for the second year. When I first met Diego, he was expecting his father to take the family to Texas immediately after graduation. Diego preferred living near Hill High and wanted to attend the nearby community college. In mid-April, the family's plans changed, so Diego was able to enroll at the local college the following fall, with an intention of majoring in business or accounting. He worked part-time after school and weekends, and volunteered as a Spanish-English translator at the local hospital. In addition to his studies, part time job, and volunteer translating, Diego was expected to attend the frequent services at the church where his father was a full time minister.

The third participant who enrolled in college was **Sonia**. She was born in the United States and grew up in the area very near the high school she attended, South High. Her parents were from San Salvador and the family had resident alien status. Although Sonia's parents spoke Spanish at home and they moved within a Spanish-speaking social network, at the age of five she began to acquire social competence in English from playing with a bilingual cousin. However, her elementary and middle schools tested her from time to time and in middle school placed her in ESOL for two years. She described this experience and "easy and fun" because her teachers took advantage of her ability to use socially fluent English and had her lead oral practice for her less fluent classmates. "I didn't learn much, but it was fun helping the other kids."

Sonia's situation is illustrative of the contradictory circumstances bilingual language minority students may encounter in U.S. schools and the possible shortcomings

of the education they too frequently receive in these public institutions. Although she received all her schooled education in the United States in English, during our high school interviews she frequently expressed a lack of confidence in her English literacy skills. A recurring theme in our interviews was her statement that she needed to “know more professional words” in both Spanish and English. At the same time, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, her performance in school literacy tasks was above average (her high school GPA was 3.1) and her teachers described her as a successful and conscientious student. Furthermore, she stated that after she entered college, she intended to continue with and exceed her high school level of achievement. Although she felt she had social competence in Spanish (a part of her job responsibilities was to translate for Spanish-speaking customers and to train Spanish-dominant new staff), she described her print literacy as “not good enough” because of insufficient Spanish vocabulary. She wrote infrequently in Spanish. However, after attending public school from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, completing tasks willingly and competently, and performing well throughout this time, she had not developed what for her was a satisfactory literacy level in either English or Spanish. Even more appalling was the fact that her teachers demonstrated no awareness of her perspective.

She enrolled at the community college with a declared major in Accounting. She worked between thirty and forty hours each week at a local discount store where she was the first Hispanic employee. Her performance was such that management asked her to assume some bookkeeping duties and to train new employees. Although her family offered to finance her schooling, she decided to continue working and pay her own way. Two of the three participants qualified for a state lottery-funded full tuition scholarship,

eligibility for which was determined by a GPA of 3.0 in academic coursework. Although the third participant's GPA was above 3.0, he was ineligible due to the scholarship's in-state residency requirement.

*My relationship with participants.* I was not personally acquainted with any of the participants, although three of them recalled me from their participation in a summer for-credit high school bilingual language minority program for college-bound students that I had initiated and directed. The program was held on the community college campus where I was a member of the faculty.

*Selection of faculty participants.* The high schools included in this study employed block scheduling, which meant that participants were enrolled in no more than four classes during their last high school semester. I began by identifying teachers of the classes in which the bilingual language minority participants were enrolled. I first attempted to contact each teacher via email, explaining my purposes and requesting that he or she agree to one or more one-on-one audio recorded interviews with me and to my conducting one or more observations of the class in which the focal student(s) were enrolled. Some teachers (four) responded immediately, agreeing to interviews and observations. I then sent a second email reiterating my request to those who had not responded to the first. Two more responded and agreed to participate. My next attempt was to call and leave voice mail messages explaining my request and saying I would email them again. One more teacher replied to this email by saying he would participate.

In the three instances when focal students' high school teachers did not respond to email, telephone, or written requests (Diego's British Literature teacher and Jia's American Government and her Environmental Science teacher), I endeavored to

interview other teachers of subjects in the same discipline at the target school who had taught the study participants. In those instances when these alternative teachers agreed to participate, I interviewed each one and observed at least one of their classes. A schedule of teacher and student interviews and classroom observations are in Appendix E, Table 3.

I obtained the names of participants' college instructors and contacted them during September of fall semester 2007. All 11 college faculty agreed to participate in interviews and observations, and I scheduled interviews and observations to take place during fall semester. A schedule of instructor and student interviews and classroom observations are found in Appendix F, Table 4.

#### *Data Collection*

In order to enhance the reliability of this study and to develop a broad understanding of the circumstances under scrutiny (Merriam, 1998), I drew on three sources of information: interviews with student and teacher/instructor participants; classroom observations; and printed course documents. By so doing, I employed triangulation, one of six fundamental approaches used by qualitative researchers to augment internal validity (1998).

I collected the following types of data in this study:

- Interviews of 20 minutes to one hour were conducted and audio recorded with ten bilingual language minority high school students; ten willing high school teachers of content courses; three matriculated bilingual language minority students who had participated in the high school phase, and eleven willing college instructors of ESL and content courses. I interviewed each student participant one to four times while he or she was in high school and three to

four times after he or she matriculated at the local community college or the urban university. Audio recordings were transferred to CDs, transcribed, and coded for analysis using NVivo. Additional informal interviews of 5 to 15 minutes were reconstructed from field notes made immediately after these conversations.

- Printed artifacts such as copies of writing samples, class assignments, textbook passages, handouts, printouts of examples of online resources used by participants, and other written documents pertinent to participants' coursework.
- Observations of representative high school and college classes in which participants were enrolled. Field notes from these observations were expanded and used to provide additional context for information from participant interviews.

*Interviews.* According to Merriam (1998), "interviewing in qualitative investigations is more open-ended and less structured" (p. 74). Following this description, interview questions in this inquiry were constructed to elicit information on predetermined topics while allowing for unique responses from each participant. Thus, I could gather information on bilingual language minority students' understandings of reading in high school and college and simultaneously provide leeway to "respond to the situation at hand, and to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 74). To prepare for and conduct semi-structured participant interviews I developed a set of questions, along with possible follow-up questions to be used in semi-structured interviews according to participants' initial responses. Care was taken to

construct questions that did not direct participants toward specific answers; rather, the intent was to provide as much latitude as possible for participants to respond in their own manner with information pertinent to class literacy demands and practices. In that manner, promising themes could be identified and pursued in subsequent sessions (1998). The lists of questions in Appendix A (pages 206-210) formed the basic structure of each interview. These lists were revised and augmented according to new and promising lines of inquiry that appeared in response to participant interview comments and classroom observations.

I conducted intake interviews with prospective student participants to explain the purpose of the study, the scope of her or his involvement, rights and recourse, and eventual use of any information gathered. I talked with sixty-eight bilingual language minority students about their post-secondary plans and their willingness to participate in the study. I recorded contact information of the students who indicated an interest in participating in the study and who stated an intention to enroll in college after graduation. As many of these initial interviews were in groups as large as 12 or 15 students, they were not audio-recorded. Instead, I made notes on the meetings and wrote up those sessions in which I spoke with eventual participants.

I conducted from one to three one-on-one interviews with the ten bilingual language minority students who agreed to participate in the project. The first interviews took place during February of their senior year of high school; subsequent interviews were done at three to four week intervals for the remainder of the last semester of high school. The college interview phase began in September 2007 after three of the original ten participants matriculated.



Interviews focused on their contextualized understandings of their high school and college literacy experiences, concentrating on descriptions of the ways in which they dealt with school reading in a language other than their first. The first round of interviews concentrated on what they understood were their high school course reading tasks and the methods they thought they were to use to complete these tasks. Follow-up interviews explored recurring and salient themes among the participants' responses and reflections. These subsequent interviews were also shaped by topics and questions that arose after discussions with other student participants and in response to topics brought to the fore after classroom observations and/or teacher and instructor interviews. The fall 2007 set of interviews focused on participants' perceptions and descriptions of how they experienced reading in college, how they accomplished professor-assigned reading tasks, and how they thought reading in college compared with reading in high school.

After preliminary analysis of transcribed student participant interviews and interviews with some of the high school teachers, I reviewed the proposed questions for the second series of interviews and revised and changed or added to them. Likewise, after preliminary analysis of the third set of student participant interviews, I again evaluated the list of questions and revised as appropriate. Examples of follow-up questions based on interview reviews were those constructed in response to participant comments regarding their teachers' use of publisher-generated PowerPoint lectures. As participant after participant named PowerPoint slides as the source they read most frequently in American government and economics classes, I developed questions to elicit how students used this content and how teachers integrated it with other printed and online

materials. I also asked how they liked the slide presentations and how the slides did or did not help them learn course content.

All interviews were conducted in non-public settings that permitted participants to respond without concern that others' opinions or perspectives might intrude. These interviews were recorded using digital recorders, typically Eiderol R-9 machines. The wav sound files were copied to CDs and then transcribed using either Transcriber or ExpressScribe, both freeware applications downloaded from Internet sites. The latter application proved to be the most efficient and effective for my purposes. These sound files were coded according to the system illustrated in D, Table 2.

In transcribing interviews, I focused on the words of both the participant and myself and not on speech and articulation features. I did, however, attempt to capture the speaker's intention and emphasis by including sighs, laughs, and other non-word indicators. I also endeavored to remain faithful to the grammatical structures and pronunciations used by each participant. Therefore, the transcription conventions I used are a combination of those described by Duff (2008) and MacWhinney (2000). Appendix B (page 211) provides these conventions.

During the interviews, I took brief notes on non-verbal matters I thought could be relevant; I also noted participant comments that might relate to patterns or deviations from patterns previously observed among the interviews. Immediately after each session, I voice-recorded follow-up questions for future interviews with the interviewee or other participants; this data was word processed and entered in NVivo as a memo entry, "Memos-follow-up q's."

Eleven high school teachers were interviewed about how they perceived and used reading in their classes. I also asked about the teachers' perceptions of bilingual language minority participants' challenges and strategies when reading and completing course literacy tasks; in addition, I asked if they made any adaptations of course content or presentations to facilitate bilingual language minority students in their classes.

In Fall 2007 I interviewed the three matriculated participants' eleven college instructors about the reading demands of their courses and about their perceptions of the characteristics of and challenges confronting bilingual language minority students as they navigated the transition from high school to college reading. Again, I asked if they adapted any lecture or printed course content, tests, or assignments to accommodate the focal students. These interviews, along with all others done in the course of the study, were recorded and transcribed. A compilation of teacher and professor interviews, along with participants' courses and classroom observations, can be found in Appendix E, Table 3.

*Observations.* Observer roles in a target setting can range from that of full participant in the relationships and activities of the phenomenon observed to one of uninvolved onlooker (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). As I wished to examine participants' classes as they typically unfolded, I did not want to create the possibility of my affecting a class's customary practices by introducing myself into the regular pattern of daily student and teacher participation. Thus, I undertook the role of an "onlooker observer (spectator)" (Patton, 2002, p. 277) with an "outsider (etic) perspective dominant" (p. 277). Although I discussed my role with each participant, teacher, and instructor, I did not explain my presence to others present during the observations unless they asked; none

did. I left it to study participants to determine whether or how much to explain my activities to others in the classes. In so doing, I was neither “covert” nor “overt” (p. 277). For the most part, the duration of an observation was brief, limited to one or two visits per class; my focus was a more general than restricted one in that I wanted a holistic view as opposed to focusing on a single element such as one class (2002).

In order to acquaint myself with the learning environments of the student participants, I observed twelve high school classes of willing teachers in which participants were or had been enrolled. In those instances (4) when a participant’s teacher did not wish to participate in the study, I selected and attended at least one other class of the same subject at that school in order to gain a perspective of what participants could have experienced in that discipline. I selected alternative classes by asking subject area coordinators for names of teachers whose classroom practices were similar to the class I had hoped to observe. As it happened, each participant had also had at least one course in a previous term with the alternate teacher selected for observation. Participants’ high schools employed block scheduling, meaning that students took at most four courses per term with classes changing at the beginning of each semester. As all the participants’ college instructors elected to participate in the study, I observed classes in which participants were enrolled. I expanded field notes from these observations and used them to develop additional context for participant descriptions and explanations and to gain perspectives on classroom events that may not have been obvious to the participants.

In both high school and college settings, I arrived before the class to be observed began and selected a seat that would simultaneously allow maximum view of the whole class while intruding myself as little as possible into normal routines and existing

relationships of faculty and students. I made a diagram of the classroom that included seating patterns, room furnishings, and wall displays. When classes began, I took field notes on class activities, teacher and professor statements and actions, student actions, questions and responses, and materials used. As soon as possible after each observation, I expanded these field notes into a more complete form and uploaded them into NVivo for coding and analysis. As I made notes during observations, I recorded events and statements that had not been fully explicated in student or faculty participant interviews and included questions about them in subsequent interviews.

An example of this is the following: while observing a high school language arts class, I realized that, contrary to my expectations as a college instructor, (a) students were not expected to read the assigned novel *outside and before* class and (b) the teacher read the novel *to* students instead of their reading it on their own. Consequently, in subsequent interviews I asked whether teachers in their other classes read to them and if so, in which classes. I also queried them about whether they thought their comprehension was affected by teachers reading to them as opposed to their reading the same content themselves; I followed this question with another asking how and why if it made a difference.

*Artifacts.* In addition to transcribed interviews and expanded participant observation field notes, I collected handouts from participants that had been prepared by their high school or college instructors, made copies of sample reading assignments, and examined and printed out online documents or digital presentations provided in the courses. These documents and online data were used to augment my understanding of the reading demands of both high school and college courses and to my analysis of

participant descriptions and explanations. Although I was able to acquire copies of quizzes, no teacher or instructor permitted copies to be made of any test or examination.

I attempted to make copies of as many course-related printed documents as possible, and in most instances, I was able to do so. However, none of the high schools would allow me to make photocopies on school equipment, despite my offer to pay for the copies. Instead, participants allowed me to take sets of notes and other relevant documents overnight so that I could copy them elsewhere. I was able to arrange with the community college to photocopy on their printers, provided I supply paper. In addition, after high school graduation the three students who matriculated gave me completed notebooks from most of their high school classes so that I could copy them at my leisure. These include quizzes, projects, and essays but no major tests, as the teachers did not allow students to retain graded tests or exams. The same held true for the college instructors. Finally, I copied sample sections of high school and college textbooks and workbooks and added them to archival data.

*Memos.* Weitzman (2000) describes memo writing as “writing reflective commentaries on some aspect of the data, theory, or method as a basis for deeper analysis” Although memos are associated with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000), I adapted memo writing for this study. Similar to memoing in grounded theory research, I used the practice to record my reflections and ruminations on what I was seeing, hearing, and reading; overall, I found the practice to be a critical tool for realizing and pursuing promising topics as they appeared. As the study progressed, I reread these memos, finding that this review frequently elicited additional thoughts that became more memos. Although I recorded the first version of a memo on whatever writing surface was at hand

at the moment the concept or idea occurred, I rewrote the notes and entered them in NVivo. The following is an example of a memo I wrote on March 12, 2007.

In the classes I've observed thus far (about six, I think), the fourteen bilingual language minority students (two of whom are study participants), are for the most part *very* quiet. They appear to pay attention to class discussions, readily engage in the activity of the moment, and respond to teachers and peers whenever they are addressed; otherwise, *they are silent*. The two exceptions are Elionai and Jia who are study participants. Elionai is the Hispanic student whose biology teacher described as her "number one schmoozer." In contrast, she described Jia as always very studious, outgoing, and engaged in the class.

Their silence is no surprise, but seeing and hearing (or not hearing) makes real what I have heard and read.

#### *Data Analysis*

In keeping with a social constructivist approach, the data analysis focused on the intersection between the study's individual participants' understandings of literacy activities and their sociocultural worlds. My access to their understandings about reading in high school and college is what they have told me. Although my perceptions and intuitions pre-exist, the participants' responses about these matters represent reality as they have constructed and understood it within the context of their high school and college worlds. Thus, data analysis is concerned with these bilingual language minority students experiences with and understandings developed from school literacy tasks at the meeting point between them and the place where they formed their perceptions about and skills for academic reading.

Data analysis was carried out in two phases: during the spring semester in participants' last semester of high school and through the following summer; during fall semester of three participants' first term in college and the following spring semester. In the first phase I concentrated on compiling and analyzing the high school segment, while in the second I focused on assembling and analyzing the college data, followed by comparing the data from both phases. Although some recurring and salient themes were evident earlier in the analyzing process, others were not. An example of a salient theme that became evident in the latter part of the process was the change in Sonia's image of herself as an academic reader from high school to college. This theme clarified itself after our last interview in late December 2007.

After completing the first set of participant interviews, I developed a form of "a priori codes" (Duff, 2008, p. 160) reflecting the study's guiding questions and categories of issues relevant to reading and schooled literacy. According to Duff, "Although qualitative data analysis is typically inductive and data driven, the codes may also be anticipated before analyzing the data (a priori codes), given the topic of the study, the research questions, and the issues likely to be encountered" (p. 160). These codes were not intended to lead to theme development; rather, I used them to group interview content according to subject (for example, "Internet searching"). As the questions for the semi-structured interviews were constructed around topics such as participants' remarks on reading sources, reading strategies, internet use, and so on, I labeled the portions of each interview on a given topic according to these categories. These codes were valuable when I began working with the transcribed interview and observation data because they provided an initial organizational structure.



I drew up the following eight categories and applied them to high school and college interviews with students and teachers/instructors: printed academic reading sources, vocabulary, Internet source selection, academic Internet use, purposes for reading, reading loads, reading strategies, and non-academic reading in English and home language. Examples of responses coded “vocabulary” are Jia’s statement regarding her frustration with “so many book words” and Sonia’s opinion that she needed to know “more professional kinds of words.” As previously stated, interviews with participating bilingual language minority students, high school teachers, and college instructors had been transcribed, recorded on CDs, and uploaded into NVivo, a digital tool for storing, organizing, and analyzing text based data. NVivo made recognizing, organizing, and investigating trends and themes more efficient and transparent, thereby facilitating responses to the study’s questions.

Following the initial coding, individual student participant interviews were reviewed and coded for recurring and salient themes. Examples of recurring themes were participant perceptions of appropriate criteria for selecting Internet sites for school-assigned projects and papers and participant decision-making about appropriate reading strategies. Categories of themes were examined for sub-themes, which were then coded according each sub-theme’s overarching focus. An example of a recurring sub-theme was the participants’ descriptions of what their teachers considered to be properly performed academic reading. This sub-theme led in turn to consideration of how their resulting conceptualizations of high school literacy practices had evolved. After the fall interview phase, this sub-theme was revisited in light of new experiences and understandings.

Interviews with high school teachers and college instructors were repeatedly reviewed and used to explain how bilingual language minority participants' literacy acquisition and practices were imbedded in sociocultural contexts of classroom and institution. Individual interview transcriptions were cross-compared to identify themes found in more than one interview. Field notes from observations were expanded, uploaded into NVivo, and reviewed for relevance to interview themes. Artifacts collected were reviewed and used to provide additional context and triangulation of bilingual language minority and teacher/instructor responses. Finally, as I drove to and from the research sites (one to one and a half hours each way), I listened to interviews recorded on CDs. This additional method for reviewing added another dimension of authenticity and context to the transcripts' content and revealed subtleties unnoticed during initial transcriptions.

#### *What Follows*

In the following two chapters, I present the two major findings of the study. Chapter 4 presents results relating to discontinuities between the high school to college reading transition that participants found to be most problematic for them as matriculated bilingual language minority students. Chapter 5 compares and contrasts students' experiences in the two higher education institutions and queries how the college contexts affected participants' adjustment and adaptation to new learning environments with different literacy task expectations.

## Chapter 4

### DISCONTINUITIES IN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE LITERACY TASKS

#### *Overview*

One of the study's most striking findings is that the participants found that their high school literacy activities and the understandings they developed about academic reading in the context of high school not only left them with inaccurate perceptions of the role of reading in college, but also impeded opportunities for learning in high school that could have permitted them to increase their competence in reading comprehension.

Another of the study's most striking findings is that the understandings that two bilingual language minority participants, Sonia and Jia, derived from their high school reading tasks, while useful and effective for reaching their and their teachers' goals, led them to develop inappropriate—and in many instances, unrealistic—expectations about their high school reading strategies' usefulness for college reading tasks. In high school interviews, Jia related many instances in which her teachers employed academic learning models that, while suitable for accomplishing objectives of that context, she found inadequate when applied to college course assignments and assessments. In contrast, the understandings about academic literacy tasks Diego developed in high school, while similar in many respects to Sonia's and Jia's, differed sufficiently from their conceptualizations so as to present less interference with his academic reading transition to a new school setting.

Repeatedly, Sonia and Jia described their high school literacy activities as consisting of directions that required them to respond to short answer questions designed

to facilitate factual information recognition and recall necessary for passing state-mandated standardized tests. Although on the surface these instructions and kinds of questions might resemble scaffolded learning, they were not. Instead, their purpose was to transmit content. Participants' teachers chose materials and gave directions that emphasized reproduction, not construction, of knowledge, thus conceptualizing students as recipients of instruction rather than active participants in their own learning. In fact, when these activities are compared with elements of scaffolded learning, it is clear that they lack important conditions necessary for learning in the sense used in Vygotskian sociocultural theories of learning.

Sonia and Jia explained their understandings of how they should approach literacy assignments with statements such as "do what the teacher tells us," "the worksheets tell you what's on the test," and "skim the PowerPoints for the answers." As a result of repeated exposure to this model of classroom instruction, these two participants developed expectations and understandings about literacy activities that sufficed for high school reading and writing course requirements but were inadequate for college learning tasks. Moreover, this focus on reproductive class activities had significant consequences for their academic literacy skill development in that they had few opportunities to acquire additional reading skills and strategies they would later need for college-level reading comprehension and conceptual understandings. Although Diego's high school literacy experiences were less restricted to reproductive responses than Sonia's and Jia's, his somewhat limited opportunities for reading extended, connected text did impact him after he matriculated. Finally, the differences among the understandings and resulting

responses to literacy assignments demonstrated by these participants speak forcefully against a one-size-fits-all pedagogy for bilingual language minority students.

### *Scaffolded Learning*

Vygotsky's theories of learning (1978; 1986) (learning mediated by tools and more capable others, students' active participation in their own learning, working within learners' ZPD) are frequently invoked in designing pedagogy for assisting learners to acquire academic and non-academic knowledge and skills. Perhaps the earliest example comes from the work of Bruner (1978), who described Vygotsky's notion of learners operating within their ZPD and with more capable individuals such as teachers and classmates as *scaffolding*. This dissertation enlists this scaffolding metaphor to reflect on participants' descriptions and understandings of appropriate and effective reading task methods in high school and college because it provides a framework for observing and delineating the congruence, or lack thereof, between participants' understandings and acquisition of literacy strategies in the former setting and the literacy task approaches they needed for academic success in the latter. This metaphor also facilitates comparisons among participants about the understandings they developed while in secondary school.

This model of scaffolding has its roots in Vygotskian theories of learning (Wood et al., 1976). Although Vygotsky did not use the term, Bruner (1976) subsequently expanded on Vygotsky's concept of a learner working with adults or more capable peers within the learner's ZPD (Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978; Vygotskiæi & Kozulin, 1986). In this arrangement, the learner is assisted by another or others to accomplish tasks and functions beyond what he or she can complete alone but can achieve through the guidance of a more skilled other or others (Bruner, 1978; Wood et al., 1976).

Although Bruner focused on children's progress in acquiring language, others such as Applebee and Langer (1983) enlisted the concept of scaffolding in the field of literacy education, thereby broadening the notion of children learning language through interactions with more competent others to include fundamental activities of school-based learning. Foley describes Applebee and Langer's perspective on learning as "... a process of gradual internalization of routines and procedures available to the learner from the social and cultural context in which the learning takes place" (Foley, 1994, p. 101). Thus, they extended the model beyond a child's first-language acquisition to include activities that may or may not involve spoken language, while simultaneously maintaining emphasis on the importance of the context in which the learning occurs; *instructional scaffolding* is the term they used to designate Vygotskian learning theories applied in organized educational contexts (Applebee & Langer, 1983). In so doing, they highlight characteristics of learning and teaching unique to school-based learning. Many, Taylor, Wang, Sachs, and Schreiber (2007) explain the concept as: "...support that a teacher or a more knowledgeable peer supplies to students within their zone of proximal development enabling them to develop understandings that they would not have been capable of understanding independently" (2007, p. 19).

According to Applebee (1986), successful instructional scaffolding must meet five conditions: (1) learners contribute to the learning event as it progresses; (2) the focal task is within the learners' Zones of Proximal Development; (3) the learning setting and task have been arranged in such a manner that learners can acquire methods and strategies suitable to the task; (4) teachers and students collaborate on tasks so that responsibility for learning is mutual; and (5) as students acquire new skills and practices,

they assume greater responsibility for directing and accomplishing the task. Drawing on this description, this study expands the notion of scaffolding to compare (a) participants' understandings of academic reading they developed in high school among the three participants, and (b) to contrast their high school understandings of suitable reading strategies with the approaches they needed for college studies.

In this chapter I argue that participants, while functioning in the sociocultural context of high school, developed meanings of and purposes for academic literacy tasks that differed so significantly from college literacy activities that they did not function as transitional scaffolding to post-secondary academic literacy. Moreover, infrequent opportunities in their high school studies for extended, independent reading and the limited repertoire of reading strategies required for accomplishing high school literacy tasks came together with their circumstances as bilingual language minority learners to impact their understandings of and learning for academic literacy tasks appropriate and necessary for successfully accomplishing college learning. Furthermore, individual participants' sense of self developed within the high school environment in some instances influenced their notions of personal competency with school literacy tasks.

### *Reading Comprehension*

According to Sweet and Snow (2003) and the RAND Reading Study Group report (2002), reading comprehension consists of three components:

1. The *reader* who is doing the comprehending
2. The *text* that is to be comprehended
3. The *activity* in which comprehension is a part

Sweet and Snow continue with the following:

In considering the reader, we include all the capacities, abilities, knowledge, and experiences that a person brings to the act of reading. By text, we mean anything that is read—whether printed or electronic. In considering activity, we include three dimensions: purposes—why readers read; processes—what mental activity they engage in while reading; and consequences—what readers learn or experience as a result of reading. (p. 2)

The reader/text/activity relationship and interaction is *socially embedded* within an encompassing context that acts on, and is acted on, by these three elements (2003). For this study, the definition/description is especially pertinent for two reasons: (a) differences among the three study participants' high school literacy experiences led to their constructing diverse understandings and expectations about appropriate and effective reading strategies, which in turn influenced their approaches to college literacy tasks; and (b) the secondary and tertiary settings, despite a shared focus of formal schooling and academic literacy, differ significantly in crucial considerations that included use of instructional time, locus of responsibility for learning, and institutionally determined educational outcomes (Harklau, 2001). In effect, study participants developed their notions about academic reading in one learning context, then carried with them the ideas, understandings, and skills they formed there to another setting, expecting them to be equally applicable in the second.

Research on academic tasks in post-secondary education identify reading and listening as primary sources of course content in college learning and the language skills that all students must use to accomplish learning tasks (Carson, Chase, & Gibson, 1992; Carson, Chase, Gibson et al., 1992; Chase & Gibson, 1994). In particular, research with



bilingual language minority students emphasizes the central role reading plays for these students' accessing course content and in their eventual success in education (e.g., Bengeleil & Paribakht, 2004; Birch, 2002; Carson, 2001; Eskey, 2005; Harklau, 2002). Printed text allows bilingual language minority students to proceed at their own pace, rereading and reflecting on text interpretations as they choose, while oral formats such as lectures can present significant challenges for learners whose listening skills may not be as well developed as their reading skills (Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 2001b; Harklau, 2002; Leki, 2007).

Study participants concurred in these assessments. They said they found high school printed materials to be crucial sources for accessing course content and college printed materials were even more important. Yet, participant responses indicated they were also challenged by individual aspects of college literacy tasks largely because these activities were significantly dissimilar to those they had performed successfully in high school. As a result, participants were confronted with two tasks instead of one: (a) comprehending and organizing course content while simultaneously (b) discovering and developing new reading strategies needed to accomplish these learning objectives. In more than one instance, the approaches to literacy tasks they had developed in high school were so different from those they needed for college that it interfered with their academic achievement and learning.

Participant interviews focused on issues at the intersection between these bilingual language minority students and their sociocultural world. In our discussions, it became evident that they found that many components of reading comprehension, and the interdependence among them, presented them with problems as they tried to complete

college literacy tasks. Their responses also confirmed the interconnections among reading components and sub-skills, a condition that affected their ease and efficiency in transitioning from secondary to tertiary settings. Although this study acknowledges that many factors work together to facilitate or hinder reading comprehension (Alfassi, 2004; Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 2001b; Jackson, 2005; S. A. Stahl & Hiebert, 2006; Tierney & Pearson, 1983), this chapter will address separately aspects of reading activities the study's U.S.-educated bilingual language minority participants identified as central to their literacy task completion. Participants indicated several issues were problematic when they transitioned from secondary school to college reading tasks including reading sources, English reading proficiency, level of guidance in completing reading tasks, amount and kinds of reading strategies required, amount of reading vocabulary knowledge, and reviewing self-generated texts.

#### *Course Content Sources*

*High school reading sources.* A particularly strong and striking finding is the perspective two study participants, Jia and Sonia, had developed about the importance of textbook reading in social studies courses. Reports of pedagogical dependence on PowerPoint and teacher-generated slides were ubiquitous in their descriptions of American government, economics, and biology classes. From their responses, it appeared that they understood PowerPoint presentations were primary printed content sources.

Sonia: The teacher gives us the PowerPoints so we won't have to read all that in the book. All we need to know for the test is in the PowerPoint. We copy down the PowerPoints from the screen and answer the worksheets. The tests are like the worksheets.

Jia's response supported these comments when she observed that "She don't want to make us read the book. It's too much."

These statements came in response to questions about the kinds of texts they read in required social studies and science classes having state-mandated end of course tests (EOCT) and other standardized assessments. For the most part, Jia and Sonia named PowerPoint slides, worksheets, glossaries, teacher-prepared handouts, quizzes, tests, and course textbooks, in that order. Typically, they said teachers did not have them read extended textbook passages, nor were they encouraged to do so. More often, their teacher instructed the class to copy the PowerPoint slides verbatim before or as he or she lectured. They were then given publisher-produced worksheets and instructed to complete the questions using their PowerPoint notes.

Interviews with teachers, along with classroom observations, supported Jia and Sonia's perceptions that their teachers were directing them to focus on the slides because they contained most of the information students needed to know to pass weekly quizzes and EOCTs. One teacher commented, for example,

I give them the notes in a form they can copy down while I go over it verbally. If they don't understand, they can ask questions on the spot. The worksheets reinforce the lecture material, so they really don't have to study very much at all.

There is a test every Friday, so they go over it again.

Both participants and teachers stated that slide content was supplemented by lectures, with students encouraged to add the new information to their notes. Jia and Sonia noted that they were careful to add this information to their notes because "it might be on the test."

Jia and Sonia were further encouraged to think of the PowerPoint slides as a primary learning source through the worksheet and vocabulary activities following class lectures in which they used their PowerPoint notes to complete the tasks. Both Jia and Sonia said they had discovered that test questions would be very similar to those on the worksheets. Jia commented that “You don’t have to study or read the book if you do the worksheets because that’s what’s on the test. He makes his questions just like the worksheets. You know what it’s going to be.” When asked if they *ever* read from the course text, they replied that if they couldn’t find the answers in their notes, both replied that they sometimes “looked in the book.”

An example of how one teacher used PowerPoint presentations can be seen in the syllabus of Jia’s American Government class. Twenty-five percent of students’ final grades was based on a sub-section in the “Grading Policy/Assignment Description” describing how grades on quizzes, homework, and individually compiled notebooks were weighted. Quizzes were open-note “vocabulary” and “conceptual” assessments and received either 100 or zero. On the conceptual quizzes and notebooks, the syllabus specified that

...during the semester we will discuss “concepts” (i.e. CHECKS AND BALANCES) and your ability to comprehend and apply these “concepts” will be paramount to ensure your success in this class. I will go to great lengths to provide the content in an understandable manner, mainly through several PowerPoint presentations, it is up to you to take down the necessary information (notes) and to make certain you use class time wisely [sic] I will given [sic] you conceptual quizzes where you have to apply the appropriate concepts to real-life

scenarios, similar to a word problem in math. You will also be allowed to use your notebook. Again, you'll receive a 100 or a ZERO.

Jia explained that students "took the notes from the PowerPoints," followed by a lecture from the teacher. She reported that he instructed students to add his lecture information to their slide notes.

Jia: We take notes and then read the book and the teacher give lecture.

HA: You take notes from the lecture?

Jia: Yep. Like we take notes from the PowerPoint and then the teacher would explain.

The following are copies of three PowerPoint presentation slides from Jia's American Government notebook. The course text was *Magruder's American Government* (McClenaghan, 2005)

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#### First Slide Different Constitution Plans

- The Virginia Plan
    - Three branches of government
    - Bicameral legislature
    - "National Executive" & "National Judiciary"
- 

#### Second slide

- The New Jersey Plan
  - Unicameral Congress
  - Equal representation in states of different sizes
  - More than one executive

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Third slide  
Constitutional Compromise

- The Connecticut Compromise (The great compromise)
  - Delegates agreed on a bicameral Congress, one segment with equal representation for states, and the other with representation proportionate to the state's populations

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Fourth slide

- The Three-Fifths Compromise
  - The Framers decided to count a slave as three-fifths of a person when determining the population of a state (also pay more taxes)
- The Commerce and Slave Trade Compromise
  - Congress was forbidden from taxing exported goods, and was not allowed to act on the slave trade for 20 years

Typically, the class was given a Guided Reading worksheet and instructed to use slide content to answer the questions. The following are worksheet questions based on the above three slides. Jia said she did not refer to her textbook to complete the exercises, only the slides.

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Figure 1. Jia's American Government worksheet (*Student workbooks*, 2005)

### A. As You Read

The chart below outlines the initial plans for a constitution and the “bundle of compromises” that resulted from the various plans. As you read Section 4, complete the chart by filling in the boxes provided.

Plan or Compromise	Provisions	Type of States That Benefited
Virginia Plan	1.	2.
New Jersey Plan	3.	4.
Connecticut Compromise	5.	6.
Three-Fifths Compromise	7.	8.
Commerce and Slave Trade Compromise	9.	10.

11. Name a group whose interests seem to have been ignored, or even harmed, by the compromises that created the Constitution.

---

### B. Reviewing Key Terms

On a separate sheet of paper, use the key term below in a sentence that shows the meaning of the term.

12. Framers

---

These slides and worksheet exercises are based on five and three-quarter pages of the course textbook that are briefly summarized in the PowerPoints without the

contextualizing commentary of the narrative. According to Jia, her teacher seldom had them use the textbook to complete this exercise.

Jia's teacher's syllabus also gave directions for adding vocabulary terms to their notebooks.

...at the beginning of every chapter you will be asked [sic] to write all the vocabulary terms in your notes in an effort to familiarize yourself with the lingo of Economics. [sic] You will also receive a grade for your efforts, usually the day after I assign the vocabulary to be added to your notebooks I'll give you a quiz and allow you to use your notebooks and all you accomplished the previous day [sic]. Again, you'll receive a 100 or a ZERO.

As previously stated, her teacher instructed the class to use their notes on vocabulary and conceptual quizzes. When Jia was asked how she felt about the PowerPoint lectures in American Government, she replied, "His PowerPoints are dumb, and he can't even read them. I think he gets them from the teacher book. I don't like them!"

Both Jia and Sonia described how their teachers used the publisher-provided worksheet activity called Guided Reading designed for use with course textbooks. In this exercise, students responded to written prompts instructing them to locate discrete item information in their textbooks and write those answers on a Guided Reading exercise sheet. Instructions directed students to look in specific sections to find the correct responses. The following is an exercise from a Guided Reading worksheet used in Sonia's Banking and Finance class. The responses are hers.



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Figure 2. Sonia's Banking and Finance worksheet (Clayton, 2005)

*For use with textbook pages 272-278*

## **DEFICITS, SURPLUSES, AND THE NATIONAL DEBT**

### **OUTLINING**

*Directions: Locate the following headings in your textbook. Then use the information under the headings to help you write each answer. Use another sheet of paper if necessary.*

#### **I. From the Deficit to the Debt**

**A. From the Deficit to the Debt—What is deficit spending?**

Spending in excess of revenues  
collected.\_\_\_\_\_

**B. Deficits Add to the Debt—What is the only way the annual budget can lower the federal debt?**

If federal budget generates a  
surplus\_\_\_\_\_

The Guided Reading worksheet questions follow very closely wording of the relevant passage in the course text.

Diego said he had had only one class in which a teacher used projected slides to present course content. Moreover, that teacher did not instruct them to copy the slides into their notebooks, nor did he use them in every lecture. “Mostly he talked and asked us questions. We also read a lot in the book. We could kind of look at the screen if we

wanted to, but we didn't have to." When I asked him what materials he used to study for test, he said he "looked at the book and my notes."

In terms of digital reading sources in high school, Sonia, Diego, and Jia said they were very comfortable with using the Internet for a variety of purposes such as emailing, shopping, finding information about non-school topics, as well as academic objectives. School-related online use included locating information for tasks such as class discussions, projects, reports, and papers. In some instances, teachers directed them to include Internet sources, while on other occasions, they turned to the Net on their own. For the most part, their teachers made no stipulations about search engines; however, in the main, these students relied on Yahoo, Google, and Ask.com sites for information. Sonia's Banking and Finance teacher was the exception: she required the class to use Google.

Their descriptions of school-related Internet use reveal a spirit of independence and resourcefulness that did not come from class instruction. Sonia, Jia, and Diego all depended on online resources to complete a variety of projects, sometimes in ways that were not sanctioned by their teachers. For example, Sonia turned to Sparknotes online for book reports on topics that did not interest her, even though her teacher had told the class that they would not find the kind of information they needed on that Web site. "I...read SparkNotes. I just like reading SparkNotes. SparkNotes helped me all the time. It did, even though she said that it won't help, it won't cover everything, but it does!"

Jia also consulted online sources whenever her teachers assigned reports and projects that mandated hard copy texts as the only content resources. Her primary reason

was that the books she was supposed to read for her reports had too many unknown or unfamiliar words for her to easily comprehend the text.

Yes, I go online....We weren't supposed to do that, but I did it.... information online is more, it's more clear and organized—no, not organized, but book, they use so many different words to decorate, not that word, but like they use so many difficult words to like, make the book, not pretty but more fancy words and stuff. So I don't know about those fancy words, so I go online and look at some—I Google him [the subject of her report] and, yeah, I find some informations.

However, when it came time to complete the project rubric, Jia turned to hard copy books first and referred to the Internet for clarification. “I use my books and, yeah, if I can't find something what I want in the book, I look it up on the Internet.”

Diego said he used the Internet for purposes such as locating and purchasing school-related books from Amazon and researching paper and project topics. During the high school interview phase, two of his teachers gave a number of assignments requiring references students found online. In his economics class,

All the information has to be from the Internet. That's for essays and for the projects, too. Like we had a project. It was a business project? Like we had to kind of create our own business and in the project we bought a house. But that was in groups. I was in a group with a girl. We had to use Internet to make sure what kind of interest rates, what house, where, how much. He gave us an amount that like, our income supposedly, how high we could purchase the house.

As only a few high school classrooms at the observation sites were equipped with computers connected to the Internet, most teachers could not access online reading

resources in the classroom. Both participants and teachers said that their classes either used computers in the school media center or a computer lab whenever an assignment required online access. Of the classes observed, the one exception to in-class use was by an American Government teacher at Jia's school. His classroom was equipped with two computers, a Smart Board, and an Internet connection. For the most part students were asked to look at—but not read, online news items and results of the teacher's Internet searches. He did not ask them to engage with the text or concepts; rather, he showed them pages from the Internet as he summarized the content.

Two teacher participants, Sonia's Banking and Finance teacher and Diego's AP Economics teacher, took their students to the Media Center to access online resources for papers and projects. Typically they were given an assignment and then instructed to "find the information on the Internet." Teachers provided lists of acceptable choices or assigned topics (e.g., historically significant figures such as Karl Marx or "The Wedding Project"). Students had rubrics they were required to complete with information such as "Family Background" and "Early Childhood" or "guest list (need a #) and "wedding rings."

Sonia's Banking and Finance teacher assigned a Banking Laws Research Project with these instructions:

Directions: Using the internet, find information on various laws that impact the banking industry and complete the chart below. In the last section of the chart, reference any sites used in order to find the information.

Examples of laws students were to research included the “Truth in Savings Act” and the “Truth in Lending Act.” They were to explain each law’s purpose and its impact on banking.

Although many of Jia, Sonia, and Diego’s social studies textbooks included teaching units on Internet search skills and critical assessment of Internet sources for point of view, accuracy, or authority of sources, they said their teachers did not use this instructional material, nor did teachers provide instruction on how students should evaluate the Internet sources they found. Sonia’s Banking and Finance teacher did provide guidelines for acceptable search engines. When asked if she specified a search engine they were to use, she replied

Moore: It depends on what it is. Um, if it’s a current event, I usually tell them it has to be from what could be a printed periodical, a newspaper, a magazine, that sort of thing.

HA: Okay, so it’s not just anything that pops up.

Moore: Right, and don’t go to a Yahoo group and give me a blog of, you know (laughs)...[they get] better results with Google...I tend to tell them to not use Yahoo.

Consequently, each participant developed her or his guidelines for searching and choosing appropriate sites. Sonia described her selection criteria as “I look for labels like the rubric, you know, ‘Childhood’ or ‘Early Influences’ and use that for the answers. I don’t like to read big old long things. It’s better when they have it in sections like the rubric.” When asked how closely the teacher supervised this activity, her response was that as long as the project was done according to the instructions and rubric, “the teacher

don't mind." In contrast, Diego said he used Ask.com most of the time. "I just put in my question and get what I need." He added that his British Literature and his AP Economics teachers cautioned them against plagiarizing but none of his teachers included critical Internet search skills in their syllabi or lessons.

Sonia's Banking and Finance teacher indicated that banking and finance was an atypical class in that it was an elective and therefore currently had no statewide standardized end of course test (EOCT). Consequently, she had more latitude in determining the course focus and assignments because there was no high stakes assessment looming at the end of the term. When asked how she felt about its being an elective course, she replied

I wish it wasn't, but...It's a great class. It's my favorite class to teach. A lot of fun, and it's so relative, and that's what's fun to teach cause they have so many questions and, you know, so many real-life examples we discuss.

This teacher commented that in the "academic courses" (required courses with mandated EOCTs and graduation tests) teachers did not have time to include the kinds of Internet projects she used in Banking and Finance, yet her students responded more enthusiastically to these reading activities than to the test-content focused assignments.

Diego's Economics class was also atypical in that it was an Advanced Placement course. As a result, his teacher said he could make greater demands on the students and assign activities that included Internet resources. Diego described one project in the following:

All the information has to be from the Internet. That's for essays and for the projects, too. Like we had a project. It was a business project? Like we had to

kind of create our own business and in the project we bought a house. But that was in groups. I was in a group with a girl. We had to use Internet to make sure what kind of interest rates, what house, where, how much. He gave us an amount that like, our income supposedly, how high we could purchase the house.

*College reading sources.* After matriculation, one of the first issues Jia and Diego mentioned was the dramatic difference in the number and variety of reading sources they had to manage. Jia expressed her dismay as “We have so many book and online to read. It’s so much I can’t read it all!”

Jia was also perplexed about how to use the PowerPoint lecture notes two of her professors posted online for students to print out. She said she had prepared for her first test in astronomy by studying the lecture PowerPoints. However, she made a 65, even after grades were curved. “Like the first test? I studied for it for ten hours, ten hours straight, and I thought I did really good, and then I failed. Like even after he curved it, I still failed.” Following the first test, Jia described how she approached her second test in Astronomy. This time, on the advice of a roommate, she altered her test preparation methods to include assigned text readings and as well as class lecture PowerPoints. Although her statements demonstrate that she had become aware of the importance of assigned readings, she did not seem to know how to integrate this information into her study plans by including adequate time to read textbook material before the test. Instead, when time was short, she fell back on a high school assumption that reviewing the PowerPoint content might be sufficient for passing the test.

Well, like my friend told me: His PowerPoint doesn’t cover everything, so like she said, I study from the book because just like his PowerPoint doesn’t cover

everything. So, we, this test on chapter five and six so I study from the book for chapter five, but then I got too tired at night. I went to sleep and I was like I'll wake up at six and then study. And then I figured I don't have time to read the book for chapter six, so I studied the PowerPoints for chapter six. I mean, I think I did good on it, but again, I don't know.

In our next interview after her second test, she was still confused about her progress; she described her situation as

Uh, I don't know. I feel like, we just had our last test, and I studied for it real hard. Remember that I told you last week I had only like 5 or 6 hours sleep each night? I studied for it real hard. I think I did good on it, but I don't know. So, this one, I don't know.

Although she passed this second test with a 70, she said she “have to make better grade next time because of Hope scholarship.”

Jia's professors explained that they assigned readings from several sources and that they intended students to print out the lecture notes posted online and use them as a guide for more detailed in-class note-taking. More importantly, these PowerPoint slides were only a small part of the material students needed to master for tests. Jia's astronomy professor stated that “They *have* to read the book and online materials just to follow class demonstrations, never mind pass the tests. Also, there are things on the exams that I don't mention in class.” During an observation of his class, nearby students were heard to comment that “You can't just read the book or take notes on the lecture. His [Dr. Joiner's] tests cover *everything*—what's online, lectures, plus the textbook. You've got to read it all to understand the lectures and pass the tests.”



Jia's Introduction to Theatre's instructor explained his attitude regarding the relation between his lectures and textbook assignments as:

I don't cover as much in class as they do in the book. I consider the book a foundation, and then I'm pulling things out and providing more detail off of what I consider the more duly important topics.

In addition, Jia's Global Issues professor described the relation between his lectures and assigned readings:

Normally what I do is, my class lectures, uh, and my readings kind of supplement each other. So, I'm normally covering stuff in class which I think the readings haven't done a good job on. So, I don't kind of take the readings and kind of summarize them in class.

He echoed the comments of Jia's other professors when he stated that students could not depend on lectures alone when preparing for tests and other assignments.

In contrast to Jia's first semester experiences, Diego made a somewhat smoother transition to college studying, notwithstanding the issues he encountered in his political science course. After a rocky beginning, he said he realized that things were different in college, and he quickly sought help from his instructor with the course reading assignments. Diego's political science instructor described his position on the importance of students' completing assigned reading in his class:

... I do expect them to read it and they know it and then when they see the test, if they didn't read it, then they know next time, "Oops, I should have read that. He wasn't kidding."

He added that he frequently gave pop quizzes to encourage students to keep up with course readings, maintaining that they could not depend on lecture content to pass the course. In response to these expectations, Diego spent at least an hour every day reading his political science texts and taking reading notes. Although his Health and Wellness class involved less printed material, his approach to these assignments was the same.

College Internet use was also different. For the most part, in high school they were more or less turned loose to locate and use online resources on their own with little guidance and few restrictions from teachers. In college, Internet use was more limited in that for the most part they were expected to go online to organize and access course materials through WebCT. Jia said she used the Internet as a resource for papers and reports in her English 101 class and presentations in her speech class, but those instructors made even more stipulations about what and how much they were to use Internet sources. “My English teacher say we suppose to use one article, one book, and one thing online for the paper.”

In summary, Jia and Diego, the participants with courses that included significant reading assignments, found that the approaches to reading tasks they had developed in high school were not effective in their college classes. Although both said they needed to do things differently now that they were in college, their success in adapting their methods and strategies varied. Although Diego found he had to spend far more time on reading and studying out of class, he was happy with the results of the adjustments he made. On the other hand, Jia ended the semester still in a state of confusion and dissatisfaction with her academic performance. It was unclear whether she had grasped

differences in reading sources needed for college work compared with those she had been required to read in high school.

In contrast, Diego and Jia said they had to manage college literacy tasks that included extended passages from textbooks and supplementary materials. These were now their primary source for course content; consequently, Jia, especially, needed to shift her study focus away from PowerPoints to texts, for the PowerPoints were a means, not an end, to accessing and organizing course content. These circumstances highlight the contextualized learning routines, procedures, and expectations that develop within particular sociocultural settings.

*Reading Tasks Management: Teacher-Directed vs. Self-Regulated*

*High school reading tasks management.* When Jia, Diego, and Sonia were asked how much time they spent on academic reading outside class, their comments were similar: “About 30 minutes.” They said most of the time they read course materials in class and generally speaking, finished the work at school. Their teachers corroborated these responses, stating that they introduced learning units by having students read paragraphs or brief passages either silently or aloud in class and followed up with explanations and discussions of the lessons. Sonia’s economics teacher explained her routine as:

Well. with her [Sonia’s] class, we had to break it up so we would read for twenty minutes, then talk about the first section, then read for twenty or thirty more minutes and talk about that section. Keep reading, then discuss.

A language arts teacher at Jia’s school added, “We read daily. I mean, there's ... whether it's a section, part of a chapter, whatever, pretty much every day they have something to

read” and “because we discuss it in class...I ask them to read it right before we discuss it.” Jia and Sonia volunteered that if the class did not complete the readings by the end of the period, their teachers typically assigned the remaining portion as homework. They also said that in many classes, brief in-class directed readings comprised most of the day’s activities. Sonia’s social studies teacher’s comments were typical of the teachers interviewed for this study: “If I don’t have them read in class, maybe 5% will do it. If we don’t finish the reading in class, I assign it for homework.” In addition, Sonia, Diego, and Jia expected their teachers to give them fairly explicit instructions for each reading; Sonia explained that “You know, before we read, they’re going to tell us what to look for, what to remember.”

*College reading tasks management.* In contrast, neither Jia, Sonia, nor Diego reported a single instance in which they read assigned material in a college class. Rather, they said that with one exception, they completed *all* assigned readings outside class; Diego described his political science instructor occasionally read a sentence or brief passage to the class and asked for their interpretation. Although Diego and Jia quickly understood that they would not be reading in class, they found they had to make adjustments in how they read. Not only were they unclear about how much time they needed to allow for assigned readings, they were also confused and uncertain about how they should read their assignments. Diego explained his dilemma: “Most of the time I try to read before, but sometimes I read it and I don’t understand and just kind of stop and then, first go to class and then read it so I can understand it better.” His solution was to meet with his professors whenever he had difficulty with assigned readings, typically at least once a week. His solution was to meet with his professors whenever he had

difficulty with assigned readings (typically at least once a week). “I [had] read it like four or five times so I went with him [his professor] and told him to explain me, and he did.”

In contrast, although Jia was experiencing the same--if not more—difficulty than Diego, she met only once with one instructor, her political science professor, about her difficulty with course readings. Before the meeting, she commented that “I don’t know what to do with the chapters. I memorize a lot, but the test isn’t that.” After that meeting, she turned to her roommate when she did not understand the textbook readings or lectures.

Sonia reported no particular difficulty with text reading tasks. However, it must be noted that her class schedule did not include any courses with extensive reading assignments.

In summary, Jia, Sonia, and Diego had learned to expect that their high school teachers would closely direct what, when, where, and how they approached their reading tasks; in contrast, they discovered that their college instructors made reading assignments and then expected them to determine where, when, and how they would complete the readings. For the most part, their college professors planned lectures with the assumption that students would complete assigned readings beforehand; their high school teachers did not.

In the target high schools, the study participants said they expected focal activities in many of their classes to be in-class reading of worksheets or brief passages in textbooks. In contrast, in their college classes, they found reading in-class was limited to board notes or digitally projected text. Furthermore, while their high school teachers had provided pre-reading activities to prepare them for what they were going to read and then

highlighted important information, they were expected to read on their own outside class, deciding themselves about what they should focus on. Again, the changing nature of participants' learning conditions emphasizes the social, historical, and cultural interconnections among context, participants, and use of mediating tools.

### *Reading Strategies*

*High school reading strategies.* Sonia, Diego, and Jia described the reading strategy they used for most tasks as “skimming for the answer,” or searching PowerPoint slide notes, and occasionally course texts, for explicit content. Jia: “Most of the time is skimming the worksheet or the book to get the answers. I just look for what the question wants.” When asked how they determined the most appropriate strategy for a particular reading, they replied with the following comments:

Jia: Do what the teacher tells us.

Sonia: I read the instructions on the worksheet or at the end of the chapter and do what it says.

Diego: In Language Arts I read for what's happening and I see it in my mind. In Government, I'm looking for something that's gonna be on the test.

The three participants stated they also applied this approach when working with online resources. Jia described how she read Web material: “We just had a project, right, so we had to write an essay and I read like just a lot of stuff from the Internet, you know, of course, and I read, skim-read...”

The emphasis on a skim reading strategy appeared to influence how Sonia selected Web site sources for projects and papers. She said she reviewed the project

rubric and looked for sites that were closest to the organizational plan of the report. The following is her explanation about selecting Web sources for a paper in Economics:

How did I choose one? Well, I chose it by, like/ there were some that had this big old reading, just like probably eleven page reading thing. I didn't want to do that. Yeah, I didn't want to do that. What I was looking for was sections, something that said "Marx's childhood" and then after that, like a time line looking thing or something, sections, and had a paragraph about it, and I skim-read it and wrote a little bit on that paragraph and read the other paragraph. I like it like that; I like it already organized from his childhood to his influences to this, to that. I like it in sections.

Thus, Sonia preferred Web pages organized to facilitate skimming over those with continuous prose and gave little if any consideration to issues such as site and source reliability.

*College reading strategies.* After matriculation, the three participants found that their college literacy tasks required reading strategies other than skimming. Diego's comment is representative of the three: "[I had to] pay a lot more attention than usual to everything I read, like what does it mean, like [because] in college, it's, the purpose is to learn." Jia saw the difference as "I have to understand by myself, not like high school where teacher help if you don't get it. I think about what it says." She added that she had far more difficulty understanding written course content in college, generally speaking, than she had in high school. "I can't find the answers like I did in high school!"

In summary, Diego, Jia, and Sonia had learned to depend on skimming their notes or text for specific content in their high school classes. However, they found the strategy

was not useful for most of their college reading tasks. What they had learned was appropriate in one context did not serve their purposes in the second context. Moreover, in Jia's case, her dependence on this high school-based strategy at times interfered with her adapting more effective strategies for her college reading tasks.

### *Quantity of Assigned Reading*

*Quantity of high school reading.* Jia, Sonia, and Diego were accustomed to reading twenty to forty pages per week in all their classes. Sonia's response was similar to Diego and Jia's statements.

I guess I read about ten or twenty pages a week this semester. I'm taking three courses, but one of them is math where we don't read as much as in Banking and Finance where we usually read like about five to ten a week. It's not a lot. Her Banking and Finance teacher estimated that "Some days it [in-class reading] was very minimal, maybe a paragraph, or other days, it was twenty or thirty pages [?]."

Although neither Diego nor Sonia said they were challenged by the quantity of reading they were assigned in high school, Jia found she could not always complete her high school reading work. When asked how she completed readings for book reports, she replied:

Ah, I skip in a book, cause I can never finish a book. Usually I can't read reading the whole book before it's due, so I skip. ... I skip around. If I see if any interesting stuff, I wanna keep reading, so I keep reading, but when I get to the boring part, I skip.... if I read every single word, I can never finish it before it's due because there are many words I don't know in the book.



Other than reading for book reports, Jia, Sonia, and Diego stated they almost never read extended passages outside class and without teacher supervision.

*Quantity of college reading.* In stark contrast, Jia and Diego estimated that with their fulltime schedules of 12-15 semester hours, they were expected to read 150-200 pages per week, quantities that represent an increase of six to seven times their high school reading requirements. They both felt that the reading load was *the* major difference between their high school and college studies; their initial reactions to these differences were similar. Diego remarked that

This isn't high school at all. It's a lot harder. I never had to read much there, but here it takes me a long time to get it finished, at least one or two hours a day to go over it one time.

He described the quantitative difference between high school and college reading as

Well now it's way more....I read way more. The thing is that if I had all the reading I did in my first semester, it'll be the same to all the reading I did in four years of high school.

He estimated that his high school readings had taken him no more than 30 minutes to one hour *each week* to complete. In contrast, after matriculation, in one course alone—POLS 1101—he said he spent approximately 10 hours each week completing the assigned thirty to forty pages.

Jia's reaction was stronger: "Oh my God! I can't read it all! I'm lost in Global Issues and Astronomy! I just read what I can." When asked which of her courses included the most reading, she replied "They're all kind of the same. Like, I didn't realize that much reading I have to do until I get in college, it's like tons of reading, it's crazy." She

went on to say that “I do what I can and skip the rest. I try to see what’s important and read that.”

As the semester progressed, Diego became more comfortable and confident in tackling his assigned readings; Jia, however, continued to lament the quantity and density of her reading tasks throughout the term: “I still can’t do it. Like, I read three or four hours a day, but no way, like, I can read it all.”

In summary, Diego and Jia found that the quantity of reading they were assigned in college was significantly more than they had been assigned in high school. They identified the necessity to learn to deal with this increase as the most important and difficult adjustment they had to make in moving from one learning context to the other.

#### *Vocabulary Issues*

*High school vocabulary issues.* In high school interviews, Diego, Sonia, and Jia said that unknown or unfamiliar words presented them with challenges when they read school materials, albeit to varying degrees. However, they had come to depend on their teachers defining any word they did not know; they had only to ask for explanations, and their teachers willingly provided them. Typically, Sonia and Diego said they “asked the teacher or somebody in the class” when they were stumped by an unfamiliar word, although neither participant followed up with efforts to make the word or words a part of their active lexicons. Both said they used dictionaries whenever they *really* needed to know a word meaning and no one was available to help them. Diego sometimes used a Spanish-English dictionary: “I look it up both ways sometimes, you know, go from English to Spanish to English.”

Of the three, while in high school, Jia was the only one of the three who did more than refer to dictionaries for word meanings outside class. Her Human A & P teacher described Jia's approach as

...many mornings Jia was in my room at seven thirty, for me to go over it [the day's assignment], cause I'm here at six thirty and they know that. And I would sit down and pronounce words for her or she would want to know a synonym.

None of the three had a systematic approach for learning unknown vocabulary items, nor did their teachers go beyond providing on-the-spot explanations about word meanings other than Sonia's Language Arts teacher suggesting students should "write it down." Jia typically wrote unknown words in the margin of her notes, along with Chinese translations. Diego also occasionally wrote down unfamiliar words and used his knowledge of Spanish cognates to help him understand and recall these words in the future. Sonia neither wrote down new words nor did she note Spanish words with similar meanings.

When Sonia was asked whether there were unfamiliar words in the texts she read in literature classes, she replied

Sonia: Yeah. A lot of them. I don't even remember them, they were just really hard, I don't know why. I should know 'em, but sometimes I couldn't think of what it would go with, with my thesaurus.

HA: So what would you do when you didn't know a word?

Sonia: I'd ask the teacher what it meant. (laughs) I'd ask the teacher, ask a friend, be like, what does this word mean, I don't know what it means. They'd tell me and I'd be like, okay, now I know, then I'd forget.

Although Sonia encountered unknown words in her literature classes, her vocabulary issues were less about reading comprehension and more about finding the right words to express her thoughts when writing.

I feel like I need to enhance a little from middle school to where, I don't know. I need a thesaurus all the time...Like during my research project I had to replace like a lot of words. Like the thesaurus, that's too immature, like no, that one's not good. I had to replace a lot of my words with the thesaurus. Like I need some more adult...[laughs] You know?

She also mentioned that she had the same problem when speaking and writing Spanish; consequently, she said she was constantly asking others for translations from English to Spanish.

In contrast, Diego and Jia's comments reflected more concern with word knowledge for reading comprehension than with choosing the most appropriate word when writing. Diego described his reading challenges as a combination of lexical and syntactic issues.

...sometimes the meaning of the words, the vocabulary, sometimes the structure is different in Spanish, so I'm like I think/I translate in my head sometimes when I don't get it in English, like it's either this or it's either that, so I just/sometimes I ask my teacher, sometimes I just "Oh well. It fits the sentence "this, oh well whatever. It fits the sentence. What is this? It makes sense."

He described his experience with reading a book for his AP economics class.

Well right now I have Economics and first we read a book that's called *Freakonomics*. I read that book and I got like the first two chapters but then it was

hard to understand. It's the same thing as sometimes it's my vocabulary and sometimes my/the structure, but since I didn't understand it, I bought it in Spanish, too.

When reading assignments was challenging because of unfamiliar vocabulary, Diego's strategy was to read the passage at least twice and sometimes three times until he felt he understood it. He added that even though he looked up unknown words, he did not always understand the dictionary's definition. When asked for an example of a word he had looked up, he could not recall one.

Jia felt that vocabulary presented the greatest barrier to her studies in the United States. When I asked for examples of words that interfered with her reading comprehension, she immediately thought of several. She said that vocabulary inhibited comprehension in all her classes, especially Human Anatomy and Physiology. At times, Jia's lack of word knowledge led to embarrassing moments, as can be seen in the following example.

Jia: Like "atmospheric pressure." I don't [know] that until I look it up. Like uh, "excretion."

HA: "Excretion?"

Jia: "Excretion." I remember it was funny. I didn't know/We were talking about "excretion" and we were talking about "excretory systems." They said "urine." I didn't know that is "pee-pee." And I go "What is that?" I guess at that time like, nobody heard me. And then I asked again and they kind of laugh. Yeah, well, uh, what else? Well, I didn't know there is like a "nervous system." I thought

“nervous” is a adjective. I didn't know it as a “system.” [Laughs lightly] And I didn't know what is “permeable.” I didn't know what is “enzyme.”

Although she enjoyed reading in Chinese, she was less inclined to read books in English because

...if there is a lot of words I don't know or I have to look up, that would lose my interest to look/to read that book....some/like most good books/they use like literature words. So [if they] use all the fancy words, that would make me not want to read it.

Her concern with what she perceived to be insufficient academic vocabulary added to her anxiety about college studies.

That's what I concerned about it. See, like, I'm really afraid. What if the professor use all the big words I don't understand and I can't catch up and I don't know? I'm kind of nervous.

Social studies and science teachers interviewed for the study volunteered that they were aware that bilingual language minority students in their classes frequently needed additional lexical information to understand many discipline-specific concepts. Some teachers tried to anticipate bilingual language minority students' need for additional context and explanations. Mr. Martin described his approach to teaching American Government and Economics to bilingual language minority students.

You know, in teaching, the students that are outside the United States, to a certain degree, it's understanding the concept, the wording. Like I remember uh, oh gosh, two or three years ago in American Government we were talking about how a bill originated, how a bill got started in Congress. And I something, it starts on the

floor. And I noticed that I had several Hispanic students kinda looking around like, “you lay it on the floor?”... You don't put it on the floor, that's just terminology that you use, you know, to look at their thoughts and some of the other things, so you have to be very careful that you try to go back and put it in words that they will understand. I will...and so, you know, that's the thing in teaching economics, so they can understand, you know, the concept when they're testing, cause the first test in economics is pretty tough.

*College vocabulary issues.* Generally speaking, Diego, Sonia, and Jia found college vocabulary issues to be more critical to reading comprehension than those they dealt with in high school. Diego commented on the relative difficulty of understanding course concepts in Health and Wellness: “Well, in some parts it’s like challenging because of some words I don’t understand, but at some times, it’s like I already knew that.” He also remarked that his political science assignments took more time than expected because the more “professional” vocabulary of college required him to read more slowly. In addition, lexical issues affected his performance on political science quizzes and tests because

I know they're right [his responses to test questions], but I don't have, they were kind of like, really short essays, I know I had the right idea, maybe I could explain it to him, but I don't know how to explain it in words, like in writing. Because if they ask me like definitions, I know what it is, but I don't know how to explain it.

Sonia noted that the oral and written language her college instructors used was different from what she had been accustomed to in high school. Her comments on college:

Yeah, they use some pretty big words. Like, Miss Kemp especially. She uses a lot of big words and she's like, if you don't know what that word was, this is it, write it down, don't forget it. I forgot it, to be honest. I know I wrote it down somewhere, but I forgot it. That's why I write them down, so...but yeah, they use some big words. Expect you to know it, too. I was like, ahh, what was that?

When asked to describe her perceptions of high school and college vocabularies, she replied

No, it wasn't that hard, there were some big words, but I understood it all in high school. But in college, they speak more, intellectual, or academic, I don't know what word...That's what I need to work on, like, words and like, replacing them with more academically inclined words.

Of the three, Jia was the only participant who reported that she consistently looked up words when she encountered new ones. She said that since matriculation, she referred to her dictionary at least two or three times each day. All three participants said they would probably not ask in class for definitions of words their professors used in lectures. As three of Jia's classes had more than 120 students, she explained that, "I might ask later, like my roommate, but no way I ask in class."

In summary, all three participants said they read more slowly in college because the academic language commonly used in college texts interfered with ready comprehension of readings and lectures. Although they said they had encountered new words in their high school studies, they all found that the college lexicon was more challenging. Moreover, the methods their high school teachers had used to assist them with vocabulary issues—providing definitions extemporaneously without follow-up



exercises that might ‘teach’ the unfamiliar items—led students to depend on at-the-point-of-need explanations instead of developing strategies that might result in their acquiring understandings of new lexical items they could recall and use. It should be noted, also, that some of their high school teachers were aware of the confusing nature of idiomatic English and tried to anticipate when these situations were likely to occur by providing explanations and synonyms to help their bilingual language minority students cope. Clearly, from participants’ descriptions of their college experiences, insufficient lexical resources and a lack of effective strategies to remedy the situation presented impediments to their developing automaticity or fluent reading comprehension.

#### *Analysis of Self-Generated Writing*

*Analysis of self-generated writing in high school.* The following discussion will not focus on writing per se; instead, it looks at participants’ reviewing of their writing as a form of reading. Although I am artificially separating writing and reading, I want to foreground the latter to call attention to the “constructive processing that takes place when a writer reads his or her own writing” (Spivey, 1989, p. 12), an action that is performed differently by expert and novice writers (Flower, Hayes, Carey, Schriver, & Stratman, 1986).

Diego, Jia, and Sonia stated that most of their high school courses required them to compose essays, reports, and other assignments of one to four pages, but they did not know how to avoid, identify, or correct errors in their writing, a condition that diminished their sense of confidence in their potential for academic success. They also said that, for the most part, they did not know how to organize written assignments if they were not given a format to follow. Jia explained how she organized her essays and papers: “She

give us a rubric, and I just fill in the parts, what it says I do.” They also did not understand how to review what they had written so that they could restructure and improve it.

Sonia was particularly disturbed by her performance on an important project in a social studies class.

I had a 90, an 84...My grammar? You won't believe my grammar. It was a 40-something. My grammar was like a 40 something [laughs] like that. Oh my god, see? Grammar is what kills me.

Like my senior paper I did on the Berlin Wall. Yeah, and my teacher thought that was too risky, but I was like, I really want to do it. “Alright, if you think you can do it, you can do it.” And so I did it. She said my content was really good. I passed it but what I failed was my grammar. I made a 46 on my grammar.

(laughs) I'll be honest. My other two grades was a 84 and like a 92 and I, then I had a 46.

However, she said she had no idea of how to edit this paper to get a better grade. “I’m like I don’t know what to do. I’m not going to do it wrong if I know the right way, and I don’t know how to look at it.”

She also described her experiences with reading her essays and reports in her high school British Literature class:

Yeah, but then in high school, it’s like I never thought about that [grammar and mechanics in writing] no more. I just thought about staying in topic, staying in topic with my essay. And that’s what happened on my senior paper. I stayed on topic but my grammar was so bad. Like, my content was, I don’t know, an 84,

staying on topic was a 90, and my grammar was like a 34. I was like, oh my gosh! That is so bad. But I think those were the grades and my average was a 69. And I was like, wow, this is so bad. But she, Miss Kelly [British Literature teacher], she was so nice. She's like, I'm gonna give y'all three days, go ahead and start editing, you know, correct, do your corrections, come in in the morning, do corrections and turn it in and I will correct it. I ended up getting like an 80 something, so I was like, yea! I passed it at least, but still, I could have done much better. I couldn't do those corrections.

Feedback from Sonia's employer increased her motivation to improve her writing skills; in fact, his comments made her aware of the importance of "good" writing outside a school context.

I write simple, but I need to learn to write better, cause in accounting you're gonna have to document, write documents for your managers, which I've had to do, and I did it once and my manager told me I had to work on it. He's like, you need to work on your grammar and stuff. I'm like, for real? He's like, yeah. Need to work on that. I was like, okay....So, I gotta learn to write professionally.

Diego's high school experiences and subsequent frustrations with reviewing his writing were similar to Sonia's. However, his situation improved somewhat when he participated in a high school for-credit summer program at the community college. He described how his teacher explained essay structure to him and what it meant to finally understand how to organize his writing.

The only time I had help was the Steps college [program] I took, Miss Harris, and there's where I kind of learned how to write an essay, pretty much just structure

and everything, and there's where I learned more than all the six years I've been here. But we didn't study grammar that much, we only studied how to do essays. Jia described her high school composition instruction and learning to read her writing as non-existent. In addition, she came to understand that because her high school teachers made allowances for her writing because she was an English learner, she did not realize how grammar, mechanics, and variety of word choice could impact her academically.

[In ESOL] I mean, we just, like, we're just read essays, we just read the book and like do activities, and had like tests and quizzes, and that was it. I mean, I don't know, just, that just didn't help at all. I mean, I wrote essays in my other classes, they don't, they don't grade your essay based on your grammar, form, and stuff. They just want you to show what you know about the topic and what related to the class, and they don't grade that much on form, and grammar, and stuff....I'm like, ohhh! Great!

*Analysis of self-generated writing in college.* In our first interview after Diego matriculated, he made numerous comments about his progress in learning how to read and review his writing.

And here, since we're studying the grammar, I've learned more in these past three weeks than in my whole six years.

Yeah, it's making a big difference, because right now, on my essays that I just did, I kinda of proof read it myself, and then I proof read it again and I found a lot of errors and I put it, I corrected it and I took it to another student who is good at

English and the writing part and she was like, it's okay. She didn't find more than three or four errors. Then I just took it to a writing lab and it was okay.

I took it to the writing lab and he told me, well, do it [read it] backwards. And I'm like, okay. And I did it, and that's how I got more of the errors and pretty much I did it all.

That's how I've been learning lately, I don't [didn't] know anything of the subordinate clause, the complex-compound, the conjunction, the transition, I was like, what is that?...And when I read the sentences, well this makes sense now, how it's separated and how it's subordinated and all that. I'm like, now it makes sense. I needed that.

In the last interview of the semester, Diego explained the differences he perceived in his ability to perform and read self-generated academic writing.

The thing is that now, it's kinda, I won't struggle to write that much, I will, but it was kinda of to like brainstorm, but now with writing, I know how to do a sentence correctly. I know how to find comma splices, fragments, I know where a comma goes, where a colon goes, where quotation marks, everything. I know how to introduce, how to say main points, how to end it. Now I know how to write.

Sonia's observations were similar.

I feel really good about my writing now. I got back in touch with my language arts class. I feel like I got back in touch with that because it was more about you know, subject verb agreement, and now I'm paying attention to it more. And when I, my essay for my final, oh my gosh. I looked over that and I scanned through it, I was like, look for your mistakes, comma splice, everything. I found

everything. I know I found everything, I was just, this is everything. It's clear, I have no mistake, I know it.

Although the first two essays Diego and Sonia wrote in ESL Writing were not timed, the rest of their writing was done in class with specific time constraints. This practice was followed because learning support guidelines for successful course completion mandated students write in-class essays within set time limits that were then graded by one member each of the English and the ESL faculty.

Interviews with Diego and Sonia's instructors during the semester corroborated both participants' estimations of their newly developed skills for reading their own written assignments. Both made comments similar to the following: "I'm not worried about her at all after she exits ESL Writing. She's really taken hold and learned to read her own writing objectively. Very few mistakes now."

Jia's descriptions of her college experiences with reading self-generated writing were less positive. All the students in her English 1101 class were bilingual language minority students, both international and US-educated. In the second interview after her matriculation, she said she was anxious about her progress in the class. At that time, she was concerned because she had a 75 or 78, with one last essay forthcoming that would decide her final mark. Papers in this ENGL 1101 were all written outside class, with the first draft and final copy having equal weight in determining a student's final grade. When asked about her approach to reading her writing, she replied, "Actually, I asked my room mate, Liz, like edit it. I mean, I read over it, but for some reason, if you write something, if you re-write it, read it, you don't think there's any mistake." Jia indicated

that she would turn to her roommate for help in reviewing her writing for the last two assignments.

When asked if she was learning how to read and edit her writing, she replied, “We kind of exchange papers with a neighbor’s and let them look at it and write comments. I mean, she do tell you to reread your paper but I mean, I guess that’s every teacher says that.” The question was rephrased to ask whether she was being taught a different way to read her writing now that she was in college. Jia shook her head “no” and said, “No, no. I don’t think so.” Her final grade in the course was C+.

An interview with Jia’s composition instructor elicited the instructor’s perspective on class objectives and activities.

... we read lots of examples and they’re asked to analyze those examples, looking, taking the essays apart, looking at topic sentences, controlling ideas, um, going from general to specific, how does the author do so, what connectors that they use, what hedging structures they use, so they do lots of sample essays and then the hope is that they’ll be able to apply that to their own writing.

The course packet says something like you know, look at your APA style, make sure it’s formatted correctly. Not all students are doing that, so I think I want them to actually circle or you know, identify the parts, something a little more where they have to write something, get something tangible that shows they actually thought about those types of things. Say, you know, look at your hedging structures, did you use them correctly? I want them to, I’m gonna ask them to start circling their hedging structures, making sure that they have them in their

papers. So they are asked to read their drafts um, and some students are taking it more seriously than others.

She also commented on Jia's reading and writing skills.

One student I'm thinking of, Jia, I find even looking at the examples, looking at all the different things that we go through in a group, she works very well and she can articulate her thoughts and speech very well, but on paper, it just comes out a big hodgepodge of disconnected information. You can't make the connection between examples. She doesn't understand how to do that. Her thesis statement um, doesn't, there really is no thesis statement. Broad general statement and then she just kind of goes off on a tangent of examples without making those connections and when you lead her back to looking at examples, other people's writing, it still doesn't click. And so I don't think it's a linguistics problem, I think it might be more of a cognitive development, just not able to see the trees in the forest or you know, something like that.

Jia's instructor's comments on Jia's lack of organizational skills—and her negative assessment of Jia's "cognitive development"—contrasted sharply with the address Jia gave in her speech class. Of the seven students who spoke that day, in my opinion, Jia's was by far the best in content, organization, and delivery. Not only was the information well-organized and relevant to her topic, she had coordinated the PowerPoint slide sequence with her speech so that progression from one slide to the next was automatic and the changes matched the pace of her delivery. The audience spontaneously applauded when she ended.



Jia retrospectively described her high school experiences with writing and reading her compositions and reflected on their effect on reading her writing in college.

I mean, I did write essays, but, oh well, actually, I did write essays in art class but not in English class because I was in ESOL class. I mean, those were like elementary English. Like really elementary school English ... I mean, I kinda happy because I mean, I got high GPA, but now I think back and it was like a waste of time and now I'm like really struggle with my actual English class because I didn't have enough practice.

Indeed, Jia's grade in her English composition class was her lowest—C-, and her overall first semester GPA, 2.7, was nearly a full grade point below her high school GPA of 3.5. In contrast, both Sonia and Diego's first semester college GPAs were equal to or greater than their high school GPAs. Sonia's high school GPA was 3.2 and her college was 4.0; Diego's high school GPA was 3.4 and his college was 3.4. Jia was very unhappy with her first semester college performance and in retrospect viewed her lack of preparation for writing in high school as a primary factor in grades that were less than satisfactory to her.

In summary, participants stated that they had not been taught strategies in high school for reading their writings so that they could re-view and re-construct essays and papers to improve them. They related no interactions with teachers in which they were taught methods for critically reading and reviewing their writing products. Although they were given opportunities to revise papers and projects to improve unsatisfactory grades, they said they had little or no knowledge of how to do so. All three expressed confusion and frustration with the lack of information about satisfactory organization, syntax, and mechanics of academic writing. Jia, in particular, felt her essays and papers were graded

more leniently because she was a bilingual language minority student. Although she had been happy that she received high grades on high school written products with significant errors, her difficulties with college writing left her with regret about these earlier experiences.

In contrast, Diego, Sonia, and Jia's college compositions were assessed against higher standards than their writing in high school had been. To prepare them for such writing tasks, the two participants attending the community college were explicitly taught through carefully scaffolded activities how to read their own writing. The resulting improvement in their writing skills contributed to their growing sense of self-efficacy and greater confidence in their academic abilities and prospects. However, Jia's experiences with her composition class did not yield comparable benefits, for her instructor did not concentrate on helping her achieve a similar level of independence in composing and revising. Instead, Jia was presented with a one-size-fits-all approach in which her instructor attributed Jia's lack of success to a cognitive deficiency, not a failure on the teacher's part to provide appropriate and effective scaffolded instruction that could result in Jia's becoming a competent and independent writer. Rather than assisting her to develop the skills needed to "re-read" her writing, English 1101 left her discouraged about her future literacy efforts and unhappy about her high school's failure to prepare her for college-level composition.

### *Discussion*

Although Sonia, Jia, and Diego's reading/writing efforts were appropriate and adequate for high school—as evidenced by their respectable grade point averages (GPA) and June graduations, the understandings about academic reading strategies and skills

they constructed in that environment were of limited use in college. Applying Applebee's (1986) conditions for successful instructional scaffolding to their high school reading activities illustrates the ways in which these "learning" experiences were anything but.

In participants' courses with EOCTs, Sonia, Diego, and Jia had few if any *opportunities to contribute to learning events as they progressed*. Lesson content was carefully broken down into discrete segments, with teachers providing detailed instructions about what they were to do with the material and when they were to do it. Teachers also appeared to assume that participants could learn, or ingest, lesson content without determining just what portions participants could perform on their own or with assistance from more capable others. From my interviews with teachers and participants, I concluded that decisions about whether a particular learning event was above, below, or *within participants' Zones of Proximal Development* were based not on the individuals in the class but on the profile of a moderately unmotivated, low-to-average achieving student.

Although it could be construed that the learning setting and activities Sonia, Jia, and Diego experienced were typically arranged in such a manner that they could acquire the methods and strategies suitable to the task, it also appears that these activities necessitated their repeatedly employing the same methods and strategies on task after task; hence, learning as Vygotsky conceptualized it did not take place. Frequently, they copied slide content and used that information to complete worksheet exercises; they also skim-read textbook and Web source passages to locate answers to guided reading prompts.

It also cannot be said *teachers and participants collaborated on tasks* so that the *responsibility for learning was mutually shared*, for neither Sonia, Jia, nor Diego related any instances of their working together with their teachers so that these three students took on responsibility for their learning. Teachers gave instructions; students carried them out. Finally, the study's participants and their teachers cited no examples of their *taking on more responsibility for directing and accomplishing assigned tasks as they acquired new skills and practices*.

As previously stated, the reading strategies and skills Diego, Sonia, and Jia acquired in high school were satisfactory for accomplishing the learning goals of that school setting, as they were for all students graduating with them. And, as mentioned earlier, they found these skills and strategies were not sufficient for their college literacy tasks, a circumstance also not restricted to the three participants. However, as bilingual language minority students, Jia, Diego, and Sonia experienced additional adverse effects to their prospects for success with college learning because their high school reading activities did not scaffold literacy learning by providing them with sufficient opportunities to acquire the routines and procedures of independent academic reading. Had it been otherwise, it is likely they would have had far more occasions to read and contend with extended passages, perhaps from multiple sources. Frequent instances of extended reading of course materials, coupled with direct, targeted vocabulary instruction, could have provided them with much needed rehearsal, greater academic vocabulary resources, and further context development necessary for more fluent reading and comprehending. In addition, they would have had other experiences and opportunities to construct alternative perspectives on the role of reading in learning,

thereby bringing the understandings about academic reading they developed in high school closer to the realities of reading in college. And to anticipate college reading tasks, they would have benefited from high school assignments calling for multiple discipline-specific reading strategies, especially if these tasks were structured in such a manner that they learned not only an array of appropriate strategies but also when and a particular strategy should be used. In this statement, I am referring to the declarative, conditional, and procedural knowledge expert readers have about reading in a specific discipline, as described by Alexander (1995) and Winne (1995b). Finally, Jia, Sonia, and Diego would have profited from working with teachers who provided guided instruction in learning to *read*, to *construct meaning* from text they had produced. In so doing, they could have learned about revising and rewriting their own work to better communicate their ideas.

Participant interviews and other data sources indicate that these bilingual language minority students' post-secondary literacy challenges are consistent with findings from L1 and L2 literacy and second language acquisition research that identify reading and listening as the primary sources for college learning (Carson, Chase, & Gibson, 1992; Carson, Chase, Gibson et al., 1992; Chase & Gibson, 1994). For many bilingual language minority students whose oral/aural language skills are more suited for informal social communication than for academic learning tasks, reading is the most effective means for them to access course content (e.g., Bengeleil & Paribakht, 2004; Birch, 2002; Carson, 2001; Eskey, 2005; Harklau, 2002). Reading, more than listening, permits them to work at their own rate, reviewing passages, settling lexical questions, and interpreting text without the additional cognitive task of carrying out these tasks in a linguistic code over which they have insufficient control (Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 2001b;

Harklau, 2002; Leki, 2007). Hence, reading for these participants was important not only as a conduit to college learning but also as the content source or input over which they had the greatest control.

Although the matriculated participants had heard that college coursework would require significantly more reading than their high school classes had, they were surprised by and unprepared for the actual volume of assigned text: a ten fold increase in volume from high school to college. They also did not anticipate the fundamental importance of these written materials as sources of course content, nor were they accustomed to reading extended passages of connected discourse. In high school, teachers prepared them for the content they would read and presented it in measured portions. In addition, class size and structure reduced opportunities for one of them to spontaneously ask instructors and classmates for explanations and definitions. The added factor of reading in a language they were still learning meant that getting through a greater quantity of text took them even longer to complete assignments than it did their monolingual peers. As bilingual language minority students, they were also confronted by comprehension issues their classmates did not necessarily experience, issues such as reading fluency, reading rate, culturally specific background knowledge, and discourse and genre awareness (Grabe, 2001a). Another crucial difference between their high school and college reading was that in college, they had responsibility for determining, developing, and implementing task-appropriate reading strategies; autonomously structuring their reading activities outside class; managing unknown but indispensable academic vocabulary; and reading and editing their own writing. Consequently, they had to simultaneously learn course content and determine how to approach and manage these new reading and learning

requirements. These changes between high school and college literacy requirements were at best challenges and at worst impediments to learning and academic success.

Consideration that the social and cultural contexts of the high schools and colleges in this study and their stated missions and learning objectives determine the pedagogical goals—and consequently learning outcomes—of each type of institution. For example, the secondary schools from which participants graduated are evaluated yearly on criteria such as school graduation rates and “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP), a measure based in part on the number of a school’s students who pass the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT) (Office of Standards, 2007). With these requirements in mind, schools construct curricula that enhance the possibility of their attaining mandated objectives.

Interviews with teachers and participants indicate that their high school learning tasks were designed to insure the greatest number of students passing the series of standardized tests required for graduation. From this perspective, the literacy skills participants developed in high school were well suited to success in that setting, for they all graduated with averages above the norm. Clearly, according to these criteria and the study participants’ achievements, their high schools had employed appropriate pedagogy since the participants took mainstream, honors, and AP classes, and earned diplomas. In effect, the schools had accomplished their stated objectives.

Thus, from the high schools’ perspective, participants’ reading skills were sufficient. However, after they matriculated, interviews with these students and their instructors, observations of their classes, and review of course documents revealed that their secondary school academic literacy understandings were in many ways

unsatisfactory and inappropriate for successfully undertaking literacy tasks in this new setting. That course-related reading skills participants developed in high school seldom matched college reading demands is supported by research comparing literacy task demands in separate and distinct settings (Carson, 2001; Carson, Chase, & Gibson, 1992; Chase & Gibson, 1994; Harklau, 1999, 2004).

Although this mismatch in literacy tasks from high school to college settings affects all students, data collected in both learning environments identified aspects of reading that were especially significant for these bilingual language minority students. These features can be categorized as sources of readings, sites for completing tasks, sources of regulation, strategies used, length of assigned readings, approaches to vocabulary development, and instruction in reading self-generated writing.

To review teachers and participants' descriptions of high school reading activities, students read projected slides and worksheets, brief sections from course textbooks, self-selected online resources, tests and quizzes. In other classes such as Literature and Language Arts, students listened or followed along as teachers or designed students read novels, short stories, and poems aloud. From time to time, teachers inserted commentary on plot and characters as they thought necessary. In sum, participants' reading of continuous passages typically ranged from single paragraphs to perhaps five pages.

At first glance, the Guided Reading activities appeared to scaffold students' textbook reading skill development. However, review of Guided Reading assignments from three courses—Banking and Finance, American Government, and Economics—show that these activities are static; they are the same from the first to the last chapter. In other words, they do not engage students in scaffolded learning, nor do these exercises



encourage students to build on the reading skills and strategies the guided readings appear to model. In effect, the exercises are actually over-scaffolded and contain pre-digested content presented in a manner that inhibits rather than encourages students to develop reading strategies appropriate to the task at hand. Moreover, the exercises are the same for all class members, thus overlooking differences in individual students' ZPD. Finally, individual modifications in classroom use, such as Jia's American government teacher's practices, at times resulted in omission of textbook reading when instructing students to complete the Guided Reading exercises. Thus, students referred to slides written in very similar language to the exercises rather than relevant textbook paragraphs.

For the most part, teachers responded to student inquiries about unfamiliar vocabulary extemporaneously with little or no follow up exercises; however, two teachers reported that they attempted to anticipate problematic vocabulary by preparing students for such items before encountering them in class readings. Finally, participants stated that in high school they received no instruction in reading self-generated writing. Consequently, they were left to develop this literacy skill, among others, in college.

As previously noted, study participants learned that for the most part their high school reading tasks called for a single reading strategy: skimming for discrete item information. Consequently, participants had few if any occasions on which they needed to use other strategies or opportunities to develop and acquire new ones (M. Ness, 2007). However, as they discovered, their college literacy tasks required a different skill set for interpreting and understanding text (Carson, Chase, Gibson et al., 1992). Rather than searching for the one correct answer as they were asked to do in high school, participants' college reading tasks including deciphering and understanding greater quantities of

printed material and applying that knowledge to analysis, synthesis, and evaluation assignments. All three participants expressed anxiety about reading assignments that asked them to go beyond information recognition and recall. Diego described his dilemma as

I'm just not used to that [readings with multiple interpretations]. I just like pretty much what they call black and white, pretty much one answer and one answer only and not like a whole new, a lot of new views and all that...possibilities, and all that. Maybe have a answer and I back it with some, I back it up and the other person has an answer and they back it up, but at the same time, there's no wrong, there's no right or wrong answer, so possibilities.

In sum, in high school participants had few if any occasions to develop an understanding that they would need an array of reading strategies to accomplish college literacy tasks. Moreover, much of the time devoted to high school literacy activities represented lost opportunities for bilingual language minority students to enhance their panoply of reading comprehension components so that they were better prepared for reading in college and beyond.

### *Conclusion*

Drawing on Applebee's explanation of instructional scaffolding, this study has employed his conceptualization to compare (a) participants' understandings of academic reading they developed in high school among the three participants, and (b) to contrast their high school understandings of suitable reading strategies with the approaches they needed for college studies.

In summary, differences between the uses of literacy, in particular reading, in high school and college learning inhibited these participants' transition from one institutional setting to the next. The literacy strategies and tasks that were normative in the sociocultural context of high school classrooms varied so significantly from college literacy activities that in many ways they did not scaffold participants' transition from high school to post-secondary learning. Participant interviews after matriculation revealed discrepancies between the two learning environments in regard to the nature of situation-specific reading tasks. These incongruities highlight the disconnect between the literacy skills participants had acquired in high school and those they now needed for college reading and writing tasks. Clearly, for these students, high school literacy activities did not provide scaffolding from one learning setting to the next. Moreover, the time spent on content transmission activities robbed these bilingual language minority students of opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills of academic reading in post-secondary settings they found they needed after all.

## Chapter 5

## INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENCES IN LITERACY EXPECTATIONS

*Overview*

In this chapter, I focus on how institutional differences in literacy expectations influenced participants' approaches to and success with college reading tasks, differences manifest in the schools' perspectives on and manners of engaging with students who may need assistance to transition from high school to college learning. Employing a metaphor of *scaffolding* to variations in participants' success with college learning permits an exploration and understanding of differences between the institutions' approaches to and expectations of first year students. In addition, employing a social constructivist perspective articulated through sociocultural theories allows consideration of social, cultural, and historical factors that could have influenced participants' experiences and understandings of the literacy events occurring in a particular context.

Those enrolled in the community college, Sonia and Diego, although challenged by college literacy tasks, with guidance from faculty and collaboration with more capable peers, were able to internalize academically advantageous literacy and study strategies, "routines and procedures" available to them in the college's "social and cultural context" (Foley, 1994, p. 101). Jia, the participant attending the large urban university, was also challenged by college reading assignments. However, situational and cultural aspects of the university mitigated against her forming associations with and receiving assistance from faculty that would have facilitated internalizing more appropriate and useful reading and study approaches. Moreover, she not only abandoned constructive literacy and study

strategies she had used to manage high school reading tasks, resorting to less effective ones for college assignments, but also did not take in new, more successful ones.

These bilingual language minority students' descriptions of their experiences present a glimpse of their transition from high school to college and provide a perspective on institutional roles in facilitating a positive first year induction into higher education. Jia, Sonia, and Diego's narrations of their initial experiences with college learning—and respective academic accomplishments—run counter to prevailing perceptions of the relative merit of community colleges versus four year schools for enhancing bilingual language minority students potential for academic success.

### *Background*

Students such as the study's participants are typically aggregated into a single category: bilingual language minority. Although the three participants are indeed bilingual language minority students and were treated more or less the same in secondary school, they are nevertheless quite diverse in backgrounds, learning experiences in the US, sense of self, self-efficacy regarding reading, and experiences in transitioning from high school to college.

Jia, Diego, and Sonia, graduates of high schools in the same county system, earned GPAs (3.0 and above), averages qualifying them for full tuition scholarships available to state residents. Jia chose to attend a large urban university in the state's capital, while Sonia and Diego elected to enroll at the local community college.

Interviews with teachers during their senior year spring semesters elicited descriptions of them as diligent and academically talented, with college success predicted for all three. Despite having comparable high school scholastic credentials, their first semester

experiences, sense of accomplishment, and academic outcomes differed markedly. Sonia and Diego ended the term having earned GPAs of 4.0 and 3.2 respectively, grades that were equal to or higher than their high school averages. Both were very pleased with their results and expressed positive outlooks for the coming term and college learning in general. On the other hand, Jia found her first semester to have been difficult, and she approached the coming term with far less enthusiasm and confidence.

This chapter investigates differences between two institutions of higher learning in regard to their notions of school roles in facilitating bilingual language minority students' successful transitions to college learning. The two year college's perception of its responsibility and role in supporting at-risk students' success led it to provide services and encourage pedagogical practices that scaffolded successful academic transitions of students such as Sonia and Diego. In contrast, the university's efforts, although offering some academic support services and generally promoting teaching and learning, were not exemplars of instructional scaffolding. The university's approach to students such as Jia did not facilitate her acquisition of the reading and learning strategies she needed to be as academically successful in college as she had been in high school.

### *Contrasts in Institutional Missions*

The discussion here will contrast mission statements of the two institutions. These include assertions that communicate each college's perspective regarding entering freshmen's readiness for post-secondary studies, along with school-specific provisions for first year student success (*Faculty Handbook*, 2008; *Fulltime Faculty Handbook*, 2008). For example, although both colleges provide academic support in the form of discipline-specific tutoring and writing assistance, they differ in how these services are

perceived and structured, and how they are offered to students. While the two year school clearly states that learning support and academic tutoring are integral to its mission, the university's educational agenda has a different, broader focus that foregrounds development and dissemination of knowledge.

The discussion will also show how the two institutions differ in criteria for faculty evaluation that directly impacted the tenor of students' experiences in their first semester. For example, the four aspects of community college faculty performance forming the basis of promotion and tenure determinations are "outstanding teaching, outstanding service to the institution, academic achievement, and professional growth and development" (*Fulltime Faculty Handbook*, 2008, pp. FF-1), while faculty evaluation criteria at the university stress "scholarly attainment and professional growth as evidenced by (a) teaching activity and effectiveness; (b) research, publication, creative scholarly activity, or artistic performance; and (c) institutional and professional service activities" (*Faculty Handbook*, 2008, p. 311). Although both schools emphasize the importance of teaching, the former places a greater importance on student-centered concerns than does the latter, which emphasizes research as a critical faculty activity.

Although the two schools emphasize common goals of offering educational opportunities to diverse student populations (HCC, 2008; UU, 2008), the community college's mission statement includes explicit commitments to provide learning support courses to "enhance students' academic success" and creating "a climate supportive of student success through academic support, administrative support and student development services and activities that complement and enhance the instructional

program” (HCC, 2008, pp. O-1). In contrast, the university’s mission statement states that the school

...offers educational opportunities for traditional and nontraditional students at both the graduate and undergraduate levels by blending the best of theoretical and applied inquiry, scholarly and professional pursuits, and scientific and artistic expression. (UU, 2008, p. 18)

As can be seen, the university proffers—but does not explicitly supply—a bridge to “educational opportunities” (p. 18) for all students. However, institution-specific decisions directing university faculty to devote more time to research than faculty at the two year school result in university professors’ having less time to work one-on-one with students; in addition, distribution of resources at four year school results, in part, in lower division courses having classes of 100 or more, thereby further reducing opportunities for individual interactions between faculty and students (Thompson, Orr, Thompson, & Grover, 2007). A study at a large land grant university examining the effects such issues have on student satisfaction and retention describes these causes as institutional issues.

Some of these organizational problems include the low priority of undergraduate teaching and the fact that little opportunity exists on most campuses for freshmen and faculty to interact informally. This is due to faculty issues such as class size, faculty workloads, lack of rewards for such interaction, and the increasing existence of adjunct faculty. (2007, p. 641)

Thus, in this setting, the onus is on the individual to navigate her or his way through the school structure to find and enlist the assistance he or she needs.



One study emphasizing the importance of colleges' establishing positive connections with new students during their first semester is Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali, & Pohlert's (2004) investigation of a first year experience program at a large residential university. This plan included academic and social service programs joined with explicit efforts to help freshmen form positive relationships with professors and peers that might, among other results, reduce feelings of isolation. The research found "that students who reported higher levels of self-esteem and more peer support had better academic and social adjustment" (2004, p. 255).

Although students like Jia can gain admission to universities that provide little individually targeted learning support and classroom instruction for non-athletes, bilingual language minority students can be at an academic disadvantage without them. Studying in a language other than the one spoken at home is considered a risk factor for college success (Moore & Christiansen, 2005). By this definition, bilingual language minority students are students at-risk. Despite this condition, learners who have greater needs for academic supports are often less likely to seek them out (Finkelstein, 2002); consequently, at-risk students can be better served by colleges who assume a greater portion of responsibility for guiding them to the assistance they need, along with discerning individual students' zones of proximal development. Had Jia enrolled at the community college Diego and Sonia attended, before classes began she would have been assessed for proficiencies in writing, reading, and math, and required to enroll in supportive courses according to placement test results (HCC, 2008). In addition, her classroom instructors would have introduced her to ESL-specific reading and writing assistance and multilingual math tutoring also available in the centrally located school

learning center (2008). Finally, she would have had an actively involved academic advisor knowledgeable about bilingual language minority student issues who would also have helped her choose classes with knowledgeable and proficient professors (2008).

Although topics related to higher education institutions—two and four year colleges and universities—are frequently investigated, research comparing community colleges with four year colleges and universities is rare (E. C. Ness, 2002). One study that includes both two and four year schools found that a commonly held opinion among students at both types of institutions is that community colleges are less challenging academically (Caporrimo, 2008). However, three studies comparing both post-secondary institutions established that actual student learning at the two types of schools is virtually equivalent, that academic preparation at two year schools is not inferior to that at four year ones (Dial-Driver, 1990; Pierson, Wolniak, Pascarella, & Flowers, 2002; Susskind, 1996). Indeed, other studies have identified ways in which students actually benefit from attending community colleges rather than four year schools; these include affective factors such as increased self-esteem (Pierson, Wolniak, Pascarella, & Flowers, 2003) and satisfaction with the college experience (E. C. Ness, 2002).

These studies are important not only for identifying positive aspects of community colleges but also for addressing and refuting the long held notion that they are lesser institutions of higher learning that serve to siphon off from four year colleges those students whose “aspirations” (Grubb & Cox, 2005, p. 32) exceed their academic talents. Proponents of this view point to low transfer and graduation rates at two year colleges, when compared with four year colleges as support for their claims (2005) . In response, others assert that “‘active’ transfer programs” (2005, p. 36)—institutional proactive

measures that explicitly assist community college students to transfer to a four year college to complete a bachelor degree—blur the boundaries between two and four year institutions and greatly enhance the likelihood that students will earn bachelor degrees (2005).

Drawing comparisons between two and four year colleges is difficult because research on community colleges frequently examines questions about institutional missions, while studies on four year colleges and universities tend to concentrate on student satisfaction (E. C. Ness, 2002). Ness’s study reviewed research projects comparing student satisfaction at the two. He found that “community colleges scored better than universities across all questions regarding student satisfaction [and]... academic, social, cultural, and overall experience” (2002, p. 1). He attributes these results to differences in missions of the two institutions that resulted in more students at community colleges feeling their school had fulfilled its stated commitment. The studies he reviewed queried cohorts of students, without drawing distinctions between subgroups such as language minority learners. Indeed, investigations focusing on at-risk students such as bilingual language minority students comparing their academic success or satisfaction with the college experience in the two environments appear to be limited. One exception, however, is the Pew Hispanic Center’s report (R. Fry, 2004) on the relationship between the kinds of colleges Hispanic students choose and the comparative graduation rate between them and white students with similar secondary school preparation and individual academic records who attend the same colleges and universities.

...the study finds that well prepared Latinos attend post secondary institutions that are less selective and have lower BA completion rates than similarly prepared whites and that even when well-prepared Latinos go to the same kind of schools as their white peers, they have lower graduation rates. (p. v).

The report notes that the difference in graduation rates between white and Hispanic students disappears when the comparison is between highly qualified students of both groups who enroll in highly selective colleges. It continues with the observation that these highly selective schools spend more per student, offer greater financial aid packages, and provide stronger mentoring programs for all students. However, neither of the two institutions in this study are included in the report's list of the 50 most selective schools in the United States, nor do they spend comparable sums per student on undergraduate education.

#### *Participants' High-School-to-College Transition Experiences*

Diego and Sonia matriculated at the local two year college. Although both are bilingual language minority students, their journeys through U.S. schools have been distinctly different. In addition, they, along with Jia, exemplify the wide diversity among the bilingual language minority learners in U.S. schools. While Sonia was educated exclusively in English at k-12 institutions in a single school system in a southeastern U.S. state, Diego went to schools in Mexico and two different states in the United States. Sonia's Spanish language and literacy skills were acquired informally within a family and community environment, with English serving as her first literacy source. In contrast, Diego's knowledge of Spanish included academic literacy skills; in fact, when simultaneously re-learning English in high school and completing mainstream high

school classes, when necessary and possible, he turned to his first language to access course content.

Sonia and Diego's engagement with their respective school's overt and hidden social cultures also differed, largely due to Sonia's having experienced a learning environment in which she was not a member of the dominant school group, white, monolingual semi-rural southern students and Diego's years spent in a school context where he belonged to the dominant group of learners. In addition, when he transferred to Hill High School, his academic talents were recognized, lauded, and encouraged. Thus, they were exposed to different messages about their competency as students and their potential for scholastic success.

Before they began classes at the community college, they, along with most entering freshmen at the school, wrote sample essays and took school placement tests to assess their readiness for college level work. Their scores on these tests and essays required them both to enroll in a learning support writing course. As they were bilingual language minority students, the school's advisors recommended they take Advanced ESL Writing (4 hours), one of a selection of writing and reading courses tailored to the learning characteristics and needs of U.S.-educated bilingual language minority students offered by the college. In addition to the writing course, Diego's schedule included Political Science 1101 (3 hours), Health and Wellness (2 hours), and Math 1111 (3 hours). Sonia took only two courses her first semester: Advanced ESL Writing (4 hours) and Math 1111 (3 hours).

*Diego's transition from high school to college.* Many of Diego's high school teachers had indicated that they were available whenever he needed assistance. Although

he described most of his secondary school classes as “so easy,” he met with his teachers whenever he felt a need to do so. In one interview he talked about his confusion about what he should do for a British Literature written assignment: “I’m not sure how to do the essay, so I just go talk with Mr. Bentley and he helps me out.” His high school teachers noticed his seriousness about his studies, and he developed a reputation as a hard working student. For example, his AP Economics teacher described him as a

very, very hard worker, very, very industrious and I think that uh, he uh, you know he's gonna do what it takes to be successful. That's, that's what I've seen in him. He's turned in every assignment. If he has a problem he'll ask me, or he'll ask the other kid, Eric, [student who sat next to Diego in the class] he'll ask him. I, I, think he'll go far.

Diego also had favorable relationships with school guidance counselors, who, along with his teachers, encouraged him to take honors and Advanced Placement courses. In all, he was in five honors classes and one Advanced Placement course.

After Diego matriculated, he repeatedly mentioned that his instructors and advisor were recommending students schedule appointments or drop by professors’ offices whenever they did not understand texts, class lectures, or assignments. Early in the semester, Diego encountered impediments to his studies. In our interviews, he talked about the difficulties he was having with reading college-level texts. The issue he first mentioned was the fact that he was unprepared to deal with the many possibilities for text interpretation in some disciplines.

The thing is that, ...because I'm pretty much a solitary math/science, so I always need to have right answers, not like, just a whole lot of different answers. Like on

science, if you mix something with something, you're going to get something, not a whole lot of stuff In math, two plus two is four, not five.

At other times throughout the semester, Diego stated he had difficulty in simply understanding his political science textbooks, handouts, and test review materials.

Most of the time I try to read before, but sometimes I read it and I don't understand and just kind of stop and then, first go to class and then read it so I can understand it better.

But sometimes, either way, it depends on how I feel when I read it If I, I always read it, but if I see that I'm not getting it, I just stop, just stop with it, and then just continue on after the class But if I get it, I just continue until I pretty much finish the chapter or until I just get bored or something.

In the second week of the semester, Diego responded to the school's offer of assistance by meeting with his political science instructor, Dr. Parr, a practice he continued throughout the term.

I go talk with Mr. Parr every week so I keep up, maybe two times a week sometimes.

Diego not only met frequently with Dr. Parr but also found that he could take his questions to other political science professors. From time to time, he sought assistance from another instructor, Dr. Dunham.

And I went, since I had a problem, I would have another political science teacher, [Dr. Dunham] and ask them questions about the things that I didn't get.

Uh, like, most of them were kind of like, I had the answer but I wasn't sure, and, but one of the answers that I didn't get was the Federalist paper, James Madison,

like number ten and fifty-one. I read it like four or five times so I went with him and told him to explain me, and he did, and yeah I got it, and most of the questions that I asked were kinda like, I had the answer, but I'm not sure. So I just wanted to be correct.

Thus, it can be seen through these interactions, Diego's instructors were assisting him within his ZPD by responding directly to his inquiries and statements that revealed what he could and could not accomplish on his own.

Later in the term, Diego noticed that the questions he was posing were yielding the specific information he needed for tests.

... he helped me out so, because we took a quiz last week, last Friday, and most of the, I had a lot of problems at that time, so I went with him and he gave me all the answers to the quiz that we took cause, I don't know how, at that time, I did ask the right questions, so I did good on the quiz, though.

In this instance, Diego describes his increasing ability to anticipate and identify important course concepts necessary for earning higher grades on course tests.

By the fourth week of the semester, interviews with Mr. Parr, Diego's political science professor, demonstrated that this instructor had come to know Diego as a student and was aware of his learning strengths and needs. He described Diego's progress and participation as

Um, but he, I think he's going to be okay, I really do He's very conscientious, he's there everyday, he asks good questions, he's been to see me two or three times already.



A second instance in which the community college's approach provided Diego with instructional scaffolding occurred in his Advanced ESL Writing class. Throughout the semester, Diego's writing instructor assisted him to develop reading and writing strategies that enabled him to perform academic literacy tasks independently by internalizing reading and revision procedures necessary for college literacy assignments. Previously, he had described his confusion and lack of knowledge about managing not only the grammar and mechanics of writing but also how to read and revise his papers' content and structure. In our last interview after his first college semester had ended, he explained what he had learned in his ESL writing class and in one-on-one sessions with his writing instructor, Ms. T.

...now with writing, I know how to do a sentence correctly. I know how to find comma splices, fragments, I know where a comma goes, where a colon goes, where quotation marks, everything. I know how to introduce, how to say main points, how to end it. I'm okay about writing now.

His instructor had focused the assistance and guidance she provided Diego within his ZPD by targeting his specific writing and re-reading and revising issues and teaching to these topics. In addition, a primary instructional objective of Ms. T's—and of the entire ESL program—was to assist Diego in becoming able to accomplish these literacy tasks on his own.

*Sonia's transition from high school to college.* As a bilingual language minority student, Sonia's issues with transitioning from high school to college were less concerned with literacy learning in a second language and more with years of attending a school whose culture was dominated by a different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic group. Despite

Sonia's having received all her k-12 schooling in English and achieving a GPA qualifying her for a state-sponsored full tuition scholarship, her high school literacy experiences had not left her overly confident in her ability to succeed in college studies or her likely comfort in that learning environment. Her narrations of pivotal high school experiences vividly portrayed perceptions of herself as an outsider in a traditionally white, English-only student body. When asked if she had taken honors classes, she replied

Yeah, like I've had honors classes and they're so different from regular classes.

I mean, they're very, very different cause...you know, there's not really a big, big part of Hispanics there, in honors classes, but there is, but not really. Me and my friend, Cindy, we're both in that class [world history] and they were all just white, you know, American people...and honors biology, cause the people in there and in my world history were both in my classes, biology and world history. It was really different, too American people, you know, they all knew each other, popular people. The high people. I'm like down here, you know? It's just different, especially when we had groups. It's because of the race difference, I think, I don't know, because like you know, we were just so different. It was hard to be in a group with somebody cause I was all so shy and timid, for some reason, when we had to read. Also I would actually think, my reading level's not as good as theirs probably. I'm sitting there, and they're like, you gonna read it? I'm like, no, don't want to, I can't. I'd be really shy cause I'm not really good at reading. I know I'm not really that good at reading. And also, because of, you know, the people that are in there, I didn't really know them much and talk to them much

even though I've been to school with them, like since elementary school, I'm shy and I felt like they judged me. I don't know why; I just always felt like they were looking at me, watching me. Sometimes I think it's because I'm Hispanic, too. [laughs] Sometimes I would think that. Like I'm Hispanic and they're not. But now, I don't do that now.

Sonia was the only study participant who had attended only U.S. schools. Both Jia and Diego had a number of years in educational settings where they were part of the dominant school group. Before they entered school in the United States, they had formed identities affected by their having membership in the dominant group where they resided. In contrast, Sonia had not experienced school culture as a member of the dominant group and consequently had participated in school culture as somewhat an outsider. In her words, she felt she was always seen as a Hispanic student in a predominately white student body. Moreover, when she looked around the classroom in honors classes, she did not see herself reflected in the ethnic and cultural worlds of the other students. Clearly, her remarks reveal a student who felt silenced and possibly regarded as someone who may well not have measured up to the norm of honors classes.

Remarks from teachers contributed to her disquiet in that school setting. She described a conversation in which her teacher offered observations on the differences she perceived between mainstream and honors classes.

It's like, and even my honors teacher, she told me, she's like, "I like honors classes better because they're more polite and more, more into class than the regular class." I was like, "oh my gosh, I'm hearing this." She's like, "Regular classes, I

don't know. Kids don't wanna do nothing, they're just kids, don't have goals in life." I'm like, wow, that's not a good thing to hear. I didn't like hearing that. That made me feel kind of mad. I was like, why would she say that? There are some people in normal classes who also pay attention. Like me, I'm in a normal economics class and I do all my work, you know? Then after work I start socializing and stuff.

Clearly, Sonia perceived these comments as disparaging and discouraging; after all, she was a diligent and responsible student *and* she had taken several non-honors courses.

Her experiences in honors biology were especially illustrative of the impact her perceptions of herself as an outsider had on her motivation to take honors or AP classes and her outlook on participating in academic literacy activities.

H: How does the atmosphere you've described in some classes affect you?

Do you think it has an effect on your grade?

SC: On my grade? Sometimes. I do, sometimes cause I do feel like I do better if I'm more comfortable. If I was more comfortable in a class or something like that, I feel like I could have done way better, especially in biology. I felt like I could totally have at least made a 90, even though it was honors. I mean, but I don't know, but the atmosphere made me feel like I didn't even want to be there. I don't know, like it's not, it's hard to be around people that I feel that don't want me around. I hate that.

Sonia frequently mentioned how much she enjoyed math courses and how she typically did very well in these classes. When she was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, she earned a 96 in Algebra I for the year. In response, her teacher said she would register Sonia for an honors Algebra II class for the next year. However, for reasons Sonia never discovered, the teacher did not. It wasn't until her 11<sup>th</sup> grade that she finally took honors math. Again, this was clearly a disappointment for her, especially because her teacher had suggested the idea.

Sonia also engaged in out of school and interpersonal and intrapersonal literacy activities that were not recognized or brought into the classroom, yet they gave her a sense of competence with reading and writing that her school-based literacy activities did not. Interviews with her revealed she had markedly lower self-efficacy about her reading skills compared with classmates from the school's dominant social and cultural group, yet her teachers appeared oblivious to the situation.

These experiences and perceptions affected choices she made in high school; she did not take as many honors classes as she could have, nor did she enroll in any Advanced Placement courses. However, her teachers' comments describe a conscientious and very capable student who consistently maintained high standards of performance.

Sonia's a great student. She's quite articulate and quite enthusiastic, and she knows what she wants to do. She didn't struggle anywhere. Also, well, Sonia's really good with numbers, so anything like, budgeting she did really well with that. I've had her for accounting, for introductory and advanced accounting; she did very well in there from the beginning. That's, she wants to be a book keeper, get into that sort of thing, so numbers are a strong area for her. And as far as

social skills as well, she works really, really well in groups. I can put her with anybody and she'll work with them, which is a great asset in today's society, cause few of them like to do that.

Although Sonia took less challenging courses than she likely could have succeeded in, her ability and desire to use her intellectual and social skills can be seen in her involvement in an after-school job. In this environment, she quickly moved from a cashier position to training other staff, translating for staff and customers, and performing bookkeeping tasks.

Largely as a result of her k-12 literacy and learning experiences, she chose to begin college as a part time student enrolled in two courses: Math 1111 (college algebra) and the same required learning support class Diego took (but with a different instructor), Advanced ESL Writing. Sonia found it easier to ask for academic assistance in college than she had in high school. She had enrolled in two courses (equaling seven hours) fall semester, saying "I want to be sure I can do it, and I don't know if I'll like it." However, by mid-semester her experiences at the community college were so satisfactory that she pre-registered for a fulltime course load (15 hours) for spring term. When asked how she felt about her first term in college, she replied

I knew I would expect it, independence and choosing, all that stuff, I mean, it's surprising how easy you can get things done, like your notes online, shared class files, all this stuff. Pretty easy to get connected with your schoolwork. To me, I feel... Yeah, so, I love going to school right now. I love it.

She stated that she was more willing to ask for assistance from her college instructors than she had been her high school teachers; she also welcomed her professors'

attitudes toward help outside class time. When asked about their willingness to work with students, she replied

It's like, if I have to compare high school to college I think the teachers [in college] are more willing to help you out for some weird reason.

She added these observations about the quality of communication with her professors.

Really good! I loved my teacher, Ms. Harris [ESL Advanced Writing instructor] cause she likes to do that one on one thing. I love that. Really good, helped me out really well.

Also, Ms. Howell [College Algebra professor], really good with her, too...one on one, asking questions, email her, very easy, very...it wasn't hard at all.

When asked if they encouraged her to seek assistance, she replied

Yeah Ms. Harris was like, if y'all ever need help, email me or my office hours are, duh, duh, duh, come by and I'll help you out.

In subsequent interviews Sonia expressed her appreciation for her ESL instructor's taking the initiative by emphatically suggesting Sonia meet with her to work on writing assignments.

Ms. Harris just told me to meet her in her office to go over my essays. She really explained everything. Finally I really got it about grammar and all that organization stuff.

Sonia explained her perceptions of the differences between high school and college in regard to locus of responsibility for learning and consequences of seeking help from faculty.

[In college] when it comes to the test, you pass it, you pass it, you fail it, you fail it. But the teacher [college instructor], you know, if she sees that you're failing and not doing well, you know, Miss Harris, she would stop and say, what's going on? Is everything okay, I mean, do you need extra help or something? She'll offer to help you out. She'll notice it, I mean, you're not going to get in trouble for it.

Sonia's transition from high school to college was clearly facilitated by the personal and effective connections her instructors made with her, their persistent efforts to assist her with mastering the writing skills she both wanted to acquire and needed for success in her college courses, and the generally welcoming and supportive atmosphere of the community college. An interesting and ironic difference between her high school and the community college: The former institution's minority enrollment was 30 percent (25 percent Hispanic students) while the latter's minority representation was 13.2 percent.

*Jia's transition from high school to college.* In high school Jia was extremely diligent and always prepared for every class, displaying no shyness about asking for explanations about topics and activities she did not understand. Jia's teachers described her as sparing no effort to be certain she understood course concepts and assignments. One teacher remarked that Jia showed no hesitation about coming to her before and after school, or for requesting clarification in class. "I think she checked in with me almost every day to be certain she was on track."

Her Human A & P teacher, Ms. Starnes, reported that whenever Jia had questions about the course, she came to Ms. Starnes's classroom at 7 or 7:30 am in order to always be prepared for the day's lesson. This teacher described her as motivated and determined.



Jia is driven. The child is driven. My understanding is that she was put in ESOL class when she first came here, but she rose above it... there's also the level of language difficulty that Jia had. I could see in Jia, just the short time I had her, an amazing transformation. She must be pretty brilliant.

Ms. Starnes also remarked that Jia's classmates respected her opinions, even though her questions sometimes seemed unusual to them. "I was glad she was in there, cause her questions, even though they might be unusual, made the rest of the class think."

Jia's approach to college studies and her anxiety and confusion contrasted sharply with her study and learning habits in high school. Although Jia had sought out her high school teachers whenever she needed assistance, she did not continue the practice in college. Socially, she seemed to be comfortable at the urban university with its diverse student body, which was a marked contrast to the semi-rural high school with a small number of Vietnamese students and no one from China besides Jia.

Throughout her first term in college, she spoke of her confusion about what and how she needed to read and study. However, she did not make the same effort to enlist her college instructors in helping her with her college reading tasks. "I don't know what to do! I don't know what to read and study in Astronomy and Global Issues." When asked why she did not make appointments with her professors, she was unclear about her reasons. "I don't know, I just don't go." She added that it was "really hard to find him [her Global Issues instructor] in the Glenn Building."

In a subsequent interview, Jia reiterated her difficulty in locating and getting to professors' offices during their office hours. More importantly, she also revealed her

belief that letting her instructors know she was experiencing difficulty with her studies would put her at a disadvantage.

To talk to my theatre professor I have to go from Alumni Hall [theatre classroom] to 1 Park Place, four blocks, and then find his office. It take thirty minutes to get to his office. Every one [her professors] is hard to meet with. They're nice, but I don't know if it help to go see them. They might not like it.

She repeated this concern when talking about meeting with her Global Issues professor and his likely response to her request for assistance.

...there always a lot of other student try to talk with him. I just don't go again cause he will think I'm dumb.

These comments contrasted sharply with her lack of hesitation in approaching her high school teachers; in that setting she appeared to have little concern about appearing “dumb” to her teachers or peers, even though she had received a significant amount of teasing in her ESOL classes.

Jia also missed the ease with which she could ask her high school teachers about her course progress, which was not possible in college, in part because of larger class sizes.

I mean, there's another thing I feel different because in high school you can always ask your teacher what your grade is, like every single day you can go there and “Oh, did my grade went up?” because like I just got a test and it was 98. But like in college you *never know your grade* [italics mine]. And that makes me frustrating because I just don't know how am I doing, to the end? You don't

know, I don't know. I mean in a small class maybe you can ask, but in a big one you can't ask the teacher [college professor]. You have to go to the office.

Unlike Diego and Sonia's experiences at the community college, no faculty member established a direct and supportive connection with Jia, nor were there institutional procedures that recognized at-risk or struggling students and explicitly encouraged them to seek help. In effect, the university did not scaffold Jia's transition to college by providing opportunities and assistive relationships to help her bridge the gap between high school reading strategies and skills and those needed for college work, nor did it help her learn new, more successful strategies. When she could not proceed on her own, she turned to roommates and in a sense tried to collaborate with them within her ZPD. Although these efforts were beneficial in that she was able to pass her courses, they did not help her develop greater independence in reading and learning, nor did they do more than provide temporary solutions for completing literacy tasks.

In contrast to Jia's experience, the participants, Diego and Sonia, responded to community college initiatives by taking advantage of school-provided academic support and scaffolding, with the result that institutionally embedded teaching and advising procedures facilitated their adjustment to college literacy demands. A key element of the community college's approach was that faculty and staff sought to determine individual students' reading and writing skills within her or his ZPD and assisted them to acquire the needed expertise, thus enabling them to accomplish reading and learning tasks they were having difficulty achieving on their own. In this setting, classroom pedagogy and interactions initiated by faculty and staff provided targeted assistance for these bilingual

language minority students within their ZPD, with the goal of helping these learners perform these new skills independently.

Moreover, the college made deliberate efforts to avoid stigmatizing students who needed help by emphasizing an active advising program for *all* students and fully integrating into the curriculum academic support at every level. For example, although the school provided an academic advising and counseling center—as do most colleges and universities, the community college regards academic advisement as “a primary function of the faculty” (*Fulltime Faculty Handbook*, 2008, Faculty Responsibilities section).

Because an advisor serves as a facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences, and an agent of referral to other campus resources as needed, he/she needs to be accessible and knowledgeable about academic policies, programs, procedures and be able to refer the advisee to other individuals who can assist him/her as necessary. The advisor should show concern for his/her advisees through understanding and respect. (*Fulltime Faculty Handbook*, Faculty Advising Responsibilities section)

This approach, combined with class sizes of 35 or fewer, personalized interactions among faculty and students that reduced the likelihood of students feeling anonymous or isolated. Finally, the campus had been designed to be user-friendly, with faculty offices interspersed among classrooms in which these instructors taught courses. Thus, students daily passed their professors’ offices on their way to and from class, and were likely to encounter their instructors in the hallways.

When compared to the experiences of the two participants attending the two year institution, Jia's transition from high school to college reading/writing tasks was more difficult and less successful. Key institutional differences between the two and four year schools contributed to the three students' first semester experiences. Overall, the university's manner of introducing new students to a post-secondary academic community and providing academic assistance to students who needed help adjusting to the high school to college transition did not encourage Jia to follow through on her initial approaches to instructors or to take advantage of available academic support. Although all new students at the university were also assigned advisors, the size and layout of the campus made it far less likely for students to encounter their advisors serendipitously. In addition, unlike community college advisors, the university faculty were not instructed to meet face to face periodically with their advisees, nor were students required to contact them in person.

Several other circumstances worked against students such as Jia establishing relationships with potentially helpful faculty through relatively uncomplicated means. Although professors routinely recommended students having questions come to them for assistance, the invitation was not reiterated or delivered personally to at-risk or struggling students. As the university of almost 30,000 students was situated in the downtown area of a major city, space was at a premium with classrooms and instructor offices widely separated. Although the school provided tutoring in writing and math, the locations for these support services were not centrally located; in addition, responsibility for taking advantage of these services fell on the student. That condition, combined with classes as large as 120 to 150, did not act to reduce the distance between faculty and students,

therefore working against university-enrolled participants who might be experiencing difficulty with their college transition.

Interview comments demonstrate marked contrasts among the three in satisfaction with their initial college experiences, academic performance, and sense of self-efficacy in a new school environment, contrasts that associate to the institution in which each enrolled. Diego's and Sonia's transition from one learning environment to another appeared to take place smoothly and without a great deal of anxiety. Although they both stated that college literacy tasks, especially reading, far exceeded those of high school, they were able to develop effective reading and study strategies for this new environment. On the other hand, Jia's first semester experience was more difficult; at times she was stressed from trying to keep up with the quantity of reading and near hopeless about changing her situation. Interestingly, of the three, in pre-college interviews, Jia had expressed greater confidence in her readiness for college studies than had Diego or Sonia. She also appeared to have a clearer notion than they of how college work would differ from that in high school.

Generally speaking, the participants enrolled at the community college, Diego and Sonia, found their first experiences with college-level reading and writing tasks to call for more effort that they had to exert in high school. However, through working one-on-one with their professors they were able to successfully adapt some of their secondary school reading and writing strategies to an unfamiliar academic environment and simultaneously develop new ones enabling them to manage college literacy assignments. Jia's adjustment to literacy tasks at the university was not as successful. Throughout the semester, she expressed a sense of frustration and confusion about reading assignments and

assessments; however, instead of moving beyond the repertoire of learning strategies she had depended on in high school, she abandoned approaches that had served her well in the pre-college setting where she had freely called on her teachers when she needed assistance.

*Participants' Interactions with High School and College Faculty*

The community college participants, Diego and Sonia, differed in how frequently and for what reasons they had asked their high school teachers for assistance. Diego was at ease with calling on teachers when he needed academic help; in contrast, Sonia was more hesitant to do so. After matriculation, they both spoke of frequent meetings with their instructors. While Sonia expressed surprise that her college instructors were more available and interested than her high school teachers had been, Diego did not. Both participants stated that their professors not only suggested they come to their offices for academic assistance but also reiterated that advice by individually contacting each of them and emphasizing the importance of these consultations.

According to both Jia and her high school teachers, Jia met with at least one or more of them daily. She appeared to have no hesitation about asking for assistance outside regular class time. Her college practices were different, however. Although all Jia's instructors stated that students should come to them if they had questions about the course, she sought assistance on three occasions only, meeting with three of her five instructors. Her perception was that her high school teachers had been more accessible and helpful than her college instructors were.

*Participants' End-of-Semester Reflections*

Sonia and Diego ended their first semester pleased with their accomplishments and imbued with positive outlooks toward the spring term. Both registered for heavier course loads than they had undertaken in the fall. In contrast, Jia was dissatisfied about the quality of her first semester performance and perplexed about the ineffectiveness of the literacy strategies she had used. She expressed conflicted feelings about her final grades, overall performance, and less than optimistic expectations for the next semester. Although she registered for the same number of credit hours, she was worried about her ability to earn the grades she needed to retain her scholarship. Each participant's final reflections were consistent throughout the semester.

Terminal interviews with participants revealed a difference in satisfaction with their initial college experiences and feelings of optimism or pessimism about spring semester. For example, Diego described his feelings about writing with these words:

HA: [H]ow do you feel about writing now?

DM: I feel more confident now. Now I know how to write.

Sonia also expressed greater confidence in her writing competence in college than she had had in high school.

I feel really good about my writing now I got back in touch with my language arts class.

Her confidence with her fall semester performance (Math 1111—A and ESLW 0075—B for seven hours of credits) encouraged her to register for fifteen hours for spring semester because “I love going to school right now I love it!” She has also been thinking about how she would alter the reading and study methods she used in high school.



I'm actually thinking I need to start studying a little bit more, for next semester especially cause I have four classes and I'm *totally* gonna keep studying and note taking, you know I'm thinking about doing this thing where when I get home, I'm gonna look over my notes and go, this is what I did in class today, don't forget it for tomorrow morning or whatever or the next day I'm gonna start doing that, I feel like I want to do that now.

These remarks demonstrate Sonia's developing understanding of key differences in effective study and reading approaches between her high school efforts and college demands. She had been a conscientious student in high school, selecting and employing reading and learning strategies effectively; she was in effect a self-regulated learner motivated to complete tasks, knew and used an array of strategies to accomplish goals regardless of the challenge they might present, and was inventive in devising solutions to problems encountered (Winne, 1995a).

Jia, on the other hand, expressed relief that she had passed all her courses, while saying she had no idea how she had done so.

I don't know, they must have curved the grades because I study very hard but I don't think I pass, especially Global Issues and Astronomy. I made C+ in English Composition, like that was my lowest grade, so I'm glad but I don't know how it happened.

When asked about her thoughts on spring semester studies, she said,

I don't know, I guess I slacked off so I have to work harder. But I don't know how I can study harder. I hear my friends say college is so harder than high school, but so much reading! How I can do all of it? I don't know, I don't know.

### *Discussion*

Information from participant and instructor interviews and examination of institutional policies and procedures suggest college-specific characteristics that influenced these participants' sense of self-efficacy and contributed to or detracted from their academic success. To begin with, the mission statement of the community college explicitly promoted faculty engagement with students (GSC, 2008), thereby deliberately creating a space for Diego and Sonia to work with their instructors within each one's ZPD to learn/acquire new and necessary reading skills and strategies. However, the university's mission and consequent distribution of resources (GSU, 2008) made it more difficult and less likely for professors to establish similar scaffolding relationships with students such as Jia. Instead, it placed greater responsibility on the at-risk student to form productive connections with instructors and tutors. In sum, interaction of these factors, with participants' distinctive literacy learning needs, influenced the approaches they took to their new literacy tasks.

### *Faculty Engagement with Students*

According to Vygotsky, human "[l]earning and development are interrelated from the child's very first day of life" (1978, p. 84). When a child begins school, a new element is introduced into her or his learning and development process that allows further understanding of a person's inner development, an individually determined "zone of proximal development" (1978, p. 85). Vygotsky defines it as

... the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as

determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (1978, p. 86)

Thus, the concept highlights the importance of the relationship between learner and teacher and/or learner and more capable peers (Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978; Vygotskiæi & Kozulin, 1986) for individual learning, and draws attention to the critically important interactions among these individuals.

Although all three participants perceived significant differences in academic literacy demands between high school and college, the two attending a community college adjusted to the disparities in literacy tasks by responding to faculty offers of assistance in developing effective and appropriate reading strategies. Diego and Sonia's writing and math instructors repeatedly checked in with them to see if they needed assistance. When help was needed, they worked with Diego and Sonia on the literacy and learning issue at hand. Diego's political science instructor, along with other professors in the department, responded to his requests for assistance with comprehending course readings. In other words, more capable others (Vygotskiæi & Cole, 1978; Vygotskiæi & Kozulin, 1986) worked with these students individually within their zones of proximal development (ZPD) and assisted them to improve their reading skills and comprehension.

Diego's reflections on his first semester college experience provide a description of how his professors facilitated his learning.

The college really made it easy to go from high school to college. At first they tell you how to do it and everything, and by the end, like the last two weeks, you see it's really difficult, but you're ready by then. It was almost like I didn't notice it

until then [I]t [the community college] kind of moved me into it [college-level studying and learning]...

He described the contrast between his experiences and those of his high school peers, both language minority and English-only classmates.

I saw my friends go away to college, to UUC and Southern State University, but, Northwestern, Foothills, like La Grande?...a lot of other colleges they went to, and they've dealt really hard with the change. I was telling them that I didn't feel the change. I pretty much didn't feel the change at all and they felt it really bad. They were like, they said that at two weeks they were crying cause like, how they had to study....And pretty much every time they didn't have fun at all. So the first semester was like, their worst. At the end it was like getting better but it didn't really because of the finals, so they kinda knew they had that pressure.

Sonia also expressed satisfaction with her first semester experience; indeed, she appeared very excited about the coming semester's studies. Whereas she had described herself as a "bad" reader in high school, she did not hesitate to enroll in courses with significant reading assignments such as Political Science 1101 and Psychology 1101. Instead of mentioning her perception of herself as having difficulties with reading in high school, at the end of fall semester she recalled how she had enjoyed reading non-fiction works and biographies, or as she described them "You know, books about real stuff and people." Her shift in perspective on her potential for learning in college revealed an increase in self-efficacy toward succeeding in post-secondary studies, a condition Shunk (1996) identifies as crucial to Winne's (1995a) theory of successful self-regulated

learning (SLR). Shunk describes self-efficacy's importance for SLR in his critique of Winne's model of SLR:

...[an] emphasis on the role of knowledge offers an incomplete view of self-regulation. What is also important, and what much of the literature cited by Winne does not address, is the role of learners' perceptions of themselves (e.g. their competencies, interests, values), of others (teachers, parents, peers), and of learning environments (classrooms, libraries, homes). These perceptions involve knowledge but are subjective and may conflict with other knowledge possessed by learners or others. Yet, such perceptions affect students' self-regulated efforts. (p. 214)

Alvermann (2003) also emphasizes the relationship between students' self-efficacy and their willingness to take on school reading tasks. "Students with high *self-efficacy*—the confidence that they have the capacity to produce a desired effect—are more likely to engage with school-related reading than students with low self-efficacy" (2003, p. 2). Sonia's responses to her first semester experiences are not those of a student who feels silenced in the learning environment (Wade & Moje, 2000).

Jia's experience was significantly different from Sonia and Diego's in that her sense of efficacy in regard to her perceived capacity to successfully complete college reading tasks quickly descended to a low level at the beginning of the term and did not recover during the semester. From the first interview after she matriculated, she talked about her uncertainty and unease in her coursework.

Global Issues, I, see, I don't know what we are doing, we haven't even had a test  
Astronomy, Oh my gosh! I studied for like 10 hours, straight ten hours, I got a 55

The class average was 60. He scale it by adding ten points, but I still fail it. I got a 55 and he scale it ten points, so I got a 65. So, I'm still fail it.

We supposed to read a lot over the week, but I just don't read, I don't know why.

...That class [Global Issues] is, is kind of, I don't know what am I doing in there and like I don't know what am I learning there, either. Like, I think he's middle eastern, and I think he's from the middle east. I don't understand when he talks.

...I feel bad because I shouldn't be slacking off like this, but at the same time...

Well that's what college students do. But I'm having a hard time.

### *Conclusions*

Although the three participants found college reading tasks to be more challenging than their high school ones had been, the approaches to college reading assignments they developed differed as they were associated with the post-secondary institution at which each participant enrolled. Diego and Sonia expanded their available reading and study strategies. Diego's college connections with helpful faculty were a continuation of his high school procedures, while Sonia's college efforts represented a new willingness to call on faculty for assistance in learning. In contrast, Jia did not continue to use successful high school strategies and did not develop new ones effective for college reading. It is apparent that institutional differences in missions and faculty engagement with students influenced whether faculty formed relations with the three participants that scaffolded participants' acquisition of effective post-matriculation approaches to reading and learning.

These results are especially important for understanding and assisting bilingual language minority students to achieve in higher education, in part, because they refute

prevailing opinions that community colleges are inferior to four year schools in assisting these students to earn at least a bachelor degree (Grubb & Cox, 2005). In this study, the two bilingual language minority students were more successful at the community college than was the student at a four year school, despite the sincere determination of all three students to win through to graduation. The findings in this study call for a rethinking of optimum paths to academic success for bilingual language minority students who wish to pursue post-secondary studies. As can be seen in this study, two year schools are capable of offering more than a mere “cooling out” place to park these students after high school. Instead, in this instance the two year school offered a more reasonable and feasible possibility for bilingual language minority students to realize their real potential than did the four year school, despite differences in status and reputed resources of the two types of institutions.

## Chapter 6

### IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study looked at the progress of three bilingual language minority students as they navigated the literacy transition from high school to college. Social constructivist theory provided the frame for examining the experience of bilingual language minority students in their transition from high school to college reading tasks. The study's questions asked how these bilingual language minority students described their high school and college reading tasks; what information and insights their teachers and instructors offered on the academic tasks these students had in high school and in college; what similarities and differences they perceived in literacy demands in secondary and post-secondary education; and how the specific post-secondary institutional structure and context affect bilingual language minority students' transition experience.

When data from the study were examined from a Vygotskian perspective, the study yielded two major findings. First, although the participants had internalized routines and procedures enabling them to successfully accomplish their high school literacy tasks, college learning called for reading and learning strategies different from those they understood were adequate for academic literacy tasks. Thus, they had to manage incongruities between the two institutions as they simultaneously learned course material and sought resources to help them develop new routines and strategies for college learning, a circumstance made especially challenging for the two participants who were still acquiring academic English skills.



Second, the participants' progress in adapting to new reading tasks was affected differently according to the tertiary institutions at which they matriculated; this divergence can be seen as a consequence of dissimilar perceptions of institutional responsibility for facilitating student learning, disparities articulated through and enacted in response to the mission statements of each institution. Employing a social constructivist perspective draws attention to the appropriate and effective social and instructional scaffolding incorporated in the pedagogy and mission of the community college that supported Sonia and Diego in their transition from high school to college learning. At the same time, this theoretical frame brings to light the hurdles even a determined bilingual minority student must overcome without such scaffolding when studying in an otherwise congenial and positive learning atmosphere. It is especially interesting that the comparative success of these three bilingual language minority students in transitioning from high school to college reading tasks runs counter to the prevailing perception that two year schools are less successful in educating bilingual language minority students.

#### *Implications for Theory and Bilingual Language Minority Students*

This study reconfirms the intricate connection between individual learner and context posited by Vygotskian sociocultural theory. Although all first year college students confront literacy challenges similar to those illustrated by the narrated experiences of this study's participants, bilingual language minority students can be impacted more profoundly by some of the dissimilarities between supposedly sequential learning contexts than their English-only peers, a situation resulting in part from participants' dual tasks of learning another language and mastering academic content and

discourse conventions. However, the pedagogy they experienced in high school failed to take these factors into account by assuming that they would need only superficial assistance (for example, simply supplying word meanings upon request). The literacy skills and procedures their high school tasks entailed did not scaffold their learning to the level and complexity of literacy tasks they encountered in college, as was evident in their descriptions of the challenges they faced upon matriculation.

The study also demonstrated that challenges bilingual language minority students may face when they begin post-secondary studies can be mitigated if they enroll in institutions whose learning environments meet these students where they are linguistically and strategically by providing the instructional scaffolding that assists them to become competent, independent readers and students. Attending the community college, Sonia and Diego were able to act to promote their own learning because that school context facilitated their doing so. Studying in a different context, Jia's efforts to adapt to college learning tasks were less successful, at least in part because academically supportive relationships with faculty and tutors were far more difficult to find and establish. Thus, a further implication is for bilingual language minority students and their adult advisors to consider the appropriateness of tertiary choices according to congruence between individual bilingual language minority students' language and study skills and institutionally provided transitional scaffolding.

This study also reconfirms the contention that bilingual language minority students are ill served when they are artificially aggregated into a unitary subset. Conceptualizing them as identical in language and learning characteristics may instigate pedagogical practices and institutional policies that fail to address their actual academic

situations and instead can impede and discourage their academic development. The one-size-fits-all curriculum and instructional practices Sonia and Jia experienced in high school failed to address neither of their markedly different learning issues. In none of the interviews with teachers or informal discussions with school personnel did there appear to be any recognition of the marginalization and silencing Sonia encountered for significant portions of her k-12 years, a condition that fortunately was absent from her first experiences at the community college. Regrettably, the same cannot be said for Jia. In high school, the institutional and pedagogical disregard for her long-term language learning needs was evident in both ESOL and mainstream classes, and this circumstance was also present in the approach her college took to providing transitional support for bilingual language minority freshmen.

#### *Implications for Pedagogy*

Saying that the solution to the dilemma of a mismatch between high school and college literacy demands would be to remake high schools is unrealistic at best, and is most likely impossible. However, there is an area within bilingual language minority students' high school learning experiences that be refocused to address their need for a greater panoply of literacy and learning skills and strategies: the ESOL classroom.

Although ESOL pedagogy currently is mostly content-based, it typically concentrates on language learning issues. Broadening the vision of ESOL instruction to include strategic and discipline-specific reading skills can not only enhance language learning but also acquaint bilingual language minority students with an array of literacy experiences that will more completely equip them with knowledge and strategies they will need for post-secondary education. Finally, an additional area of concern for bilingual language

minority high school students' learning is their academic journey that begins after they exit ESOL classes and move into non-ESOL courses. Implications for high school ESOL pedagogy also include a need to rethink approaches to and provisions for the academic needs of bilingual language minority students attending schools in areas unaccustomed to educating these students. The ESOL instruction Jia, Sonia, and Diego received had at best a benign influence on their learning; in reality, it did little to further their learning beyond teaching them academic survival English.

An additional area for pedagogical innovation is how to assist mainstream classroom teachers to understand and support the academic strengths and needs of students such as Sonia. Undertaking such changes involves recognizing and addressing aspects of the hidden culture of classrooms that negatively impact bilingual language minority learners by marginalizing and silencing them, a considerable task by itself.

#### *Implications for institutions*

When participants' performances are considered as they relate to the two different higher education institutions, it is clear that bilingual language minority students were better served at the two year school than at the four year. Clearly, four year schools similar to the university included in this study will need to provide more appropriate support and instruction for students such as Jia, students her school accepted because they demonstrated sufficient verbal skills on measures the school used to predict success with first semester academic literacy tasks.

#### *Future Research*

The experiences of bilingual language minority participants described in this study are local, not global. Although these results cannot be generalized to all U.S.-

educated bilingual language minority students and to all U.S. high schools, descriptions of participants' high school reading experiences demonstrate that these conditions can occur in locales where similar circumstances exist. For example, the prevalence and influence of PowerPoint slides as primary reading sources may well extend to other school systems where high stakes testing is mandated for measuring student and institutional success, especially given that mainstream textbook publishers produce these PowerPoints for teachers' use and market them as containing content included in the standardized tests students must pass.

The findings in this study suggest that additional research offers the possibility for developing a fuller understanding of how bilingual language minority high school students' prospects for success in higher education can be enhanced at the secondary level through qualitative and multiple methodology longitudinal case studies from these students' perspectives that include their high school experience in its entirety in a variety of settings and that cross the boundaries between high school and college. Promising research foci include the following qualitative study topics approached from a student perspective:

- Academic experiences of high school bilingual language minority students who do not continue with post-secondary education
- Academic experiences of both persistent and non-persistent bilingual language minority students in 2 year (community colleges) and 4 year institutions (colleges and universities)
- Affective factors influencing bilingual language minority student success in high school and college

- Tertiary institutions and bilingual language minority students' changes in self-efficacy.

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## Appendix A

## SPRING SEMESTER 2007 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Each participant was asked the following questions about the courses he or she had spring semester 2007, the first phase of the study.

1. I would like to know about the reading you do in your classes in high school. Let's begin with your \_\_\_\_\_ class, \_\_\_\_\_. Would you tell me everything you read in that class?
2. When do you read \_\_\_\_\_ (first item participant mentions)?
3. Where do you read \_\_\_\_\_ (first item participant mentions)?
4. What are you supposed to do with \_\_\_\_\_ as you read it?
5. What are you supposed to do with \_\_\_\_\_ after you read it?
6. Think about a typical homework assignment you have in your \_\_\_\_\_ class. Would you tell me about it?
7. Possible probe/follow-up questions:
  - a. How long is a typical assignment in \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. How much time does it take you to read it?
  - c. When do you usually do your homework reading?
  - d. Do you ever read in class?
  - e. Tell me about what you read in class.
  - f. Describe what happens when you read in class. How does the activity begin?
8. Do you ever read books from the library?
  - a. If so, what do you choose?
  - b. How do you decide which book to choose?
9. Do you use the Internet in your \_\_\_\_\_ class?
  - a. How do you use the Internet in \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Would you describe what you do when you use the Internet in \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. How do you choose which pages to look at when you do an Internet search?
  - d. What makes an Internet page a "good one" to use? What characteristics are you looking for?

- e. Have your teachers or Media Center staff talked with you about how to use the Internet or helped you work with it in your school assignments?
  - f. When you find an Internet source that you want to use, what do you do next?  
How do you use the information from the Internet in your assignments?
10. Do you teachers talk about plagiarism?
11. What do they tell you?
12. I'd like to understand what is easy and what is difficult in the reading assignments in high school. Let's talk about a typical assignment.
- a. Tell me about an assignment that was easy.
  - b. Why was it easy?
13. Can you think of one that was hard?
- a. Why it was hard?
  - b. What did you do with the difficult parts?
12. How is reading it in English different from the way you would read it in your first language?
- a. What do you do with new vocabulary words?
  - b. What do you do when a sentence doesn't make sense?

## Fall Semester 2007 Interview Questions

Each participant was asked the following questions about the courses he or she had fall semester 2007, the second phase of the study.

1. I would like to get an idea from you about the reading you are doing in your \_\_\_\_\_ class in college. Tell me about a night of homework in college.
2. How long is a typical assignment?
3. How much time does it take you to read it?
4. When do you usually do your homework reading?
5. Do you read in class?
6. If so, how much time do you spend reading in class?
7. Do you use the Internet in your \_\_\_\_\_ class?
  - a. How do you use the Internet in \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Would you describe what you do when you use the Internet in \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. How do you choose which pages to look at when you do an Internet search?
  - d. What makes an Internet page a “good one” to use? What characteristics are you looking for?
  - e. Have your teachers or Media Center staff talked with you about how to use the Internet or helped you work with it in your school assignments?
  - f. When you find an Internet source that you want to use, what do you do next? How do you use the information from the Internet in your assignments?
8. Do you ever read books from the library?
  - a. If so, what do you choose?
  - b. How do you decide which book to choose?
9. How do your instructors address plagiarism?
10. I'd like to understand what you think is easy and what's difficult about the reading assignments in your college classes. Can you think of an assignment that was easy?

11. Why it was easy?
12. Can you think of one that was hard?
13. Why it was hard?
14. What did you do with the difficult parts?
15. Is reading in English different from reading in your first language? If so, how?
16. What do you do with new vocabulary words in English?
17. What do you do when a sentence in English doesn't make sense?
18. I'm interested in how you think about your college reading work compared with the reading work you did in high school. Tell me how you compare reading in high school with reading in college.
19. Does anything seem different to you about the reading you are doing in college?
20. Do you read in your home language? Tell me about reading in \_\_\_\_\_.
21. How is it different from reading in English?

## High School Teacher and College Instructor Interview Questions

1. When you assign reading homework in the course, how do you prepare students for it?
2. What are typical questions students ask about the reading assignments in this course?
3. Do students ever have difficulties with the readings? If so, would you describe them?
4. How would you compare the questions asked by ESL students about reading assignments with those asked by native English speaking students?
5. Would you describe these differences?
6. What do you regard as instructor responsibility related to reading in content areas?
7. Do you ever assign books from the library? Can you tell me how you use library books in\_\_\_\_\_?
8. Do you use the Internet in your \_\_\_\_\_ class?
  - a. How do you use the Internet in \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. Would you describe what you do when you include Internet assignments in \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c. What do you tell students about how they should use Internet sources?
  - d. How do you evaluate student Internet use?
  - e. What makes an Internet page a “good one” to use? What characteristics are you looking for?

## Appendix B

## TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Participants:	I = Interviewer Initials used for teachers, professors, and students identifiable by pseudonyms (e.g., SC, NM, JZ) rather than generic T, S, or P.
Overlapping speech:	Left bracket, [ marks the beginning of overlapping speech for both speakers. The second bracket marks the end of the segment of overlapping speech, again for both speakers.
Unclear words:	Parentheses with (x) indicate unclear word. Two unclear words are indicated with (xx), three with (xxx).
Emphasized speech:	Underlined <u>words</u> indicate speaker emphasis.
Loud speech:	FULL CAPS indicate loud speech.
Punctuation:	Unlike customary transcription conventions used with discourse analyses, periods, question marks, and exclamation points are used as sentence terminal indicators. Commas indicate phrasal junctions such as subordinate clauses, series, transition words or phrases, and introductory words and phrases.
Researcher notes:	Curly brackets { } are used to indicate words or phrases inserted for unclear references and other clarifications.
Other vocalizations:	Non-word sounds such as ((laughs)) are enclosed with double parentheses..

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## Appendix C

Table 1: County and City School Systems Statistics

Number of Students in 2007: 24777

Economically Disadvantaged: 51.00%

English Language Learners: 19.00%

Did this District make Adequate Yearly Progress in 2007? No

	Total # pupils	% EL	Hispanic	White	African-American	Asian	Gender	Free/reduced lunches	9 <sup>th</sup> grade/12 <sup>th</sup> grade #s	Graduation rate
County (36 E&M/6 HS)	24,877	19%	29%	64%	6%	1%	48/F 52/M	10,310+2303=12613 50.7%	N/A	N/A
West High	1102	13%	22%	76%	1%	0%	N/A	364+74=438 39.75%	335/173	69.4% 57.1% EL
South High	1026	13%	25%	69%	3%	2%	N/A	378+76=454 44.25%	315/211	75.5% 36.8%EL
Hill High	1069	10%	23%	56%	18%	1%	N/A	504+130=634 59.31%	376/167	57.7% (49.4) 54.2% EL (31.3)
City (4 schools/1 high school)	5543	29%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	75%		
City High School	1144	12%	35%	30%	32%	3%	N/A	57%	N/A/285	80.7% 41% EL

## Appendix D

Table 2: Data Coding Key

1/02/07

Semester 2 numbers	Participant 2 letters	Medium 1 number	Occurrence	High School-2 letters College-2 letters	Complete Code
61-Sp 07 62-Su 07 63-Fall 07	Represents first & last names (pseudonyms)	1 Audio CD 2 Transcript 3 Notes—Observ. 4 Artifact 5 Final—Observ. 6 Other	1 <sup>st</sup> CD, 2 <sup>nd</sup> CD, 3 <sup>rd</sup> CD, etc.	High schools XXXXXX HS-WC YY YYY HS-SC ZZ CCCC HS-TS WWW WWW HS-HC Colleges Community college-CG University-SU	61XX11YY

## Appendix E

Table 3: High School Courses, Teachers, Observations, and Interviews

Hill High School  
Diego Montez

HS Course	Teacher	Observations	Interview(s)
British Literature	Sam Hoffmann (SH)	N/A	N/A
AP Economics	Carl Wilson (CW)	2/22/07; 5/8/07	2/29/07; 5/16/07
Weight Training	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>(11<sup>th</sup> grade)</i> <i>American Government</i>	Bob McGee (BM)	5/6/07	3/20/07

South High School  
Sonia Cortez

HS Course	Teacher	Observations	Interview(s)
Algebra III	Wanda Teasley (WT)	N/A	N/A
Banking and Finance	Nan Moore (NM)	2/27/07	3/6/07
Economics	Wesley Martin (WM)	2/27/07	3/8/08

West High School  
Jia Zheng

HS Course	Teacher	Observations	Interview(s)
Environmental Science	Don Arnold (DA)	N/A	N/A
American Government	Calvin March (CM)	N/A	N/A
Health	Roy Smith (RS)	N/A	N/A
Human A & P	Vicki Starnes (VS)	4/12/07	4/10/07 4/12/07

West High School  
Elionai Juarez (did not matriculate)

HS Course	Teacher	Observations	Interview(s)
Algebra III	Sandy Miller (SM)**	4/24/07*	4/24/07*
Economics	Warren Joiner (WJ)**	N/A	3/6/07
American Government	Hal James (HJ)	3/8/07	3/6/07

\*also Veronica Caceres

\*\*also Jia Zheng

Veronica Caceres (did not matriculate)

HS Course	Teacher	Observations	Interview(s)
Algebra III	Sandy Miller (SM)	4/24/07*	4/24/07*
British Literature	Chris Holden (CH)	3/1/07	3/1/07
American Literature	Genie Jones (GE)	3/20/07	3/20/07

\*also Elionai Juarez

Hill High School  
Rogelio Morales (did not matriculate)

HS Course	Teacher	Observations	Interview(s)
American Government	Bob McGee*** (BMcG)	5/7/07	4/26/07

\*\*\*also Diego Montez

## Appendix F

Table 4: College Courses, Professors, Observations, and Interviews

## Diego Montez—Community college

College Course	Professor	Observations	Interview(s)
Political Science 1101	Phillip Branyon (PB)	10/19/07	10/10/07 1 hour 10 m.
ESLW 0075	Helen Tanner (HT)	10/02/07	10/02/07 1 hour 15 m.
PHED 1210	Wanda Laney (WL)	10/23/07	10/23/07 45 minutes
MATH 1111	Brenda Day (BD)	N/A	N/A

## Sonia Cortez—Community college

College Course	Professor	Observations	Interview(s)
ESLW 0075	Paula Kelly (PK)	10/2/07	10/2/07 1 hour 30 m.
MATH 1111	Haley Hinson (HH)	10/4/07	10/4/07 35 minutes

## Jia Zheng—Urban university

College Course	Professor	Observations	Interview(s)
Global Issues (POL 101)	Nawaz Sharif (NS)	10/2/07	10/2/07 1 hour 10 m.
Speech 1000	Terry Chastain (TC)	11/1/07	11/1/07 55 minutes
Introduction to Theatre	Gordon Styles (GS)	9/25/07	9/25/07 40 minutes
Introduction to Astronomy	Warren James (WJ)	10/4/07	10/4/07 50 minutes
ENG 101 - ESL	Sherri Miles (SM)	11/1/07	11/1/07 1 hour