

“GOING BACK HOME”: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF CARIBBEAN ADOLESCENTS’

LITERACY PRACTICES

by

CHERYL ANN MCLEAN

(Under the Direction of Donna E. Alvermann)

ABSTRACT

This narrative analysis explored the literacy practices of three immigrant Caribbean adolescents in the United States. The researcher sought to understand how immigrant adolescents negotiated the new contexts of United States schools and communities. The overarching research question guiding the focus on the participants’ literacy practices and identities was: How do immigrant Caribbean adolescents see themselves within the context of United States schools, and what are the consequences of their identities for their literacy practices? The study was conducted in the metropolitan city of Atlanta, in the south eastern state of Georgia. The participants were three female 16 year old, high school students who migrated from their Caribbean homes of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. The researcher collected data in the participants’ homes, schools and communities from April- November, 2007. Using ethnographic research methods, the researcher collected interview, observational and documentary data including photographs and participants’ personal and official school documents. In this study, narrative was the principal mode of data collection and method of analysis. Drawing on the works of Cortazzi (1993) and Gee (1999), the researcher designed a method for analyzing and representing the narratives.

The researcher used the works of Bakhtin (1981, 1986), Fanon (1967, 2004), and Freire (1987, 2003) as theoretical lenses from which to interpret the data. The key findings revealed the centrality of the Home cultures and values. The participants made ongoing connections with their native countries in order to navigate the United States schools and society. Points of tension included language use, conceptions of learning and teaching, online identity groups, and identification with back Home. The three young women specifically drew on their backgrounds to engage in cultural dialogue with their various social contexts. The findings suggest the need for teachers and researchers to see immigrant adolescents as agentic, cultural brokers with sophisticated knowledge of the cultural norms and literacy practices of diverse social groups that cross cultural, geographic and linguistic borders.

INDEX WORDS: adolescents, Caribbean, dialogue, identity, Jamaica, language, literacy, narrative, narrative analysis, sociocultural, Trinidad and Tobago.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Lennox and Barbara McLean. Your unconditional love, and your strength, sacrifice, guidance and support have helped make this journey possible. For this, and for everything, I am forever grateful.

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I give God thanks and praise for his continued blessings.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Going Foreign

“It was one of those things that I guess I knew was gonna happen when I grew up.” As a child, growing up in Jamaica, Ashley—now a 16 year old 10th-grade high school student living in the United States—had been always been told that her family would someday leave Jamaica for the United States. Ashley spent many years subconsciously preparing for the family’s eventual migration. Though the family did not openly advertise their plans, Ashley was always aware of her mother’s dream to migrate to the United States. Over the years, Ashley saw her mother carefully preparing to make the dream come true. “So it wasn’t like spur of the moment: ‘Let’s go to America.’ It was something my Mom always planned—always had for us. So, I was sure it was going to happen one day. *Someday* we were going to see America. We were going to do what we’d planned to do.” For this young person, the idea of the United States as a final destination eventually became central to her home and school realities. She started preparing to take qualifying exams for entry to United States schools. With these steps, Ashley began to view schooling in Jamaica as temporary. Ashley knew that she and her two siblings, now in primary school, would not go to high school in Jamaica—and, if they did, their stay would be brief. For her, it was only a matter of time until her Mother got her “ticket in” to the United States. Ashley always knew that “someday soon come”.

“It came as a surprise to me: my parents deciding that we leave Jamaica. I guess it all started with my older sister. She moved up here so she can go to college. And, this way it made it easier for my parents to see her and pay for tuition and stuff. And, plus with me, you have better opportunities here. But, I never expected that I’d be living here now. Of course, there was always the possibility of sometime in the *future*—that someday, I’d maybe go to college but...not so soon, not *now*...” LeeAnn, 16 years old, speaks of her family’s decision to move from their homeland of Jamaica to make a new life in the United States. At the time when her parents decided to have the family migrate to the United States, LeeAnn was 11 years old. It was a move that she was not yet ready to make. However, the decision was one over which she had no control. Even so, LeeAnn understood that schooling and education were the key reasons for the move. Hers was a family of scholars. In fact, LeeAnn was the only member of the family of five (three children and two parents) without a graduate degree. Both elder sisters had followed in their parents’ footsteps and had gone on to pursue masters and doctorates in their fields. No one doubted that LeeAnn would also do the same. College and a professional career seemed almost a rite of passage in the family. So, it was no surprise to LeeAnn that her parents, who were both teachers, would continue to seek out all possibilities in order to provide adequately for their children’s academic needs. Her parents had explained to her that life in the United States would offer a wider range of academic and future career options. To a great extent, her parents’ views on the range of educational opportunities in Jamaica and the United States would eventually determine the place that LeeAnn would eventually call home.

Zeek, who was 11 years old at the time, knew that migration was inevitable. Three years earlier, Zeek’s mother had returned to the United States, leaving Zeek to live with her

grandmother in their Caribbean home in Trinidad. Staying with her grandmother was something that Zeek quietly accepted. Though extremely difficult at first, Zeek adjusted to life without her mother: Her Mom's education was important. Later, Zeek eventually learned that her mother had no immediate plans to return to her native land. However, Zeek certainly did not expect to live apart from her mother forever. "I was living without my Mom for like, three years, 'cause my Mom went back to New York to go to college. And, so when I heard that I would be moving to New York *just now* to be with her, I was like, "Yeah!" I guess that was always the general idea, right? I always thought so. Especially after Mummy moved to the U.S It was a consideration. It wasn't as if she *told* me, but it was always a consideration. So, when the news came, I was fine with it." Zeek's mother's decisions after graduating from college would determine whether or not Zeek would leave her life and school in Trinidad to eventually make the move to the United States.

These three young persons, Ashley, LeeAnn and Zeek, are now high school students in the United States. The schools and the classes they attend, and the communities they each live in are as different as each young person's experiences in it. The 10th grade looks different for each of these young women as did their lives and schools before moving to the United States. Yet, underlying these differences are common stories about their experiences as immigrant students that form unifying plots of the overarching narratives of their lives. For each of these young women *someday had come*.

Caribbean Movement

Open your eyes and look within:

Are you satisfied with the life you're living?

We know where we're going;

We know where we're from.

We're leaving Babylon, y'all!

We're going to our Father's land.

Exodus: movement of Jah people!

(Marley, 1977)

In the song, *Exodus*, Marley (1977) called for the Africans in the Diaspora to move toward a better future. I believe that this *movement* of Africans and their descendants from the West to which Marley alludes can also be applied to the migratory movement of native Caribbean peoples to the metaphorical *land of opportunity*—the United States of America. Ogbu (1997) stated that the United States has been and is considered by many immigrants to be a land of opportunity for a better life through jobs and education. Migration is often seen as a movement toward increased opportunities for personal, academic and economic growth. In many ways, the ongoing exodus from the Caribbean continues to shape the sociocultural landscape of the United States society.

Historically, the Caribbean nations have been known to have high levels of migration, and immigration. Given the Caribbean history of imperialism and colonial domination in the region by the British, Spanish and French, inter-island and cross-Atlantic movement to and from the various “mother countries” were not unusual. Foner (2001) pointed out that, in the

Caribbean, migration is considered a way of life. Three of the most widely recognized migration destinations for Caribbean peoples have been Britain, the United States and Canada.

The United States has become an increasingly favored migratory destination for Caribbean peoples. During the 1960s and 1970s there was a noted change in the trend of the country of destination. In 1930, in the traditional gateway city of New York, Caribbean immigrants (predominantly nationals of Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana and Barbados) comprised one fifth of the city's Black population; by 1998, Black Caribbean immigrants constituted 8% of the New York population making them the largest immigrant group (Foner, 2001; Kasinitz, 1992). More recently, the numbers of immigrants from the Anglophone Caribbean or West Indies (English-speaking Caribbean countries) to the United States has increased by 2000% within the last decade. To date, Jamaicans are the largest group of American immigrants from the English-speaking Caribbean, with Trinidadians comprising the second largest group. Collectively, Jamaicans and Trinidadians represent .4% of the United States population (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, 2007). In 2002, there were approximately 2.5 million foreign-born and first-generation Black West Indian immigrants living and attending schools in the United States (Rong & Brown, 2002). In their quest for the promise of a better life, many Caribbean peoples anticipate and plan for that day. And, for millions of others, that day has come.

The Caribbean and the United States South

Jamaica, located near to top of the chain of Caribbean islands, is home to 2,780,132 people (91% of whom are of African descent) (The World Factbook, 2008). The Jamaican Patois (the local dialect) is spoken among the majority of the population. It is the third most populous Anglophone country in the Americas, after the United States and Canada (Wikipedia The Free

Encyclopedia, 2008). Until two and seven years ago respectively two of the participants in this study would have been counted among the nation's residents. The island, some 146 miles by 50 miles is best known for its natural resources, reggae music and minerals exports. However, predominantly a service-based economy, the tourist industry is the country's main source of revenue. Tourist destinations, boasting white sand beaches, lush mountains and luxurious resorts cater to North American and European vacationers. Coupled with the natural beauty and resources is another face of Jamaica reflected in the sometimes stringent economic challenges.

Some 2148 miles away from the state of Georgia, and less than 1000 miles away from Jamaica, at the base of the island chain, the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, anchors the base of the Caribbean archipelago. Trinidad and Tobago is this most southerly of the Caribbean nation that, up until five years ago, one of the participants in this study called home. An industrialized nation of 1,979 square miles, Trinidad and Tobago is a world top producer of such commodities as petroleum and natural gas, methanol, and iron (Health and Home Report, 2007). The country is touted as the fastest growing economy in the Western hemisphere. This twin island nation of one million odd people offers sometimes stark contrast: the more industrialized, modernized island of Trinidad, and the pristine beaches, coral reefs and rain forests of Tobago. A multiethnic and multiracial society, the population of Trinidad and Tobago comprises 40 % Indian (South Asian), 37.5 % African, 20.5 % mixed (European, Chinese and Arab), and 2 % unspecified (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, 2007)

The two countries of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago share more than a geographic space. They share a common history of slavery and colonial domination by Europe. Colonized by the British from 16th century, each saw its Amerindian (Native American) population almost decimated, to be replaced by peoples of Africa who were brought to be slaves and British

colonists. Trinidad and Tobago, as former British, French and Spanish colonies, saw its population and its diverse heritage shaped by the colonial history. It is this colonial history—though giving each country its distinct culture including its traditions, ethnic populations, linguistic forms and accents, and foods—that ultimately unites the nations.

European domination and control of the islands has helped define the British based political and educational system in the Anglophone Caribbean. With the achievement of independence from the British in 1960s, the countries maintained the overall structure of the education system that came out of the colonial heritage. However, to a large extent, curricular content and examinations have been reformed to reflect a Caribbean identity. On average, schools are generally organized into five major levels: preprimary, primary school (ages 5-11), secondary school (ages 11-16), post-secondary (ages 16-18), and tertiary (ages 18 and over).

To the north of the two Caribbean nations of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, lies the southeastern state of Georgia that, within the past decade, has increasingly become home for many Caribbean immigrants. Be it the northward movement from the Caribbean or the transition from the northeastern state of New York for current immigrants, the city of Atlanta, Georgia is now an increasingly popular non-traditional gateway city. According to the 2007 census estimate, the metropolitan (metro) Atlanta population is over five million, and is the fastest growing metropolitan area in the state, and the ninth largest in the United States (Demographia, 2007). The city is home to several national and international multi-million dollar businesses including The Coca Cola Company, Delta Airlines, and Cable News Network (CNN). Within the metropolitan area, the suburbs are highly populated locations known for its many wealthy residential areas and large churches. Based on the 2006 population estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau (2007), the racial makeup of the city was 59.39% Black, 33.22% White, 2.93% Asian,

0.18% Native American, 0.04% Pacific Islander, 1.99% from other races, and 1.24% from two or more races.

How I Came To This Study

Having grown up in the Caribbean twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I understood migration to be a way of life: an historical, social and cultural practice. In the past years, some of my own relatives and friends have migrated to England, Canada and the United States—some in search of financial opportunities that, because of the currency exchange, can bring temporary financial relief upon their return. It is not uncommon to have the breadwinner of the family make his/her way to the foreign land in order to provide for the family members back home. Some, however, have opted for a more permanent move, making the destination countries their homes and rearing their children as nationals of those countries. Others still, have migrated for tertiary level educational opportunities. Whatever the motive, for many Caribbean nationals, temporary or permanent migration represents a move toward something better—be it achieving economic and/or academic success.

For over a decade as a secondary school teacher in Trinidad, I have had some of my students share with me the bittersweet news that their families were about to migrate or—as the students popularly phrased it—“going foreign”. And, for many years, I would with much curiosity, repeatedly observe students’ negative attitudes to their studies that came with the announcements of migratory preparations. Invariably, and with increasing frustration, I watched many of these bright students shut down completely or pay only cursory attention to their school work. Yet, such students assured me with teenaged bravado that they would focus on their studies when they went “foreign”. They were confident that they would succeed because, “Everybody know[s] we could *handle our stories* up North.” I knew that, for these students, “North” and “foreign”

was North America: the United States and, to a lesser extent, Canada; “we” represented Trinidad and Tobago nationals and Caribbean peoples in general.

For the young people in my secondary school classroom, *handling their stories* meant that they would be taking care of business, which in this case, was succeeding at the job of being a student. They expressed hardly any doubt, misgivings or concerns about their capabilities of taking on another cultural setting and educational system. Sometimes, one young person might express passing concern about whether he/she would be able to fit in their new communities. But, in general, my students believed that academic and socioeconomic success was inevitable. “You’ll see...” the bolder ones promised with confidence-inspired nonchalance, “When I come back with my papers, you’ll see.” With the passing years, I did in fact see many a bold promise honored as former students returned to visit their alma mater on vacation from their high schools and colleges in the United States, and spoke—sometimes in noticeably foreign-accented tones—of their academic achievements up North.

It was with pride that I listened to such stories of success—happy that my students were indeed *handling their stories* in foreign. Yet, at times I wished for the opportunity to extend such brief visits so that I could learn more than just the fact that these young persons were “making it”. I wanted to find out *how* they went about making it in their new homes. I was curious to learn about the challenges these students and their families may have faced, and the choices that they made.

Years later, like so many of my former students, I would also make the move up North to attend graduate school in the United States. My own experiences of living in the United States and being a doctoral student at the University of Georgia directly exposed me to some of the

realities and challenges that my newly arrived students might experience adjusting to life in the United States. Up to that point, I had lived only in my native country of Trinidad and Tobago. In many respects, I was a true *Trini/Trinbagonian* (the local terms for Trinidadians and natives of The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago). I was born and bred in the Caribbean nation; I was educated under the British-inherited Caribbean-adapted educational system including post graduate schooling. After completing my Ordinary and Advanced levels secondary school exit examination certification, I proceeded to tertiary level schooling. At The University of the West Indies (UWI), I received my Bachelor of Arts and Masters of Education degrees.

In Trinidad and Tobago, I grew up actively participating in and/or respecting the many cultural practices and festivals (religious and otherwise). I not only walked the walk, but talked the talk—my lexicon ranged from Trinidad Creole (a national dialect of English with elements of African, French, Spanish and Hindi languages) to Standard English. I understood that the red, white and black—the country’s national colors—represented the collective strength, pride and respect of a diverse people who had survived and triumphed over a history of conquest and colonization; and, I was taught to always see myself and my country as connected to the Caribbean region and the world.

What then did this mean for me as I adjusted to another sociocultural system? As I moved within my new space in the United States, I found myself dealing with the academic, social and cultural realities and expectations of my new learning and living communities. A Caribbean immigrant student, I engaged in my own negotiation of foreign contexts—academic content, pedagogical practices, cultural norms and values—amidst the tensions of my own *social and cultural baggage* (Hintzen & Rahier, 2003). In migrating, I brought along my own cultural lenses, ascribed characteristics (Caribbean, Black, female) and achieved characteristics (teacher,

graduate student, and teacher educator). I came to the United States having viewed and experienced the world through these lenses, and these lenses informed my thinking, my academic work and my pedagogy.

I also found that my experiences as a secondary school English teacher in the Caribbean provided me with multiple perspectives on issues related to adolescent literacy, pedagogical practices, schooling, and immigration. Working as an instructor of preservice secondary school teachers, I became increasingly aware of teacher candidates' concerns about and sometimes resistance to teaching immigrant student populations. The range of issues raised in my classes highlighted some of the tensions that immigrant learners experience. The preservice teachers' responses also suggested that the world views and pedagogical practices within some United States classrooms may not always facilitate opportunities for meaningful engagement for immigrant students. Such experiences highlighted for me, the importance of having practitioners, administrators and policymakers understand multicultural and diversity issues in the classroom, specifically related to immigrant students, and intergroup and intragroup diversity.

A Caveat

I acknowledge that there is a range of sociohistoric and cultural distinctions within the Caribbean region. Thus far, in talking about the nations and the region, I have used the terms Caribbean and West Indian interchangeably. However, the term West Indian refers to the geographical location of the Caribbean, and distinguishes the cultural and historical commonalities among Anglophone Caribbean nations as opposed to the Spanish, French or Dutch Caribbean. In this study, from this point onward, I defer to my participants in their preference for the overarching term "Caribbean" to represent and identify themselves.

In addition, in choosing to share my own story about migration, I am in no way suggesting that seeing and experiencing the world as a woman in her thirties would be similar to that of the adolescent high school Caribbean native. Nor do I contend that the experiences of the Trinidad and Tobago native would necessarily be the same as that of the Jamaican national. To do so, would be to negate the rich individual cultural heritage and differences of each nation, and the nuances that the sociocultural realities and individual identities bring to the new contexts.

However, my experiences of transition caused me to think about my secondary school students and the countless other students across the nation and Caribbean region who had migrated. I was motivated to find out what the transition to the United States looked like for Caribbean adolescents and what were some of their cultural resources, social relations, and literacy practices. In other words, how were adolescents up North *handling their stories*? And, more to the point, what *were* their stories?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the identities and literacy practices of three Caribbean adolescents who migrated from the Caribbean to live and attend school in the United States. I was interested in understanding the social and cultural resources upon which the immigrant youth draw to negotiate different sociocultural contexts. Even further, I argue that, in order to get a more richer sense of the immigrant adolescents' perceptions of themselves as individuals and as learners, it was important for me to see their lives and their worlds not as one-dimensional but in flux, complex and dynamic contexts (Bakhtin, 1981). I believed that because their various contexts were not discrete, the adolescents drew on their collective experiences across the multiple spaces. Thus, I considered it important to try to get at some of these intersecting contexts by looking at the homes, schools and communities in which the adolescents

operated. Dyson (2003) offered the view that negotiating social spaces involved “processes of transporting and transforming material across symbolic and social borders” (p. 10). Thus, in my attempt to understand how Caribbean immigrant adolescents adjusted to school and life in the United States in general, I felt I needed to attend to the social, geographic and cultural border-negotiation and transformation taking place.

In this study, I drew on sociocultural theories as part of my conceptual framework for understanding the identities and academic experiences of Caribbean immigrant adolescents. From a sociocultural perspective, the individuals’ realities and knowledges are viewed as actively constructed within the social and cultural contexts in which individuals participate. Individuals’ realities are not only social and cultural, but also historical, because individuals use the cultural tools of communicative signs and symbols handed down to them to construct their learning (Wink & Putney, 2002). This view of knowledge implies that as persons engage in various social practices, they make meaning in response to their experiencing of the specific social worlds. My approach to this study was, therefore, guided by the view that individuals are *social* beings that shape and are shaped by relationships, environments, and experiences.

I view all meaning-making as involving active, contextual, and collaborative *construction* of knowledge (Berger & Luckman, 1966). In taking this stance, I found that it afforded me opportunities to consider multiple layers of the reciprocal relationships involved in meaning-making. Matthews and Cobb (2005) suggested that such an approach would enabled me to focus on the individual, the social, and the cultural layers either simultaneously or separately with the understanding that while one may be in the foreground, the others are in the background, present and influential. This framework allowed me to explore the range of identities and literacy

practices of the Caribbean immigrant adolescents. It is against this backdrop that I asked the overarching research question:

How do immigrant Caribbean adolescents see themselves within the context of United States schools, and what are the consequences of their identities for their literacy practices?

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the research question, three sub-questions guided my analysis of the data.

1. How do the adolescents perceive themselves as learners?
2. How do the adolescents talk about their academic experiences as Caribbean immigrant learners?
3. In what types of literacy practices do the adolescents engage?

In the following section, I discuss some of the kinds of discourses that helped me think through and contextualize this study. I offer an overview of my conceptual framework as it relates to immigrants, literacy and identity.

Figure 1. Map of the Caribbean.



Education and Immigration

The literature on Caribbean immigrants supports the widely held notion that immigrants come to the United States in search of a better life (Bashi & McDaniel, 1997; Rong & Brown, 2002). However, education and schooling are viewed as central to the immigrant's abilities to achieve this better life. In their research on Caribbean immigrants, Kasinitz, Mellenkopf and Waters (2004) argued that getting an education is the biggest individual challenge facing children of immigrants. Consequently, schooling becomes pivotal in the lives of adult immigrants, and the lives of immigrant children and United States-born children of immigrants.

Given the apparent centrality of education in the lives of Caribbean immigrants, what then have been some Caribbean immigrant learners' responses to United States schools? Generally, much of the literature points to the academic success of Caribbean immigrants (Waters, 1996;

Rong & Brown, 2001). One argument offered for success among Caribbean Blacks is the influence of the Caribbean culture (Bobb & Clarke, 2001; Waters, 1996). These researchers contend that Caribbean immigrants use strong ethnic identities as resources to achieve socioeconomic success.

Ogbu (1987; 1995) offered a “folk theory” of immigrants’ school success where *voluntary minorities* (groups who have migrated to the United States by choice) view the United States as the land of opportunity—a place to achieve success through hard work and education. According to Ogbu (1995) “Immigrant minorities are people who have moved voluntarily to the United States or to any other society, because they believe that such a move will result in improved economic well-being, better overall opportunities, and/or greater political freedom” (p. 85). The argument being made here is that because the immigrant chooses to come to the United States, the element of personal choice influences the individual’s willingness to succeed within that environment.

Even further, it is Ogbu’s (1995) view that the ways immigrants perceive and respond to the social structures in the United States are influenced by the expectations the immigrants bring with them. Ogbu went on to state that though they usually experience initial problems of adjustment in school, their experiences are not characterized by persistent problems and low academic performance. I will admit that Ogbu’s folk theory aligns with some of my own experiences as a classroom teacher in Trinidad. Many students and their parents espoused this folk theory in their views that Caribbean students would generally have positive academic experiences when they migrated. In addition, Ogbu’s theory is supported by the reports of high educational achievement among foreign-born Blacks (Kasinitz, Mellenkopf, & Waters, 2004; Rong & Brown, 2001; Waters, 1999). Kasinitz et al. have mainly attributed Caribbean

immigrants' achievements to (1) immigrants' resources and networks, (2) individual efforts, talents and choices, (3) parenting and family background, (4) community, neighborhood and school quality.

However, some researchers such as Gillborn (1997) and Nieto (2002) have argued against any *carte blanche* acceptance of Ogbu's (1995) folk theory. Gillborn pointed out that Ogbu's theory does not allow for individual differences because not all voluntary minorities experience success. Nieto suggested that Ogbu's theory places an inordinate responsibility on students and families without taking into account conditions outside their control that affect learning. One such condition might be the United States racial structures that sometimes position Caribbean Blacks so that their achievements eventually come to be viewed within the context of African Americans (Foner, 2005; Pedraza & Rambaut, 1996). In addition, the works of Au and Mason (1981) and Au and Kawakami (1996) have demonstrated that sociocultural differences in expectations between students and teachers, and the devaluing of subordinate cultures impede school learning and best explain school failure for ethnic and cultural minorities.

Limitations of Research Foci

In reviewing the literature on immigrant learners, I found that there was limited research that focused on the development of beliefs and attitudes affecting Black immigrants' perceptions about the management of cross-pressures of ethnicity and identity (Rong & Brown, 2002). In light of the increasing migration trends and cross-cultural exchanges, and the strong relationship between Black immigrants' identities and results in school to which Rong and Brown (2002) referred, I argue for a more informed understanding of the experiences and practices of Caribbean immigrant populations negotiating different societies, cultures, and academic structures. According to Foner (2005), the challenge is to more fully understand how the

construction of ethnic identity develops in different urban centers in the United States in the context of immigration.

In addition, because most immigration specialists still pay little attention to Black immigrants in favor of Latino and Asian groups (Kasinitz & Vickermann, 2001), in this study I made the case for more research on Black Caribbean immigrants. Kasinitz (1992) pointed out that Black Caribbean immigrants experience double marginality—an additional layer of invisibility as immigrants—because they are incorporated into the larger United States African American minority community. As a result, the tendency toward collective grouping contributes to the devaluing of real differences, values, achievements and needs, and lack of support from the host society. Perhaps this might account for the fact that, in comparison to other immigrant groups, there has been relatively little research directly addressing the education of Black immigrants despite the significant increase in numbers. Thus, this study allowed opportunities for making visible Caribbean immigrants' experiences, meaning-making processes and identities. This was particularly significant given that, within educational research, there is limited knowledge about Black immigrant learners (Rong & Brown, 2002).

In addition, much of the body of scholarship on Caribbean immigrants in the United States within the past 30 years has tended to focus mainly on two main geographic areas of the states of New York and Florida. Within these areas, the research issues span economic achievement, and racial experiences of first-generation adults and second-generation youth, and second-generation youth identity. Though valid and much-needed foci, I believed that it was also important to broaden the scope of research to focus more directly to educational issues specifically related to first generation adolescent immigrants. Thus, I chose to expand the (1) existing research foci: literacy practices and identity, (2) participant demographics: first

generation adolescent Caribbean immigrants and (3) research sites: urban center in the southeastern state of Georgia.

More importantly, I argue that by helping to fill a gap in knowledge on some of literacy practices employed by Caribbean immigrant adolescents in the homes, communities and schools, the study may arguably, help reduce misconceptions and miscommunication in cross-cultural contexts. In addition, by extending knowledge on learners' literacies, and how literacy is used by Black Caribbean immigrants to communicate and learn in classrooms, I make the argument that there is much to be learned from the cultural negotiation in which the young persons engaged. I saw the study as a way to create opportunities for Caribbean families, communities, policymakers, practitioners and teacher educators to better understand, value and address the strengths and challenges of the Caribbean immigrant population.

Sociocultural Theories of Literacy

Given the centrality of education and schooling across much of the discussion on immigrants in general, I chose to focus on Caribbean immigrants' experiences within the contexts of home and schooling experiences. I hold the view that literacy is closely bound to the social contexts of school, and the social practices with which adolescents negotiate academic texts and contexts. According to Bruner (1986) experience structures expressions and expressions also structure experience. What I see this view suggesting is that the meanings that adolescents make of themselves as individuals and as learners, come out of their active negotiation of a range of school-based discourses and literacy practices across the cultures and contexts into which the adolescents have been socialized (Gee, 1991; Street, 1984). The individual's sense of who he/she is in the world is interconnected with social practices and group memberships.

Closely aligned with the view of meaning-making as a social act, is Gee's (1999) concept of D/discourse as ways of being in the world. Gee argued that Discourse represents "ways of acting, interacting, feeling, believing, valuing, together with other people and with various sorts of characteristic objects, symbols, tools, and technologies—to recognize yourself and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways" (p. 7). I think it is important to note that the individual's sense of belonging is determined not only in the ways he/she identifies as belonging to that group, but also whether others identify the individual as belonging. Thus meaning-making, literacies and identities are reciprocal and social relationships negotiated by the individual and the members of the particular identity groups.

I wanted to explore adolescents' ongoing authoring of their worlds as they negotiate the push and pull of the forces of multiple cultural and social contexts. I found Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) notion of *dialogue* useful in seeing meaning-making as a process that involves the active use of language. It is through language that any culture embeds meanings and values that frame articulations, understandings, and projects that constitute a way of life (Gergen, 1995; Goldberg, 1993). Thus, I chose to take the individuals' uses of language as reflections of how they are constructed, and how they construct their lived experiences.

In this study, I make the argument that in order to achieve meaningful understanding of the experiences of literacy, schooling, identity and immigrant life, there must be consideration of how individuals shape and are shaped by discursive practices, cultural resources and social structures. I therefore drew on the works of Fanon (1967, 2004) and Freire (1987, 2003) to help me understand how persons with sociocultural histories of imperialism and colonialism respond to the D/discourses and social positionings. Even further, this perspective allowed me to explore how such persons position themselves in the new sociocultural texts of their adopted home. In

terms of education and schooling, Freire and Fanon asserted that how and what individuals learn come out of, and are defined by the knowledge and interactions that are valued and privileged in those contexts. Gergen (1995) contended that in responding to individuals and social structures, individuals are in fact responding to the historical, social and cultural words and worlds of a social-discursive matrix. However, Gergen's position highlights the perspective that all actions, practices, and ways of viewing the world are ultimately determined by the values and privileges afforded certain practices and experiences.

Identity

I agree with the view that social and cultural contexts intersect to shape how adolescents make sense of the world and themselves in the world. Individuals' identities—their sense of who they are in the world—are always being co-constructed in collaboration with their historical, social and cultural contexts including the home, school and community (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). These authors see identity construction as a process that involves negotiating and organizing self around discourses and practices with the aid of cultural resources and relationships. I believe that the immigrant adolescents drew on their own experiences and expectations, and the cultural and social practices of the cultures in which they live and go to school. Active participation in specific social worlds would, therefore, require the adolescents to adopt certain social practices and discourses into which they have been socialized (Finders, 1997). However, according to Holland et al., an individual's response to new cultural institutions and values is shaped by his/her sociocultural histories. Therefore, the sociocultural backgrounds that the immigrant adolescents bring, also directly and indirectly inform the cultures and identities of the classroom, schools, homes and communities in the United States.

Applying this view to the realities of Caribbean Blacks suggested that, particularly in terms of first generation immigrants, cultural background and ethnicity are central to the understanding of the immigrant adolescents as individuals and learners. Researchers have found that Caribbean Blacks have distinct ethnic identities (Bryce-Lapport, 1976; Foner, 2005; Vickermann, 1999; Waters, 1999). As a result, the adolescent learner is required to negotiate the tensions of the power dynamic between home and host values, culture, and economic, political and historical contexts.

The issues in which I am most interested are the adolescents' literacy practices and identities as learners, and as Caribbean immigrants, and whether Caribbean adolescents, when placed in different sociocultural contexts consciously negotiate their own learning and social practices by purposively and reflectively remaking their worlds (Holland et al., 1998). In this study, I take the position that approaching the issues of literacy, identity, and Caribbean immigrants from a three-pronged perspective of home, school and community offered a richer understanding of the immigrant students' experiences. This approach allowed me to tease out the practices and resources that the young persons draw on in order to achieve personal and academic success

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 presents a rationale for the study. In this chapter, I discussed the research foci, and research questions that guide the study. In chapter 2, I identify and discuss some of the key concepts and research that informed my approach to the study from a social constructionist theory of meaning-making and sociocultural theories of learning. I situate my review of the literature within the research on immigrant social practices, cultural identities and academic experiences in the United States.

In chapter 3, I focus on the methodological framework for this study. I discuss the research design. I provide details of the selection of the participants and the research sites. I focus on the ethnographic methods of data collection that I used in my fieldwork. I also explore some methodological challenges of data collection involved in conducting fieldwork. Finally, I provide a description of the analytic procedures of the narrative analysis.

I provide narratives of the major findings from this study in chapter 4. The findings were presented in the form of the overarching narrative *Going Back Home*. I explore four storylines that focus on the participants' views of success, and their cultural identities and literacy practices: If You Can Make It Here, Dealing with Difference, Sounding American, and A Place Called Home.

I expand on the narrative analysis in chapter 5 by drawing directly on the works of Bakhtin (1981,1986), Fanon (1967, 2004), Freire (1987, 2003), and Gee (1996, 1999) as lenses for interpreting the literacy and identity-making practices of the adolescents across the intersecting spaces of home, school and community. I use the three research sub-questions to ground the issues raised in the discussion. I offer the metaphor of engaging in cultural dialogue, from which to discuss the participants' academic experiences, their literacy practices and their perceptions of themselves. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss some key implications of the findings in this study, and offer directions for future research.

I use chapters 4 and 5 specifically to respond directly to the overarching research question and the sub-questions:

How do immigrant Caribbean adolescents see themselves within the context of United States schools, and what are the consequences of their identities for their literacy practices?

1. How do the adolescents perceive themselves as learners?

2. How do the adolescents talk about their academic experiences as Caribbean immigrant learners?
3. In what types of literacy practices do the adolescents engage?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

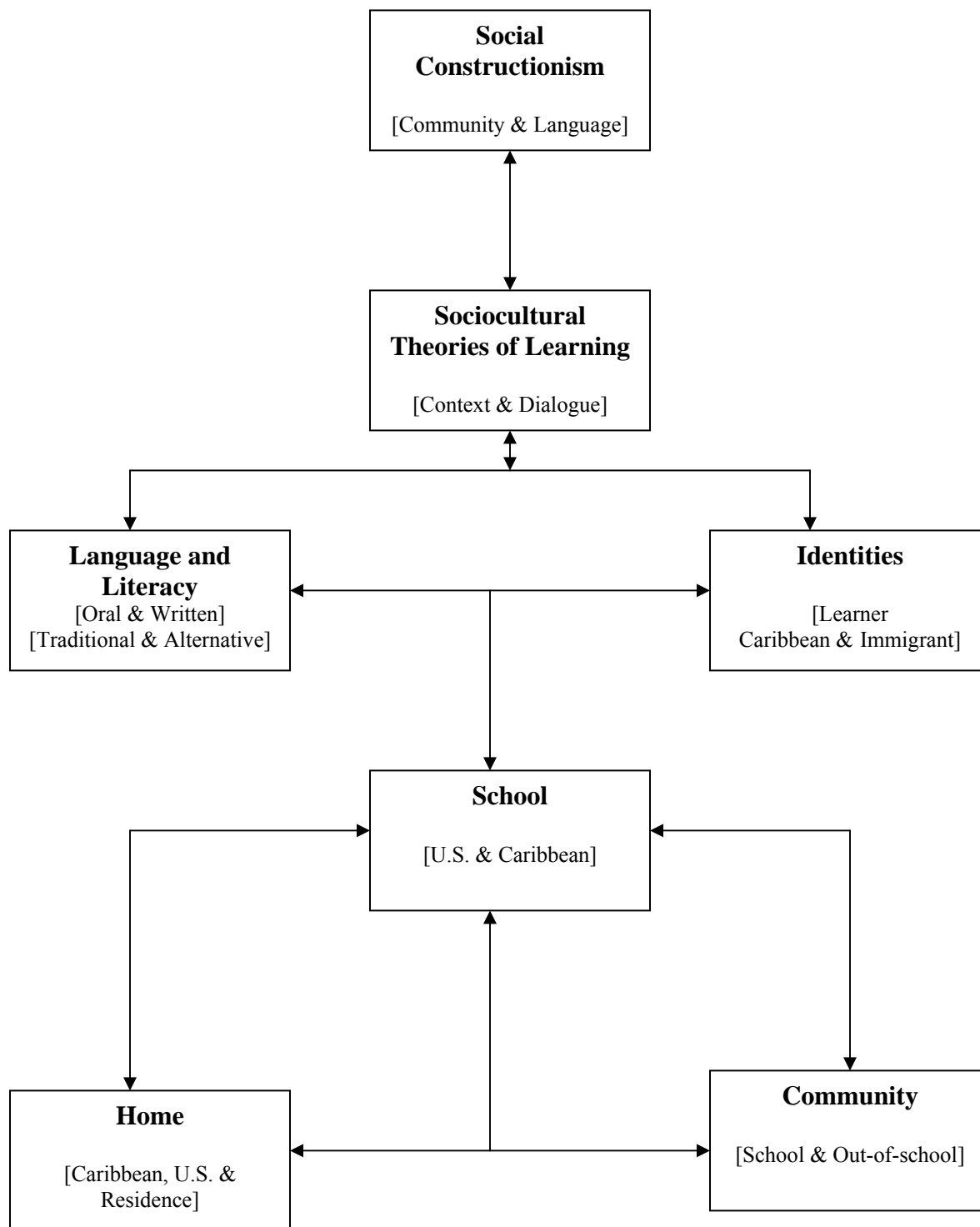
In chapter 2, I identify and discuss some of the key theories, concepts and research that informed my approach to the study. First, I look toward a social constructionist theory of meaning-making and a sociocultural view of learning. Next, I focus on issues of literacy and identity from a sociocultural perspective. More specifically, to help frame the discussion in terms of Caribbean adolescents, I situate my review within the research on immigrant social practices, cultural identities and academic experiences in the United States. I highlight research studies that focus on education, literacy and identity issues primarily related to Caribbean immigrants. In doing so, I point out some connections and differences between the existing research and my own research study. Next, I discuss how I use a postcolonial perspective as an ethical compass that guided how I framed the study.

A Social Constructionist Perspective

Social constructionist theory views meaning-making and knowledge as social processes that are negotiated in relationship with others (Shotter, 1995). This perspective of learning challenges traditional individualist value investments: a world-centered and mind-centered approach where world and mind are independent and knowledge is a mental state of representation and environment, and reasoning and logic (Gergen, 1995). Gergen argued that social constructionism seeks to replace an individualistic ideology with the notion that rational articulation is achieved *out of community*. From this standpoint, knowledge is not merely shaped

or colored by social experiences and interactions, but actually *exists in those interchanges* (Sfard, 1998).

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework.



A central tenet of this sociological perspective is that knowledge is constructed collaboratively *through language* (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Gavelek & Raphael, 1996; Hruby, 2001). Based on this social view of learning, meaning-making is inextricably linked to an individual's discourses, contexts, experiences and relationships. From this perspective, meaning-making does not take place in a social vacuum, and language use involves interdependent and collaborative relationships. Gergen (1995) stated, "Our agreements regarding the relationships of language to referents are always located within particular sociohistorical circumstances" (p. 25). I see language as bound with how a culture accumulates, represents, transmits and reproduces knowledge. In creating particular textual and social worlds, language shapes how culture is created, and how persons experience that culture. By extension, the centrality of language in knowledge production and transmission informs the process of learning and teaching. When this perspective is applied to how language influences pedagogical practices, Gavelek and Raphael (1996) made the point that:

Language and language practices are crucial to student's intellectual, social and emotional development. But it is not simply the language practices that are inherently important. Rather, what matters greatly are the ways these different language opportunities connect among each other, the ways teachers mind these opportunities for their instructional potential, and the ways students come to understand that language is one of the most important tools of our culture. (p. 191)

From a social constructionist perspective, in order to understand how individuals make sense of the world, I needed to view learning as situated, relational and grounded in individuals' lived experiences, and sociohistoric and cultural competencies.

Thus, in acknowledging the centrality of language and the social and cultural aspects of knowledge, I turned to a sociocultural theory to guide my understanding of how a social view of learning and language plays out in learners' lives particularly as it relates to literacy. In this study, I found that a social constructionist lens allowed me to keep as a central focus, the social relationships, the sociocultural component of language, and the individual in relationship to others (Gergen, 1995; Lee, 2004).

A Sociocultural View of Learning

In holding to my view of learning as a social process, I found that sociocultural theories also helped me to frame how I approached this study. I take the position that meaning-making involves interactive and contextual *construction* of knowledge in collaboration with others. Underlying the collaborative nature of meaning making is the notion of the individual's active participation in the group's collective activities. Mediating these collective activities are the group's cultural tools and resources. According to Bakhtin (1981), our realities are not only social and cultural, but also historical, because we use the cultural tools of communicative signs and symbols handed down to us to construct our learning. The author's statement reinforces the view that how individuals learn and what is learned is contingent upon the group's communicative resources and tools, and the knowledge that is valued within the group. Thus, when individuals respond to others and to social structures, they are in fact responding to the historical, social and cultural words and worlds of social-discursive matrix from which knowledge claims emerge and from which their justification is derived; the values/ideology implicitly within knowledge posits; the modes of informal and institutional life (sustained and replenished by ontological and epistemological

commitments); and the distribution of power and privilege favored by disciplinary beliefs. (Gergen, 1995, p. 20)

The group influences the nature of, and the values assigned its practices, experiences and relationships. The individual's participation within a group suggests that the individual is bounded by the norms of the group. Similarly, I see the individual also participating in creating and perpetuating the practices of that group. Thus, a sociocultural perspective of learning reminds us that all actions, discursive practices, experiences and world views are ultimately determined by the values and privileges afforded certain practices and experiences (Gergen, 1995; Sfard, 1998).

In embracing the view of the social nature of meaning-making in this study, I was in fact saying that immigrant adolescents in this study were drawing on their own experiences, expectations, cultural and social practices that have been shaped by the various cultures in which they participate. I found it necessary to recognize the individual as part of various social groups. I contend that, in order to achieve meaningful experiences of literacy, language, teaching and learning there must be consideration of the social forces that influence how individuals learn.

Literacy. Social constructionist and sociocultural theories of learning have influenced the broadening conceptions of literacy. Literacy has moved beyond the narrow printcentric conception (Goody & Watt, 1968; Olson, 1977/1994) to a more ideological and socially-situated perspective (Gee, 1996; New London Group, 2000; Street, 1984) that acknowledges multiple forms of texts, communication and social relations that are based on sociocultural and linguistic diversity. According to Gee (1991, 2000), literacy is more than the self-contained ability to read and write English; rather it includes social languages—specific ways with words—used to enact, recognize and negotiate different socially-situated activities. For example, Heath's (1983)

seminal ethnographic study of the preschool practices of three rural communities revealed that each community had its specific valid social languages or ways with words. However, a significant finding by Heath was that for the most part, the literacies of two of the communities were not valued and/or legitimized within the mainstream schooling. Thus, the children whose literacy practices more closely aligned with the school literacy were more likely to attain academic success.

Literacy and literacies are, therefore, now seen as a social and cultural practice (Delpit, 1988; Gee, 1991; Street, 1984). What a socially-situated view of literacy does is to underscore the fact that there are multiple forms of literacy, and that these literacies are dependent upon its specific contexts. Consequently, I believe that it is important to consider individuals' literacies beyond traditional school literacy practices into the diverse communities and identity groups to which individuals belong.

Linked to redefinition of literacy as situated and shaped by social contexts and interactions is Gee's (1999) concept of D/discourse as "Ways of acting, interacting, feeling, believing, valuing, together with other people and with various sorts of characteristic objects, symbols, tools, and technologies—to recognize yourself and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways" (p. 7). Lee (1992, 2004) working with African American students has explored classroom genres and language practices. Similarly, Gee (1996) has also conducted research on the language practices of African American children. The work of these researchers suggest that the linguistic forms and language use are key to understanding how students' identities as learners, and provides insights into how learning and teaching practices support or negate the individual. Thus, all discourses, reading and writing, and social languages are political practices and group memberships are political acts. Gee makes the point that literacies are "differently and

distinctly shaped and transformed inside different sociocultural practices [that] have inherent and value laden, but often different implications for what count as “acceptable” identities, actions and ways of knowing” (p. 356). No more is the politics of language evident than in the main socialization institution of school and classrooms. Christensen (2000) sees the teaching of literacy as a political act because texts of the classroom legitimate a “social blueprint” of the world. Christensen’s work with high school students exposes hegemonic texts such as the media. In turn, the researcher worked with her high school students to critique and provide counter-discourses. These approaches underscore the fact individuals’ literacy practices help define word-world experiences.

Identity. Like literacies, identities are socially situated. Identity is the fluid interconnections between the intimate and public venues of social practice (Bakhtin, 1981; Holland et al. 1998). Holland et al. go on to state that one way of representing one’s identity is through the use of language as a way of placing oneself in relation to others. The individual’s view of self is intimately linked to his/her relationships with others. It is in this sense that I believe that the persons with whom the individual interacts, help define who the individual is, and who the individual is not. According to Gee (1996) one’s Discourse becomes an “identity kit”—a way of identifying oneself as belong to a particular group, and allowing others to identify one as such. Thus, identity is rooted in an individual’s membership in particular ethnocultural groups (Ferdman, 1990). However, membership, and the privileges afforded these memberships also have consequences for the individual’s sense of self depending on the affirmation or negation of the individual within the group.

In order for individuals to acquire the Discourses that constitute mainstream school-based literacy, they must be socialized into them (Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984). For example,

in their ethnographic research on schooled literacy of minority and African American high school students, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) highlighted that the devaluing of students' language and linguistic forms challenged students' identities as learners. More recently, studies on immigrant high school students' academic achievement and identity have found that when negatively positioned by educators in their schools, students often resist, employing counter-discourses by resisting reading and writing activities (Henry, 1998; 2001; McKay & Wong 2000).

In referring to colonial governments and how their actions constrained colonized people's self-images, Holland et al. (1998) point out that the colonized were constrained to reconstruct themselves, either in embrace of or in opposition to the categories used to describe them. The authors allude to hegemonic practices that devalue the literacy practices of subordinate groups. In doing so, the hegemonic texts of the dominant group challenge the identities of non-members. Thus, for some groups, particularly those within a historical, social hierarchy, socialization brings with it tensions of changes in identity (Fanon, 1967; Holland et al., 1998).

A Caribbean Immigrant Perspective

In this section, I explore the broader issues raised in the previous section, from a Caribbean immigrant perspective. I discuss academic achievement, ethnicity, identity and classroom practices. However, the research presented in this section is not limited to research on Caribbean persons. I wanted to offer a richer perspective of the Caribbean immigrant as an identity group, as well as a subgroup within the wider social structures of the United States society.

Education

Much of the research directly addressing the education of Black immigrant children, from which education researchers and educators draw, comes out of works *outside* of education from fields such as sociology and anthropology (Rong & Brown, 2002). Early research on newly-arrived immigrants suggests that immigrants may experience difficulty in adjusting cognitively, attitudinally and behaviorally in a new cultural system (Padilla, 1980). The tensions of adjustment are increased when the values, beliefs, language and cultural symbols place the immigrant learner in a highly vulnerable position if these cultural resources are not valued in the classroom.

More recently, Kasinitz and Vickermann (2001) in their discussion of the Jamaican immigrant response to the tensions of home and adopted home, made the point that the cultural framework of achievement through education is a centrally defining character of the Jamaican experience. Kasinitz and Vickermann go on to state that most Caribbean immigrants display a culturally-based idealization of achievement. The authors' claims are supported by Rong and Brown (2002) who, in their survey of socioeconomic and cultural factors affecting Black immigrant identity and educational aspirations, state that Caribbean Blacks have done well in terms of adjustment, employment, community life and schools. In addition, a statistical study of Black immigrant educational achievement reported that Black immigrant children were more likely to be ahead of the immigrant children in grade levels, made satisfactory academic progress and received more high school diplomas (Rong & Preissle, 1997).

The findings on immigrant academic achievement are consistent with Waters' (1994, 1999) research that confirm that there is a positive connection between Caribbean immigrants' ethnic identities and academic success. In 1994, Waters' study of 83 adolescent second-

generation Caribbean youth in New York suggested that adolescents with stronger ethnic identities demonstrated consistent academic achievement. However, Waters argued, the adolescents who had assimilated and adopted an “American Black” identity were more likely to take an oppositional stance toward education. Later, Waters’ (1999) study of West Indian immigrant youth showed that many male youth who took on African American identities over Caribbean ethnic identities, pursued what the author called, *oppositional identities*.

On one hand, these findings of oppositional identities by immigrant youth are in conflict with Ogbu’s (1991, 2003) theory of voluntary and involuntary minorities that suggest that the immigrants—voluntary minorities—are more willing, and likely to achieve academic success. Ogbu’s (1982, 1993) cultural ecological model of socialization offers the view that socialization of the child directly impacts the child’s compatibility within the wider society. Using the theory of voluntary and involuntary immigrants, Ogbu argued that social groups that have come to the United States by choice are more willing to cultivate practices and accommodate social structures that better enable them to achieve continuity and fluid movement within the society. However, some researchers such as Gillborn (1997) and Nieto (2002) argued against any carte blanche acceptance of immigrant minority success. They contended that Ogbu’s (1995) that does not allow for individual differences because not all voluntary minorities experience success. Nieto (2002) argued that Ogbu’s theory places an inordinate responsibility on students and families without taking into account conditions outside their control that affect learning. One such condition might be the United States racial structures that have shaped scholarship on Caribbean Blacks so that their achievements are viewed by the White majority, and eventually come to be viewed by West Indians themselves in the context of African Americans (Foner, 2005; Pedraza & Rambaut, 1996).

On the other hand, Ogbu's (1991, 2003) study of African American and immigrant groups can also be seen to validate Waters' (1999) findings of group opposition to mainstream values as an inherent character of the African American identity. These findings are further supported by Valenzuela's (1999) study of Mexican immigrants' social and academic identities. Valenzuela's findings pointed toward students' disconnect with school because of negative perceptions by teachers and schools. Valenzuela offered the concept of "social mirroring" where the immigrant youth internalizes the negative positioning by the dominant group.

Ethnicity. A significant number of ethnographic studies focus on how Black, Caribbean immigrants negotiate the mainstream United States culture. Many of these studies explore the newcomer's adjustment to United States racial constructions, and the development of culturally-based notions of ethnicity in response to United States racialized structures (Kasinitz & Vickerman, 2001; Pedraza & Rumbaut, 1996; Vickerman, 1999, 2002; Waters, 1994, 1999). In the research by these authors, the term "ethnic" refers to (1) immigrant communities and related forms of social organization, and (2) the ways of discourses and identities of culture difference are employed by Black immigrant groups to resist racial discrimination.

The notion of ethnicity as "culture difference" (Hintzen, 2002; Vickerman, 1999, 2001; Waters, 1994, 1999) is a central argument in some of the scholarship on United States Black immigration. In their research on socioeconomic success, Hintzen, Vickerman and Waters have alluded to "cultural superiority" of foreign-born Blacks. On the other hand, working from a somewhat different paradigm of "selectivity", the works of Grasmuck and Grosfuguel (1997) and Pedraza and Rumbaut (1996) suggested that the "cultural superiority" argument may be flawed in light of findings that the privileged class and educational backgrounds of immigrants

contribute to opportunities for migration to the United States, and the immigrant's ability to compete favorably in United States schools and labor markets.

Another challenge to the ethnicity paradigm that can be found in the research on Black immigrants is the issue of race. The central premise of some writers is that race shapes the lives of *all* Blacks in the United States (Bashi & McDaniel, 1997; Foner, 1987; Omi & Winant, 1986). These writers contend that race inevitably constructs the identities and experiences of Black immigrants who must negotiate and position themselves within racially-inscribed social structures. This sociological viewpoint runs counter to the much-cited, and often controversial seminal works of Sowell (1981) and Glazer and Moynihan (1963) that posited socioeconomic and sociocultural factors as determining the experiences of Blacks in the United States. On the other hand, research by Bashi (2001) supports findings by Rong and Brown (2001, 2002) that Caribbean Blacks have a differing construct of identity and self, and that transnational social networks, and cultural repertoire provide coping strategies and challenges for the immigrants.

The research on Caribbean immigrants shows a direct connection between educational achievement and ethnic identities. In Bobb and Clarke's (2001) research on Caribbean immigrants' experiences of success took the form of a collective interview study. Bobb and Clarke used the results of a 1996 interview study with 44 adult children of immigrants, and a 2001 study of 55 college educated women of West Indian ancestry. The authors revisited the data to report on what these second generation participants understood success to be. One of the researchers' key findings revealed the immigrants' abilities to invoke their ethnic status and conception of success by making connections to "back home".

Waters' (1999) seminal study on West Indian immigrants in New York City focused on immigrant self-identity. In this generational study, Waters interviewed adult immigrants and the

children of adult immigrants—adolescents and young adults. Similar to researchers such as Vickermann (2001), Waters' argued that West Indian immigrants maintain their West Indian ethnic identities. However, Waters pointed to the increased affiliation of West Indian immigrant youth with African American identity through school. The author went on to attribute the poor academic performance and socioeconomic progress with the adoption of African American cultural frameworks. It is worth noting that Waters seems to be suggesting that school, and the adolescents' socialization in schools with African American populations increases possibilities for the appropriation of oppositional ethnic identities and negative academic achievement. However, Bashi (2001) offered the argument that the social experiences of young immigrants who enter schools are very much like that of the second generation immigrants. Further, Bashi (2001) critiqued Waters' (1995) findings that choice exists between ethnicity and race for native-born Black children of immigrants because of the social structure. Bashi argued that ethnicity membership is not a choice or focus of the immigrant child. Rather, it is the negotiating the sociocultural systems.

Immigrant identity. More recently, studies on immigrant cultural negotiation suggest a creative use of cultural resources by immigrant youth. Stritikus and Nguyen (2007), in a two-year qualitative study, looked at the social and academic adjustment processes of recent Vietnamese immigrant youth. Examining the tensions of immigrant values and practices with school site, the authors found that the participants' gender identity shifts across social contexts. Though gender is not the focus of this dissertation study, I highlight this Stritikus and Nguyen study because of the focus on youth transition and the role of school in academic experiences. The authors argued for looking at how schools provide important sites—cultural and learning spaces—for students to articulate and negotiate social and cultural gender identities. Similarly,

research on Vietnamese immigrant youth, Zhou and Bankston (1999) and Zhou (2001) reveals that youth learn to straddle social and cultural spaces. According to the authors, immigrant youth adopt the language and cultural skills of the mainstream while simultaneously cultivating cultural and ethnic identities within ethnic communities. The findings by Zhou, and Zhou and Bankston are consistent with Ogbu's (1995) theory of voluntary immigrants.

Research on immigrant youth reveals that the internet and personal web pages are being used to create transnational linkages and reinvent and position national identities. Miller and Slater (2000) conducted an ethnographic study on the transnational internet literacy practices of Trinidadians. These researchers found that the internet provided a natural platform for enacting, on a global stage, core values and components of the Trinidadian identity such as national pride. The authors showed that participants went to great lengths to make the affinity groups and online communities a "Trini" place where they could "be Trini" and perform "being Trini". In addition, Lam (2006) in her work with adolescent immigrant youth of diverse nationalities and regions, found that students used digital media networks to conduct relationships. In most cases, as in the case of the Trinidad youth, the relationships included the United States and the adolescents' countries of origin.

Here, I turn to Sarroub's (2005) ethnography of immigrant Yemini American girls that uncovers the tensions of becoming American in the public schools. Sarroub's study highlights the inherent value conflicts of youth in "ethnic enclaves"—a focus of much of the literature on Caribbean immigrant youth. One key focus of the study that I found particularly relevant is the notion of success and what it means for the adolescent girls to successfully negotiate home and school worlds in order to navigate the multiple expectations (of teachers, parents and students) for success. Included among Sarroub's findings were points of tension arising from the pressures

of negotiating being Muslim in United States public schools. Sarroub noted that, “As they successfully negotiated the academic and social expectations at each grade level, they also had to attend to their community and parental expectations for success, and these sets of expectations did not complement one another” (p. 10). I believe that the research findings point to the fact that for some immigrants, the intersection of school and home expectations for success can be turbulent space.

Classroom practices. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) made the point that school is central to helping immigrants succeed in the host culture without losing their home culture. They go on to state that the role of the school is to embrace and accommodate immigrants’ values while teaching the skills and behaviors of the host society. Key concerns that the previously mentioned research studies bring together is the focus on immigrant academic and sociocultural experiences. A recent study was conducted by Adams and Shambleau (2007) on the experiences of newly-arrived children in an elementary school in the midwest United States. Using a broad survey study, the researchers included follow-up interviews with teachers and immigrant students and parents who had been in the United States for an average of two years. The researchers focused on transnational migration, school experiences and social relations with administrators, teachers, parents and children, and sought to connect school policies and classroom practices. Findings showed that the teachers brought varying cultural experiences to the classrooms, and used a number of approaches that directly built on the strengths and experiences the children and their parents brought to the classroom.

Taking a Black feminist perspective, Henry (1998, 2001) conducted a study with Afro Caribbean adolescent girls, ages 14-15, in a reading, writing and discussion group. The author examined how the traditional classroom practice, language and texts can silence adolescents’

voice and limit opportunities to write authentic, meaningful texts. According to Henry (2001), adolescent Caribbean immigrants go through schooling without opportunities for self-discovery. Henry argued that particularly when labeled as having limited English proficiency, Caribbean immigrant students were “constantly *reading* the word and yearning for spaces to read, write, and speak themselves into the curriculum” (p. 188).

I highlight this and other research studies, because the focal participants included Caribbean immigrants, and because the researchers brought together some key issues related to the centrality of cultural transition and its connections with education and identity. According to Kasinitz, Mellenkopf and Waters (2004), getting an education is the biggest individual challenge facing children of immigrants. Even further, the findings reinforce Rong and Preissle’s (1997) argument that “to work well with immigrant children, educators must understand immigrant, cultural, and ethnic diversity in communities in the United States, examine and clarify their own racial and ethnic attitudes, and develop appropriate pedagogical knowledge and skills” (p. x).

Connections and developments. Based on my review of the literature on Caribbean immigrants, I would argue that largely missing from the narrative on Caribbean immigrants is the voice of the first generation immigrant adolescent. In addition, much of the work on Caribbean immigrants in the United States focuses on issues of race, ethnicity and socioeconomic assimilation with adults and second generation immigrant youth. It is also worth noting that, as researchers Bashi and Clarke (2001) argued, much of the research to date has focused on objective indicators of socioeconomic status attainments, but few explore what members of the different generations believe about this success in their own social experience or emphasize it directly. I agree with these researchers’ assessment of the directions and foci of most of the existing research on Black Caribbean immigrants. It is here that I saw my research

study serving to expand the existing body of research. I take the point made by Rong and Brown (2002) that in order to understand the accomplishments, and attitudes of the immigrants, we need to understand their experiences.

While language and culture continue to be the focus of many studies, I would argue highlighting the interconnectedness of the spaces—home, school and communities—and the emphasis on the adolescent’s voice would offer a richer understanding of the immigrant youth identities, and the multiple spaces across which their identities are negotiated. As Foner (2005) indicated in her recommendations for future research, “place matters”. I, therefore, argue that this study attended to place from multiple perspectives in terms of home, school and community, and the location of the research site.

In addition, a large number of research studies on Caribbean immigrants has focused mainly on adult immigrants, and second generation children of immigrants. In choosing to explore the literacy practices of first generation immigrant adolescents from the multi-level points of interactions, I was taking the position that the experiences of immigrant adults, as well as second generation children would not necessarily be similar. Further, the direction of this study broadens the understanding of the immigrant experience, not only from the demographic group, but also the access to the school and home, and a non-traditional gateway city site. Through the use of ethnographic research methods, this study brought together these research foci.

A Postcolonial Perspective

Parry (2004) stated that among the many definitions of the term *postcolonial* is perhaps the unifying and signifying view that it is a world view that denotes an “historical transition, a cultural location, a discursive stance, and epochal condition distinguished by the entry into

metropolitan cultures of other voices, histories and experiences” (p. 3). It is in this sense that I believe that a postcolonial perspective can be taken as one that acknowledges and addresses the inscribed power of the colonial over colonized peoples, and one that resists inherent oppression by offering the perspectives of the colonized on their lived experiences. I contend that in exploring the issues of culture, identity, language and schooling of adolescents from formerly colonized nations, I am attempting to create a space for the “voices, histories and experiences”. Supporting this view, Hogan (2000) pointed out that cultural identity is at the center of politics and daily life. According to Hogan,

One’s reflective identity as defined by the colonizer is often brutally demeaning. And yet the economic and political domination of the colonizers—their widespread control of the structure of work, their system of education, and so on—impels one to accept the colonial categories, their implications and practical consequences. This can give rise to very sharp and painful conflicts in one’s self-understanding, aspiration, expectations, action, etc. leaving one almost entirely unable to take coherent action toward humanly fulfilling goals—and thus in effect requiring that one take some sort of stand on the issue of identity. (p. 2)

In *Moving the Centre*, Ngũgĩ (1993) stated that “Culture is a product of people’s history. But it also reflects that history and embodies a whole set of values by which a people view themselves and their place in time and space” (p. 42). Here, I would like to point out that language and literacy is used by formerly colonized peoples to give voice to cultures that have been silenced; to engage in dialogue with the West as they redefine self, and to read and write their words and worlds. I use a postcolonial perspective mainly as an emic perspective—about the colonized *through the eyes of the colonized*.

Though much of the work with postcolonial theory involves theorizing through writing, I choose to highlight some research studies that have helped inform my decisions and raised some ethical concerns about using writing and narrative as a methodology and form of representing my participants in this study. Fournillier (2005), in her ethnographic study of Carnival mas' camps used postcolonial theory as an ethical discourse as she participated in the mas' making activities and engaged with her participants. Fournillier found that a postcolonial perspective allowed her to take responsibility for how she chose to represent her participants of a previously colonized society, without herself becoming a colonizer by "othering" her participants.

Using postcolonial theorizing, Visweswaran's (1994) ethnographic research focused on the tensions of Western feminism and Indian nationalism. Using fictive narratives, Visweswaran, in *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, explored her experiences during her return to her native land where she confronted the issue of rendering her participants' subjectivities within the dominant narratives of the West and the East, and the colonial histories. The author stated that the understanding of relationships between subject and their histories are complex and shifting, yet not "free". She went on to argue that positioning and practices that arise out of colonization and decolonization form interwoven and unequal relations. What Visweswaran's research highlights for me is that, as researcher, I needed to take into consideration the participants' and my own colonial histories, and the ways these histories shape relationships and representations.

Writing and Narrative

Narrative has been studied in terms of cognition (Bruner, 1986, 1997); identity (Gergen, 1995, 2004); philosophy (Polkinghorne, 1998); narrative has also been examined as theory (Gordon, 2002; hooks, 1994). In this section, I discuss how my conceptions of language and narrative informed my approach to this study. I do so with the stance that narrative offers the

historically oppressed and marginalized, opportunities to theorize about and understand their existential realities (Gordon, 2000), and to develop their sense of selves in relation to the world.

I saw the intersection of language, writing and power as a way to think about this study intrigued me. As a native of a former colony, and a secondary school teacher of English and History, I was keenly aware of how *the word and the world* (Freire, 1987) have shaped and continue to shape how I learn and experience the various contexts in which I operate. It therefore became important for me to find ways to have the voices, histories and experiences of the Caribbean adolescents to enter into the conversations about the world, and themselves in the world. “Voice” according to Britzman (2003) is the meaning of experience that resides in the individual that enables participation in a community. It is here that I looked toward the telling and writing of stories as ways to theorize about and re-present lived experiences of colonized groups, and to locate them within the society (Cudjoe, 2003). Using different literary and literacy forms, styles and practices, Black writers and postcolonial theorists such as Fanon (1967, 2004), Ngũgĩ (1983, 1986), and Visweswaran (1994) have used *writing* and stories to address issues related to their sociohistoric experiences. I also chose to use stories as a way to *make sense of what was happening* in the everyday life experiences of these Caribbean adolescents.

One aspect of writing that is consistent with the postcolonial perspective is narrative. I find it significant that colonized peoples have used narrative as the preferred form of expression (Gordon, 2002) in their examination, theorizing and representation of self. In this way, the stories that the oppressed tell become ways of challenging, persuading, publicizing and addressing the conditions of their existence. In looking at the work of many post colonial writers including Brathwaite (1984), Walcott (1986), and Ngũgĩ (1983, 1986) one finds that they have mainly used narrative to deal with what Gordon (2002) calls, the question of existence. Fanon (2004) stated

Every time the storyteller relates a fresh episode to his public, he presides over a real invocation. The existence of a new type of man is revealed to the public. The present is no longer turned upon itself but spread out for all to see...It even happens that the characters, which are barely ready for such a transformation...are taken up and remodeled. (p. 241)

In addition, Lee, Rosenfeld, Mendenhall, Rivers, and Tynes (2004) support this view when they stated that such storytellers, poets, novelist, and playwrights often wrestle with taboos, with the deeply unresolved questions of human experience.

More so, what I contend is that these scholars' and writers' *individual* narratives then become the plot of the *collective* narrativizing of the story of the marginalized group's lived experiences, existence and identities. According to Kramp, (2004), it is in the telling life as experienced that meaning is given to experience. Therefore, the narrative and literate practices are ways of representing or performing particular identities (Gee, 1996; McCarthy, & Moje, 2002). Gordon (2002), for example, would agree that Blacks in the Diaspora use their stories to theorize about their place and space in the world. Narrative provides "potent ways of understanding relationships in motion and relationships from the past as they appear in the present" (Gergen, 2004, p. 27). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) remind me that, as you tell your story, the meaning you construct about your life connects you to others, making communion—community—possible. Intimately bound in these stories, therefore, are the trajectories of the narrators' identities and their struggles for meaning.

I contend that it is the conscious act of telling one's story that enables the process of discovery and revelation. Cortazzi, (1993), supported the view of writing as discovery and revelation when he stated that narrative is a major means of making sense of past experience and

sharing it with others. Thus, the telling of stories not only enables the individual to structure and make sense of his/her existential reality but to “tell” what this means for him/her. It is in this process of organizing, making sense of, and explaining one’s experiences that I see narrative allowing for theorizing through the interpretation, understanding and (re)presentation of self and experiences. According to Crotty (2003), in the narrating and telling of one’s story, the many voices of one’s culture are heard in what is said.

Linked to this process of inquiry, self-discovery and self-definition that narrative offers is the notion of power and agency. In looking at narrative, I take Reissman’s (1993) point that stories are a means of expressing agency and imagination. Storytelling becomes a process whereby the individual must struggle for voice and find the words, speak for self and attempt to communicate private meaning to someone else (Britzman, 2003). For example, I would argue that, for those who have been denied their own language and/or oppressed, narrative becomes a way to *write* their way into the discourse of meaningful and legitimate existence (Achebe, 1976; hooks, 1994; Visweswaran, 1994).

Through the narrative, the storyteller has the power to “evoke deeper parts of self, heal wounds, enhance sense of self—or even alter one’s sense of identity” (hooks, 1994, p. 70). I would agree that for writers such as Kilgour Dowdy (2002), in the reliving of experiences, writing is cathartic and transformative for it affords the telling of untold stories—especially when historically, those stories have not been told, have been marginalized, or have been told from the perspectives of (an)Other. In her reflective essay, Kilgour Dowdy (2002) used narrative to share her experiences with language use, and to explore her sense of self. The author reflected on the tension she experienced as a child growing up in Trinidad, a former colony, when she was faced with choosing between the language of the colonizer, British English, and the language of

intimacy, the local dialects. Kilgour Dowdy argued that, for the colonized societies and colonized individuals, the language of personal expression must be validated in the public sphere.

Thus, these writers and scholars, use their stories for a new project of resistance and reclamation of identity. Consequently, storytelling by the marginalized reflects the purposeful recreating and reclaiming of self and a meaningful existence *as they see and tell it*. In the words of Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) “The individual is both the site and subject of these discursive struggles for identity and for remaking memory” (p. 962).

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the theories, concepts and relevant research that informed my approach to this study. I showed how social constructionist theory guided my views of meaning-making and knowledge. I went on to show how social constructionism aligns with a sociocultural view of learning. I then explored issues of literacy, identity and ethnicity from a sociocultural perspective. The following section focused specifically on the central issues of academic achievement, identity and ethnicity as it relates to Caribbean immigrants’ experiences in the United States. In addition, I provided a brief discussion on how a postcolonial perspective informs my use of writing and narratives in this study.

In the following chapter, I discuss the research methodological framework for the study. The chapter focuses on the methodological considerations and decisions involved in using narrative inquiry to explore Caribbean immigrant adolescents’ identities and literacy practices. I provide details of the research design including participant selections and data collection and management, and analytic procedures.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section I present the methodological framework for this study. Then, I go on to discuss the research design where I provide details of the selection of the participants and the research sites. In the following sections I explore some methodological issues of access, and I focus on the qualitative ethnographic methods of data collection that I used in my fieldwork. Afterwards, I discuss the data management procedures and some the challenges that arose. Finally, I provide a description of the analytic procedures of the narrative analysis.

Narrative Inquiry

In defining my approach to narrative research, I drew on Clandinin's and Connelly's (2000) view that narrative names the structure of the experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. Thus narrative is both methodology and method. Schwandt (1997) and Kramp (2004) offer a definition of methodology as a way of looking at a phenomenon; one that guides how inquiry should proceed. As a method, narrative refers to a procedure or tool used by the inquirer to generate, interpret and represent data in storied form (Schwandt, 1997).

Guiding my decisions to use narrative is my personal history and sociocultural background that comes out of the oral tradition. Within oral societies, social value is placed on stories and storytelling. The knowledge, history and practices of a society and community are passed on through stories. The story is seen as a way to make meaning of, and communicate one's lived experiences. Such a view suggests that individuals live storied lives (Polkinghorne,

1998) and come to organize their experiences and express their understanding of the world *through* stories (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I therefore, saw stories as a way to demonstrate and represent the knowledge and practices of my participants in this study. According to Bamberg and McCabe (1998), narrators strive to make sense of themselves, social situations, and history. I believed that the oral way of knowing offered potential for exploring the participants' experiences of living and attending school in the United States.

Even though some writers use the terms narrative and story interchangeably, I use the term narrative to refer to a methodological process and a product. More specifically, in this study, narrative will also be distinguished from a story (recounted events) by the use *evaluation* (the teller's point of view on events) that provides a value judgment or moral stance. A core value of the narrative is its potential for inquiring into, and better understanding the storyteller's identities and lived experiences as constructed by the active storyteller (Kramp, 2004; Riessman, 1993). Kramp (2004) stated that what distinguishes narrative as mode of inquiry is the fact that it is both a process (storyteller) and product (story). Kramp's view suggests that it is not simply the content of the narratives that is critical to narrative research; rather it is the interplay between the narrative that is told, and the structure of the telling. Consequently, the *context*, *content* and *structure* of the story are central to understanding *how* persons make meaning and *what* meanings are made.

In an effort to maintain the focus on the participants themselves, and the experiences that they felt were important to them, I chose an analytic process that best allowed me to achieve these goals. I used what Polkinghorne (1998) referred to as a descriptive narrative—one that produces “an accurate description of the interpretive narrative accounts individuals or groups use to make sequences of events in their lives or organizations meaningful” (pp. 161-162). Even in

offering Polkinghorne's definition, I acknowledge that the "accuracy" of my descriptions is relative and contextual. What I would suggest is that the descriptive narratives I construct produce richer and more trustworthy descriptions. Consequently, I interwove my own discourses and those of the participants in ways that allowed me to construct the narratives that focused on the participants' lived experiences.

Narrative as Research

In this section, I offer a rationale for using narrative inquiry to conduct this research study. I provide a brief review of the literature on narrative inquiry as a rationale for using narrative as a methodological framework for understanding and representing the participants' experiences.

The study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world with the story itself as the object of analysis (Riessman, 1993). The story is used as the lens for the storyteller to make sense of the world, and it is also the lens through which the listener and reader make meaning. In this sense, learners, teachers, and researchers are the storytellers of and characters in their own and others' stories (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). The fields of education and the social sciences have used narrative studies to develop and advance intellectual thought, including stories of classroom experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1994), stories of teaching and learning (Hankins, 1998; Heath, 1983), and fieldwork (Fordham, 1996; Van Maanen, 1988). In this study, I argue that the content, context and structure of the story provide texts of the individual's experiences. However, I contend that in the process of recounting events, the narrative also becomes a text of the *researcher's* reading of his/her relationship with the storyteller's text. It is in this co-construction and collaborative act of meaning-making that lies the complexity and validity of narrative research.

One critique of narrative inquiry is that it focuses on the individual rather than on the social context. However, I argue that the individual cannot be separated from the social, for the individual is always responding to social contexts, environments and events. The individual's sense of self comes out of his/her social relationships. Through participation with the group, each member engages in a collective and ongoing redefinition and reaffirmation of self through stories. To highlight the social nature of meaning-making, I found it necessary to use a mode of inquiry and mode of representation that brought together the idea of meaning-making as a social and collective process where the storyteller, audience, researcher are active participants.

Representation and Truth

There is no telling it like it is, for in the telling there is making.

(Eisner, 1991)

The focus on understanding is, however, fraught with tensions of the “truth” that is ultimately represented in the researcher's story. Such issues of truth and representation of identity through narrative raise questions about the extent to which the story can, if at all, reflect the realities of the participant's experiences. Moreover, can the researcher, whose experiences are sometimes words and worlds apart from the participant, ever understand and *represent* the storyteller's identity? These issues speak to the notion of the “truth” that narrative offers, and the possibilities for and limitations of learning from this method of inquiry. Even so, I think it is important to recognize that though the narrative allows access to the participant's world, the narrative does not claim to give *the* “truth”; every narrative is a version or view of what happened (Cortazzi, 1993). Riessman (1993) reminds us that “any methodological standpoint is, by definition, partial, incomplete and historically contingent” (p. 706). So, I argue that narrative

offers opportunities for what might be taken as a rigorous interpretation of someone's interpretations of events.

The power issues inherent in narrative as research are even greater across social spaces because language helps to construct one's sense of who one is in the world. "What something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them" (Richardson, 2001, p. 36). Consequently, when one hears the many voices of *another* culture, one cannot but interpret and make sense of them through what Bakhtin (1981) would call, the *internally persuasive discourse*, of one's own culture, perspectives and lenses. Thus, the researcher's biases and pre-existing value systems highlight the power relationships inherent in the research process because the story that is told is done through the *researcher's* eyes, and not, as was originally told, through the *eyes of the storyteller*. Further, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit that in the research process, when as researchers, we ask participants to share their stories with us, in that process of sharing and retelling, we change their stories *in being changed by their stories*. These writers argue that because the research process is a dialogic one, the story that is eventually retold or reported by the researcher, reflects the researcher's engagement in dialogue with the participants' stories, and the ways the researcher has been shaped by that interaction with the participants.

Politics of writing. I take the position that language and writing are political. I see all language and language use as value-laden and political acts that construct a particular view of reality and of self. My use of narrative as my methodological framework brings with it the tensions (re)presentation and the responsibility to the participants. When writing is done in sociohistoric contexts of the lived experience, "What you write about and how you write it shapes your life, shapes who you become" (Richardson, 2001, p. 36). The notion of accountability is very important, because I believe that within the storyteller-participant and

storyteller-researcher relationships, there are possibilities for oppression. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) caution that, “we enter the relationships with certain intentions and purposes, and, as the ones most often initiating the relationships, our care and our responsibility is first directed toward the participants” (p. 422). Therefore, in choosing narrative as method and methodology, I recognize the importance of having checks and balances built into the research design.

In the following section, I describe the research design for the study. I provide details on the participant selections, research sites, and the methods of data collection. Next, I describe the analytic procedures that guided the generation of the key findings.

Research Design

In this study, I use narrative inquiry as a way of collecting, analyzing and presenting the data in order to examine and illustrate the complexities of three immigrant Caribbean adolescents’ literacy practices and identities. Using ethnographic research methods, data were collected from individual interviews with each participant, documents: artifacts that included participants’ academic and personal writings and readings and photographs, and observations of participants in their homes, and in school-related and out-of-school settings. By participating in and/or observing a number of different settings, I was better able to access a range of experiences the participants had in their various communities. I collected data for eight months, from April to November, 2007.

Participant Selection

The sampling process I used to access participants was *snowballing* (Patton, 2002). The network of friends and colleagues in the United States and the Caribbean provided me with referrals for families living in the southeastern United States. From September 2006, I started calling on my family and friends for referrals for possible participants for my study on Caribbean

immigrant adolescents in the United States. In addition, I became involved with the Trinidad and Tobago Georgia Association and had also been in contact with members of other Caribbean organizations, including the Atlanta Jamaican Association, and church and community leaders (see Appendix B). I felt confident that, because “everybody know[s] somebody who know[s] somebody who gone foreign” , the process should be relatively smooth.

I was wrong. January 2007 found me with the names of many informants but no participants. “Why don’t you come to New York and do your work?” I was often asked by some contacts, many of whom were parents and teachers who lived in New York and were willing to have their children and/or students participate in the study. I knew that if I were to go that route, I would have direct access to many homes and classrooms. These offers, all of which I—sometimes reluctantly—turned down, reinforced my own views and the research literature about New York being a traditional gateway city for Caribbean immigrants. However, I wanted to extend the existing research *beyond* the traditional points of entry. I would not be swayed. I continued to make phone calls, send email notices, and attend Caribbean events in the hopes of finding participants who met my criteria and were willing to participate.

Consequently, in selecting the participants, I chose to use the practical considerations of availability, accessibility and information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). It was important that I select persons from whom I could learn most based on the research questions: Black, immigrant Caribbean youth attending secondary school in the United States. I wanted the young persons selected for the study to have had schooling both in the Caribbean and the United States. Because the focus of the study was on the experiences of transition to life and school in the United States, I focused on finding participants who could speak to their experiences of both geographical and educational spaces.

When selecting the participants, I used my overarching research question that focused on how immigrant Caribbean adolescents saw themselves within the context of schools in the United States. I sought out participants who I felt would be able to talk about their experiences particularly as it related to their sense of themselves as learners and as immigrants. In selecting the three adolescents with whom I would eventually spend the next eight months talking with and observing, I found that they each had similar schooling experiences in the Caribbean in terms of the years of schooling. Each of the young women had completed all of their primary school education in their native Caribbean countries of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. I believed that these three young women offered me the best opportunity to learn from their experiences.

In designing this research study, the location of the participants was important. I chose to extend the existing research on Caribbean immigrants by looking at a non-traditional gateway city in the southern state of Georgia in the United States. In addition, the research site served another purpose in terms of access to the geographical location of the participants' residential communities. Because I wanted to observe the participants in their natural environments, it became critical that I have easy access to the participants. I had to be within relatively easy driving distance of the participants' homes, schools and communities. I eventually selected the three participants who lived within the state, and were within 90-120 minutes' drive from my apartment in Athens, Georgia.

Another criterion for selection was the participants' connections with their home countries. Because my intention was not to generalize across the Caribbean region, I was not necessarily concerned with having a wide range of Caribbean nationalities. I was more interested in having participants who had migrated, identify as Caribbean. More to the point, given that the

parents of the participants were the one who gave consent for me to work with their children, it was important that the *parents* self-identify as Caribbean natives.

Based on these general criteria, I purposefully selected three adolescents with whom to conduct the study. Initial meetings were arranged where the parents and young persons read, discussed and signed the parent and participant consent forms, indicating their willingness to participate in the study, and their comfort with the research process (see Appendixes C and D). In addition to the parents and participants being asked to give signed consent, the terms of the levels of participation and access were negotiated to meet the approval of parents and participants.

The Participants

The participants of the study were three adolescents from three Black, immigrant Caribbean families in a large city in a southeastern state in the United States. The participants' families originate from the Caribbean countries of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. The participants, LeeAnn and Ashley (pseudonyms) were natives of Jamaica, and Zeek (a pseudonym) was a native of Trinidad and Tobago.

Table 1. Participant Profile

Name	Age	Gender	Country of Origin	Years in U.S.	School	Grade Level	Class Average
LeeAnn	16	Female	Jamaica	7	Public	10	A
Ashley	16	Female	Jamaica	2	Public	10	A
Zeek	16	Female	Trinidad and Tobago	5	Private	10	B+

Zeek. Full of energy, Zeek's love of life is immediately evident. Upon meeting her, one quickly sees Zeek's easygoing and outgoing personality. Tall and slim, behind her black-rimmed glasses, Zeek is always smiling. She quickly puts you at ease with her laughter, casual conversation, and lively spirit. When I first met Zeek, she welcomed me with a warm hug. I would eventually learn that Zeek generally greets family and friends with hugs. In addition, she routinely addresses adults and elders close to the family as "aunty" and "uncle". As I sat next to Zeek during the school play, Zeek pointed out some of her friends who were actors, and whispered details to help fill me in on the behind-the-scene activities. At the end of the play, Zeek announces excitedly, "I want to go congratulate my peers". What follows is a flurry of hugs, kisses, waves, introductions, and excited talk and chatter as parents, players, peers, and supporters offer congratulatory wishes, and present bouquets of red roses. There is no doubt that Zeek had a natural way of putting everyone around her at ease. She admits that one of her greatest joys is being able to make others feel comfortable around her.

It is no surprise then, that Zeek describes herself as a people-person. Friendships and social networks are very important to her. She values the opinions and interests of her peers, and her social networks are central in her life. It is therefore important that she be in-the-know at all times. Thus, time spent communicating with friends is considered time well-spent. Zeek makes every effort to stay connected to her friends in the United States and Trinidad and Tobago.

Zeek is an independent, outgoing young woman who is not afraid to try new things. Bubbling with enthusiasm, Zeek is a 16 year-old social butterfly. Like her parent, she is ready to visit and entertain family and friends. Zeek views social events as ways to make new friends, strengthen existing bonds and share her knowledge and learn from others.

Her life at home, in school, and in community life reflects Zeek's outgoing personality. At home, Zeek is always chatting with friends and family online and on the phone. There is always a lot of say, and never enough time to say it. But, giggling mischievously, Zeek admits, "Believe you me, I try." Yet, Zeek's leisure time is also spent with her parent attending functions and events in the city. Zeek has grown to love the upbeat rhythms of her life.

Zeek always tries to have a positive outlook on life, and has a strong faith in God. It is important to her to live life to its fullest. Zeek therefore, finds time to actively participate in activities at her school and at church. Zeek's participation in sports, community and church organizations and clubs keep her actively involved in the corporate life of her school. She is an active member of cultural clubs that focus on cultural and racial diversity. However, one can also find Zeek on the Step Team, and refereeing Varsity wrestling. Zeek's volunteers for youth activities in church, including teaching Sunday School. Over the last couple of years, these activities have become a regular part of her weekly routine.

Zeek strongly believes that it is important to have a say in the issues and events that affect her life. In addition, she wants to hear what others have to say. This attitude extends to all aspect of Zeek's life. She is committed to making the most of her life by exposing herself to a wide range of experiences. Zeek's bold, indomitable spirit and positive attitude reflect her approach to life.

LeeAnn. Her confidence and maturity are unmistakable. Though quiet and soft-spoken, this 16 year old young woman is unafraid to speak up to speak up and speak out. Debating controversial issues is a challenge she willingly takes on. She is known to be the type to ask the tough "what if" questions in class, among her friends, and during her own personal time. Yet, she is also prepared to work through those tough questions.

When invited to describe herself, LeeAnn uses terms such as adaptive and goal-oriented. She is willing to work hard for what she wants. LeeAnn is quick to point to her academic accomplishments as evidence of her determination and "strong work ethic". Even so, this young woman makes no attempt to show off her accomplishments. With simplicity and modesty, LeeAnn is comfortable appearing to be "average" by some of her peers. Publicizing her accomplishments is just not her style.

However, LeeAnn's skills and talents move beyond the classroom. An athlete and musician, LeeAnn finds pleasure in the rigorous training of the track and field, and piano. She channels her boundless energy into training and studying classical piano. You can find LeeAnn outdoors, particularly in the summer—she easily favors warm climate conditions. With tank top, jeans and sneakered feet, you can sometimes see her strolling through the quiet streets of her neighborhood, and chatting with a group of teens gathered on the front lawn of one of the nearby homes.

LeeAnn enjoys doing anything that makes her feel comfortable. Some of the ways she likes to have fun and relax are through dancing and writing poetry. Music and poetry are important parts of her life. When something is troubling her or when she wants to talk about something, LeeAnn turns to writing poetry. Writing poetry gives her an outlet. It is a way to explore and deal with important events in her life. She has her journal of poems within easy reach by her bedside.

LeeAnn has been living in the United States for the past seven years. During that time, she has lived briefly in the northeastern state of New York, and then in the southeastern state of Georgia. LeeAnn's home is located in a suburban subdivision. The neighborhood reflects a distinct middle class socioeconomic status of its residents. The homes are generally similar models, and boast two-storey designs with five bedrooms, two and a half baths, and ample space for landscaping. LeeAnn's home is tastefully decorated with modern furniture and appliances. The French windows in the living room open onto a back deck adorned with plants and flowers. The deck overlooks a landscaped flower and vegetable garden that flows unto the open woodlands. On weekends, you can find LeeAnn's parents tending to the garden. According to LeeAnn's mother, the garden is a source of pride for her husband. He has a "green thumb". The produce is eagerly shared with neighbors and friends, and bouquets of flowers grace the family's living room and kitchen. The family also enjoys sharing the bouquets with members of their church.

This is a young woman whose social life revolves around her family, school and church. Like her parents, she had adopted a steady and simple approach to life. She leads a quiet lifestyle, opting to do family-oriented or school-related activities. Her household is generally quiet. Invariably, the family might have the television in the living room tuned in to a movie

channel. With both her siblings working and attending school in different states, LeeAnn, the baby of the family, lives at home with her parents. The home reflects the kind of calm, warmth and thoughtfulness that is indicative of LeeAnn's personality. Inside her home, the energy is more subdued—channeled into her school assignments, work on the computer, poetry writing. All the while, the rhythmic sounds of Reggaeton spill out from her Ipod or bedside radio.

Family life is important to her. LeeAnn values the time to connect with her parents and siblings. Family time gives her the opportunity to learn from the examples they set. And, yet, LeeAnn is fiercely independent. She is quick to point out that she is ultimately responsible for making her own path in life. Given her independent nature, LeeAnn prefers to first try to work through difficulties on her own before turning to her parents. However, LeeAnn is the first to acknowledge that her independent spirit and strong work ethic are a direct result of her family life. She uses the examples set by her family and the lessons learned from her interactions within various social networks to assist her in making informed choices. However, she insists, the choices are hers to make.

An avid reader, LeeAnn favors novels that challenge her to engage in issues of morality and faith. Curious to learn and broaden her knowledge, she seeks out information through books and conversations. For example, LeeAnn says that novels by Dan Brown push her to think explore taboo topics. Her parents would be the first to point out that LeeAnn is eager to engage peers and adults in conversation. LeeAnn openly admits to her interest in getting different perspectives that her conversation partners generally offer. More so, she finds that she values the experiences and wisdom of adults. Even then, there is a quiet introspection about her. You sense that she is connecting deeply to the moment. It is generally common to have her think carefully and ask for clarification before responding to questions.

Her eyes light up as she talks about herself, her goals and her future. LeeAnn carries herself with a confidence and dignity that announces to the world that she has a plan and has the determination, skills and talents to achieve it. There's a familiar saying "Still waters run deep." In many ways, LeeAnn's quiet, thoughtful manner and love of "thinking about things" reflect the deep consideration she gives to many issues in her life. LeeAnn carries herself with a confidence and dignity that announces to the world that she has a plan and has the determination, skills and talents to achieve it.

Ashley. Ashley is a quiet, soft-spoken young woman who admittedly, doesn't say much. She describes herself as shy and not very outgoing. You can generally find her at home, curled up in bed with a young adult novel such as the Gossip Girls, and her favorite snacks. Reading is a favorite pastime for her—a way to learn about other aspects of life. Reading provides Ashley with the quiet time she enjoys to learn something new. Ashley also enjoys writing poetry. It is a way to express her feelings.

Ashley appears to be something of a mystery to many people who know her. Not much of a talker, Ashley describes herself as "shy". A private person, Ashley prefers to deal with issues on her own. She does not easily open up and share her innermost thoughts with others. She appears comfortable with herself and with silence. Ashley generally chooses not to initiate conversations, and when prompted offers matter-of-fact response devoid of elaborations and digressions. In a business-like manner, she often prefers to get to the point and stick to the matter at hand.

Behind the black-rimmed glasses, Ashley's eyes have a mischievous twinkle, suggesting that she is observing more than her words let on. There is a fun-loving and playful side when she interacts with her siblings. And, always, she appears to be the level-headed and responsible "big

sister”. However, more of an introvert, Ashley chooses not to socialize a lot. She surrounds herself with her family and a small group of close friends for support. She considers it important for her to have persons in her life who can understand her. Ashley chooses her friends wisely. She doesn’t want to get caught up with the wrong crowd—her friends must value education and religion. Ashley admits that her friends are generally immigrants and children of immigrants. They understand her, she says: they really *get* her.

Her calm demeanor is not easily shaken. Even when speaking about her joys and her disappointments, her voice hardly ever rises from the softly-modulated tones. There is an air of nonchalance that suggests that she prefers to downplay her triumphs and disappointments. She never makes a big deal of anything, she insists.

Ashley does not consider herself to be much of a risk-taker. She is only willing to try new things after careful consideration. She is, after all, still a “goody two shoes” at heart. And though, she sometimes wishes she could break out of the image—just a little—she knows that she will still hold true to her core values. Ashley strongly believes that her actions must sit right with her sense of responsibility and her commitment to God. Ashley therefore, devotes her time between her home, school and church.

In order to move toward an understanding of how the three Caribbean immigrant learners saw themselves in United States schools and the literacy practices they used to achieve success, I invited LeeAnn, Ashley and Zeek to share with me the stories of their experiences. For the next eight months, the three young women allowed me into their lives, homes, schools and social spaces and shared their perceptions about their lives as they have come to know it.

Levels of Access

As a Caribbean researcher doing research with Caribbean participants, to some extent I may appear to be insider and have access to the participants. However, the reality was that I had to go through similar procedures as most researchers: email and phone communication, visits to sites, conversations with potential gatekeepers. Many of my contacts were unable to deliver the participants they had promised, primarily due to the participants not meeting my predetermined selection criteria. In addition, I remember the many times I would email and make phone calls to possible gatekeepers only to receive no email replies or return phone calls (see Appendix B). Often, promises of follow-up phone calls with contact information never materialized. I would, at those times, question the home-grown traditional view of the community spirit and the Caribbean connections that existed between peoples of the Caribbean anywhere in the world.

It was with some measure relief and excitement that I finally secured my three participants. Even then, having the three participants agree to be part of the study, came with limitations regarding my access to the young persons and the research sites. Generally, I was afforded varying levels of access based on the participants' and their *parents'* levels of comfort with the research process. As a result, my relationships with the three participants varied in terms of access to and observations of the home, school and social events and activities. In addition, out of respect for the participants' preferences, I also had to negotiate the number of documents that the participants provided.

For example, in LeeAnn's home, I was treated as friend and guest. I felt very comfortable in the space as I interviewed and observed LeeAnn's interactions with her parents and friends. The conversations were easy and often focused on school, career and life in the Caribbean. My

fieldnotes reflect the quality of the relationships, and how the relationships influenced my access to LeeAnn.

LeeAnn's home [Fieldnotes, July 21st, 2007]

Today, when I rang the doorbell, both mother and daughter come to greet me. First I see LeeAnn's mother as the door opens, and then I see LeeAnn in tow. They're smiling. Once more, I feel totally at ease. The mother comments that I'm right on time. I present them with the gift bag of Caribbean snacks. They thank me. I hand LeeAnn the bumper stickers with "I love my country" in the Jamaican colors. As I do so, I hear LeeAnn's mother express pleasure at the contents of the bag. We all laugh heartily—the snack was a Caribbean favorite.

LeeAnn and I settle down in our favorite spot on the carpet between the leather couch and love seat. Today, she wears a mini jeans skirt and black tank top. Her hair is in "cane row"—braided with about two rows undone. LeeAnn plops herself unto the floor and we talk. We have established a routine. She lies casually on her stomach on the floor. From time to time, we both shift our positions: LeeAnn moves from lying on her stomach to propping against the sofa with her legs curled under her; I stretch my legs out in front of me, my back propped against the couch. Across the room, her mother busies herself with household chores and phone calls. Usually, around this time, she begins to prepare dinner for the family. Sometimes, I'd interrupt my conversation with LeeAnn to chat with her mother. Our conversations, like the atmosphere in the home are relaxed.

The limits imposed on the access to the home provided a distinctly different level of interaction, and quality of relationship. My interactions with Ashley and her family all occurred *outside* of the home. I was full observer of most events, having access to Ashley only at the library and at school events. Though the level of participation shifted when I observed at school

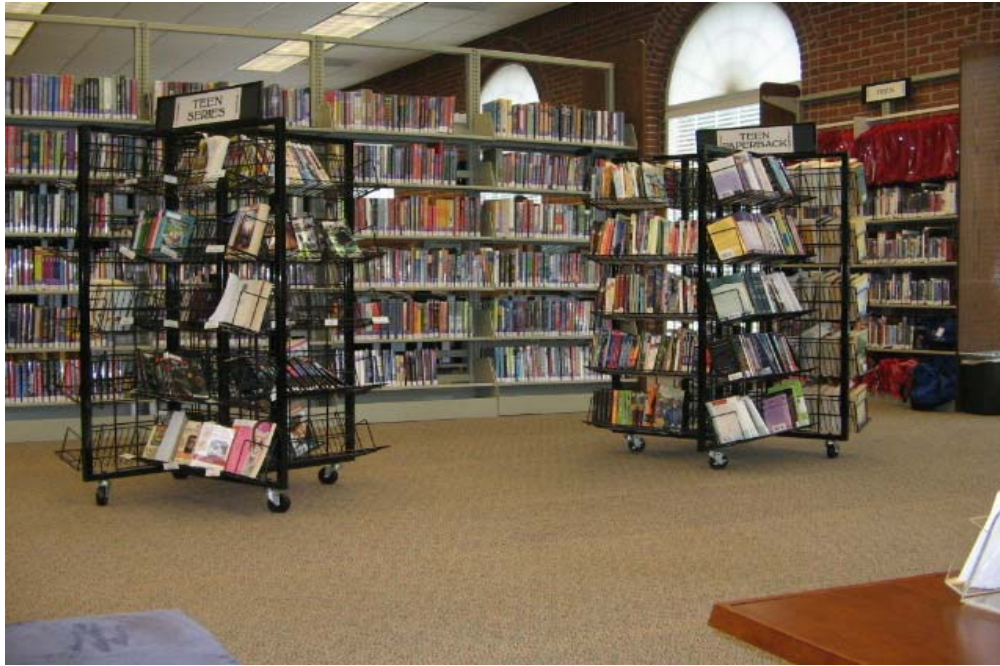
events (the conversations moving to current events and stories about family routines), I remained primarily in the role of observer in Ashley's life. My initial meeting with Ashley and her mother set the tone for our relationship.

Thomasville library [Fieldnotes, June 12th, 2007]

It's now, 11:55 a.m. I've been here since 10:55. I stand outside the library's automatic doors looking out onto the parking lot. I count 15 cars tucked into the lot. My cell phone rings. It's them. I'd been hoping they'd arrive. Not sure if things would go as planned. But, the mother had given me her assurance that they'd be there. I watch every car that comes in. I answer my cell phone. A girl's voice with a Jamaican accent says, "Hello? We're on our way." I breathe a sigh of relief as simultaneously, I see a SUV turn into the parking lot. They're here.

Ashley's mother apologizes for the late arrival. Introductions are made. As previously arranged, I show my id cards (University Id and driver's license). Ashley's mother quickly inspects them, and verifies my identity and the legitimacy of my research. We enter the library. I let them direct me to the right corner of the library's entrance. There are two sets of wooden tables with four matching chairs each. A blue sectional sofa is used to partition the area. From the sofa, we have an unobstructed view of the book displays from the Teen Series. First, we sit on the couch, and then move to the tables. In the far corner, there's a computer station and a young woman works at the computer terminal and listens to music. Young people, children and adults mill around. We talk.

Figure 3. Thomasville Library.



Ashley's mother expresses concerns about the readers' access to the data from her daughter. During my earlier phone calls with her, she agreed to meet with me, but stressed that she had some misgivings about what I would be doing with the information I would be collecting. We agreed to meet at a public place of her choice where I would explain the details of the study. If she chose to grant permission for Ashley to participate, I assured her that I would let her set the ground rules for what data would be collected.

Mother and daughter sit on the couch with me. I explain my research: what the process will entail. I let them read the forms, and then I explain the key points of the consent forms, and describe the study. "What happens to the individual photos she takes of herself where she can be identified?" Ashley's mother asks. I assure her that I will only use group photos and/or scenery.

Also, the photos selected will be approved by her. “And the samples of her work? The names will be taken off, right?”

“Yes, I will take it off. I promise. And the interviews only have the “new” names.”

“Ok”, she says. As I answer her questions, and make requests, Ashley’s mother explains once more that she is concerned about the welfare of her daughter. Her child is a minor, and while she and her husband may be willing to trust me, they do not know who will be reading my research, and who will have access to her child’s and family’s identities. Once more, I assure her that I fully understand her concerns and will be careful to protect Ashley’s identity.

Would they be interested in participating, I ask? Yes, they say, smiling. Good, I think. Mother reads carefully. She seeks clarification. Again, she is concerned about the “home” visits. I assure her that I was flexible and that the visits would be based solely on their wishes. She signs. Yes! They’re on board.

Follow up note: Arising from the meeting, Ashley’s mother and I negotiated certain ground rules and procedures that we were to follow for the next six months of data collection: the library would be our meeting place, no photos of Ashley or audio recordings would be used, all identifiers would be removed from documents, and the parent would read all transcripts and give permission for their use. I assured Ashley’s parent that I would respect her request for privacy and anonymity.

On the other hand, with Zeek, I became full participant and insider. In many respects, I became a part of the family.

[Cheryl’s journal, April 21st, 2007]

Earlier that morning, Zeek had answered the phone, telling me that her mother was entertaining Aunty Lisa (her mother’s friend from Florida). Later that morning, Jaycee, Zeek’s

mother, returns my call: She outlined the family's plans for the weekend, including a play at Zeek's school on Saturday, and church service all day on Sunday. I begin to feel somewhat disappointed. I had hoped to meet with Zeek. "Next week, perhaps?" I ask tentatively. Jaycee talks and thinks out loud, then suggests that I spend the weekend. That way, I would attend the school play "As You Like It" and then sleep over, and go to church. I'm hesitant. I didn't want to inconvenience, to intrude. Jaycee points out that this might be one of my "observations". Despite my hesitation, I'm eager to really get started working with Zeek. I agree to her invitation but not without seeking assurances once more that I was not imposing on the family. Jaycee feigns offense, and in mock outrage says: "Excuse me!" I know then that it would be ok. I bid goodbye until later. I pack my overnight bag, digital voice recorders, journal and notebook, and I'm on my way to Atlanta.

I would eventually come to have open access to Zeek's home and would actively participate in many of the family daily household routines. I found that in some instances, I had to be briefed on some of the practices that were unfamiliar to me that were part of the family's regular routine. For example, Morning Prayer followed by relaxed, weekend breakfast of pancakes, toast, eggs, and sausages was a regular practice. At nights, a cd recording of a relevant sermon from their church pastor played while everyone slept. I soon learned and fell into the routine of life in Zeek's home.

Data Collection Methods

The different levels of access influenced the kinds of data that I was able to collect. In this following section, I focus on the kinds of methods, and strengths and limitations of these methods used in this study. I also include some of the practical decision I had to make during the data collection process.

Interviews. I would for the most part characterize the interviews as informal. I would argue that it was not only the format of the questions that helped make the interview informal and comfortable, but also the atmosphere that was created by the setting, and the quality of relationship with my participants. The interview settings and questions formats were intended to “yield a conversation, not a question and answer session” (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989, p. 138). My decision to go with this format and to find opportunities to create this setting, also allowed me to focus on what was important to the participant. I considered the open-ended structure and predominantly respondent-directed conversation as a way to elicit stories and to ensure that the participants’ views remain the focal points.

Generally, I used the setting to create an atmosphere of a conversation between friends. I went into the field with the understanding that narrative inquiry requires a great deal of openness and trust between participant and observer. The inquiry should involve mutual and sincere collaborating, a caring relationship akin to friendship that is established over time for full participation in the storytelling, retelling and reliving of experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I chose to avoid Patton’s advice on requesting demographic information from the participants. I chose instead to let the demographic details come out as the data collection progressed. I pulled the necessary information from the multiple data sources, including conversations and interviews with the parents. Given this, I was more comfortable about the ethical and methodological decisions and approaches I made. I felt that I was doing everything possible not to violate my participants’ ethical boundaries and safeguard my own. For the most part this worked given that the interviews with two of the participants were conducted in the homes as we usually lay casually on the floor or couches with tape recorders at varying positions

close to the participant. I used three recorders at a time as a precautionary measure—my experiences with failing technology had taught me well.

I used the audiotaped interviews as the main approach to generating data in this study. As researchers, I interviewed each participant four times with each interview lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. I also had at least one interview with the parents of each participant. Interviews, along with informal conversations allowed me to open up, follow up on, and clarify lines of discussion. These semi-structured and open-ended interview questions provided the framework from which to elicit participants' stories about themselves and their experiences. A general interview guide (see Appendix A) allowed me to systematically explore and probe key issues, while offering the respondents some flexibility and control over the directions of the discussions.

I was cautious about the ways in which I conducted each of the 12 semi-structured interviews—the questions that I chose to ask, and when and how I asked them. I was careful about not shifting the interview to interrogation. By structuring the interview data collection in a way that focused on having the participants tell their stories, I sought to allow for a voluntary sharing of information by the participants. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable sharing and telling *only what they wanted to share*. One principle that I adhered to in the interview process was that if the issue did not come up after probing questions and follow-up interviews, then it may not be important to the participant. I was also aware that I had other data sources to obtain additional information from, namely, observations, reflections, and documents. I was, therefore, comfortable using general open-ended questions that allowed a level of comfort for the participants to share their stories with me.

Further, I saw storytelling and narrative as a way to circumvent some ethical issues of interrogation. Thus, the interview questions were purposefully worded in a way that would allow

the participants to take their responses in whatever direction they chose. I saw this approach as one that would be less intrusive and establish trust.

Fieldnotes

In this study I attempted to get a rich sense of the environments in which the participants operated. In the observational field notes, I described the physical settings, activities, participants, quotations, actions, and interactions of the persons participating (Patton, 2002). These notes provide a record my relationships with the participants, descriptions of the site and events, persons observed and conversations that occurred. “Fieldnotes become an important field text in personal experiences methods when we acknowledge the relationships we have as researchers with our participants” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 422). I interviewed and observed the adolescents in their homes, school-related and social functions or events. I wanted to capture a range of experiences the adolescents have, the various communities in which they participated, and the interactions that occurred within and across these social spaces. The multiple settings helped to give a more holistic picture of the participants, the multifaceted aspects of their lives, and also allowed for triangulation of data sets. However, the constraints of time and access imposed limitations on the number and range of observations that I was able to conduct. I also understood that it was practically and ethically impossible for me to observe every situation.

Fieldnotes were the principal method by which I recorded my observations. Many of these descriptive details were originally surreptitiously jotted points and phrases that I would write in my small notebook during interviews and observations. Later on, after the event, I would elaborate on the notes and create expanded fieldnotes. Often, depending on the setting of the observation, and my level of participation, I would not be able to make notes. In those instances,

I created mental storylines using characters, and catchy chapter titles that I would be able to easily recall and would allow me to later pick up on these threads and develop the detailed descriptions. However, in using this data source, I was aware that the fieldnotes were “constructed representation of experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 428) and thus, reflect *my* views of the participants’ worlds. The following descriptions of the living room of Zeek’s home, and my interactions with LeeAnn’s family were taken from my expanded fieldnotes.

Zeek’s home [Fieldnotes, May 22nd, 2007]

Upon entering the apartment, I’m again aware of the light and airiness in the room that come from the cream décor: carpets, lamps, living room sectionals and white walls and curtains. By the front door on the wall, there are two maps of Trinidad and Tobago decorated in blue and green. On the main wall hangs a picture of Zeek as a toddler. Around the room, there are a number of ornamental hats, two wooden bookcases, glass coffee table, and a small entertainment center with a large television. A light brown wooden desk with the computer faces the doorway connecting dining room, living room, and kitchen. Surrounding the computer and desk are multiple files that belong to Zeek’s mother, Jaycee. She is in the midst of preparing for a Caribbean function on June 21st, as part of the Caribbean Heritage Month in June.

It’s 11:30 a.m. and Zeek is still asleep on the couch when I arrive. I organize my voice recorders, questions and notes while I wait. Jaycee and I talk about the next steps for the upcoming Caribbean event. I relax on the plush carpet. I’m comfortable on the floor where I can reach my notebooks etc. My back is propped against the love seat with my legs stretched out under the heavy glass table. I glance at the books that are displayed on either end of the glass table: Children’s Illustrated Bible, Family Life by Creflo & Taffi Dollar. . . . I make a note to

browse through the books in my spare time. After about 30 minutes, Zeek is ready for our interview. Wearing a red Trinidad and Tobago t-shirt and green shorts, she curls up on the carpet and we talk.

LeeAnn's home [Fieldnotes July, 19th, 2007]

I get an invitation to go get my slippers and come see the garden. Her mother gives me the grand tour. I smile to myself because the backyard reminds me of my own home in Trinidad. Huge tomatoes ripening and bending toward the rich earth. Spinach. Mint thyme. Yams. Potatoes. Beans. Bell and hot peppers. Each with it's little space and sectioned off with colored paving stones. In the midst is a fountain. The place is wide, open and cool. It's a labor of love. It's her husband's little piece of Jamaica, she says. Her husband uses this as a little project and plants vegetables year round. (In the winter, they'd take some of the plants to the garage.) LeeAnn's mother has suggested that after LeeAnn leaves for college that they move into a condo or townhouse. However, her husband had said "no" because he wants a yard, he wants a garden. He wants that feeling of "home". I admitted to her that I also feel the same way. A house is not a home unless it's a "house" with a back yard, a "porch" or deck. I marveled at how there was so much I could identify with in this family!

Documents

Two main types of documentary data were used in this study: participant-generated data and researcher-generated. Of the participant generated documents, personal and public artifacts were provided. The personal documents included writings and photographs. The public artifacts were drawn from official school documents. In addition, the researcher fieldnotes and journals formed part of the documentary data.

Personal writings. Personal artifacts were used as a key way for each participant to share stories of various aspects of their lives including home and school. I used each artifact to capture small fragments of experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Together the artifacts helped me to piece together a clearer image of the whole person. These personal documents included samples of the participants' writings and readings (electronic and traditional texts).

Initially, I had asked each participant to submit their choice of 15 pieces of writing that they believed reflected their personal interests, character and thoughts. These pieces, I explained, could include poetry, journal entries, photos, artwork, email, and websites. In addition, I invited the participants to reflect in writing on their involvement in the research process by providing 15 journal entries. I received mixed responses to my request. Based on the concerns expressed by Ashley and Zeek about the requests, and my growing understanding of each young person's personalities, preferences and schedules, I eventually negotiated to have a total of 15 documents of her choice.

Photographs. The photographic data provided an additional source of descriptive data. I used the Ewald's (1985) photo elicitation. Each of the participants was given a disposable camera and asked to take photos that told their story of what it means to be a Caribbean student in the United States. Bogdan and Biklen (2006) warn that when using photos, the researcher must take into account that such photos would have been taken for a particular purpose and from a particular point of view. It is precisely because of this cautionary note that I opted not to use photos that were randomly provided, but chose instead to have photos that were taken *by the participants* for the study.

The prompts "Tell me what it means to be a Caribbean student in the U.S." and "Tell me the story of these pictures" were intended to direct the particular viewpoint that the photos would

take and the participants' descriptions of the photos. I found that this data source allowed me to probe more deeply into how the participants defined their worlds (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

Official documents. In order to generate data on the participants' experiences in school, official documents from the participants' schools formed part of the data set. I asked each participant to provide me with at least 10 samples of documents that reflected their academic work and achievements. I explained that these documents could include but were not limited to academic transcripts, records, awards, projects, assignments, examinations, letters, notices and flyers.

Researcher records. My researcher fieldnotes of the observations provided detailed descriptions of the participants and settings. Fieldnotes provided records of my observations and descriptions of events and experiences in the field. These records were used to contextualize the setting, and generate details about the participants. I used descriptive fieldnotes as my base on which to reconstruct narratives in ways that would give substantive portraits of the participants, constructions of dialogue, descriptions of physical settings and behaviors (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

Included in the data was my researcher journal. I used the journal to consistently reflect on my field experiences, and my interactions with my participants. Often, the journal became an ethical compass. I raised issues about my decisions in the field. Also, I believed that it was important that I also write about my experiences as I had asked my participants to do. My reflective journal allowed me to tell my story about how I was experiencing the research process.

Observations

A key assumption of participant observation has been that by entering into close and relatively prolonged interaction with people in their everyday lives, the researcher can better

understand the beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of participants than by any other approach (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The three participants were each observed at least four times over the eight-month period, in at least three different settings: home, school, and social event. The specific details of access and duration of the observations were negotiated with the participants. Being on site in the home, and at social events, I was both participant and observer depending on the context. I was also able to note things that may have been overlooked, taken-for-granted and/or avoided by the participants. In addition, the observation process allowed for my own reflections, introspection and reflexivity on the events experienced and explained. Observations provided an important means of cross-referencing the participants, as well as my own biases, perceptions, knowledge and interpretations.

[Ashley's school: Fieldnotes September 21st 2007]

Ashley is all smiles dressed in black jeans, with digital camera dangling in her hand. I give her a special hug and kiss for her Sweet Sixteen. As I chat with her parents, I notice that Ashley and her brother (an energetic ten year old boy) would walk sometimes arm in arm and talk playfully. Across the small courtyard, once more, I see Ashley strolling past, one arm locked playfully around her brother's neck. He grins at me, and tickles Ashley before running off. This evening, the family, all sporting t-shirts of the school colors, has come out in support of the school's pre-homecoming event. From time to time, the Ashley's sister would run over, and beg her parents to wait just a little longer as she chatted with her friends. The father smiles and points out that this was an all too familiar routine.

Both parents are very protective of the children. They admit that they try their best to support their children's interests—including attending events including school sporting events, and staying way into the night until the end of the function. Ashley's mother and father are committed

to sacrificing their time and energies and finances in order to ensure that their three children made the most of their education.

Table 2. Data Inventory

Source	Origin	Number	Participant	Site	Date
Interviews	Participants	12	LeeAnn: 4 Ashley: 4 Zeek: 4	Home	May- Nov
	Parents	4	LeeAnn: 1 Ashley: 1 Zeek: 2	Home; Library; Phone	May- Nov
Observations	Participants	18	LeeAnn: 4 Ashley: 5 Zeek: 9	<i>School: plays, football games, library Social: family meals; church; parties</i>	
Documents					
<i>Journal reflections</i>	Participants	10	LeeAnn: 5 Ashley: 3 Zeek: 2	Home www	July- Nov

<i>Photographs</i>	Participants	34	LeeAnn: 12 Ashley: 10 Zeek: 14	Home	April- Nov
<i>Personal writing</i>	Participants	27	LeeAnn: 12 Ashley: 10 Zeek: 10	Home	June- Nov
<i>Email</i>	Parents and Participants	5	LeeAnn: 5 Zeek: 10	www	June- Nov
<i>Websites</i>	Adolescents and parents	2	Zeek: 2	<i>Hotmail;</i> <i>Facebook;</i> <i>MySpace</i>	May- Dec
<i>Assignments</i>	Participants	30	LeeAnn: 10 Ashley: 10 Zeek: 10	School	June- Nov
<i>Transcripts</i>	Participants	5	LeeAnn: 2 Ashley: 1 Zeek: 2	School	June- Nov
<i>Awards</i>	Participants	12	LeeAnn: 6 Ashley: 4 Zeek: 2	School	June- Nov

<i>Field notes</i>	Researcher				April- Dec
<i>Reflective journal</i>	Researcher				Mar- Dec

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Credibility and trustworthiness refer to the ways in which the findings reflect *as accurately as possible* the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I used the multiple data sources to cross-check as far as possible, the accuracy of the participants' stories. Eight primary approaches to establishing credibility, professional integrity and methodological competence were built into the study.

1. Data triangulation: Data triangulation was achieved by systematically setting out to collect and double-check findings, using multiple modes of evidence (Denzin, 1997; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 2002). In this study, the use of multiple sources of data (interviews, documents, and observations) helped ensure consistency in findings because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive picture.
2. Peer debriefing: Debriefing interviews and discussions with colleagues and experts in the field helped to keep the research process honest. The debriefing process pushed me to always examine my interpretations of the data. Peers and colleagues were asked to look for consistency in the data, and provide insights that helped me strengthen the analysis. One such debriefing interview took place in December 2007. This two hour audiotaped interview was conducted by my friend and academic colleague (see Appendix E).

Responding to probing questions, I talked through the research study and challenged some of my biases and assumptions.

[Journal entry: Debriefing interview: December 13th, 2007]

“No, no, no....That is how you’re seeing it. Be careful of imposing your values.” I remember these words clearly. I’d been immersed in the data analysis early December 2007. I was at one of the annual literacy conferences and I’d brought along my “work”. I needed to go for a walk to think things through, talk things through. I made the call to my friend, colleague and Trinidadian native to share some points of analysis. I was stuck. Were my interpretations “accurate”? Was she seeing similar plots coming out of the stories I was telling her? Her words of caution reminded me that I needed to continually revisit my biases and the assumptions.

3. Member checks: Member checks allowed the participants opportunities to verify the accuracy of my interpretations and ongoing representations (Patton, 2002). I asked my participants to review, verify and respond to the preliminary findings and interpretations, and highlight problematic areas. Their responses subsequently helped me develop new ideas, directions, and interpretations. Miles and Huberman (1984) stated that verification requires checking for the most common and most insidious biases that can steal into the process of drawing conclusions. Therefore, by self-consciously and systematically setting out to double-check findings, I tried to increase rigor of the process.
4. Reflections: I felt it was important to have a reflective component built into the design of the study—for the researcher and the participants. In order to incorporate this reflective element, I used my researcher reflective journal, and I asked the participants to write 15 reflections using a format of their choice. One month into my fieldwork, after listening to

my participants' concerns, and having an initial sense of each of the personalities of each participant, I recognized that my initial request for at least 15 journal entries felt forced and contrived. I was already grateful for each of the young person's willingness to open up their lives to me, and I was unwilling to force any additional "busy work" on them. I returned to my dissertation committee informing them that I would have to find other ways to get some of the reflective data.

I then planned to use the follow-up interviews as a way of incorporating the reflective component. But, how would I get at this reflective aspect in our conversations without distancing my participants? I was well aware from my review of the literature that some qualitative researchers such as Patton (2002) have argued against "why" questions because it shifts the participant from the revelation to justification; from the in-the-moment to the reflective. Consequently, in addition to leaving the journal entries open to the participants' discretion, the follow-up questions I asked and discussions I introduced came out of *my own reflections* on and analyses of the prior interviews and participant journal data. In this way, I indirectly allowed the participants to engage in some type of ongoing reflection by inviting them to revisit some of the key events that they talked about.

In my journal, I recorded reflections of my field experiences and my ongoing data analysis. My personal reflections became analytic memos on themes I saw emerging out of my impressions of my observations and interactions in the field, and the ethical dilemmas I faced regarding my own values and those of my participants.

5. Prolonged data collection: Data collection lasted eight months. This period provided prolonged engagement in the field and helped give in-depth understanding of the lives of

the participants. I saw the length of time as a methodological strength in that it allowed me to build trust with my participants, and to verify and follow-up on emerging storylines.

6. Audit trail: Merriam (1998) referred to the audit trail as a careful documentation of data collection, analysis and methodological decisions. I provided a detailed inventory of the data sources, origins and dates (Table 2). In addition, the analytic procedures and presentation of findings included verbatim transcriptions and samples of documentary data in order to minimize bias, and leave an adequate amount of evidence so the audience can reconstruct the processes by which I reached the conclusions.
7. Theoretical iteration: Through an iterative process, I revisited the data and research questions that ultimately guided the analysis. I also re-analyzed the central storylines, in addition to discrepant cases, and used the guiding theoretical framework to the findings. I would argue that through this iterative process, I was better able to tease out the participants' reflections and/or evaluations of their experiences.
8. Researcher reflexivity: As a researcher, it was important that I declare my biases, motivations, research agenda, and the ways in which I position myself. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) and Bloom (1996) talk about self-reflexivity as "coming clean" as a researcher about how "race, class, gender, religion and personal/social values influence the researcher's understanding of the power dynamics of the research setting, the phenomena under study, and the researcher-respondent relationship" (p. 177). In this study, I critically addressed the origins and implications of my own perspectives, backgrounds, and theoretical orientations, and considered the ways in which my subjectivities inform the research process.

I agree with Patton (2002) that reflexivity involves moving beyond critical reflection on beliefs, values and biases, to include action. I allowed for an ongoing and purposeful renegotiation and re-forming of my actions and conceptions of myself as researcher, and private and public declaration of how my subjectivities informed the research process and product. In this way, I hoped to become more ethically responsive to the research.

Ethics

Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world.

Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict

(Stake, 1998)

In this study, ethical concerns arose from the tensions of the “truth” of representation of identity, and whether the research product can—if at all—reflect the realities of the participants’ experiences and identities. Riessman (1993) reminded researchers that “any methodological standpoint is, by definition, partial, incomplete and historically contingent” (p. 706). Thus, I approached the (re)presentation of the findings as my own rigorous interpretations of the *participants’* interpretations of events, given that every narrative is a version or view of what happened (Cortazzi, 1993). I saw the research process as dialogic—co-constructed by participant and researcher. Consequently, when I asked participants to share their stories with me, I understood that the story that I eventually retold reflected the mutual shaping of the participants’ and my own (re)lived experiences.

Even so, I argue that the stories presented are the *participants’* truths and should be taken as such. This stance was particularly important given that I was interested in understanding the participants’ lived experiences—their views of the world *from their eyes and in their words*. In

addition, I believed that truth is relative to time and space. Consequently, there is no such thing as a single telling of a story, or a single truth. Human behavior is never static and so the individual's realities are constructed, multidimensional and ever changing (Merriam, 1998). I acknowledge that the participants' stories of their experiences would perhaps change depending on factors such as the format and environment of the interview, the identity of the interviewer, the age at which they were interviewed and/or the length of time between events.

Closely linked to the ethical issues of representation is the fact that, even though committed to the participants' own story, it is the researcher who decides what story will or will not be told. Even further, Stake (1998) and Van Maanen (1988) agreed that though a researcher would like to tell the whole story, the whole story exceeds anyone's knowing, anyone's telling. Consolidating, selecting and sidelining certain stories were required due to the limitations of space, respect for the participants' privacy, my research timeline, and the focus of the research.

Another ethical concern is the use of voice. I consider the term "voice" as an acknowledgment that the participants have something to say. In deciding how I would eventually represent the research, I struggled with multiple questions about voice of my participants, and my own voice as individual, and as researcher. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argued that voice, and the dilemma it creates, can never be sorted out except judicially. Even in wanting to share the voice of the participant, I was well aware of the possibilities of silencing. In one sense, I was including the participants' voices about issues specifically related to identity and literacy. Yet, in another, I was deliberately silencing their voices on other issues they would have raised in their stories, and may have been equally or even more important to them. During this study, I continually engaged in ongoing reflections and questioning of the data, I examined the ways in

which I was representing the participant, and to what extent I was controlling the text at the participants' expense.

To begin to address these issues of representation, I created opportunities in the research design and data presentation for reciprocity, multiple voices and positions (participants and researcher) and shared meanings. Built into the research design were opportunities for participants to actively shape the analysis by verifying and commenting on the findings and interpretations.

In addition, the findings of the research were presented in the form of narratives that were constructed from the actual words of the participants. The voice of narrator was drawn from my field notes and reflective journal. I used fieldnotes and journal entries to link the storylines and pull the subplots together into a cohesive narrative. I would argue that my style of writing, the threefold format (narrator voice-over, participant interior monologue, and participant dialogues) reflect my presence throughout the text through the multiple forms, and consequently provide my "research signature" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 424).

Data Management

Fieldwork is not predictable. This reality became increasingly evident during seven months of seeking participants for the study, and the subsequent eight months of data collection. Often, I found that fieldwork required me to be flexible and open to change particularly in the collection and management of the data. The rule of flexibility became a guiding principle I my fieldwork.

During each interview, I tried to be very prepared for technology failure, using three digital voice recorders at a time. All audiotapes of the interviews were saved on two separate computers with a back-up copy located on an external hard drive. I saved the Microsoft Word

documents with the interviews I had transcribed on the two computers and the external hard drive. In addition, I had multiple hard copies of all interview transcripts and documents.

Despite the precautions, my fears of technology failure came to pass in two important ways. As part of my data management and analysis tools, I had planned to use ATLAS.ti qualitative data management software. I intended to use this qualitative analysis software to create a database from which I would analyze the large amounts of written text, audio, and digital photos. Having loaded the software onto my laptop, and started preliminary analysis, I had a major setback. In September 2007, my computer crashed. I lost everything—including the software and data analyses.

I vividly remember being in a state of shock for a few days. Finally, picking myself up, I tried to regroup. Time and money were against me. I needed to continue analyzing the data, well aware of my writing deadlines and research timeline (see Appendix F). In addition, I could not afford a new laptop and qualitative software. I accepted that I had to analyze the data “old school” with pens, color highlighters, and paper. So, I began color-coding the key events and storylines on the multiple copies of the transcripts and field notes, writing my memos in the margins. At times, managing the volume of data was an unwieldy process, but I knew the research process needed to go on.

I had also provided each of the participants with a disposable camera for photographic data. The photos that LeeAnn had carefully taken to best tell her story failed to develop. When I called in October to arrange to visit to do the interview, I was told the disappointing news. LeeAnn’s disappointment and my own disappointment were palpable. However, LeeAnn’s parents were quick to rally, perhaps recognizing the importance of this key piece of data, and knowing how much time and care their daughter had invested in taking photos. Postponing our meeting for a

couple of weeks, the family assured me that LeeAnn would take some new photos, and would also select some recently taken photos from LeeAnn's mother's digital camera. Two weeks later, I received a phone call from LeeAnn's father saying that his daughter was ready to tell her story.

Analytic Procedures

In this section, I discuss my approach to analyzing the data. I draw on the works of Cortazzi (1993) and Gee (1999) to guide my analysis. I outline the steps used to generate and construct the narratives presented in the Findings chapter.

The process that I used for analyzing data drew on Cortazzi's (1993) and Gee's (1999) guidelines for identifying and analyzing stories. In order to come up with the narratives, I looked across multiple interviews, participants' reflections, photo-stories and my field notes. In analyzing the data, I looked within and across the data sources to find key stories that answered the overarching research question: How do immigrant Caribbean adolescents see themselves within the context of U.S. schools, and what are the consequences of their identities for their literacy practices?

I examined the transcribed interviews, the documents, fieldnotes and journals for stories that the participants told about their experiences in the United States and their native countries. In analyzing the data, the questions asked of the participants were no longer important; rather it was their responses, the events recounted, and the stories told. Kvale (1983) argued that the transcribed interviews become a text from which interpretation ensues, and that the interpretation relies on the respondent's own terms and category systems rather than the researcher's. This holds true of my approach to identifying the key storylines—where I took an emic approach by relying on the *participants'* views, beliefs, feelings, actions and evaluations of events.

I wanted to identify what I considered to be the key events in the participants' lives. These key events identified were based on the central storylines or plots, recurring phrases, images, and the extent to which these storylines addressed the research sub-questions:

1. How do the adolescents perceive themselves as learners?
2. How do the adolescents talk about their academic experiences as Caribbean immigrant learners?
3. In what types of literacy practices do the adolescents engage?

I then revisited the data asking the following broad questions of each previously identified storyline that I saw emerging from the data:

1. What is the story about?
2. What is the conflict?
3. What are the events surrounding the conflict?
4. What role does the participant play in the story?

Having abstracted the plot, the textual layout of a narrative followed. Cortazzi (1993), drawing on the work of Labov (1972), offered five narrative elements that are central to every narrative: Setting, conflict, crisis, evaluation and resolution. I then proceeded to construct a narrative integrating Cortazzi's story elements, though not in sequential order.

In order to start developing the narratives from the storylines that I constructed, I used the supporting method of applying Gee's (1999) analytic questions. I applied the following five data questions:

- (a) What does the protagonist believe, value and feel?
- (b) How do the protagonist's beliefs guide actions and interactions?
- (c) How consistent are these beliefs?

(d) How does the protagonist judge self and others?

(e) What sorts of experiences give rise to these beliefs and actions?

These data questions, modified from Gee's (1999) analytic discourse framework, helped me to elicit the sociocultural contexts, choices, actions, history, and character of the main "character", and provide in-depth understanding of the constructed narratives. These data questions addressed the storyteller's beliefs and values, actions and interactions, consistency of beliefs, judgments about self and others, and experiences given the beliefs and actions. I used these data questions to "interview" the multiple data sources in order to flesh out and build the narratives that would offer an in-depth understanding of the participant's lived experience. I believe that the data questions strengthened the analytic process by helping me to pull key episodes out of the data and develop the plot.

After having followed this procedure for each participant, I then looked across the narratives of the three participants to identify common storylines. I chose to group these common conflicts and events using the following questions:

1. How did the conflict arise?
2. How did each participant respond to the events?
3. How was the conflict resolved?

The common storylines and narratives were eventually organized and presented using three approaches: researcher-narrated narratives, protagonist interior monologues and participant dialogues.

The modes of representation of the narratives in this study were also intended to take a dialogic approach by bringing in and responding to the multiple discourses, contexts and relationships that shape the participants' and researcher's experiences. I wanted to find a way to

bring together the multiple voices that shaped the study, and to acknowledge the mutual shaping that was taking place. Further, this approach allowed me to bring this larger dialogue into focus, and helped to highlight the fact that stories and the reconstructed narratives reflect the mutual shaping of the participants and the researcher. Within these narratives, as researcher I act as narrator, offering my voice to connect the narratives. Here, the researcher's voice provides the reader with context, and becomes another common thread that ties the stories together.

Using this analytic framework, I constructed the overarching narrative, *Going Back Home*. *Going Back Home* is structured in the form of a prologue that introduces the protagonists. The prologue is followed by four sub-plots: If You Can Make It Here, Dealing with Difference, Sounding American, and A Place Called Home. The narrative closes with an epilogue.

Summary

In this section I presented the methodological framework for this study. I focused on my decisions to use narrative inquiry as a methodology and method of inquiry. Then, I discussed the research design followed by data analysis procedures. In the following chapter, I use the analytic framework outlined in this chapter, to construct and present narratives of the participants' experiences of living and attending school in the United States.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The narrative, *Going Back Home*, forms the centerpiece of Chapter 4. Using the narrative analytic framework, I constructed the narrative *Going Back Home* to explore how immigrant Caribbean adolescents see themselves within the context of United States schools, and the consequences of their identities for their literacy practices. The narrative is made up of subplots of the narrative that address the three guiding research questions: (1) How do the adolescents perceive themselves as learners? (2) How do the adolescents talk about their academic experiences as Caribbean immigrant learners? (3) In what types of literacy practices do the adolescents engage? The subplots are: *If You Can Make It Here*, *Dealing with Difference*, *Sounding American*, and *A Place Called Home*. The prologue and epilogue introduce the three central characters, and close the chapter on the characters' lives. Throughout the narrative, I use the researcher's voice as a common thread that ties the plots together.

I use some stylistic forms that are intended to highlight the three approaches used to present the narratives. The four sub-plots and the voices of the characters are organized and presented using researcher-narrated narrative, protagonist interior monologue, and participant dialogues. In the researcher-narrated and the interior monologues, the voice of the protagonist is embedded within quotation marks. Speakers in dialogues, where the multiple protagonists' voices are interwoven, are indicated by separate line spacing. Throughout the narrative, each individual protagonist is introduced by name, using bold font for the names.

Going Back Home

Prologue

Three voices: Ashley, LeeAnn and Zeek. Two countries: Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Two regions: the Caribbean and the United States. Three young women, who live separate lives, yet are united in one common story of migration to the United States. They speak out with 16 year-old candor about their new homes, schools and communities—their new lives.

They share their stories with me: compatriot-researcher-friend. They tell their stories of lived experiences; of things they have often thought about, but sometimes never talked about. And, in retelling their stories, I add my voice to their words and worlds. Their stories become a dialogue of multiple voices—of speakers that overlap, accents that jar, linguistic turns, ideological stances, from face-to-face and in cyberspace—each vying to be heard, to break silences, to challenge, and to find voice and define self.

Ashley

At the start of summer 2007, Ashley and I began meeting for our interviews at one of the local libraries in Ashley's home town of Thomasville. Ashley's mother had chosen the library for our initial meeting. The library would eventually become our designated meeting place. I indicated that, if Ashley and her mother were so inclined, I would be willing to have our meetings at alternative venues. "No, that's ok. We come here a lot. We get books and stuff to read, and do assignments." By "we" Ashley was referring to herself and her siblings. Over the next six months, I would observe Ashley checking out and returning novels during each visit to the library. Sometimes, after chatting or an interview, she would sit on what we had now come to consider "our couch". Her brown face, framed with her black-rimmed glasses and black curls,

would periodically glance in my direction, and offer a shy but welcoming smile. Her tall, slim frame is clad in a navy blue and grey tank top and jeans with black and white slippers. Elbows anchored on her lap, chin nestled in palms, Ashley slowly shifts one hand to flip the pages of the latest edition of Seventeen magazine or one of the *Gossip Girls* novels. Even in her leisure time, Ashley's studies continued to be important. Summer, she said, was a good time to read the novels that she would be studying in the upcoming semester. Her visits to the library were more that entertainment and relaxation. She was working toward being a success in school.

An urban city center houses Ashley's school, Thomasville High, on its main street. Thomasville High has been serving the Thomasville community of 20,000, since the 1950s. Nearly 3000 students attend Thomasville, 2 % of whom are Asian, 53% Black, 6% Hispanic, 35% White, and 3% Multiracial. The school's annual report for 2007 indicates that approximately 35 % of the student population was enrolled in free and reduced lunch program. With over 10 departments, the students are taught a range of content areas that include Mathematics, Science, Fine Arts, Technology Education, Media and Language Arts. Boasting a proud athletic program, students at Thomasville participate in sports such as football, tennis, track and cheerleading. Students have the opportunity to participate in a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities are offered at Thomasville. In some cases, membership in these clubs and groups are open to all interested students (e.g. Art Club, Drama, and Service and Action). However, there are other groups that are competitive, and membership is strictly by audition, and/or requires certain prerequisites (Alpha Club, Winterguard, Dance Team and Yearbook).

From the front of the school, a steady stream of cars can be seen making their way about the town's commercial center in which the school is located. It is along this street that Ashley's school bus must pass daily as it takes her to school, having picked her up from her home at 6:30 a.m. Each day, Ashley makes her way with the throngs of students to one of the ten 10th grade classes. Ashley is a student in this space. However, as a newcomer to the United States school and society, she soon finds herself a student *of* the space for she must learn the norms and meet the expectations of life within the school community.

For Ashley, "Education is a way of eventually defining who you are and your economic future—how much money you're gonna come to make, and the house you live in. It's the basis of everything. It's the thing that's gonna get you to where you wanna go in the end. And the foundation is just education and school. And it's very important what I get out of it because I know that there's so many people who don't have the opportunity. And, so why not take full advantage of it?"

Zeek

Some 40 miles away, each day, Zeek's mother drives her to her private high school in the city suburbs, some five minutes away from her home. Zeek's home is situated in one of the state's most affluent counties. Known for its high quality school systems, Zeek's high school, The Abbey, bears testimony to the reputation of the school district in which she lives. For the students of The Abbey, there is no school bus: Parents and chauffeurs deliver the students to classes. A large iron gate with the school crest announces The Abbey. Nestled among tall, evergreen trees and imposing white colonial style buildings, the driveway meanders lazily along lush lawns and parks. The campus is a sprawling mix of old-world traditional grandeur and sleek

modern buildings. The school boasts a strong history of quality academic programs and student performance.

Located within metropolitan Atlanta, for over 50 years, The Abbey has served the students of the Arima County in which Zeek lives. With a predominantly White student population, The Abbey has a minority enrollment of 19%. The students of The Abbey consistently graduate to attend some of the country's top private and public universities. At this private institution, the tuition averages \$20,000 per academic year. Only 12% student body receives financial aid awards. However, attendance at this private school guarantees students small classes, a high percentage of teachers with graduate degrees, and a competitive curriculum. Students enrolled at The Abbey also have access to over 25 Varsity teams. School sports include cheerleading, crew, lacrosse, swimming, tennis and gymnastics. In the performing arts, there are clubs devoted to drama, dance, debate and band.

It is not uncommon to have the term "elite" associated with the school. Yet, Zeek is not unaccustomed to private or "elite" spaces. Her parents have always paid for her schooling. Zeek has never attended public school in either Trinidad and Tobago or the United States. Her elementary schooling in Trinidad was also at a private school. Like The Abbey, Zeek's elementary school, Port-of-Spain Preparatory, has a proud history and fine reputation for providing strong academic programs and producing fine scholars. It was important to the family that Zeek find a comparable educational space even before she migrated to the United States.

Five years after having moved to the United States, school continues to play a central role in Zeek's life. Behind streets dotted with boutiques and shops with exclusive stores is the entrance to gated community where Zeek lives. Dressed in comfortable jeans and t-shirt, and knapsack flung casually across her back, Zeek hurriedly jumps into the car. From the bottom of

the stairway of their townhouse, her mother had been urging Zeek to hurry because she would be late for school. After making the daily trip to drop off Zeek at The Abbey, Jaycee, Zeek's mother, returns to the home to settle down to work. Jaycee runs her consulting business from the family home, conducting business meetings, and daily planning on the computer and phone.

During my weekly extended visits to Zeek's townhouse, I would find that, in many ways, home and school did not have distinct boundaries. Zeek's mother's active involvement in Parent Teacher Associations and cultural events at school and the community, helped to connect both spaces. During our conversations about school events, Zeek would often point out that her mother would be able to elaborate on the point she was making because, "My Mom was on that committee." And, if her mother happened to be within earshot: "Not so, Mummy? Mom, you were helping my teachers with that cultural event, Explore, what do you think?"

It was also commonplace to have conversations in the home that touched on Zeek's plans for college and future career as a veterinarian. Zeek had also begun to think even more seriously about her career, and had secured a summer job at a pet store. "Education is very important to me. I grew up in an environment where everything was very academics-oriented. Since I was very young, I've known that I wanted to be a vet. I know what it takes. So, I don't want my years in school to be a waste of time. So, I push myself."

LeeAnn

LeeAnn takes the bus to school. Her journey is a short and quiet one. The peaceful suburban streets snake carefully toward the yellow and cream-colored campus buildings. The school, Cheyenne High, tucked away off the tree-lined street, fits snugly among the neighboring 5-bedroom homes with manicured lawns. The neighborhood speaks to a certain socioeconomic status, and inside the school, LeeAnn is aware of the academic hierarchical structures. She is in

the advanced placement (AP) track. School serves as a constant reminder of her academic abilities and her projected educational path.

Cheyenne High is conveniently located within a 30-minute commute from Atlanta. Established in the 1980s, the school is actively supported by the Cheyenne community. There are approximately 2000 students attending Cheyenne, 39% of whom were enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program. According to the school's website, at Cheyenne High a majority of the student population (61%) identifies as Black, with Whites comprising 26%, Hispanic, 7%, Multiracial, 4% and Asian, 3%. Cheyenne High ranks above the state and national averages in the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). In addition to the academic programs at the school, students are provided with a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that include National Honor Society, Color Guard, Beta Club, Debate, Drama Club, Mock Trial, Scholar's Bowl, and Step Team.

The focus on education in LeeAnn's home was no different from Zeek's. LeeAnn's routine is structured around school and her education. Around 5:00 p.m. on a very warm Saturday in July, I was sitting with LeeAnn's mother at the kitchen table. We were chatting about a recent trip to visit relatives in New York from which LeeAnn's mother had returned. I had long since finished my second interview with LeeAnn. Then, LeeAnn came bounding down the staircase in her usual fashion. "Mom, can I go outside a little?" I did not find this an unusual request. It was after all, summer time, and the weekend. Earlier that day, LeeAnn's friend, Crystal, had stopped by for a couple of hours and the two of them had been listening to music in LeeAnn's bedroom. "Have you finished doing your work on the computer?" was her mother's response. LeeAnn had not. With a quick nod, and a knowing smile directed toward me, LeeAnn leapt back up the steps to her bedroom. Her mother then explained to me that the "work" to

which she was referring was the SAT preparatory lessons. In the eighth grade, LeeAnn took the test “for the experience” and made a top score. Now, two years later, LeeAnn planned to take the examination in the fall semester. LeeAnn understood that her education was a priority. An aspiring criminal lawyer, LeeAnn believes that, “Education is a way to provide for the future and for my children.” She insists, “It’s kinda imprinted in my head: I need an education in order to have that good life that I want. So I guess that’s why I’m working towards it so hard.”

If You Can Make It Here...

LeeAnn

“I’m afraid to fail. That’s one of my greatest fears: failing.” And, she worked hard to ensure this never happened. LeeAnn consistently produces A grades in school and had numerous awards and transcripts documenting her academic prowess. Most recently, she has been accepted into a prestigious national association for high school scholars. “I guess you can say I’ve always been the kind of person to always try my best. In Jamaica, I was at the top of my class as well.

Now I’m here in America, I’ve got to make it. Failure is not ok for me. But, you know, there was this one time in school here that I failed. This one time I got a B. It was my Math class—Algebra. I was so disappointed to bring home those test grades. But, my parents knew that I’d been working the whole year. They knew I was trying to work hard for it. That I would go over it, over and over. They knew I did my *best*.

My Mom and Dad told me, ‘LeeAnn, you know poor grades are not acceptable in this house. So if you wanna do this, then you have to do certain things to get there.’ But, I already knew that. When I don’t do as well as I’d hoped, I always beat myself up about it. You see, my parents taught me that being a leader is part of life. They lead by example. And, they *let* you

know that; and they *let* you know that you can look at them, and see what they do. And, it's *there*. What you're supposed to do, is what they're *doing*.

So, yeah, I'd say that I'm goal oriented. I figure out what I want and I work toward it, you know? Like, since I was nine years, I've wanted to be a lawyer." She laughs, "Oh, ok... Well, I did want to be an engineer. But that was before I realized how much math was involved. Since then, I've been working toward my goal." She has plans to attend a top-ranked college like Harvard, secure an internship at a prestigious law firm and then practice law.

"Because of the competitive nature of the field of law, it's important that I excel academically. It's not good enough to do well. I've got to be the best! That's why I've got to work hard if I'm to make it. It's the way to a good career and a comfortable life." LeeAnn never doubts that she will achieve her goals.

Ashley

"I'm a good student. I pay attention in class. I do all my homework on time to get it out of the way. I don't allow myself to be distracted: If someone asks me a question, I say, "Wait"—because I want to listen to what the teacher is saying. And, I ask questions—sometimes. When I write my assignments, I always try to do as much justice to the topic I'm writing about. I really put effort into the essays because I want to do really good. So, yes, I'd say I'm a good student. My grades? I get As. I've got awards. And, I'm ranked 12th out of 900 students in my grade level. That's a big thing! But, I don't make a big deal out of it. You've got to do what you've got to do.

"But, to be honest, back home in Jamaica, I didn't really have anything that I'm proud of. That's right. *Nothing*. I was always just average. I guess you could say I was always in the middle. I didn't win any awards and stuff like that. I don't have any achievements to talk about. I

wasn't *up there*...I didn't make the cut. I didn't make the grade. I guess, looking back, I think I could have done better if I'd pushed myself. But, there were always students on top!

"I mean, in Jamaica, my parents always struggled to buy books for us. We didn't have things easy as we have it here. Sometimes, me and my sister would have to share books. And, my parents had to buy uniforms and stuff like that. But here, the books are free. The classes are smaller. And, the teachers—you know, they're willing to help...

"So, for me, America was a new start. A new beginning. I looked at it like, what happened back home in Jamaica didn't matter. All that's in the past. I was getting a chance to start over. And, it really was a fresh start: I was no longer in the middle! I was on top! I was on the honor roll! You know, I never thought that I brought anything from Jamaica—that Jamaica taught me anything. I was in the middle and, the middle doesn't count. I just felt like I would get a chance to forget that part of my life. Start over. Start on top.

"But, getting to the top and staying there isn't easy. I can't understand it, but...I had to work hard! I mean, it wasn't as if when I came here I studied all the time. No, no...It's not that at all. I'll admit, I had to study—and I'm looking back on the work more, making sure that I do all my assignments... So, yes, I am a little different than I was in school in Jamaica. I'm more careful. If I don't understand something, I'll ask the teacher. I never used to do that in Jamaica. Maybe, if I'd done that I might have been a better student. I don't know.

"But, now when I go home after class, I look over my work. But it wasn't as if I was studying every second. Even that wasn't enough! I was so close to being on honor roll and getting the tassel in my middle school. *So close*. And I didn't get it. I really wanted it. But, I didn't do well in Math. They were saying that I really only did average. And so I didn't make the cut. After all my hard work, I still wasn't on top. I was so disappointed!

“But, I shouldn’t have to work so hard, right? I remember when I was getting ready to leave Jamaica to come here, my teachers and relatives told me: “Don’t worry Ashley, you’ll do well.” They said that the work wouldn’t be hard, and I would do very good at it. So, right before I left, they said: ‘Ashley, you have to be the top! You’re gonna be the top because they aren’t really smart!’ But, that wasn’t the case when I came. It wasn’t as easy as I expected. I mean ... You had to work! You had to study and stuff. But, what I got from them is that it was gonna be easy (‘cause some of them actually came here before, or taught here or something). And, so the teachers were like: “You’ll be on top. It’s gonna be easy. It’s gonna be all right.” You know? But, when I came here, it wasn’t that, because I had to work a bit more. So I wondered: how come it wasn’t so easy for me?

“So when I didn’t get the tassel, that’s when I promised that it would never happen again. I’ll do whatever it takes to be on top. Now, I’ve got medals and awards to show. I didn’t have anything like that in Jamaica. The other students were on top. Not me. Now, I’m ranked 12th in my school. My Daddy took me out for ice cream when I told him the news. Now, my parents, you know, they’ve come to expect me to do good. So, they usually don’t make a big deal about it. It’s not like my sister, who usually gets Bs, so when she gets an A she wants a reward. But, when I placed 12th, my Dad was so proud. We had to celebrate. So, I guess you could say I’m doing ok. You could say I’ve made the cut.

“But, hey, it’s not like that puts any pressure on me or anything like that. I don’t let it bother me. Ok, I know that when you do well, the students in class kind of always want me—expect me—to always do good. And, I know that my parents expect me to do well. And, sure, my teachers and relatives in Jamaica, wouldn’t be happy if I came here and didn’t do well. But, I

don't think I wanna put that much pressure on myself and do gifted classes or nothing like that. 'Cause I don't want to have this expectation, and not fulfill it. I know I've got a lot to live up to.

“See this poem here? I always think about what my teacher said in the poem he wrote for our class for our graduation from elementary school in Jamaica:

Sometimes it's hard but try and you'll make it, believe you me

In order to achieve go forth and take it, set yourself free.

With obstacles in your way you may fall before you rise

But if you want good yuh nose afi run

So get up and keep your eyes on the prize.

“But, it's not like I let that put pressure on me or anything. Really. So, when I'm doing well, I'm doing it for God. I never forget to pray and thank God for making us reach this far. And, it's not even 3 years and we're where we've always wanted to be. And now we're here—*living the American dream*. I just do what I have to do to be on top. I'm gonna do well. I have to. There're no ifs, ands or buts about it. That's just what's gonna happen.”

Zeek

“Sure, I've brought home a few not-so-good grades. Some Cs.” Zeek grimaced. A hint of embarrassment? There was an expectant pause. Zeek was waiting for my reaction.

“Really?” I asked, careful to mask my expression. It was important for me not to let her think that I was judging her “not-so-good” performance. “Oh, ok,” I followed up quickly.

Yet, Zeek seemed to be expecting disappointment or some measure of censure from me by her confession. Her thick brows knitted together and she scrunched her face sheepishly. In an apologetic tone, she hurriedly explained. “Yeah, I've had a couple of real doozies. Tough. But, it's not that I didn't try. I push myself as far as I can. My Mom knows I try. She understands.

“It’s just that sometimes, there might be a little confusion when you're coming in and you’ve learned something one way in Trinidad, and you have to *relearn* it up here. It’s happened in some of my classes. I know the work. But, I’ve got to learn it the way they do it up here.

“The T&T curriculum was so wide that I came here well-prepared. I mean, you got it from all sides: home, teachers, everybody. You know the familiar saying that Caribbean parents always want you to: "Study yuh book!" Zeek burst out laughing.

“The standard joke is: ‘Mummy, I got a 99 on the test!’

‘A 99?! So, why you couldn't get that one last point?’

‘But, Mummy, it's still an A+’

‘Go and study your book!’ She bubbles with her infectious nasal laughter. “Of course, they're not that strict! But, they are very academic-oriented.

“I remember doing the Secondary Entrance Exam (SEA).” I smiled and nodded. I understood the significance of the Trinidad and Tobago standardized national secondary school entrance examination. In fact, each of the Anglophone Caribbean nations had similar versions of the secondary school entry examination. “I was well-prepared—and after school and every Saturday you'd have lessons. It's mandatory. And, my grandmother! My grandmother would be: ‘Why aren't you studying?’

And, I'm like: I just came from studying.

Grandma’s like, ‘Go and pick up yuh book!’

“I passed for my first choice! But, I was always afraid to say that the test was easy in case I failed. So, when my grandmother picked me up from school that day after the exam, and she asked, I said, it was “doable”.

Grandma's like. 'Hmm...Doable?' Zeek chuckles at the memory. "So, now, anytime I take a test, my grandmother would always ask me if it was doable."

She reflects, "That might be my proudest moment! For real! Because I mean, I can't really say that I've had that experience before. Like even up to now. Just opening something and just being like, wow, I can do this. Like, I mean, of course, I'm not saying that I've never gotten good grades on a test, but. . ." In a more sober tone: "But, I guess that now that I'm here, I've had some not-so-doable tests. I really had to *learn how to study* here. Because, like I said before, I didn't do a lot of on-my-own studying. But, T&T gave me such a good foundation, And, God is such an important part of my life. *I know I'm gonna do well*. You know what? I've never even believed otherwise."

Dealing with Difference

LeeAnn

LeeAnn is pleased but not surprised at how well she is able to adapt to life in the United States. She was first in her class in Jamaica, and has also excelled in the school for gifted students, and in her AP classes in the United States. I pressed her as to what she meant by being adaptable. I'd heard her often use the term to describe herself. She responds, "I understand that I'm different, but it's *not feeling out of place*. And I know what's expected in a situation. I know what it takes to make it. I can find ways to make it work for me." When faced with challenges in the classroom, LeeAnn did find ways.

"In Jamaica, it was kind of like, one way flow of learning? Teachers teaching students. The teacher's in front and she lectures, and then she asks questions based on the subject. It's not very interactive, but you do get enough interaction for it to be ok. And, here, I guess they try to do two way flow most of the time. And, the teachers want to get your thoughts before they teach

you. And, there's more group activity with students learning from each other.

“But, in Jamaica, it kind of felt like I was *floating above the class*. Like I was being taught, but the other students weren't really there. Well, it's like, she's talking and she's asking questions. But, it's like, she's talking to *me*. So, it's just me—I'm not really thinking of the class. I'm just listening to her. And I think it's just me and her.

“And, here in America, I'm more aware of students. Because sometimes I'm working with them: they're helping me or I'm helping them. *Here*, the teacher might stop and have a student talk about something they think they might relate to. So she might end up having a small conversation with them. And, if you listen to the conversation, you're getting something from it. But, in Jamaica, it's just that you can create a sense of more one-on-one if you needed to.

“Well, the thing about me is that I'm very adaptive—when I'm not comfortable, I find a way to deal with it: different study habits for different ways of teaching. Sometimes, here, I try to find ways to float. Yeah. Like, if I'm doing something wrong, if I say something wrong, I like saying it *to the teacher* so at least she can correct me, without me losing points for it on the test or something. So, I ask her—I'll ask questions. And, I'm good at bringing my thoughts to a discussion. Oral stuff helps me learn—oral stuff that connects to a text. In class, it's just mutual exchange: I do what I need to do, you do what you need to do, and we're working together and getting it done.”

Ashley

Fitting in has not always been easy. After moving to the United States, Ashley found her classrooms to be digital worlds of word-processed and internet-based assignments. Her teachers assumed that she knew how to type and use the internet—and more so, that she *wanted* to! But, Ashley prefers to hand write her assignments. To her, the internet just isn't *that* important. An

email account is more than enough for her. Besides, her parents were right: you had to be careful—the internet could be a dangerous place. But, she would do whatever it takes to make it work. She would try and she would learn.

However, Ashley would find out that school didn't always teach her what she needed to learn, or *wanted* to learn in order to succeed. Though she was eager to make the most of her education, she found that she not only had to try, but she was also needed to *try out*. At her school, she learned that she would be required to try out for membership in the clubs and groups she was interested in. She balked. How was she expected to know how to do these things *before* joining? She just thought that she would *learn it in school*.

“In Jamaica, you could just join a team, and they will teach you stuff. But, here, you already know it, so you have to "try out". And, so when you try out, it's possible that you might not make it. They don't expect you to come to school to learn! You should have learned it outside the school. Like now, I've started taking tennis lessons. And, when I go to the courts, the kids are so young. And, they can play so well. And, I ask them, where did you learn this stuff?

If you don't know the stuff, there's a strong possibility that you might not make it. They don't teach you, and they are not willing. And, so, I think that's why even though I'm really interested, I'm not really going to try out. Because I'll be just wasting my time. They're just looking for the best.”

Figure 4. Students taking tennis lessons.



Zeek

Zeek spends countless hours on the family desktop computer in her living room interacting with her friends in her online groups on her personal web pages on Facebook and Myspace. The rapid-fire tapping of computer keys was often punctuated by peals of laughter and followed by Zeek's animated voice as she shared the details of the messages she was receiving and sending. At those times, the walls of the living room disappeared, and Zeek was transported back home. Intermittently, she would make excited, urgent appeals for us—her Mother and me—to view the photos of she had just received, or to read a note a friend had written on her Wall. Her web page boasted a colorful collage of candid photos, comments in colloquial Trini expressions, and music from Skid"nevely, a local rock band.

By June, nearly three months after meeting Zeek, I had also joined Zeek's friends on Facebook and MySpace. Observing her in both spaces, I realized that the computer screen became more than a window to the world. It was also a virtual bridge that allowed her to move

beyond the walls of her own classrooms in the United States into the virtual classrooms of her friends and peers back home in Trinidad. Zeek marks her own progress by the progress of her Trini friends. It was important for her and her friends to be closely involved in each others' lives.

Figure 5. The Mutt Squad in Trinidad.



Zeek and I were chatting about a photo of the Trinidad and Tobago flag that had been recently posted on her Wall by the Mutt Squad—her group of best friends in Trinidad. The Mutt Squad was eagerly awaiting Zeek’s visit to Trinidad in August. Sprawled on a couch in the living room, Zeek laughs excitedly.

“Girl, thank God for MySpace and Facebook! I still have most of all my friends who I went to school with. So I’m *soooo* glad the whole world can get Facebook. Now they opened it to regions, other schools in other countries, my Trini friends have been able to come in.

And, it’s just great to have Trini presence in the Facebook group because they make all these different groups, right? Like, there’s a group that I’m in that’s like, “I Went/Go to School in Port of Spain So I’ve Seen Everything” And, they just tell like all these um—it was supposed to be stories about Port of Spain.” But, it’s just something that you can bond in: ‘Yeah, oh my gosh, I know what you’re talking about!’

It's just fun because, living in America, they wouldn't know what you're talking about. Like, if you said, *Boyo and Carla*, (who taught everybody to read) or *Crix, Vital Supplies* ('cause I mean, that just goes without saying) or something like that, they would be like: "What? What are you talking about?" And of course, since I'm from T&T, I think it's important to know what's going on in the country—not only where you live, but where you're from! And, so it's just good to, you know, have the American part of me, but still be able to find like, a space where I call *home*.

Sounding American

Ashley

"I'm Jamaican, but I don't sound like it right?" The question came unexpectedly. Ashley carefully studied my expression as she waited for my response. I thought back to my researcher journal where, after my first meeting with Ashley I'd noted what my native ear had recognized: 'She's been living in the United States only two years and she already *sounds foreign*!' I was careful to check my response—not wanting to impose judgment. After a moment's hesitation, I replied honestly, "No. No, you don't." Ashley nodded solemnly, somehow indicating in that slow, serious nod, that she understood what I was thinking. With what seemed like resignation tinged with remorse, Ashley half-smiled, half-grimaced.

Behind her black-rimmed glasses, her eyes searched for the surprise, shock and disappointment that often came with the revelation that she was Jamaican—and a relative newcomer to the United States. She knew the responses would be different depending on with whom she was interacting and their points of reference. To her American peers, there was pleasant surprise that she was Jamaican. She didn't sound like it. Yet, Jamaican students at her school were shocked that she no longer did. Then, Ashley had to deal with her relatives who,

during summer visits would openly chide her—freely expressing disappointment and shame that she had “changed”, no doubt for the worse.

“No, you really don’t sound like it.” I repeated, almost relieved to have come clean about my views.

She quickly offered, “But, I didn’t try to change it on purpose. It just happened. I know when I just came to the States, my accent was very strong and stuff. So, I just felt like I had to become Americanized ‘cause they wouldn’t understand. In school, they literally couldn’t understand me when I talked. My accent was so thick. So, I tried to form the words so they could understand. And my Mom would always tell me: “Talk properly”.

“I didn’t think it changed that much. I knew there was a distinction between when I’m talking to my friends and when I’m talking to my family. I don’t know when it came but I knew there was a difference. I know it’s not the same.

“But, when I’m home, we don’t put any barriers on the way we speak. And, my relatives, they ask me: ‘Why don’t you do that? Why don’t you say those stuff when you’re at school?’ And, I’m like: ‘I just don’t feel comfortable.’ And, they’re like: ‘Are you afraid of the language? Are you ashamed of the language?’ And, I’m like: ‘No!’

“But, they think I’ve changed.” Ashley blushed with shame, doubt and confusion. “And, I know there are so many Jamaicans at my school. And, they’re so proud about it. Loud about it. And, they’ve been here for years and years. And, it’s still there! And, I have no idea why I’m not that same way. But, I had to find a way to succeed. That’s just how it is. I’m not gonna apologize for it.

Zeek

“Awesome! You got totally, poned! Sure, we should go hang out.” Zeek’s distinctly nasal voice calls out to one of her classmates. Her accent and colloquial expressions are no different from the group of friends excitedly milling around her at the school auditorium. Yet, I’d also grown familiar hearing Zeek switch both her accent and colloquialism to the Trinidad Creole: “Nah boy, dread, that lime over dey sweet fuh so!” Zeek’s social networks (family, Caribbean groups and events, and online community groups) afforded her opportunities to communicate in the local dialect.

She has learned that everything has its place, including her language. Without prompting, Zeek admits to hiding her Trinidad accent in school. “At school, I don’t use my accent. But, it’s because when I first came there, it was really hard to understand me, I guess. My accent was thick, thick.” She sighs deeply. With an apologetic laugh, Zeek goes on, “Americans—if you don’t sound like them, then they think that you’re hard to understand. It was so frustrating. And so, I formatted my accent to sound like them so that I didn’t have to hear the annoying: ‘What’re you saying?’ or ‘Can you say that again?’ So I decided to change my accent.” But, it’s not because I’m not ashamed or anything. I’m very proud. Maybe, I’m too proud. Everyone knows I’ve got big small-island pride!

“But, even when I changed my accent, I still couldn’t use the Trini slangs. I mean, when I go to T&T I bring down all my “Yankee slang” that, of course, makes my friends laugh. I mean, my friends know a lot of them, because of pop culture and television. But, it’s not the same in the U.S.” Zeek sighs again in exasperation and rolls her eyes as she thinks about her many experiences. She continues: “It usually goes like this: ‘Sure, we can go and lime.’ ‘Lime? What’s lime? What’s that?’

‘You know? Hang out.’

‘Oh, well, why didn’t you just say that?’

It’s frustrating. Why didn’t I just say it the way *they say it*, the way they know it—*the way they want it*. It’s always been that way. They say there’s no place like home? Well, there’s no place for *home* here. They don’t even try to understand it or to use it.

It’s frustrating and a little hurtful when persons who matter and who say they care about you, don’t seem to want to share an important part of you. T&T is a huge part of who I am. I just wish I could bring more of it to my friends and peers here in the U.S. I mean, I talk about T&T all the time. You can ask them. Everyone knows....But, it would be nice if I could bring the T&T *talk* to them. Or, at least when I bring the talk, they would be willing to at least *listen*. I mean, my T&T friends listen, even if they don’t always *get it*. So, I guess that’s one reason I like MySpace and Facebook. I can use proper English, American slang and all the Trini slangs. So, no—I’m not ashamed. I’m proud of where I come from.”

Table 3. Zeek's Facebook Wall.



Joons (Trinidad and Tobago) wrote at 10:29am on May 4th, 2007

haha, its so funny lyrics, but ye... its kinda mean! lol,,
 "cuz dem a war inna chi chi man bar"
 hahahahaha,,, love u

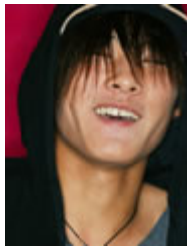
[Message](#)



Pius (Port-of-Spain High) wrote

wha gwan tany stazzy lolol... im chillin you good!!!!
 Exams! I guess its gonna all work out in the end and when i get those results
 i'll be soo happy and of course den nuthin is keepin me home! mi ah love u
 babe!

[Message](#)



Nahim (The Abbey) wrote at 9:24pm on May 29th, 2007

Wow, i'm not going to lie...i kinda want to be you right now Oh, and I'll def
 relay the message for you...haha JLink said "Gangsta Bitches" again this
 year. What am I doing? hmmm...procrastinating?...at least debate is over so
 i'm not getting in as much trouble for it...oh yeah, and that whole prom
 thing...lol And I MISS you (I would have said that in spanish but i'm sure i
 would have messed up)

[Message](#)



Hanni (The Abbey) wrote at 12:10pm on June 11th, 2007

Dear Ana,
 This one time, there was this girl and she was so amazing and beautiful. Her
 name was Zeek. Everyone loved her, especially Hanni, who was also
 really amazing and beautiful. The End.

Love, Hanni

[Message](#)



Natalie (Trinidad and Tobago) wrote

Hey Girl!!! How are things..how is your luv life going?? Wey Ha!
 I hope to see you this summer. All is well on the home front. I hear that there
 is a hot LNG summer party at ZEN that you absolutely cannot miss...can't
 miss out on those Zeek moves chile. Say hi to your mom pls. Loads of love
 xoxoxoxo

[Message](#)

LeeAnn

“I don't want to feel out of place.”

She paused, her mind working, searching, grasping for the “right” words to explain the feelings of confusion. “*I don't want to have my difference hinder me. But, help me if anything.* So, I want to express myself so they can understand me—so, that I can communicate.

“But, in Jamaica, when I was a little kid, you always heard crazy little things when you're a kid.” She laughs. “And, you're like: Oh, they act like this, and they do this. They're so silly: They spell color without the u.” The playfulness in her voice weaves itself throughout her words. “And they didn't necessarily seem to make it a bad thing to be that way, but it was understood that we were different. *And, I liked being different. I liked being Jamaican.*”

Her eyes that had earlier held my gaze, now lowered abruptly. She stared for a moment at her fingers that were threading themselves together in nervous tension. Finally, her now serious brown eyes met my questioning glance.

“And, so I got here and um...It's like *it didn't seem that weird*. And, then I was worried that it doesn't seem that weird because *I'm LIKE THEM!*”

Silence. “So, when I lost my accent, I was worried that I would lose being Jamaican.” Her voice, usually soft and sure, quivered gently. “*I was afraid that I'd lose my identity.*”

A Place Called Home

Ashley: When I left, I didn't think I'd miss Jamaica. Until now...

LeeAnn: Sometimes, I find myself saying, *I wanna go home*. And, I don't mean *here*. I miss it. I miss Jamaica.

Zeek: I know what you mean. T&T is me! I love it! It's who I am.

LeeAnn: I miss the whole atmosphere—the music, the food, the people...Everything.

Zeek: I guess there are some Trinidadians that move away, and they're just like "Eh...forget about that!" But, I just love Trinidad! I just do! Why? 'Cause it's home. For me it's like the best of both worlds: T&T and the U.S. But, when I go home after experiencing up here, it's just like: "Oh, I love you so much!"

LeeAnn: But here, I practice my culture on the inside. Inside the house. But, it's not because I hide it. My neighborhood is mixed. It's the kind of community that doesn't want to portray one culture over another.

Zeek: Me? I'm always involved in Caribbean things—because of my Mom. And, now that June is Caribbean Heritage month in America, my Mom and I have been getting into it. I get a chance to share my culture with everyone. My Mom's been great about that. I mean, she's the one that put me back in touch with all my friends in Trinidad. My Mom makes sure I bring T&T with me. I learn a lot from her.

Ashley: I learn a lot from my parents too. They are the ones that made the American Dream come true. They influence me 'cause they've got a good head on their shoulders. I mean, they'll do almost anything for us. . . . I guess I kind of want to be like them because they're so strong-minded and strong-willed. When they put their minds to do something they do it. So, I think that has influenced me toward how disciplined I am now.

Zeek: Ah, yeah! Caribbean parents! You can't get away from that, right? Discipline is important. They're strict.

Ashley: My parents are *hardcore*. They focus on if you're doing good in school. They always tell me do better. Even if I have a 90, they're like: "Oh, can't this be a hundred?" And that helps me be disciplined-minded and proud.

LeeAnn: My parents lead by example; they're people you can look to for examples. They say what they mean and mean what they say. And, they let you know that; and they let you know you can look at them and see what they do. And, it's there. What you're supposed to do is what they're doing. I guess that's why Caribbean students will work hard, and try, no matter whether they're in a bad school system.

Ashley: So, that's why I take a lot of pride in who I am.

LeeAnn: I agree. Jamaica and my parents represent this culture that I've come from, and kind of created me into being the individual that I am. I've always been like the unique or the exotic person. I'm different. I'm way more open to different cultures than some of my friends.

Zeek: I want my friends here to understand me—who I am and where I come from.

Ashley: You can't forget where you come from or who you are.

Zeek: That's what I call big small-island pride!

Going Back

Green, lush trees and mountains shoulder the ocean blue skies. At the foot of the shady, green landscape is a large garden abundant with sun-ripened fruits and vegetables. Brightly-hued bougainvillea dance lightly, and the scent of golden five fingers floats on the warming, forever-summer breezes. Clustered along the grassy paths are vines of scarlet red tomatoes, heavy with fruit. The sharp scent of large, red and yellow scotch bonnet peppers, and mint thyme tickle the nostrils. In the distance, the steady roar of the crashing ocean waves calls out to the prodigal daughters to return for their blessings. Calling them to come back Home. With open hearts, these three native daughters answer the call. Each continues to respond:

LeeAnn leans forward, her wrists adorned with yellow, green and black bands engraved with the Jamaican flag. Hugging her knees, her eyes are serious, and expression thoughtful.

“Because my base is Jamaica, I’m stricter in my values, so I’m able to carry myself properly, and be able to use the opportunities here in the U.S. Jamaica influences me all the time. When I learn, I’ll pull something from what I learned in Jamaica. So, I’ll bring stuff from there. It is just the way I think, and how things come to me, and the ways I see thing. So, it’s always kind of there. I’m always thinking about it—I’m always connecting it to where I am now. From where I’m from, to where I am now. I’m always trying to bring connections in the way I think, how I think, and what I think.” Her voice is soft, her words confident.

Figure 6. LeeAnn's grandparent's home in Jamaica.



Figure 7: A view from LeeAnn's home in Jamaica.



“I would still love to go back once I retire from practicing law here in the U.S. I was thinking that maybe I could then start a law firm in Jamaica. I would love to go back!” There is a yearning and almost distant look in her eyes that suggested that—at least for a brief moment—

her thoughts had already done her heart's bidding. The conversation is taken up by Zeek and Ashley.

Zeek's bold and playful voice pipes in. As she fiddles with her Ipod, shuffling from Indie music to one of the many songs of her favorite rock band, Skid'nevely, that hails from Trinidad and Tobago, Zeek weighs in on the conversation. "T&T is me! I'm proud of it. I have big small-island pride. I can't keep it down. I won't keep it down. So, I keep my friends on Facebook and Myspace and I use instant messenger. My T&T friends write on my Wall. I have all their pics and know what's going on in their lives. And, because of my age, my peers are important. They matter. And, like I said before, it's important for me to know what going on in the place where I come from. It's made me who I am. So, I'm always gonna keep that part of my life."

Figure 8. Zeek's view of Home.



There is an air of confidence about her. Zeek gestures to the map of Trinidad and Tobago hanging on the wall of the living room. “Right now, I’m thinking about going to the University there. Yeah, it’s one of my options because I want to live a couple of years there. There’s just something about being from another place and then getting to go back. But, even if I don’t move back right away, I know my children must live there—if only for a while. They’ve got to know where they’re from.”

Usually quiet, Ashley listens to the exchange. The words tug at the heart. She is torn. Her mixed feelings bring pain. Ashley wants in on the conversation. “I miss it. It’s been two years now that I’ve left Jamaica. I’ve never been back. I feel bad going back to my friends and stuff, because I feel like I probably forgot them. I ain’t really called them or anything since I’ve been here. They’ll think that I’ve turned.” The poem, *Strive*, holds an important message. In a haunting voice, Ashley whispers, “He wrote that poem for me.

So as part a yu plan

Yuh fi have ambition

And the Almighty one as yuh foundation

Hey, nuh bada get rich an’ switch

Because that is definitely wrong

Mi a beg uhnu, don’t forget your friends and where yuh come from.

Haltingly, she offers, “I always hear his voice. ‘Don’t turn. Don’t turn, Ashley.’ But, I’ve never been back.” Her long fingers distractedly smooth the edges of the paper. Hers has been a battle between loyalties forged in her home country and the expectations of success.

“I’m gonna make it.” she vows. “I’m gonna prove that I haven’t turned—that I haven’t forgotten. I’ll make them proud. I don’t want to lose that part of me. Even if I don’t ever go

back...No, I don't think I'll lose it. Once I make up my mind that that's not going to happen, it's not going to happen! I want to keep in touch with them because we share a common thing. I don't think I would allow myself to ever forget that. I want to look back. I don't want to *not* look back." Eyes wide and glassy, Ashley stares into her past. She cries.

Epilogue

LeeAnn's poem, *A Woman*, reminds me that *we* (for I include myself here) have left our Caribbean motherland. Yet, like the strong woman that she is, our Caribbean mother stands proud. And, like a good mother, she waits—ready to embrace her prodigal sons and daughters. She waits for her children to come back Home:

I birthed my children

I watched them grow and leave me

And I am still standing here

My children created nations

I watched these nations prosper

Then dwindle away

And, I'm still standing here.

I watched my husband

Grow from a boy to a man

I cared for him 'til he too left me

And I am still standing here

I reached for my friends when they stumbled

But I didn't always catch them

And I am still standing here
So when they ask me do I doubt myself
I say no
Because I am still standing here.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided narratives of the major findings from this study. The findings were presented in the form of the overarching narrative *Going Back Home*. I explored four storylines that focused on the participants' views of success, and their cultural identities and literacy practices: If You Can Make It Here, Dealing with Difference, Sounding American, and A Place Called Home. In the following chapter, I go on to use the theoretical lenses from Bakhtin (1981), Fanon (1967, 2004), Freire (1987, 2003), and Gee (1999, 2001), and the research questions to discuss the central issues raised in *Going Back Home*.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The overarching research question guiding the narrative analysis of the data in this study was: How do immigrant Caribbean adolescents see themselves within the context of United States schools, and what are the consequences of their identities for their literacy practices? In the previous chapter I constructed the narrative, *Going Back Home*, to reflect the participants' literacy practices and their identities as learners and Caribbean immigrants in the United States. The form and content of *Going Back Home* offered a narrative representation of the issues the three Caribbean immigrant adolescents negotiate in academic and social settings, and the literacy practices they use to achieve success in schools and their daily lives in the United States while grappling with their cultural identities.

In this chapter, I expand on the narrative analysis by drawing directly on the works of Bakhtin (1981,1986), Fanon (1967, 2004), Freire (1987, 2003), and Gee (1999) as lenses for interpreting the literacy and identity-making practices of the adolescents across the intersecting spaces of home, school and community. I use the three research sub-questions to ground the issues raised in the discussion: (a) How do the adolescents perceive themselves as learners? (b) How do the adolescents talk about their academic experiences as Caribbean immigrant learners? (c) In what types of literacy practices do the adolescents engage? These three research questions drive the discussion in this chapter. However, in keeping with my argument that identities, literacy practices and contexts are fluid and not discrete categories, I choose to organize and present the discussion to reflect my stance. I offer the metaphor of a cultural dialogue, from

which to discuss the participants' academic experiences, their literacy practices, and their perceptions of themselves. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss some key implications of the findings in this study, and offer directions for future research.

Engaging in Cultural Dialogue

As immigrants, the three young women in this study are compelled to address and respond to multiple contexts that span host (United States), Home (Caribbean nations) and home (households in the United States) settings. In order to negotiate these various contexts, the young women become active participants across key aspects of their social worlds. The young persons' multiple group memberships highlight their fluid movements across identity groups, and sociocultural contexts. Ashley, LeeAnn, and Zeek each recognize the need to find ways to cross sociocultural boundaries, and connect the various contexts in which they operate.

These three young persons each draw directly on what they have learned in their Caribbean Homes in order to navigate the challenges of migration and transition to the host society in the United States. Henry (2001) in her study on Caribbean female immigrant adolescent students argued that immigrant adolescents cross both physical and psychological boundaries in traveling north to the mainland. This view of migration further complexifies the social dynamic because, in many ways, migration represents geographic and sociocultural transitions that challenge each adolescent's knowledge, literacy practices and sense of self. However, in this study I note that each of the young women uses the Home as a central point of reference. The values and practices within the Home contexts become resources for negotiating other social spaces. Yet, the specific practices of each context reinforce the young persons' responses to the dynamics of each context. Their responses would suggest therefore, that it is primarily the participants' *immigrant identity* that is an initial, salient aspect of their perceptions

of themselves. Thus, I take the position that, in responding to the worldviews, values, and social practices of the Home and host societies and the home environments, the three participants in this study each finds herself engaging in *cultural dialogue*.

I offer the concept of cultural dialogue to represent the active negotiation of multiple and often competing cultural models of the home, Home and host environments. According to Gee (1999), “cultural models tell people what is typical or normal from the perspective of a particular Discourse” (p. 720). In taking this view, I am suggesting that each context has its shared and accepted ways of being in the world. As newcomers to a given context, individuals are required to learn and engage with the practices valued within that specific context.

At this point, I draw on Bakhtin’s (1981) *dialogic* theory that is based on the key assumption that meaning-making is a social process that involves the use of language to co-construct and shape meanings. According to Bakhtin, every word and sign system become active participants because “the living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads woven by socio-ideological consciousness” (p. 276). In using Bakhtin’s dialogic theory as part of my framework for understanding the participants’ experiences, I take the position that, more so as immigrants, the three participants come up against the tensions of competing ideological forces. These ideological forces present themselves in the form of the *authoritative discourse*—the centripetal force of unifying or homogenous thoughts, actions, and values—and the *internally persuasive discourse*—the centrifugal force that attempts to decenter the dominant discourse. Bakhtin stated:

An individual’s becoming, an ideological process is characterized by a sharp gap between...the authoritative word (religious, political, moral; the world of a father, of

adults and of teachers etc.) that does not know internal persuasiveness...[the] internally persuasive word that is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society. (p. 342)

Thus, the ways in which the participants go about experiencing life and school in the United States suggest that they are responding to the authoritative word and persuasive words inherent in each context. Further, the meanings that the participants make reflect their engagement in dialogue across their various social and cultural contexts.

I, therefore, apply the concept of a cultural dialogue as a way of thinking about the literacy practices of the three adolescents as they work through the challenges of new schooling, and social and cultural contexts. In examining the ways the three immigrant young women go about their lives, I am suggesting that these young persons are actively negotiating multiple and sometimes conflicting practices and world views. Immigrants arrive in the United States with previously learned cultural values and acquired cultural ways of behaving and communicating (Ogbu, 1995). Each young person in this study brought her own cultural baggage from her native country. Each Caribbean nation has its own cultural models, and the three young persons have each been socialized into the sociocultural practices of their communities. The values and world views of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Caribbean influence how the adolescent *reads the word and the world* (Freire, 1987).

By interacting with their various contexts, the adolescents are actively engaging in *addressing and responding* to the discourses across geographic and sociocultural spaces (Bakhtin, 1981). I see immigration creating cross-cultural and intercultural spaces that compel the three immigrant adolescents to actively respond to multiple and sometimes conflicting cultural models. The participants' responses may require them to acknowledge the ways in which

they are positioned by particular cultural models, and to re-author and re-position themselves within these spaces. More importantly, the findings in this study illustrate that, for the three young persons, the values and sociocultural practices of their Caribbean Homes are central to the ways in which the three adolescents transition and experience their new lives in the United States. Thus, the young persons' perceptions of themselves as learners, their approaches to school, and the choices that they make regarding their literacy practices are in direct response to their lives back Home.

How Do Adolescents Perceive Themselves as Learners?

The three participants' word-world responses to competing ideological forces are shaped by current and past experiences. Having been socialized into the cultural models of their native countries, the young women must also engage with the norms, practices, and frames of references within the United States schools and communities. It is the meeting and intersection of contexts that compel the young women to take adopt, adapt, and/or reject certain practices from host and Home communities. The three young women find that because they are now living and attending school in the United States, the United States mainstream values influence their own social practices, and broaden their views of the world, by offering additional lenses from which to view the world and themselves.

However, I also believe that the shaping is not one-sided. The young women's presence and participation in the United States classrooms and communities also influence the interactions within those spaces. When the young women present alternative cultural models in the host society, this compels their United States teachers and peers to address and respond to the "difference" that the young women bring, and actively position themselves and the young women in specific ways. Consequently, I contend that because mutual shaping of the individual

and communities occurs within and across social contexts, it is important to view each young person's stories as a response to multiple contexts and experiences.

Doing Home Work

Education and school play a critical role in the adolescents' transition to life in the United States. The findings show that the young women draw on their cultural resources to successfully negotiate their classrooms in the United States. The language, values and beliefs, and the social, and cultural networks of Home/home (Caribbean and United States households) become tools and resources for organizing relationships and negotiating group memberships.

The value of education and school is clearly articulated in the Home/home. To a great extent, these Home/home values become the authoritative discourse to which the young women respond: poor grades are not acceptable and failure is not an option. Bakhtin (1981) stated that individual cannot argue with the authoritative voice—the individual must either accept or reject its authority. The adolescents internalize the standards and expectations required in their home and their native countries. At no point do the adolescents dispute the importance of education or the fact that they are expected to succeed in school. Bakhtin argues that the authoritative word, “demands that we acknowledge it; that we make it our own” (p. 342). For example, Ashley would often point out that: “They wouldn't be very happy to know that I came here and did worse.” The message here is that grades, tests and academic success are important. The participants appear to value the importance of making good grades, receiving honors and awards, and achieving a professional career.

It is worth noting that, to a great extent, the participants seemed to have internalized the perceptions that they will achieve success by default of their Jamaican and Trinidadian upbringing. For example, LeeAnn's claims that Caribbean students do well in school as a result

of the values of parents, are taken up in various ways by the other participants. By offering other reasons that include the Caribbean educational system, the participants view the Caribbean background as a resource. In the case of the three participants, the United States educational systems are viewed as peripheral to their achieving academic success. This positive view of the Caribbean aligns with the notion of culture difference and cultural superiority offered by Hintzen (2002), Vickermann (1999), and Waters (1994, 1999). According to these writers, Caribbean Blacks attribute their success in the United States to their upbringing. What the participants' views suggest is that if they were not Jamaican or Trinidadian or Caribbean, they would not have been as successful. Though this argument appears somewhat contradictory given the young persons' strong sense of selves, I believe that their strong identities are directly related to their Caribbean identities.

Even so, I cannot offer the argument of a Caribbean ethnic identity and cultural superiority, without critiquing it. Though the participants place an inordinate amount of emphasis on their Caribbean Homes, the issue of their educational backgrounds must be addressed. In the case of Zeek and LeeAnn, the academic primary school preparation they received in their native countries directly contributed to their continued academic success in the United States. On one hand, the educational backgrounds of these two young women are consistent with Grasmuck's and Grosfuguel's (1998), and Pedraza's and Rumbaut's (1996) argument that immigrants from a privileged class and educational backgrounds are able to access opportunities to migrate, and consequently compete favorably in the United States schools. Zeek's private schooling in Trinidad and the United States, as well as LeeAnn's focus on schooling, and the fact that her parents are educators, support these writers argument about the selectivity of immigration. It is

worth noting, however, that the schooling experiences and social class all form part of the participants' experiences of being Jamaican and Trinidadian.

The adolescents use Home/home discipline and the value of education as an ethical compass to direct their paths to success in the United States. To realize the expectations for success by parents, relatives and teachers back Home, the adolescents each turn to the values of the Home/home that emphasize discipline and hard work as resources. Collectively, the three adolescents have embraced the view of Caribbean peoples as hard-working, and willing to overcome barriers to success. The participants use a range of tools and strategies including symbolic life lessons, parental models, native values and Caribbean academic base, to work through the cultural dissonance that occurs as newcomers to the United States education system and pedagogical practices.

Also, it is important to point out that the participants have nuanced definitions of success and approaches to achieving success. Consistently, the participants are seen to draw on their home and Home values including parental modeling and discipline. However, looking across the three participants, there is evidence to suggest that the participants have varying practices. Zeek appears not as committed as LeeAnn and Ashley, to always being at the top of their classes or being the best in school. Zeek talks about "doing well" and "doing her best". Though Zeek is focused on doing what is necessary to achieve her goals, she does not appear to be driven to be the best at all times. Zeek's experiences also offer another layer in understanding the notion of success in that Zeek also defines success in terms of the social aspects of her life. She is committed to becoming well-rounded in terms of her active participation in her various social networks in and out of school. Zeek's approach is in contrast with LeeAnn, who sees her extra curricular activities as helping to build her resume for her college application.

In addition, in the case of Zeek and Ashley, their beliefs in God tie in directly with their notions of success. Zeek believes that because God is central in her life, He will guide her in the right direction, and her efforts will be rewarded. For Zeek, displaying doubts that her best is not good enough, shows lack of faith in God's plan for her. Ashley, on the other hand, sees her hard work and being the best in everything, as a way to give praise to God for the opportunities He has provided her. I contend that even though the goals of academic success are consistent among the three participants, reasons guiding their actions and approaches are varied.

I concede that in many respects, with regard to the importance of education, the discourses of each of the participant's home and their United States schools align. The value placed on education and academic success is consistent across the cultural contexts of the Caribbean and the United States. Consequently, this common valuing of education *facilitates* dialogue between the participants and their school environments in the United States, and by extension, supports the adolescents' abilities to achieve success. The participants' attitudes to school support Ogbu's (1987, 1995) cultural ecological theory that socialization in the home, particularly for the immigrant, allows for seamless movement across social spaces. The alignment of values around education and schooling suggests that the participants are more willing to adopt appropriate attitudes such as working hard and persevering at academic tasks. Consequently, though the social identities and cultural frames of reference of the immigrants may often be different, in terms of education they are not necessarily ambivalent or oppositional. Ogbu (1995) argued that it is this complementarity of education and schooling that facilitates the immigrant students' abilities and willingness to cross cultural and language boundaries.

However, a more critical look at the participants' experiences of school reveals points of tension. I contend that, though the adolescents may reorganize and rearticulate their resources in

order to achieve success in schools, the cultural work that they engage in does not necessarily facilitate meaningful dialogue in the classroom. There is evidence that the hegemonic texts of school—language, pedagogical practices and the curriculum—ultimately inform what takes place in the classroom, and what knowledge and practices are valued and perpetuated. In this study, LeeAnn and Zeek have discovered that key aspects of their Home cultures have to be practiced *in the home* and in a virtual space called Home. The classroom only affords these young women opportunities to actively participate in their learning and draw on their Home cultures in so far as it directly aligns with the dominant discourses and teaching and learning practices. Thus, the young women find that the alternative critical knowledge and practices that they bring to the classroom from Home/home have to be silenced in order to fully embrace the mainstream classroom culture and achieve academic success.

I would argue that the silencing of the participants' voice is connected to the centrality of the values and beliefs of Home and the inherent perceptions of "difference" imposed by the host society. The school and classroom contexts reinforce the participants' difference and lack of *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu's cultural capital theory suggests that the values attached to knowledge, skills, attitudes place persons at an advantage for achieving success in that society. The participants recognize that their cultural identities are not valued. Nieto (2002) stated that cultural identities such as language, dialect and, ethnicity are central to how students experience school. Nieto stated that "youngsters from some communities are placed at a disadvantage relative to their peers simply because of the experiences and identities. Understanding this reality means that power relations are a fundamental, although largely unspoken, aspect of school life" (p. 8). Thus, the adolescents' *difference* is not seen in terms of

what the adolescents can add or contribute to the learning space, but rather it is presented as a deficit.

In the case of LeeAnn and Zeek, they came to the United States with very positive identities as learners. However, they found that their positive senses of selves were challenged because of their language. These young persons see their cultural practices as important aspects in their personal development and in their academic careers. They consider the values of discipline and a strong work ethic as assets that are critical to their success. In addition, one participant, Ashley, did not have a positive academic experience in Jamaica, her view of the United States as a “fresh start”, and the support and high expectations of her parents and community back home, directly influence her positive identity. Even so, the young women find that some of their cultural practices are positioned as liabilities to success in school. The negative positioning by their peers and teachers compels the three young women to re-position themselves by using mainstream linguistic forms in their respective classrooms.

Despite the participants’ generally positive perceptions of themselves, they come up against hegemonic discourses that position them as “lacking”. Central to the deficit model is the view of cultural and linguistic minorities and Other. As newcomers, the young women were made very aware of their difference. The participants’ difference is emphasized because they did not always have the cultural vocabulary with which to communicate. They each admit to difficulty adjusting and communicating with teachers and peers because of their “thick” accents. Freire (1987), in critiquing what he called the “banking model” of education, argued that a deficit model approach to teaching and learning views the learner as *tabula rasa*. This reality puts the participants’ identities in tension as they must engage in dialogue with negative and

positive positionings. They are compelled to negotiate dual and conflicting models of themselves: lacking competence versus knowledgeable.

Even further, the role of school and the approaches to achieving success in school can appear significantly different to the immigrant adolescent. For example, Ashley comes to the host classroom and school with conflicting conceptions of how learning takes place within these environments. This is evident than in the cultural practice of “tryouts” to which Ashley refers. Ashley’s unwillingness to try out for extra curricular activities because “they’re just looking for the best”, suggests two diverse frames of reference regarding success and the role of school. Ashley’s experience of Jamaican cultural practice of inclusion—modeling, teaching and mentoring all students in school—contrasts with Ashley’s experiences of United States schools as exclusionary—one that does not allow for equal and active participation by all students. To this newcomer, school becomes a place for the *performance* of knowledge rather than the *acquisition* of knowledge, skills and competence. In terms of academic achievement, Ashley’s response to school and learning reveals that she does not view the host school as a place to *become* the best; rather school is a place to *be* the best. Ashley chooses not to participate or place herself in a situation where she may be further negatively positioned.

I see a disconnection between school and education, where the educative value and purpose of school is deemphasized and negated in the eyes of the immigrant adolescent. By extension, this perception further limits opportunities for the immigrant students’ active participation in school. The pedagogical practice of *trying out* is perceived as a threat to the participant’s academic success and identities: it increases possibility of failure (a reality that conflicts with her Home and personal values) and emphasizes her lack of cultural and socioeconomic capital.

In making this argument, I acknowledge that Ogbu (1995) argued otherwise, when he stated that immigrants do not view the dominant discourse of the host society negatively impacting their ethnic identities. He went on to argue that immigrants are therefore, more willing to participate in the cultural frame of reference of the dominant group, without perceiving such participation as a threat to their own minority culture or language. However, it is worth noting that, for some groups and individuals, socialization brings with it challenges to identity (Fanon, 1967; Gee, 1996; Holland et al., 1998). In the case of the adolescents in this study, when the mainstream culture conflicts fundamentally with or poses a threat to their native culture, the participants find ways to make use of and give precedence to the values of Home/home.

How Do Adolescents Talk About Their Academic Experiences?

The Language of Success

The participants' abilities to use multiple linguistic codes in relevant contexts, determine the levels of successful interaction they are able to have. Language, therefore, marks the user. Gee (1996) talked about how language and literacy are social practices and therefore tied to identity. I agree that language signals to the listener something—an important something—about who you are in the world. The participants in this study show tacit understanding that successful migration and smooth transitioning to the United States culture require careful preparation that included language. For example, in Jamaica, Ashley found her oral language being policed by her mother. Her language use was now directly connected to the United States, to migration, and, by extension, success in the United States society. In addition, after a brief time living in the United States, the three adolescents each “lost” or “changed” their Jamaican and Trinidad Patois and Creole and accents that identify them as belonging to the Caribbean. In order to enter and

pass as members of another Discourse group—United States society and schools—the young persons learn, practice and master using the oral *master discourse* of the host society.

Being able to read and write Standard English are not enough. The oral element is equally important. Sociocultural differences in expectations between students and teachers contribute to communication breakdown and impede school learning (Au & Mason, 1981; Obidah, 1998). The participants' essays, poems and reflections, reveal that each is proficient in writing in the power code, Standard English. Consistent "A" grades in English, along with at least seven poems published in school newspapers attest to their proficiency with the language. Yet, "success" moves beyond a 3.90 grade point average (GPA), or being able to *write* effectively in Standard English; success goes beyond the honors and awards, and passing tests. Success also means passing the social and cultural tests. Each participant believes that "they" (peers and teachers) could not, would not, and needed to understand her. There is tacit criticism and silencing of the positive Jamaicanness and Trinidadianess. By adapting to the language expectations of the host community, the participants seem to be demonstrating their understanding that language use helps determine success. In her research on immigrants and their children, Kirova (2007) pointed out that "language can help them to know how best to become what they may become in the new country" (p. 189). I would argue that Ashley's parent signals this when she urges Ashley to *talk properly*. The participant's language (accents and dialects), and how it is viewed by the members of the host country, have the power to position her as outsider.

I want to stress the point that because of the cultural differences in practice and expectations, language and accents become problematic for the participants who find themselves forced to silence their native tongue in favor of becoming Americanized—sounding American and talking properly. Even so, there is similar devaluing of the Caribbean Creoles and Patois as

“bad English” within the *Caribbean* classrooms because of the sociohistoric colonizing inferiority and ideology attached to the native languages and linguistic competencies (Fanon, 2004; Henry, 1998, 2001). However, for the immigrant, the tensions of the colonizing ideology is increased in the United States context when the immigrant’s mother tongues and dialects are equated with inferior cognitive abilities, and peers, teachers (and parents) may discourage children from expressing themselves in their native tongue (Henry, 1998; Solomon, 1992). The situation with each of the participants is no exception. Each has expressed concerns as to how her language and the expectations of teachers and peers negatively position her in the classroom.

As a result, with migration, language takes on a new role and relationship in each of the participant’s lives. The awareness of language broadens her awareness of herself as a Jamaican and Trinidadian immigrant. For example, in the case of Ashley, language no longer is limited to communicating with her family, teachers, peers, and fellow citizens back Home. Language took on a much more global meaning—it means communicating with the *outside* world. More so, the responses of the three participants’ United States peers and teachers signaled to each participant that her native language was not good enough to communicate on a global scale. The responses within the United States school community underscore the limits of the young person’s local language. The conflict regarding language use also signaled the need for her to start redefining her conceptions of the value of the native tongue and her relationship with language forms. Immigration, therefore, moves language out of a narrow conception and singular, immediate geographic space to a broader global and international space.

In one sense, language helps connect the adolescents to their heritage, but in another sense, language becomes a barrier to success because it is not valued in school. I believe this reality reinforces the view of language as political. The young persons in this study learn that

competence with the two codes (written Standard English and Creole) did not bring with it the cultural capital in spaces outside of the Home country and region. The participants' pride in and respect for the language of intimacy, and the value attached to each participant's identity did not garner similar respect on the world stage. For example, Zeek is frustrated that her Trinidad and Tobago dialect and colloquialisms are not valued and taken up by her United States peers. Ashley talks with pride about renowned Jamaican writers and dialect poets such as Louise Bennett, yet finds that in school, she must silence her Jamaican voice. At some point early in their transition, each young person recognizes that her linguistic difference hinders rather than helps her. As Fanon (1967) has argued, mastery of language affords remarkable power because "a man who has language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language" (p. 18). Thus, despite being proficient at using the written language, the participants opted to code switch and use the "language of success".

Language, according to Freire (1987, 2003) is a form of cultural empowerment. Thus, language is not innocent, but imbued with the historical, sociocultural and ideological belief systems of the speaker/listener and reader/writer (Bakhtin, 1981; Fanon, 1967; Freire, 1987). Just as the native language of the enslaved and colonized peoples were devalued, the immigrant learner finds that in transitioning to the United States, her native language is suppressed and silenced. Even further, the participants in this study *choose* to silence themselves in order to take up the dominant discourse. Yet, ironically, it is the centrality of the native language that speaks to the participants' identities, and to the ways they identify themselves as learners. Fanon (2004) makes the point that as long as individuals live in the duality in which *to be* is *to be like*, and *to be like* is *to be the oppressor*, liberation from oppression is impossible. Here, Fanon is arguing that successful adaptation of a new context places the individual in the position of self-inflicting

oppression. The participants' code switching to a United States accent now identifies the three young women as "belonging" to the United States. However, the three young persons' identification with their Caribbean Homes appears even more contradictory when the young persons do not sound like it. The participants find that changing their language use brings about added ramifications. The change of accent suggests a rejection of one's cultural and national identities—something that the adolescents grapple with privately and publicly.

When the participants silence their language of intimacy, and confine it to the Home/home, the practice brings with it another layer of conflict. Fanon (2004), in talking about the native's response to the colonial authority refers to the guilt and resistance associated with the use of the master discourse. Referring to the colonized person who strategically moves toward assimilation and success, Fanon points to the demands the move places on the colonized: "The native intellectual has clothed his aggressiveness in his barely veiled one to assimilate himself to the colonial world. He has used his aggressiveness to sense his own individual interests" (p. 60). The participants' responses reveal the struggle of competing identities. LeeAnn fears that, in losing her accent, she loses her sense of self. Hers is an internal struggle. Though having similar concerns about the change of accent, Ashley on the other hand, is forced to publicly confront these identity issues when her relatives in Jamaica call her actions and choices into question. "Are you afraid of the language? Are you ashamed of the language?" they ask. Their words underscore the realities of being perceived as having become "like them"—an outsider. Though the language of power brings greater opportunities for success, it also brings with it the fear of being perceived as the Other and fear of becoming and being the Other.

Each participant finds herself forced to respond to challenges that question her loyalty and pride in her cultural identities. Ball and Freedman (2004), contend that literacy is a political

choice. The choices learners make about what types of language to acquire and use are political, just as the decisions teachers make about what types of language to promote and accept in the classroom are political. Particularly for the immigrant, this political choice comes with the risk and shame of being positioned as a traitor to her heritage. The poem “Strive” holds an important message not only about the importance of attaining academic success, but also the importance of never forgetting one’s cultural identity:

So as part a yu plan

Yuh fi have ambition

And the Almighty one as yuh foundation

Hey, nuh bada get rich an’ switch

Because that is definitely wrong

Mi a beg uhnu, don’t forget your friends and where yuh come from.

However, having learned to make the cultural adjustment and learned the language needed to succeed in school, some of the adolescents’ political decisions now make them appear to *be the oppressor* by seeming to devalue their own cultural identities and shut down cultural dialogue.

In What Literacy Practices Do The Adolescents Engage?

In this section, I discuss the participants’ agentic use of literacy practices to consciously navigate their new environments. In keeping with my position on the interconnection of literacy and identity, I discuss the literacy practices of the adolescents in terms of their identity construction. I focus on how the participants negotiate competing discourses across multiple contexts.

Reauthoring Self

I take agency to represent the individual's "strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, relationships, cultural tools, and resources, and histories" (Moje, Enciso, & Lewis, 2007, p. 18). The adolescents' stories show that in many ways, they see themselves as consciously reflecting on their new communities, the benefits and challenges their cultural resources offered, and strategically making decisions that affect their lives. Ashley, LeeAnn, and Zeek continually struggle to find ways to respond to and address the losses and gains that arise from the decisions and choices they make. In the narrative, *Going Back Home*, the multiple discourses of language, culture, identity, and schooling are in tension. The young women find that they must respond to the often competing discourses of the values and sanctioned practices of the classroom, the guidance of parents, and expectations of teachers and friends from her native country.

One common feature of the agentic practices is that their actions are always closely tied to the Home/home values. An individual's response to new cultural institutions and values is shaped by her sociocultural histories (Holland et al., 1998). Though having the option to define success based on the normative values of the host country, the young persons each choose to look toward the home and Home to measure success. A close examination of the choices, and actions of each participant, reveals that the norms and expectations of the host communities may not always validate the Home or host cultures. The findings in this study support Sarroub's (2005) research study that identified conflicting sets of expectations between parents and community, and the school.

I contend that each young person actively responds to her various social contexts by resisting, repositioning and redefining self. Some adolescents resist cultural models in school and

are always crafting counter-discourses (Alvermann, Commeyras, Young, Randall, & Hinson, 1997; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990). The participants strategically use their connections to Home to circumvent some of what was lost in the migration. For example, their uses of language, passing academic tests, poetry writing, and online networks become ways to modify the silencing of their Caribbeanness.

However, I am unwilling to propose this argument of the participants' use of counter-discourses without offering a critique. The idea of counter-discourses suggests that the participants only position and reconstruct themselves as accepting or rejecting the authoritative discourses. This view of the individuals reconstructing self in embrace or in opposition of categories assigned by the host or Home suggests the operation of binaries. I believe that such a view implies that participants operate in discrete social spaces. However, this view conflicts with the concept of identities as multiple, fluid and socially-mediated contexts that overlap and intersect (Gee, 1999, Holland et al., 1998). Though I agree that the individual is subject to positioning by the dominant social discourses they encounter that regulate practices (Holland et al., 1998), I am arguing that the adolescents' draw on the discourses across cultures and contexts in their ongoing authoring of selves.

I believe that is within the act of responding and actively negotiating that the adolescent is validating her personal voice and agency. In discussing the identity of the colonized, Fanon (1967) stated, "Because it is a systematic negotiation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: In reality who am I?" (p. 250). In many ways, the dominant discourses of the host society challenge the young person's self image through its power to silence her voice.

I believe the notion of identity-making as an act of resistance offers some insights into the literacy practices of three adolescents. In talking about the native-colonizer relationship, Fanon (1967) argues that when the native is socialized into becoming the colonizer/Other, the native person eventually engages in forms of resistance. I see a link between Fanon's theory of the colonized and the immigrant adolescents' responses. Each participant finds ways to resist what she perceives as negative positioning. She creates opportunities to affirm herself by recognizing and using the power that mastery of language affords. For example, the young women master the mainstream language expectations. They diligently apply themselves in the classroom, and use personal writing to express themselves and forge relationships with the Caribbean Home. According to Bakhtin (1981) "The internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer ways to mean" (p. 346). I argue that the adolescents, in appropriating, reconceptualizing and/or rejecting certain literacy practices, they are in fact finding newer ways to mean.

I illustrate my point by offering Zeek's participation in online affinity groups as an example of sites of resistance. Zeek uses her online affinity groups to "perform being Trini"—a strategy for surviving or succeeding in the new flows and spaces (Miller & Slater, 2000). Unlike Ashley who resists the use of technology, Zeek actively uses the technology to constitute her ethnocultural identity. Zeek's appropriation of the online spaces and identity groups enables her to create dialogue between her two main social worlds (Trinidad and Tobago and the United States) by providing a common space with common social languages.

By creating her virtual community, Zeek is actively creating a space where mediated by digital language, the primary and secondary social languages—dialects of both cultures and Standard English—can co-exist and inform each other. She uses digital spaces to create hybrid

literacy practices where there is a mixture of social languages across geographic and cultural boundaries, previously separate and hierarchical linguistic forms (Bakhtin, 1981). By moving—if not removing—linguistic boundaries, Zeek tries to give all languages equal opportunities to enter the social relationships. I would argue that Zeek’s online literacy practices can be taken as a conscious re-authoring of her world by taking control over her relationships and language practices *outside of the school and classroom*.

Within her online communities, Zeek uses language as a positive identity marker. By assigning equal worth to her language, dialect and Caribbean identities, Zeek’s cultural resources are no longer positioned as deficits. In doing so, she is able to marshal her Caribbeanness. “To take control of language, speakers must give those words their own accent, infuse them in some way with their own intention—that is, deprivilege or dialogize the language, to render it an option among options, a world among worlds” (Holquist, 1981, pp. 426-487). Zeek creates and transforms social spaces that integrates her social worlds and validates the language and national identity.

I argue that the participants in this study are dialoguing with multiple discourses and using it to reframe themselves as learners and to find their voices. The more expert the young person becomes at using language, through in-school and out-of-school texts, the more conscious and deliberate use of power. The language user can consciously choose to have the “individual word retain their alien expression, but they can also be re-accentuated...[and] can be repeated with varying degrees of re-interpretation” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 91). Dyson (2003) alluded to this reconceptualizing of language practices in her own research on the classroom literacy practices of young children when she found that the learners brought discourse structures and styles of their unofficial worlds into the official school world, and deprivileged official school material in

the unofficial worlds (home). I believe that when placed in this new context, the participants' literacy practices signal their resourcefulness in participating in and creating communities across their various identities and linguistic forms.

The consciousness of self is not the closing of a door to communication, but rather provides an opening (Fanon, 2004). I view the adolescents' literacy and identity-making practices as opening up channels for communication. The participants actively negotiate and articulate their social and cultural identities across the multiple spaces of school, Home/home and communities. Their agentic acts show their purposive use of their cultural resources, and use of literacy to construct their identities as learners, individuals, and Caribbean immigrants.

Reflections on Cultural Dialogue

LeeAnn, Ashley and Zeek recognize that their new lives require them to actively engage in *multiple ways of being* within and across a range of contexts. Their actions reflect a critical awareness of culturally appropriate discourses and expectations of their new communities. More so, the participants rearticulate and renegotiate the various spaces in which they operate based on their own needs, literacy practices and cultural resources.

The participants' responses to their lived experiences open up opportunities for ongoing reclamation and reauthoring of identities and literacy practices. The findings from this study move beyond the binaries of assimilation or ethnic identification, to the recontextualization of identities and practices, across Home and host cultures. The modes of participation in the host society by these three young women reveal that they are consciously and actively engaging in cultural work. I would argue that their literacy practices move beyond the mere passive reaction to situations and events. The young persons position themselves as agents, acting in life worlds with moral complexity (Riessman, 2000).

Education, schooling and financial stability were the main reasons for migrating to the United States. In two cases, the parents' decision to migrate was directly linked to providing their children with access to a wider range of educational opportunities. However, the young persons have come to understand that the decision to migrate for education and economic success came with emotional, social and cultural price tags. It appears that in order to gain academic, economic and social success in their United States, these immigrant adolescents must give up and/or suppress their Caribbean identities. The dominant norms of their United States schools and communities undermine the participants' language and cultural identities. For example, the participants' change in accent, though it may appear to facilitate easier social transition, is complexified by the loss of identity and loss of place that it also signals. In losing their native accents, these young persons risk no longer being identified as Caribbean, while not ever truly being (or wanting to be) seen as American. Though some of the practices in the home create opportunities for the young persons to hold onto cultural identities, and circumvent some of what was lost in the move, migration, in many ways, posed a threat. Each young person learned that going foreign required her to sacrifice something in order to gain another.

In their stories of how they choose to "be" in their new worlds, the participants in this study continually struggle to find ways to "make it". The young women earn high honors and grades, they make their parents, relatives and native country proud by being the good student, and fit in with their peers by being "less different". On the other hand, success results in the silencing of individual voice through the loss of public space to practice aspects of their identities in the form of their language and cultural knowledge. For these three young women, "success" as has its price—one that each in her own way, is willing, and sometimes forced to pay in order to make it in the United States.

I agree with Foner (2005) that place matters. However, linked to the losses and gains that comes with negotiating the host society, is the sense of placelessness that the immigrant experiences. I offer the concept of placelessness to reflect the loss of meaningful connections with home and host countries that is linked to migration. Migration puts the newcomer in the precarious position of being *without place* and continually trying to find place and space. I say this because, in the case of the participants, they find themselves not only having to give up their language, and cultural practices in order to belong, but also their physical geographic space in their Caribbean nations. They no longer live in Jamaica or Trinidad and Tobago nor do they interact intimately with the social and political landscapes of these countries. This physical, and to some extent sociocultural distancing, signals the magnitude of the loss of place that these young persons experience. Though they may still embrace their respective society's values and practices, LeeAnn and Ashley in particular, admit that they would be "lost" in Jamaica because they have not visited regularly, and have not been afforded the opportunities to grow and change with their Caribbean Home.

Similarly, I would argue that, in the host country, the young persons in this study experience a sense of placelessness. The tensions of possibly no longer being seen as belonging to the Caribbean, are heightened by their awareness that, in many ways, they are not seen belonging to the United States. Despite the young persons' efforts to become Americanized, they are aware of their difference. They are unable to fully express their native voice, yet are unwilling to completely deny their native voice and embrace the mainstream cultural models of the United States. I would even argue that the participants' use of the term "Americanized" suggests their awareness of their non-native or innate identity; it implies that this American identity is not their own, but one that they must cultivate. Even further, I believe that because of

the young persons' purposeful attempts to connect with their Caribbean heritage, completely "belonging" to the United States is not an option. Consequently, I argue that these young persons experience a sense of placelessness because they are no longer seen as fully belonging to the Caribbean or the United States.

Migration also requires reconceptualization of the notion of success and the ways in which to go about achieving success. The young persons' experiences of the social and cultural practices learned in school, in addition to their own cultural resources result in the reorganizing and rearticulating of their resources (Dyson, 2003). The three young persons in this study, consciously draw on their values as Caribbean natives to facilitate success in the United States. Back Home becomes central to the young persons' literacy practices and identities. Ultimately, their responses seem to suggest that it is not primarily the school practices and structures in the United States that determine success, but how they choose to respond to these contexts.

A Dialogue: Bakhtin, Fanon, and Freire

I see the works of Bakhtin (1981, 1986), Fanon (1967, 2004), and Freire (1987, 2003) offering a richer understanding of the complex layers of issues of language and identity, and the connections to place. Our identities and our language uses are not accidental. Neither are the cultural tools that the individual uses to represent his/her identities. Place matters: the individual's social place affords and denies certain experiences, and ways of being in the world. Bakhtin stated that each individual's sociocultural background informs language choices and responses to social interactions. I choose to add to Bakhtin's perspective, Fanon's theory of colonization that allows for a broader, global and crosscultural view of language and identity by recognizing that world histories ultimately determine contemporary practices, and the lenses with which we see the world. I see Fanon's work providing historical balance and depth to Bakhtin's

and Freire's perspectives on language, literacy and identity by directly framing these perspectives against an historical backdrop. Fanon directs us to not only notice the importance of contemporary and national contexts, but also to move beyond specific geographic spaces to a more global contexts and world views.

Fanon (1967, 2003) writing during colonialism reminds us that it is the historicity of the world's linguistic "chain of utterances" (Bakhtin, 1981) that eventually shape the ways in which we "read the world and the world" (Friere, 2004). The individual's sense of self, and the choices made in operating in the world are directly derived from the ways language has come to position and, in turn, is used to position individuals. For Fanon, centuries of colonization cannot be downplayed when examining how all individuals—the colonized *and* the colonizer—make meaning. He contends that the sociopolitical and economic structures, practices, and values that come out of colonization and imperialism are those that eventually become privileged in postcolonial societies. Therefore, the pervasive power of colonization and imperialism cannot be seen as separate from contemporary contexts. They directly and indirectly inform the conditions of existence of all colonized peoples and their descendants, and how these peoples come to *be* in the world. I believe that in holding to the view of meaning-making as a social act, Fanon pushes us to see individuals' collective experiences as more than immediate communities and personal histories. Though in some cases, the cultural vocabulary and tools may have changed—from enslavement, colonization and serfdom—the tensions of the dialogic process of communication and meaning-making continue to be dependent on and framed by these contexts.

More importantly, Fanon's (1967, 2003), Bakhtin's (1981, 1986), and Friere's (1987, 2004) theories of language, identity and society highlight the centrality of history, power and agency. In using the works of these theorists as lenses in this study, the findings suggest that

social experiences, including school, home, and community interactions, are by no means neutral. Even further, the more polarized the experiences, the greater the tensions, and more seemingly aggressive the acts of agency. Within hegemonic postcolonial structures, marginalized groups experience ongoing and inescapable dilemmas of equating success and power with a process of *becoming*, *being like*, and *being* the oppressor.

According to Freire (2003), “Dialogue is a way of knowing.” I agree with Freire’s characterization of dialogue when he stated, “I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing” (p. 7). Therefore, to engage in cultural dialogue in classrooms, communities, and wider societies demands a willingness to enter that tension-filled space where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide. Within this Bakhtinian (1981) heteroglossic space, individuals are forced to confront, acknowledge and call into question the range of discourses, values and privileges afforded meaning-making practices. The conscious decisions and acts of engagement, compliance and resistance to language and the word, are all part of the dialogic nature of communication. Perhaps it is here that the “heteroglossic” forces lie: that centrifugal force of the struggle for individual voice; and that resistance against this notion of “one language of truth”.

How one comes to be in a place is inextricably tied to how one *comes to be* in this place. To some extent, in attempting to better understand issues of language and identities can help work toward an ongoing redefinition and representation of meanings. However, the positive space for this restorying will not be forthcoming without a direct confrontation of how our histories and the histories of the contexts directly shape the actions, reactions and interactions within those spaces. Without this, individuals continue to struggle to have their words and worlds directly author the grand narrative of their lives.

Reflections on the Research Process

In this research study, it was important that I let the participants tell their stories, and let the study be about them. However, by interacting with the participants and sharing their lives, work, words and worlds, they have also helped to inform my thinking. Their words and worlds have and continue to shape my own words and worlds. During the research process, my participants and I created a space to talk about our experiences based on the sociocultural and historical contexts that we brought to the conversations. The space of the interview became a co-construction site for knowledge (Kvale, 1996). Our dialogic relationships afforded us opportunities to author and re-author our identities as learners, students, teachers and Caribbean immigrants. Even so, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me that in the research process, when as researchers, we ask our participants to share their stories with us, in the process of sharing and retelling, we change their stories *in being changed by their stories*. I, therefore, acknowledge that the narratives presented in this study, are my re-presentations of their representations of themselves.

In presenting the adolescents' narratives, and my interpretations, I present the three young women as writers, critical thinkers and transformers of the conditions of their existence (Gordon, 2004). I believe that our interviews and the entire research process became *another* setting that provides opportunities for the participants to redefine themselves. Riessman (1993) argued that narrators can position themselves as victims of one circumstance or another in their stories or as agentic beings who assume control over events and who purposefully initiate and cause action. LeeAnn, Ashley, and Zeek each choose the latter. For example, by consistently doing well in school and forming social networks, the three young women each enact their agency in the classroom, homes, and communities by demonstrating their intellectual prowess

and social skills. However, the research process afforded them opportunities to talk about their actions, and self-identity as agentic. The telling of their own stories allowed the young persons to name their world, and in doing so, affirm their world, and themselves. In this sense, the research process offered the adolescents other opportunities to find voice and to position themselves as mature and intelligent individuals.

As Freire (1987) has shown, the word is inextricably tied to the world. In addition, Smith (1999) pointed out that by naming the world, people name their realities and retain as much control over meanings as possible. If as Bakhtin (1981) stated, the word in living conversation, provokes an answer, then in the sharing of their stories, LeeAnn, Ashley, Zeek, and I call for a response.

Implications for Practice and Research

What Do the Findings Mean For Classrooms, and for Policymakers and Practitioners?

The findings in this study provide a backdrop for rethinking policy, pedagogical and research approaches. Alvermann and Eakle (2007) in referring to in-school and out of school literacies argued that to divorce those literacies from the very spaces that give them meaning limits what teachers, researchers, and policy makers can learn from students' experiences. I agree with the authors that "Listening to and observing youth as they communicate their familiarity with multiple kinds of texts across space, place, and time can provide valuable insights into how to approach both instruction and research" (p. 28). Because immigrant adolescents are always reading the world and using their backgrounds as lenses, policymakers and pedagogues (teachers, teacher educators and researchers) need to continually look for ways to meaningfully engage with these students' cultural resources and frames of references for learners who are always going back Home.

What Does This Mean For Policymakers and Pedagogues?

Education vs. schooling. There needs to be a renewed commitment from policymakers, administrators to providing quality and equitable access to education, and to success for all students including immigrant students. The commitment to educational success that comes from the immigrant adolescent learners and their families is not enough. Reinforcing the educative focus of school is critical. Schools must implement programs that facilitate meaningful participation by all students, and create a culture of learning. More specifically, I see the notions of school, education and academic success related to the messages being sent to young persons about the expectations for and definitions of success, and how success should be achieved.

Ongoing mentoring into mainstream social and academic activities and practices that are part of school culture is necessary without compromising immigrants learners' individual cultural identity. Educational systems cannot place all the responsibility for success on immigrant adolescent learners and the families. The existing folk theory of model minorities "making it" despite all odds, though true based on the findings in this study, can no longer be used as an excuse to make the immigrant invisible in the mainstream classroom. In addition, the view of learning and education must not be restricted to passing the test. Such a narrow view of school and participation in school encourages the cultivation of students as *tabula rasa*, decreases broad learning opportunities and active participation, and perpetuates the view of schooling as oppressive.

Teacher education. Teachers must be taught ways to examine themselves, their biases, and to find creative ways to value the intersecting layers of students' lives. I suggest a dialogic critical inquiry classroom model (Fecho, 2004). By first examining their views of learning and teaching, and culture, teachers begin to avoid the potential dangers of accepting a deficit model

of cultural and linguistic communities. Teacher educators must invite preservice teachers to see future classrooms as a space where students' interests, cultural resources, knowledge and skills form not just the starting point, but the center of the curriculum.

Immigrant learners exercise their intercultural capital in terms of the knowledge and dispositions that allow for multiple lines of differences (Lam, 2006). There is need to redesign teacher preparation and teaching practices that draw on the learners' experiences and competences. Classrooms and schools must become places that move beyond the view of immigrant learners as lacking. Instead, teacher educators and teachers must also do intercultural work by moving toward seeing immigrant learners as sociocultural experts who navigate and move across local, national and international boundaries, and practices, and who practice this knowledge in classrooms. It is not enough to acknowledge—rather, there must be a move to action. According to Adams and Kirova (2007), “when teacher preparation does not include sufficient training in cultural diversity, intercultural understanding, and multicultural education, teachers may misunderstand or misinterpret as culturally inappropriate students' attempts to succeed in their environments and either may not support or may rejects such attempts” (p. 15).

Culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive teaching (Ladson Billings, 1995; Delpit, 1998) offers a way of opening up communication across cultural worlds by acknowledging and addressing the cultural needs and literacy practices that all learners bring to the classroom. The learners' interests, background and competencies must become the base for learning in the classroom. Classroom teachers must not only acknowledge that all learners have “culture” (including themselves) but also to engage in teaching and learning practices that directly reflect this knowledge.

This culturally responsive pedagogy requires a reconceptualizing of who are learners, how students learn and what learning is valued. I believe that this approach to classroom instruction acknowledges and validates student differences, and advocates for a cultural integrity through the creative modification of curriculum, teaching and learning practices and interaction. Darling-Hammond (1997) argued that teachers need to understand and be prepared to positively respond to the differences that may arise from factors such as culture, language, family, community, gender and prior schooling. Thus, teachers would need to shape individual classroom practice to support dialogue among persons from linguistically and culturally diverse groups.

One such approach to opening up dialogue in classrooms would be through creating writing and learning communities. This requires teachers to find ways to better create opportunities for students to find their voices in classrooms. Focusing on writing instruction creates a safe space to give voice particularly when the linguistic barrier is oral. In doing so, the classroom moves toward becoming an inclusive space that increases learning opportunities.

Directions for Future Research

Gender. A related research direction that comes directly out of the study is a focus on gender and the ways in which gender influences the immigrants' experiences in the United States. There is need for studies that look at how gender impacts the attitudes of the young persons and the expectations in the home. Though there is a significant body of literature on gendered experiences among other immigrant groups (Sarroub, 2005; Stritikus & Nguyen, 2007), Henry's (2001) research with Caribbean girls underscores the need to broaden the research focus to get at a range of dynamics that influence the immigrant experience.

Social class. Another important area of research is the issue of social class and immigrants. I agree that there have been many studies on how race, language and ethnicity affect the socioeconomic status of adult immigrants (Waters, 1994, 1999; Vickerman, 1999). However, the underlying premise of much of the research has been that immigrants come in search of better lives—economic prosperity. Because this is not always the experience of all immigrants, there is need to conduct research that compares the attitudes, experiences and ethnic identities of immigrant youth who come from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds in the Caribbean.

Schooling. Caribbean youth who have had schooling in the Caribbean believe that their Caribbean education provided the strong foundation that supports their academic success in the United States. Comparative research studies that examine the structures, practices and curricula in the Caribbean and the United States would be worthwhile. The findings from this study prompt the question: What are Caribbean educators doing in their own schools and educational systems that facilitate Caribbean students' success abroad? Research that focuses on the educational systems will explore what can be learned from the Caribbean educational systems and pedagogical practices that can further support immigrant students' transition to the United States school system, and inform the teaching and learning practices within United States classrooms.

Family and ethnic enclaves. I agree with Foner (2001) who stressed the need for more studies on the dynamics of family life. The findings of this study reinforce the importance of the home environments in the lives of the immigrant youth. Conducting ethnographies that shadow the adolescents in the home will provide a more in-depth view of the lived experiences and how the ethnic culture—to which a large body of the literature refers—is practiced in the home.

How do family expectations and immigrant adolescent experiences compare with that of adolescents in ethnic enclaves? Much of the research on adolescents focuses on second generation youth in the ethnic enclaves. Research that looks across traditional and non-traditional gateway cities would offer a richer view of the Caribbean immigrant experience.

Online spaces. In this study, I offered the view of the immigrant youth as cultural workers capable of reshaping global and local settings. Therefore, the digital spaces in which the immigrant youth operate offer viable research directions. One such avenue might be to explore the linkages between academic literacies in school and in online spaces. I believe it is important that as researchers, we consider how immigrant students' sociocultural identities, language and schooling are influenced by online spaces.

Summary

In this chapter, I used the works of Bakhtin (1981, 1986), Fanon (1967, 2004), Freire (1987, 2003), and Gee (1999) as lenses for understanding the literacy practices of the three Caribbean adolescent participants, and how their experiences as immigrants shape their identities. Guiding my discussion was the overarching research question: How do immigrant Caribbean adolescents see themselves within the context of United States schools, and what are the consequences of their identities for their literacy practices? I offered the metaphor of a cultural dialogue to address the intersection of literacy and identity issues across the Home/home, school and community. In this chapter, I directly addressed the three research sub-questions (a) How do the adolescents perceive themselves as learners? (b) How do the adolescents talk about their academic experiences as Caribbean immigrant learners? (c) In what types of literacy practices do the adolescents engage? In the sections that followed, I expanded on the theoretical lenses informing my interpretations of the data, and I reflected on the research

process. Finally, I discussed some key implications of the findings in this study, and offered directions for future research.

Conclusion

This narrative analysis explored immigrant Caribbean adolescents' experiences of transition to the United States. By conducting this study, I sought to understand how immigrant adolescents negotiated the new contexts of United States schools and communities. The focal issues were the adolescents' literacy practices and their identities as Caribbean immigrant learners. I asked the overarching research question: How do immigrant Caribbean adolescents see themselves within the context of United States schools, and what are the consequences of their identities for their literacy practices? In order to gain a deeper understanding of the research question, three sub-questions guided my analysis of the data.

1. How do the adolescents perceive themselves as learners?
2. How do the adolescents talk about their academic experiences as Caribbean immigrant learners?
3. In what types of literacy practices do the adolescents engage?

Metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia in the United States was the setting for the eight months of fieldwork from April- November, 2007. The participants in this study were three female high school students who migrated from their Caribbean homes of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Using ethnographic research methods, I collected interview, observational and documentary data including photographs and personal and official school documents. I collected data in the participants' homes, schools and communities. Narrative was the principal mode of data collection and method of analysis. Drawing on the works of Cortazzi (1993) and Gee (1999), I designed a method for analyzing and representing the narratives.

In the narrative *Going Back Home*, the key findings revealed the centrality of the Home culture and values. The participants made ongoing connections with their native countries in order to navigate the United States schools and society. Points of tension included language use, approaches to learning and teaching, online identity groups, and the importance of Home. The three young women specifically drew on their backgrounds to move within and among their various contexts. The findings suggest the need for teachers, teacher educators, and researchers to view adolescents as agentic, cultural brokers with sophisticated knowledge of cultural norms and literacy practices of diverse social groups that cross cultural, geographic and linguistic borders.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

Experiences of West Indian Immigrant Adolescents in the U.S

Background/Context

1. Tell me about how you came to be living in the U.S.
2. Describe for me what it has been like for you living in the U. S. What are some of the adjustments to living in the U.S. that you have had to make?
3. Tell me about some of social (out-of-school) activities that you take part in.
4. Suppose I was present at one of your social events, what would I observe you doing?

School/Education

5. Describe for me what it was like for you starting school in the U.S.
6. Describe for me what it has since been like for you attending school in the U. S.? Tell me about some of the adjustments to school have you had to make.
7. What are some of your favorite and least favorite subjects? Why?
8. How would you describe yourself as a student? Explain.
9. If I followed you through a day at school, what would I observe you doing?
10. Describe for me a class you enjoy. Tell me about one of your least favorite/most challenging classes.
11. Tell me about some of the school-related activities in which you are involved.
12. Describe for me how you would usually go about doing a reading/writing assignment.
13. Tell me about your proudest school experience.
14. Tell me about a time when you had a difficult experience in school. How did you deal with this difficulty?
15. How important is school and education for you? Why?

16. How do you think you have changed as a result of attending school and living in the U.S.? What would you say are some reasons for these changes?

Identity

17. How would you describe yourself?
18. What and who are some of the key influences in your life?
19. Describe for me what the Caribbean and (nation) represent to you (feelings, key events)?
20. How important is your West Indian background in your life? Explain.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear _____:

My name is Cheryl McLean, and I'm a graduate student at the University of Georgia. I'm conducting research on West Indian youth in the U.S. I am looking for persons who might be interested in being a part of the project.

In my research study I am looking at the academic experiences of foreign-born and first-generation immigrant West Indian (W.I.) adolescents currently attending secondary school (middle and high school) in the U.S. The study focuses on issues of literacy related to academic performance and identity of W.I. students, and the ways young persons from a Caribbean background achieve success in U.S. schools. I am particularly interested in what the experiences of immigrant W.I. youth might mean for schools, homes and communities in terms of kinds of structures that support their learning.

This semester, I put together the proposal for the study and, upon approval, I plan to conduct formal data collection between May and November 2007. I'm looking for W.I. parents/guardians and relatives with secondary school teenagers (male and female) in the Atlanta area who are interested in sharing their experiences as part of the study between May and November 2007.

I would really appreciate your participation, and/or suggestions for persons who may be willing to participate in the study, or be of help in some way.

I welcome the opportunity to talk with you, and to answer any questions you may have.
I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks.
Cheryl.

Cheryl McLean
University of Georgia
Email: cmclean@uga.edu
Tel: (706)308-7411 (c)
(706)389-6580 (h)

APPENDIX C

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Parental Consent Form

I _____, as parent or legal guardian of _____ agree to let him/her take part in a research study titled "*Identity and Academic Experiences of West Indian Immigrant Adolescents in the U.S.*", which is being conducted by Cheryl McLean, Department of Language and Literacy Education, (706-542-2718) under the direction of Dr. Donna E. Alvermann, Department of Language and Literacy Education, University of Georgia, (706-542-2718). Participation is voluntary. I can refuse to allow my child to participate and can withdraw my child from participation without any penalty or any loss of benefits to which he or she is otherwise entitled. Even if I give permission for my child to participate, he or she can refuse to participate and can quit at any time. I can request to have the results of the participation, to the extent that it can be identified as my child's, removed from the research records or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to learn how West Indian immigrants who live, study and attend school in the U.S. society see themselves as individuals and as learners. Information will be gathered through interviews and through being observed in the home, and school-related or social settings. Because of your child's participation, he/she may gain a deeper knowledge of how his/her experiences and practices help develop his/her views of myself and his/her environments.

If I decide to allow my child to take part in this study, I understand that my child will be asked to do the following things during the months of May to November:

1. Participate in at least 4 one-hour audio-taped interviews about his/her experiences in the U.S. These interviews will take place between the months of May to November at home or a setting of my choice.
2. Be observed at least 4 times for at least one hour in the home, school-related function/event and social setting.
3. Submit at least 15 samples of school-related artifacts of his/her choice.
4. Submit at least 15 samples of personal writings and readings of his/her choice.
5. The researcher would like to make audio and video recordings and/or take photographs of my child at each interview, school-related event and social activity during the months of May to November.
6. The researcher will collect class grades, assignments, scores to use as research data. My child's name will be removed at from any assignment or score immediately after it is collected.
7. The researcher will ask my child to read and comment on the accuracy of information in the interviews and findings.

No risks, discomforts or stresses are expected from my child's participation in this study. His/her name will not be used in any papers that the researcher writes or publishes about this research. Any individually identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study, and that can be identified with him/her will remain confidential unless required by law. All information will be kept secure, and access to the records will be limited to the researcher. After participation, the researcher will code the data so that my child's name and responses will not be directly linked. After data analysis is complete, the researcher will keep the recordings but will destroy the key that connects my child's identity to the results.

If I want my child to stop participation in this project, I am free to do so at any time. He/she can also choose not to answer questions that he/she does not want to answer.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at: 706-542-2718.

Cheryl McLean

 Researcher's Signature
 Telephone: 706-542-2718
 Email: cmclean@uga.edu
 Date: _____

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I am agreeing to allow my child to take part in this research project. I will be given a signed copy of this form for my records.

 Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

 Date

 Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

 Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX D

MINOR ASSENT FORM

Minor Assent Form

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in my research project titled “*Identity and Academic Experiences of West Indian Immigrant Adolescents in the U.S.*” Through this research study I hope to learn secondary school students’ views on school.

If you decide to be part of this study, information will be gathered through interviews with you and through observing you in various settings: home, school functions/events and social activities. I will ask to meet with you at least 4 times to talk about school and classes. I will ask you to write about your activities both in and out of school.

Your participation in this study will not affect your grades in school. I will not use your name on any papers that I write or publish about this research. However, because of your participation you may improve your progress in your regular school work.

If you want to stop participating in this project, you are free to do so at any time. You can also choose not to answer any questions that you don’t want to answer.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at: 706-542-2718.

Cheryl McLean

 Researcher’s Signature
 Telephone: 706-542-2718
 Email: cmclean@uga.edu
 Date: _____

My signature below indicates that I understand the research study described above. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I will be given a signed copy of this form.

 Signature of Participant

 Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX E

DEBRIEFING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Debriefing Interview Questions

1. What was your motivation for this study?
2. What was the purpose of the study? Did this purpose change throughout the research process?
3. What kinds of lenses did you bring to the study and what accounts for the choice of these specific lenses?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these lenses?
5. How did these lenses and your motivation inform the planning and implementation process in terms of:
 - (a) Design: participants, sampling strategy, methods of data collection
 - (b) data collection: actual implementation how much data when to collect who to collect from when to stop collecting
 - (c) data analysis: methods used to break down and build back the data.....
 - (d) re-presentation
 - (e) discussion and conclusions
6. Having completed the data collection, what literacy practices stand out in your mind and why?
7. What accounts for these specific practices being important to (1) the participants (2) the researcher, (3) the educational community
8. If you had to summarize in the elevator in one minute what is the major finding of the study what would be your response.
9. Is there anything else of interest you think you would like to share on the research process and outcomes and how they have contributed to your understanding of the topic/issues related to literacy practices?
10. How do the students' context inform their practices?
11. How does your contexts and knowledge (s) (personal, academic, social, political) inform your understanding, analysis, and interpretation of the data?

APPENDIX F

RESEARCH TIMELINE

Research Timeline

(April 2007 - May 2008)

[illegible]