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About hopes, aspirations, and uncertainty: First-grade English-language learners' emergent reading

Fitzgerald, Jill

This article describes the reading development of two Hispanic children during their first-grade year of school. Their literacy emergence is portrayed in relation to the teacher’s (and to some extent the children’s families’) expectations and the classroom balanced reading program. This qualitative study, written here in the "Iwitnessing" or `confessional" narrative genre, was conducted in the first author's classroom while on reassignment in her i7th year as a university professor of Literacy Studies. The children's reading development is interpreted in light of current controversies in secondlanguage learning, including whether English orality must precede literacy.

THIS A TALE of two English-as-a-second-language (ESL) learners'English reading development over their first-grade year. It is a complex and layered tale, for it is not just a portrayal of two children's reading development. Their reading development was uniquely woven into and out of their everyday relationships with others. Many people touched their lives. Their families', school's, and community's ways of seeing and thinking affected them. They lived and worked within a particular classroom instructional program. As their teacher, my views and beliefs touched them, and equally important, their lives touched me. Many of us had hopes and aspirations for the two students, Roberto and Carlos; for each other; and for ourselves. We all forged ahead in the face of uncertain futures.

Some of these contexts and influences are symbolically but peripherally located in this tale. Others are featured more prominently. In particular, my views and instructional program are more clearly displayed than are others'. In fact, a secondary theme in this tale is that Roberto and Carlos shaped, reinforced, and in some ways changed my thinking and understanding about teaching reading.

Roberto and Carlos's tale is written here in the "I-witnessing" or "confessional" genre (Geertz, 1988; Van Maanen, 1988). It is a narrative told by me as the witness to Roberto's and Carlos's reading development. It is also confessional in that I try to make my part in the tale clear and to portray my own strengths and shortcomings in so far as I have been able to examine them.

The narrative genre is unique in educational research journals, and the usual schema that individuals bring to bear as they read articles in such journals does not fit well to this genre. Though all of the information typically contained in an educational research article is present here, there are three primary ways the form differs from usual expectations: (a) Some information is subtly woven through the narrative through implication as opposed to explication. (b) The tale is told in part through representational "scenes," which are set off from the text in italics. The scenes are narrative reconstructions of events that are supported by data. (c) Most of the technical information related to the research overlay as well as some
other information related to classroom practice is placed in appendices. To facilitate an easier reading, the following overview is given:

Looking Back, the first section, describes the context of my reasons for teaching the first-grade class. Embedded in this description are key theoretical underpinnings that point toward the need to describe ESL children's emergent English reading development.

Doing the Research gives an overview of selected aspects of methods of the study and of why Roberto and Carlos were chosen as central characters in this tale. Very detailed descriptions of all methodological aspects are located in appendices. Some readers may wish to interrupt the tale after reading the methodological overview and move directly to the appendices to understand fully the methods used. Others may wish to defer learning about the details of method, finding them intrusive to reading the tale itself.

The Main Characters begins with a description of Roberto, Carlos, and their families. Then my co-author and I summarize our own lenses and biases to the extent that we are aware of them.

Through the Year portrays in four parts Roberto's and Carlos's reading development in the context of my goals for them along with examples of reading instruction.

Reflections provides interpretation of the findings and self critique. Appendix A gives details about sources of information; variables, scoring, and reliabilities; and data analyses. Appendix B describes the balanced reading instruction approach used in my classroom. Appendix C shows a typical day in my classroom. Appendix D describes a typical reading meeting format.

Looking Back

In 1995-1996, I had the unusual opportunity to return to teach in an elementary school as a full-time first-grade teacher. I had taught for 7 years as a primary-grades teacher and as a Title r reading teacher, but that had been 11 years before. I was in my 17th year as a professor at the university, teaching teachers, researching and writing about literacy, when I quite suddenly felt an urgent need to immerse myself once again in public school classroom life. I was teaching about ways of teaching that I had not even used myself. Twenty-two years ago we did not even seriously think that first graders could actually compose very much. We taught handwriting kids copied from the board a lot - and once in awhile, we allowed a little time for "creative writing" on a late Friday afternoon. I knew the ideas and methods I was sharing with my college students had merit and were founded in a strong research base, and I was invested in them, but even so, I deeply felt I needed to do much of it with young children myself to know for sure.

I had also been studying and writing about ESL reading research and theory for several years (Fitzgerald, 1993b>1995a> 1995b), and I had been learning Spanish. I knew there were some growing controversial issues in the second-language-learning arenas, and I was fully engaged in aspects of the controversy (see Fitzgerald, i995a, i995b). Some researchers and
theoricians thought second-language reading was significantly different from plain old reading, or at least different enough to require a special model to distinguish the two (e.g., Bernhardt, 1991; Gunderson, 1994). I just was not sure about this. I had learned about Heath’s (1986) notion of transferable generic literacies, Krashen’s (1984> 1988) reading hypothesis, and Cummins’ (1981) common underlying proficiency model, which all revealed an underlying assumption that second-language literacy entails the same basic processes as first-language literacy (see Hedgcock & Atkinson, 1993). And Carrell and her colleagues (Carrell, Devine, & Eskey, 1988) had applied an interactive model of reading developed for native-language speakers to ESL reading. I thought, too, that models such as Ruddell and Unraus (1994) sociocognitive model of reading and Adams’ (1990) summary of the first steps of early reading might work as well for second-language learners as for first.

More central to my soon-to-be first-grade teaching was that I was puzzled that some work suggested there were researchers, theoricians, and practitioners who thought BsL students should defer reading and writing until after some, if not considerable, oral fluency was developed (see discussions in Clarke & Silberstein, 1977; Krashen, 1985; Weber, 1991; Wong Fillmore & Valadez, 1986). This notion certainly did not mesh with my understandings from the last decade of research on emergent literacy. I thought it likely that the basic tenets we now hold for first-language emergent literacy should also be true for second-language emergent literacy notions such as literacy and orality are intertwined and emerge together, and they develop from birth onward (e.g., Clay, 1972; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Yet when I went to the research literature, I only found fewer than a handful of studies of emergent writing of learners in bilingual programs, which tended to reinforce my own view (e.g., Edelsky, 1986). I thought that we really needed some studies of ESL children’s emergent reading development documented in classrooms where teachers use methods based on first-language emergent literacy tenets. Through a collection of studies like this, we may have a better sense of what can happen (for similar discussion see August & Hakuta, 1997).

In addition to my understandings of the theory and research on emergent literacy and on ESL reading, I also took another theoretical perspective to school with me - one that I believe greatly influenced how I thought about and acted out teaching and learning. This was a constructivist outlook on language and teaching and learning. There are many sorts of constructivism (Spivey, 1997), and I frankly am not sure that my views are purely constructivist or that they are constructivist of one sort in particular. I do know, however, that I believed that we all make meanings and knowledge. We create, imposing categories on what we encounter. And I believed strongly in some constructivist tenets most often traced to the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1986; cf. Wertsch, 1985). Principal among these were: (a) a child can be more successful when working collaboratively with an adult or more advanced peers (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Spivey, 1997); (b) through collaboration, a child socially constructs knowledge (see “appropriation” in Leont’ev, 1981); (c) language mediates learning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986); (d) children make the greatest learning leaps when they are working in a “zone of proximal development,” moving from the edge of the known and sure to the unknown and risky (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986); (e) adults can help children construct knowledge through scaffolded interactions (see Bruner, 1990, 1992).
It is not possible to say all of the ways in which this constructivist outlook impacted teaching and learning in my classroom. It permeated activity all day every day. In global ways, it affected decisions about grouping, about materials, and about the extent of "teacher-directed" versus "undirected" activity. For example, I used a flexible grouping plan for reading instruction - sometimes having children read with partners, sometimes in small groups with me, and sometimes in the whole group - because I believed that different sorts of knowledge would be constructed through different sorts of collaborations. Every day, I held small-group guided reading over texts at instructional level, because I believed that scaffolded interaction with me on material at their level and working on "skills" they in particular needed would best meet them at their zone of proximal development.

My year in first grade was a test, not only of myself and whether I could actually practice what I preached in my university teaching and writing, but more importantly, it was a test of the possibilities for EsL emergent readers. Over half of the children in my class would be Hispanic, and I decided to trace their reading development over the year. (I use the term Hispanic, because that is the term adults in the community used to refer to themselves.)

Doing the Research

An ethnographer colleague from the university, George Noblit, spent a full day in my class every other week throughout the school year. From October on, we also had the assistance of a graduate student who photocopied student samples, videotaped lessons approximately once a week, and helped to administer tests and informal assessments. He also served as data manager (see Appendix A for more complete information on methodology, including data sources, variables, scoring, reliabilities, and analyses).

During George's first two visits, he observed and took notes. By the third visit, though, he was ready to become a partner teacher in the classroom. The children had warmed to him from his first day. In fact, by lunchtime of that day, they were vying for seats beside him in the lunchroom. So beginning with George's third visit, he followed my lead for our daily lessons and worked along with us, but continued to take field notes throughout the day. Generally he did a writing activity from a brief plan I wrote for him with small groups of children during the reading meeting rotations, and otherwise assisted in all other activities in the day, just as my teacher assistant did. (State law required a full-time assistant in all kindergarten through second-grade classrooms.) If the children were out of the room for a special class, we used that time to talk about children and how things were going in the class. In the evening after each visit, he completed his field notes. (Some readers may wish to read Appendices A through D now before continuing the narrative.)

George and I knew at the end of my first-grade year that some of my Hispanic students had ended the year at high reading achievement levels and some had ended at relatively low levels. We decided that it would help us (and perhaps others) to learn more about the paths taken by children who wound up in different places. One way to approach such an understanding would be to do a close portrayal of two children, looking at one from each of the two subsets. Then we could look at patterns in their reading development in relation to
what I was trying to do with each in instruction and to a limited extent in relation to their oral language abilities. Among the several Hispanic students who had made significant reading gains over the year, and ended the year reading at or above grade level, Roberto stood out because he began the year speaking no English. His was the most dramatic growth. Among the several Hispanic children who ended the year at low reading levels, there was not one child who stood out as an obvious one to choose for the study. After some discussion, we decided to look closely at Carlos, largely because, of the children in the "lower achieving group," one might have expected schooling to be especially challenging for him, because he was learning English as a third language.

The Main Characters

It had finally arrived - Open House, the night before the first day of school. My assistant, Evelyn, I and I had worked hard and rushed around for several days, right up to the last minute, to prepare the room for our "opening." I so wanted the scene to look bright, cheerful, and inviting. And I wanted books and words and letters to be the first things parents and children would notice. Evelyn and I had changed our clothes and run out to Burger King for a fast dinner, returning just as the first (early) parents came in. I grabbed my camera and, as each child came in with his or her family, went over and offered a big hug, trying to bend down to meet eyes and show with my own eyes how much I wanted to be there with and for them. `May I take a photo?" Each parent and child said, "OK," some sounding a little bewildered by the request. I had anticipated savoring every single child and having time to chat a little with each family. Instead, it all seemed like a mad rush - just as the days before had. "Please know the door is always open.' `I hope we'll have time to talk with each other through the year." As I turned from one group, I noticed a family - mom, dad, a little boy staring at a desk with the name "Carlo" on it, and who would that be - his io- or m year-old sister and a baby brother, maybe 3 or 4, or perhaps cousins or friends? "Hello. Buenas Noches. Prefieren ingles o espanol?" "Ah, his name is Carlos, with an `s'!2 I'm sorry - the computer records you know I'll fix the spelling on his name tag tomorrow I'm so happy you're here! I'm looking forward to getting to know Carlos and all of you too. I'll try hard to be a good teacher for Carlos." As I moved away I saw the tears in Carlos father eyes. I wondered if I should turn back and stay awhile with them....

Carlos and Roberto

Carlos was a cute boy with medium-length dark hair and dark eyes, and of about average size for his age, 6 years and 5 months old in August. He had a sweet, gentle, and reserved disposition. He made many friends in the class and was willing to play with everybody. Carlos was generally reticent to either volunteer participation in class events and lessons or respond when called on. He did, however, love to get books to look at and sometimes chose to go to the listening center to listen to a book on tape during early morning free play when we awaited the arrival of the final bus. I always thought Carlos's reticence to participate in class was a reflection of his kind and introverted nature. As the year wore on, I began to wonder if it also, or more so, revealed something of his Tarasco Indian heritage. Carlos was born in Mexico, evidently in a Tarasco community, or at least in an area where his family's primary
contact was with others who spoke Tarasco. Some friends of his family saw Carlos in the cafeteria one day and came over to speak to him. When I rose to talk with them, they told me that when in Mexico Carlos originally spoke Tarasco. They said that he later learned Spanish and then here in kindergarten in our school began to learn English.

Both of Carlos's parents were born in Mexico. They moved the family to this small, rural town in North Carolina and took line jobs in a poultry plant. Carlos qualified for free lunches. His older sister was in fourth grade, and he had a baby brother who was about 3 years old. Carlos's parents could speak no English. His mother had completed third grade in Mexico; his father, ninth. Both parents were extremely shy. His mother was always present when we met at school or in their home, but Carlos's father did most of the talking. Neither could speak English, but their daughter's English was reasonably good. She frequently accompanied Carlos to the classroom and often asked about his "homework" book for the week. I had spoken to Carlos's parents about ways they might help him at home with school-related things, like math, making sure he showed them his book each week, and so forth. He liked to play with his older sister, and we tried to encourage her to read with him each night, though the extent to which this occurred is unknown. Carlos's father's notes to me were always written in Spanish, generally with mistakes in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Whenever I saw his parents, Carlos's father always asked about his manners and his academic progress in school.3 Excepting one of the countywide Hispanic parents' meetings, they never missed a school event - conferences, the school fair, other meetings - as long as the event was held after their work hours.

Roberto was a handsome child with an olive complexion, dark eyes, and dark hair usually kept "brush-cut" style. The second youngest in my class at 5 years and 11 months, Roberto was of medium height and build for his age. Quiet, reserved, thoughtfully energetic, he was a good friend to many, a willing playmate, and an ardent student.

Roberto's parents, Roberto, his older brother, and his baby sister were all born in Mexico. They had lived in Mexico City, where Roberto went to kindergarten. A month or so before school started, Roberto's parents moved the family from Mexico City to North Carolina, where, like Carlos's parents, they took jobs in the poultry plant. At first, they lived with another Hispanic family whose two children were also in my classroom. Roberto's parents could speak some English, but spoke only Spanish at home and preferred using Spanish with me both when we talked and when they wrote notes to me. I do not know their educational levels, but Roberto's mother's notes were always written in cursive style, with few errors. Roberto's parents seemed to care very much about both his deportment and academic progress in school. At least one of his parents read with him at night from the English, and occasionally Spanish, books Roberto took home each week. They kept in touch through notes, coming to school for parent conferences, visiting the class for an hour or so one day, and occasionally stopping by to check on something.

As we moved in our line from the lunchroom, we slowed to the usual stop at the double doors. Roberto's dad came up to me and said, "Buenas tardes. Could I just ask about his lunch money?" "Sure. What's the problem?" "Well, he says each day he doesn't get a dessert, that
he picks one up, but the cashier makes him put it back. A couple of days, he has also come home with a note saying he didn't have enough money to pay for his lunch. But we send enough money. We don't understand what is happening to the money." Roberto was one of only five children in my class who paid the full amount for lunches. His dad and I talked quickly. I was distracted by the noise my kids were making and by trying to see what the ones at the end of the line were doing. `If you can put his money in an envelope with his name on it and the amount enclosed, I'll try each morning at school to have Roberto show me how much money he has, so we can be sure he hasn't lost it on the bus, and I'll write you a note at the end of the week. Would that help?" "Yes, thank you. But now, would you help me with my son?'"Of course."His dad called to Roberto to come over. As Roberto approached, his dad said to me, `I just want to make sure that he knows we're talking with each other. I think it's important for him to see and hear us talking about him so he will know we work together.'

Lenses and Biases

I saw my children and the spaces we lived in through my own history as a North American, Anglo woman, knowledgeable about reading processes and instruction primarily from a first-language perspective and secondarily from a second-language perspective. I thought I knew quite a bit about reading and teaching reading from a first-language vantage point, both from the long-ago first-hand experience and from the many years of reading and studying about it. From my first-language perspective, I saw the major work of early reading to be the challenge of "word getting." Comprehension and response were important, actually the ultimate goal, but research clearly supported phonological awareness and figuring out words as the central features of beginning reading (Adams, 1990). This lens led to my desire to use a balanced approach to emergent reading instruction, which would emphasize both word getting and comprehension, but which would make word getting central.

A related bias was that I believed it was essential to incorporate a fair amount of informal assessment into my classroom on a regular basis, and some formal assessment less often in order to make decisions about the levels and sorts of reading knowledge the children had. Because word getting was featured in my view of emergent reading, it would also be featured in classroom assessments.

My recent study of ESL reading research had been preceded by 2 years of reading and studying about language learning, second-language learning, the history of bilingual education in the United States, and intermittent reading on the histories of language minority presence in North America (e.g., Fitzgerald, 1993b). As I said earlier, my outlook on reading and the teaching of reading was that there were more similarities than differences in learning to read across languages, and I was invested in the belief that a balanced approach to reading instruction would benefit ESL children as well as their native-English-speaking counterparts.

I thought I knew a little about how it felt to learn a second language, because I had been experiencing that myself for a few years now. I knew a little about how it felt to be in a "strange" land, trying to understand and speak a new language, because I had traveled intermittently in Mexico, Portugal, and Spain. I was sure, though, that these experiences were
considerably different from my children's - different at least because I was an adult and because travel experiences of short duration are far less stressful than learning to live in an entirely different culture.

Perhaps some of my own personal family history contributed to a sense of common ground with many of the children and families in my classroom. I grew up in a working-class family and had always taken pride in having a strong work ethic, "pulling oneself up by the bootstraps,"rising above one's circumstances," and "fighting for the underdog" As an overachiever in school, and being quiet in character, I stood apart in my extended family as "different." I often felt "social-class othered" in the midst of the high-achieving friendship circles I belonged to throughout my school career. Also, my mother was a British war bride, who left a homeland and family she dearly loved behind, able to return only twice in 20 years. I had watched her sometimes sit quietly by herself at my father's family gatherings, and I had seen her grieve her own parents' deaths distanced from her brothers and sisters.

I saw my Hispanic children's families as courageous, seeking a "better life," wanting a good education for their children, and working very hard to make a decent living. Though many had greater physical comfort here, they had also left behind considerable emotional comfort. Perhaps part of what I saw was my own stereotyping, but I related to the image I created. I very much wanted to reach out to my children and their families, to support them, to know them, and to help them to feel wanted and cared about. I saw myself as an advocate, attending all the special meetings held for and by Hispanic parents at the school, and arguing with administrators and "special teachers" on my children's behalf when I felt their interests were not being well served.

As I began the year, I thought I could plan a classroom that would have more active community involvement and that would bring more of the adult Hispanic contributions to our lives. I had read the works of Moll and others (e.g., Moll & Gonzalez, 1994) on the importance of community knowledge and the inherent values of learning on a community's ground. I also knew about culturally linked ways of learning and that incongruities between ways of talking at home and ways of learning at school could potentially affect learning (e.g., Au & Mason, 1983). I planned for parental involvement through story sharing, class fairs, and potluck dinners, and I planned to visit my children's homes regularly I wanted to practice what Serpell (1997) recently termed "bicultural mediation." As it turned out, sadly, I failed to accomplish most of what I had planned for community involvement. I found it difficult to do "interactive talk story" lessons (e.g., Au, i980), I only managed occasional visits to four children's homes, and of all the other plans, I just never could make time, in part because of the work, load and consequent exhaustion of being a teacher.

Another important aspect of my lens was that I knew from prior reading that bilingual education and bilingual reading were extremely beneficial to children. I personally felt that bilingual education would be superior to ESL instruction. However, my Spanish was not good enough to carry out bilingual instruction, and further, the school district I worked in opposed bilingual education and would not have permitted use of Spanish for instruction except during
"Spanish" classes led by the Spanish teacher. I did assume, though, that children would
naturally and freely use Spanish in our classroom, and I purchased many Spanish readers.

In retrospect then, I believe I was sensitive to the children's circumstances and predisposed to
accept some positive stereotypes. I also believed that the children brought considerable
knowledge and abilities with them to our classroom. I did not view them as having "deficits."
However, my first language lens in conjunction with my failure to incorporate our learning into
the community and vice versa also then reflected the necessity for the children to "fit into" a
classroom life created on my (and the school's) terms.

My co-author is an experienced ethnographer who has studied issues of race equity for 25
years, advocating for culturally appropriate education for African Americans. He had much less
knowledge of asL and literacy than I, but had recruited several Latina/o students to study for a
Ph.D. in Anthropology of Education with him and was in the process of learning from these
students during the present study. Further, he had just completed a study of community
perspectives about Hispanics in the community I was to teach in. Like me, he was predisposed
to positive stereotypes about Hispanics and was a constructivist, albeit more informed by
works like Berger and Luckman (1967) than Vygotsky. He had not been an elementary or
secondary teacher and was not committed to any specific pedagogical approach. His own
research on an African American teacher, in fact, had led him to conclude that there is not
"one best method" (Noblit, 1993). Rather, the definition of appropriate pedagogy is itself
socially constructed in specific contexts.

Through the Year

Starting Out

Reading meeting: The first week of school. "Oooooh, you are going to love this story! Look! `I
Went Walking' (while pointing to the title of the book; Williams, 1989). See the little girl? What
do you think this is going to be about? (Roberto and Carlos sit quietly as others answer.) Oh,
look at this picture. What do you see? Yes, a cat, a black cat (simultaneously pointing to the
word on the page). What is it Carlos? (Carlos says, A black cat.') Great! Look (holding up a
card with `cat' on it, placing it under the text word, and repeating the word again) ... (Later)
Listen and follow along while I read. 1 went walking. What did you see? 1 saw a black cat
looking at me. I went walking. What did you see? I saw a brown horse looking at me'... (Later)
What do you think of this story? (The children ask me to turn the pages again, and they talk
about funny parts of the pictures.) ... (Later) Now let's read some of it together. (1 read and
children chime in sometimes.) ... (Later) Let's write some of the words! (1 give each child
three small squares of paper and marking pens. As 1 hold up a word card, 1 say the word
slowly, stretching out the sounds of it.) OK! Who can tell me this word (holding up one of the
cards)? This? This? Manuel, can you read them? Esteban? Rosa? Carlos? Roberto? (Each child
except Rosa tries to say each word.) Who can point to the one that starts with `boy'
(emphasizing the `b' sound)? Fantastic! 1 can't wait to read some more with you tomorrow!"
The next day, at reading meeting, I scrambled the three cards for the sight words I had taught the day before -I, black, and cat - and asked each child to read the words. Several children in the group remembered only 1. Carlos, Rosa, and Olivia remembered none. On the drive home from school later that week, I talked into my tape recorder and reflected back to what had happened:

I pretty much thought Roberto wouldn't be able to remember the words. [After all, he'd only been in the country a month or so before school started and could speak no English.] Guess what?... When I held the words up ... he said all three without any help! And each day this week, he's done the same. He doesn't speak at all, and I don't think he understands much of what is said to him, but he can relate the sight words to the pictures in the book, which gives him a supportive context for his language development. And he's learning English words right away through the repetitive reading we're doing every day. (Tape-recorded journal entry, August 31)

Locating children's reading levels and kinds of reading knowledge. During the first a weeks of school, I wanted some immediate determination of the children's developmental levels in reading and writing. This would help me with various instructional decisions, like how to group children for word and letter study. I thought about Clay's (1993) and others' (e.g., Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Morrow, 1986) discussions of emergent literacy and decided to do some informal individual assessments.

From these and from my daily observations, I realized that Carlos's sense and knowledge of reading and writing were only just barely beginning to emerge. Carlos had been learning English for at least the preceding year in kindergarten. The EsL teacher said Carlos's fluency level on the test she gave him was B -"limited English speaking." He was able to listen, respond, and initiate in English reasonably well, yet his decontextualized vocabulary was quite limited. For example, on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn, 1990), he correctly identified 43 word meanings, but compared to the English-speaking norming sample for his age, this score placed him in the zero percentile.

As compared to other children from my past experiences in the primary grades, his literacy abilities were similar to those of many children entering kindergarten. Carlos could hold a book, turn pages, and when prompted, could talk about the pictures (in English). He could not, however, point to individual words in a sentence as the sentence was read aloud, nor could he locate a word in a sentence that was spoken for him. He either had not developed a concept of"word" or had not learned that, in writing, words are demarcated by space. Carlos could not recite any of the alphabet, nor could he accurately write it completely. When asked to write it, he scrambled much of it and omitted several letters, writing k through q and v through y correctly in uppercase. He could write no letters in lowercase. When shown letters scrambled up, he could name only ii lowercase letters and ii uppercase ones. Carlos could write his first name using the initial capital letter and remaining lowercase. The only word he could read when shown several lists was purple, and he could not read any simple sentences. When asked to write a sentence about something he liked, he wrote "I." I did not ask Carlos to attempt any of these activities in Spanish, but I doubt that his responses would have been
more advanced in Spanish, because according to his father, he had never received instruction in letters and words in Spanish.

Likewise, Roberto showed little evidence of emergent literacy knowledge, even in Spanish. He was nowhere near the developmental level of my entering first graders in rural Ohio. Za years ago. He could hold a book and turn pages correctly, but he was not sure what else to do with it. When I once or twice prompted him to use Spanish, he could talk about the pictures in Spanish. He could not point to individual words in a sentence as the sentence was read aloud for him in English, which suggested he had not developed a concept of "word" or had not learned that words in text are demarcated by space. He could not point to an individual word in English text when asked to. His English alphabet knowledge was limited. He could write some of the alphabet on his own, mixing cases and reversing some letters, but he could not recite the alphabet in Spanish or English. He could not name any letters in English in either upper or lowercase when the letters were scrambled. He could write his first name and parts of his last name. He could read no words in English. I doubt that he could read any Spanish words, but we never asked him to, so I am not positive. When asked (in Spanish) to write a sentence, he would write nothing. He had some trouble holding a pencil and forming letters.

Early writing. Carlos's and Roberto's first journal writing also gave me insight into their developmental levels.

"OK boys and girls, it's time to write in our journals. You may write about anything you want. We've just been talking about our Terrific Kid for this week, and we made a nice (Language Experience) chart about her. You could write about that if you want to. What else could you write about? (Some children give ideas.) Remember, use pretend spelling! (The assistant and I move around the class.) Oh, Manuel, what a nice picture! What does it say? Cassandra, may I read yours? Help me. What does it say? 'Suzette was the Terrific Kid.' Very good writing! Now watch and listen while I write this: 'Why was Suzette the Terrific Kid?' Can you write me the answer? No? Then tell me the answer. Oh, she was nice to other children. Can you write 'nice'? No? How do you think it starts? N-n-n-n-ice. Good! It starts with the letter "n." Can you write that? Fiery good! Carlos, what did you write? What does it say? You don't know? Oh, did you copy it from there? It says, plants need water' (holding my hand over Carlos's to point his finger at each word as I say it). Roberto, what does this say? (I point to the page [see August 31 entry in Figure 1] and raise my eyebrows.) No? You don't know? You don't understand? (I notice that Roberto has copied letters and words from around the room, some of them in reverse of the original.) Well you have some nice letters there! What's the name of this one? (Roberto names the letter.) And this one? How are these two different? No? You don't know? Look, this one goes up. This one goes down."

Carlos's and Roberto's journal and other writing during the first couple of weeks of school suggested to me that they did not understand the constructive nature and/or function of writing. Their journal entries mainly consisted of words and letters they copied from some place in the room (and sometimes these entries were copied in reverse order). Maybe they did not think about writing as a way to express and preserve their own ideas or as a way to talk with others. Another possibility I considered was that they did know about the functions and
purposes of writing, but that they simply had not yet acquired enough phonological knowledge to carry out what they wanted to do. Although the other assessments seemed to affirm their lack of phonological knowledge, I believed that they also did not quite understand the notion of composing. Both children seemed as if they were trying to please me, to do what I was asking them to do. They just were not sure what that was. They knew it had something to do with letters and drawing. They watched others around the room and tried to do what they saw them doing. But otherwise, my attempts to use journals as ways of helping them to record events and ideas and to ask me and others in the classroom questions were in the beginning experienced by them merely as tasks I wanted them to do.

Looking forward. Yes, I was disappointed that Carlos's and Roberto's English (and Spanish) literacy levels were not more advanced. After all, they had both had yearlong kindergarten experiences. But I was not discouraged - at least not about the possibilities for their literacy growth not yet. I just knew that the instructional plan I had worked out through the previous spring and summer would help to move them along quickly. I actually felt that if I just did my job well, both children would be reading at least at grade level by the end of the year (see Appendices B and C for detailed information about the balanced reading approach I used and for an example of typical daily activities).

So we started out. I never wrote them down, but my initial main literacy goals for Roberto and Carlos were clear to me. I wanted them to develop a keen phonological awareness; to learn some sight words; to learn about letter forms and their names; to learn about the communicative, recording, and creative functions of writing; to begin to experiment with letters and words so as to encourage development of the alphabetic principle to understand and respond to what they read; and most importantly, to love reading and writing. One important part of the plan was daily reading meetings, which regularly revolved around good literature that contained few words and much repeated grammatical structure. For a few months, Carlos and Roberto came to reading meetings with five other Hispanic children who had the least English proficiency in my class (see Appendix D for details of the reading meeting format). Three of the others had no English and very limited Spanish, one speaking a North American Indian language as her first language, and the other two speaking Spanish at about a 3-year-old developmental level. Other important parts of the plan were whole-class games and songs playing with letters and their sounds, daily meetings (in the same small group) with my assistant playing letter and sounds games, daily whole-group listening to stories which were sometimes followed by children retelling the story, weekly half class literature response groups, occasional whole-group story writing, daily whole-group experience-chart writing, and daily individual journal writing. Most importantly for Carlos and Roberto (among others) at the beginning, I tried to plan ahead for as much focus as I could on sessions that would in some way work toward my initial literacy goals for the children. Then throughout each day, whenever I was aware that the opportunity was there, I would try to incidentally "push the literacy moment." I thought I would do everything humanly possible to have these kids up to their ears and eyes in words and sounds and letters and loving reading.

Looking back, an analyst might say that Carlos's and Roberto's fall literacy growth pretty much flatlined. Yes, there were occasional blips hinting at some as yet unsteady cognitive changes,
but frankly, I just was not seeing the sensational results I had expected. It was slow going, and this was not the way it was supposed to be.

Roberto: Holding steady. Roberto's early success with sight word learning had led me to expect an explosion of progress in reading. What I was getting was a slow burn. In mid-November, our first report cards went home. This marked 12 weeks into the year, and what I noted at report card time pretty much reflected Roberto's literacy development well into January.

It was a lovely Saturday morning. As I sat down to dig into the report card pile again, I looked out the window just in time to see three deer running across the field on the other side of the creek. I felt pretty sick, this time with what turned out to be a 6-week sinus infection. I was very tired and wished I didn't need to do these, not on this lovely morning. I finally came to Roberto's - not an especially difficult one to do. Roberto's report card was in Spanish, and I had to mark several entries for his reading and writing progress, using notations for "most of the time," "sometimes," and "not yet." For reading, I marked "most of the time" for "talks about reading," "guesses what the text means," and "understands what he reads." I put "sometimes" for "connects the spoken words with the words on the page" and "uses the punctuation," and "not yet" for "tries to predict and confirm words and meanings in the text." For the entry, "knows the required vocabulary," I wrote that he knew about 30 sight words. For writing, I noted that he usually tried to do our writing activities with teacher support; he sometimes tried to explain his pictures with words, sometimes mixed Letters with drawings, and sometimes tried to use invented spelling; and he never continued from one line to the next on the page. On the lines under "opportunities for improvement," I wrote, "sight vocabulary words, learning the sounds for letters, connecting the spoken word with the word on the page."

I sat back and looked at the overall picture these notations conveyed. I thought the reading entries were pretty accurate. He was making good progress in learning sight words. It was his biggest strength. I thought his quick memory would be a boon to his reading development. He tried hard to learn the story we were working on and did pretty well at that. But he couldn't always follow along with his finger in a familiar text, and he had learned but a few of the consonant sounds yet.

On the other hand, I thought I was probably erring on the generous side with my notes about his writing. I thought of his journal entries. He resisted encouragement to use pretend spelling. Most of the time, he didn't use letters and words unless he copied them from a sign or chart or the word wall in the room. When he did try to write words on his own, which was rare, he wrote random letter strings. His writing couldn't be read by others, and sometimes he could not read it himself. He showed no knowledge of letter-sound correspondence in his writing, preferred uppercase letters, and mixed lower and uppercase indiscriminately. But he did have some knowledge about writing letterforms, did understand that the letters could represent a message, and after the first week or so of school, had shown a sense of left-to-right and top-to-bottom directionality. He was definitely in the very beginning stage of writing.
"What I’ve put here is OK," I thought to myself. "I want to be honest with his parents and let them know how he is doing on these benchmarks, and what I’ve noted is a fair reflection of his work. I just hope they will keep in mind that these are the benchmarks we use for all kids, that Roberto is being evaluated here using the same criteria that are used for kids who were born here and have learned to speak English here since they were born. I guess I need to keep reminding myself about this too!"

Carlos: Plateaus and only momentary highs. To me Carlos's reading was at a standstill. He loved books and enjoyed reading meetings. He chose books from the shelf to look at when he had free time in the mornings. He usually tried to participate in any reading sessions. But it was just hard for Carlos to learn our new sight words. His alphabet learning was advancing, but slowly. He still could not follow words in a sentence while I was reading, even on a familiar text. In late October, I carved out some time for my assistant to spend ao to 30 minutes a few times a week to help Carlos with the story and words we were doing in his reading meetings.

I am ... very disappointed. Evelyn spent probably 20 to 30 minutes with Carlos by himself working on some words [from] the My Mom Travels a Lot [Bauer, 1981] story with very little success she said. He couldn't memorize even a page or two still. This is after several, probably 2 weeks now, every day of hearing it. I don't expect him to actually read this whole book. It has too many new words in it for Carlos. But I'd hoped he'd remember just a few sight words and the repeated phrase that's on just about every page, "The good thing about it is ..., The bad thing about it is ..." I gave her four sight words to work on with him, and she said that even by the end of the last lesson, after repeated work with him over and over in that amount of time, he still could not recognize any of those words. (Tape-recorded journal entry, November 2)

November passed, and December brought little promise of discernible change in Carlos's reading progress.

This week [in Carlos's reading meetings] I started an experience chart using four or five of those sight words [from the last couple of stories we had been reading] a lot on the chart. Two or three of the children have ... done quite well with it. We have spent probably 3 days where everybody gets a chance to read that, and we do some group reading of it. Esteban has done quite well with it. Benjamin has done quite well. Geraldo has started to catch on and is doing fairly well. Manuel has a little more trouble. Manuel is still trying to figure out how to say the word and to match the word he has memorized to the specific word in the sentence. Carlos is quite lost with it, and is really struggling. (Tape-recorded journal entry, December 4)

Only occasionally did I sense an outward glimmer that Carlos's literacy knowledge was moving forward. These glimmers of possibility came mainly in Carlos's writing. In October, we all (myself included) drew pictures of our families and wrote about them when we were reading a book called Family (Johnson,1995). Carlos wrote a random letter string,"TwPMOheMaHcmoPamoh," and when asked later, he could not remember what the words said. This writing showed just about the most risk taking of any of Carlos's writing through the entire fall. Most of the time, even into January, he disliked "pretend spelling:' In
spite of considerable encouragement from me and my assistant, from September 26 until December ii, Carlos did not write any letters or words in his journal, instead copying the date from the board and drawing pictures, which he generally did talk about.

"Carlos, what do you want to say? Nothing? Well, let's think. Maybe you could write about something we were just talking about. Who took home the class pet? Yes, Julie. OK. Now, listen. J- Julie' (stretching out the first sound). Can you write the first letter? No? Watch. Julie' (stretching out the sounds as I wrote). Can you write some of those letters?"

Then suddenly, after days and months of trying to do all we could think of to encourage Carlos to risk pretend spelling, there came a breakthrough. "Carlos, that's a nice picture (see December 18 entry in Figure 2). What do you want to say? I like Mexico? OK! Listen, I know you can write the first word - 'I'! Can you write 'I'? Sure you can. It's just the letter 'I'. Write that. (Carlos writes 'L') Great! Now listen. 'L-L-L-ike' (stretching out the 'I' sound). What Letter do you think starts 'I-I-I-ike'? You don't know? Well, how about 'M-M-M-exico'? What Letter do you think starts M-M-M-exico? It's the same letter that starts 'M-M-M-arcos' (a boy in our room). (Carlos writes 'M') Carlos, that's terrific! Mrs. James, look! Carlos is starting to write some words! Carlos, can you write any other letters for Mexico (stretching it out)? (Carlos pauses while I repeat the word over and over. He writes two more letters. ) Carlos, that's fantastic. I'll bet you can write a lot more from now on!"

I was shocked but happy to see this giant step. Carlos had shown us here, all at once, that he had acquired the alphabetic principle that letters stand for sounds, that words can be broken into sounds, that he could hear at least some of the sounds in a word, and further, that he accurately knew a few letter-sound relationships. I was overjoyed. But between this day and February ai, he would only manage such risk taking in his writing two more times and then only with the fullest teacher assistance. The rest of the time, he continued to draw pictures.

Through the Winter

Taking stock. It was the beginning of January, and I was feeling pretty low. I was discouraged about Carlos's and Roberto's reading progress. They just were not moving along as I had hoped. Carlos was really struggling in our reading meeting sessions. He continued to have difficulty remembering even one sight word every few days, usually could not read much of a big book after repeated readings, and still could not match a spoken word to one written in the text. One thing I felt good about though was that Carlos still loved the idea of reading. He continued to choose to listen to books on tape at the listening station, and even though he still could not read any of the words in any of the books he picked up in the room, he seemed to enjoy looking at the pictures and thumbing through them. Whenever we read books together, either in small groups or large groups, Carlos always participated in discussions about the books, initiating points he wanted to make and responding to questions. He had made no overt progress in his writing, however. In late January, I ranked him a2nd and asst on reading and writing ability of 23 children in my room at that time, and uth and loth for reading and writing among my is Hispanic children.
Roberto was doing all right with our big books, with our shared reading sessions, the language experience charts that used words from our big books, and repeated readings. But he was struggling to read novel preprimer material - around a Level 4 or 5 in Reading Recovery levels. And he seemed stuck in the initial stage of writing. It seemed to me that he had been there forever. I ranked him 17th and 18th on reading and writing ability at that time, and 6th and 7th for reading and writing among my 12 Hispanics.

I worried a lot. I had self doubts. What was I not doing that I needed to be doing? What was I not seeing? What was wrong? I lost sleep, and often, I had to work hard not to let the children see I was losing patience. I pulled out some of the textbooks on teaching reading and writing that I admired, like Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham, and Moore (1995) and Tompkins (1997), wondering if there were some activities I could do that I had not thought of. I called one of my literacy-education colleagues at the university who offered to meet and talk about what I was doing. At the end of that discussion, she said, "You're doing everything I can think of." So then, I considered some of my interpretations of Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development. I thought, "Maybe you just need to take a good look at where the kids really are. Maybe they are developmentally more like kindergartners than first graders?" And I stepped back and tried to take stock by doing some diagnostic assessments - individual sight word lists, running records of oral reading for students who could do them, and a few other means.

Unhappily, Carlos read no words on the San Diego Quick Assessment (LaPray & Ross, 1986) list of sight words. I was taken aback, because some of those words were ones we had worked on as sight words, ones he could read in our reading meetings. I did not attempt a running record with Carlos> because I knew he could not read any novel material on his own.

Carlos's oral English had not noticeably changed since August. As a check on his oral English progress, we asked Carlos to do two decontextualized language samples - a Picture Description Task and a Definitions Task (Snow, Tabors, Nicholson, & Kurland, 1995). The results of these assessments affirmed my earlier sense that he had reasonable English proficiency for a 6-year-old child in his second year of immersion in English, but that he was still below typical vocabulary and syntax levels for English-speaking children his age. For example, after seeing the colorful circus picture in Snow et al. (1995) Picture Description Task, he said, "There was a man that he was bringing a bear, and the girl had a lotta balloons, and the clown was inside the, mmm, house, and some people were getting in the . . . getting in where's the clown (searching for the word, `tent')." The Snow rating of his language used in this description was 8, close to the mean of 7.1 for end-of year English-speaking kindergartners in a previous study done by Snow et al. (1995).

Roberto, however, seemed to be making steady progress in oral English. His vocabulary and syntactical knowledge were limited but growing. He could now correctly identify 16 words on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn, 1990), and his score of 9 on the Picture Description Task (Snow et al., 1995) was about the same as Carlos's. Of 14 words on the Snow et al. (1995) Definitions Task, he attempted 6. As expected, his responses showed lack of vocabulary and lack of correct syntactical knowledge. For example, he attempted the relative
clause form on only one of the six attempted definitions. However, I had for a long time thought that Roberto's greatest strength as a language learner was his sense of pragmatics, of what makes good discourse, of the importance of effort and conversational obligation in initiating and responding. And on the midwinter language sample, he continually showed this strength. I later showed his Picture Description response to a colleague at the university in Speech Pathology:

The the the balloon the balloon is is right up there. And and the people he's gone in the ... What is it? (asking the teacher for the word "tent") Here go here h nu h in the in the a (pause) and the peoples a this people h he n said the people give me give me the the checks (there's a man in a booth selling tickets outside the tent). And the peoples he pass it out. N n nnn (pause) n n and the and the (pause) nnn (pause) and the oooh I don't know, what's his name?

My colleague said, "Wow, look how he's asking for clarification. That's a sophisticated language strategy." I agreed. This brief sample showed his extreme effort to communicate - lots of clarification seeking, lots of vocabulary searching, using whatever it took to be understood including word approximations. And this was typical of his day-to-day talk.

Roberto had made a little more reading progress than Carlos. He scored at the preprimer level on the San Diego Quick Assessment (LaPray & Ross, 1986) list of sight words, reading all of the io preprimer words, but only 5 of the io primer words. I also decided to try to take a running record of Roberto's reading of a preprimer passage, the lowest possible passage, from a standardized informal reading inventory (Ekwall, 1986; see Table i). I wanted to see what strategies Roberto might try to use with this very hard passage - a passage he had not seen before and one with no pictures present to provide clues.

What did I learn about Roberto's reading from this sample? One thing was that his sight vocabulary was so limited that he was unable to build enough context as he was reading to use many reading strategies. His accuracy rate for this passage was very low (see Table 2 for a summary of both children's miscue results for all samples in this article). There was not enough context in the passage for him to try to use the semantic and syntactic cueing systems of English. Relatively few of his codable miscues showed good use of meaning to work out words and very few showed good use of syntax. Likewise, there was not enough substance there in what Roberto could make out of the passage for any self correction at all to occur. I was disappointed that Roberto had not acquired a larger sight vocabulary at this point, but at the same time, this running record renewed my belief in the centrality of a minimally sufficient sight vocabulary in learning strategies for getting or making unknown words. I knew that we had to continue to push hard to develop Roberto's sight word knowledge.

I was pleased to see Roberto making some effort to use the graphemes on the page to guess at some words, like "t-t-t-t" for"Tim" and "hus" for"has" (see Table i). A relatively high percentage of his codable miscues showed good use of the visual cues on the page. This clearly marked a different level of phonological awareness for Roberto. He now knew that words were made up of sounds, that letters could stand for sounds, and that he could use this newfound knowledge to unlock words he had not yet been taught. This was a big step - an
encouraging one. I renewed my resolve to continue to teach the variety of word recognition strategies I so wanted Roberto to learn.

Carlos: Staying put or shifting? Through the winter and as far as late April, Carlos gave us little outward sign of cognitive shifts in literacy knowledge. In several journal entries from February through April, I lamented his holding pattern. Even into February, he still could not match a spoken word to a word on the page. He could name all the letters (scrambled), but even into early April, he had not learned all the consonant sound-letter associations.

Throughout this time, I continued to persist with the same activities I had earlier planned for Carlos aimed at advancing his phonological awareness, his sight vocabulary, word attack strategies - especially comparecontrast, using the content to guess at a word, using first-letter sounds to make guesses - and general enjoyment of reading. I did add some activities during this period, with an eye toward intensifying my efforts with Carlos in a diversified way. My assistant did daily abbreviated "Working with Words" (Cunningham & Hall,1994) activities with small groups of children, which included Carlos. She also did consonant-sound minilessons with Carlos in a small group, in which she worked on the specific sound-letter associations he had not yet learned. These were explicit inductive instruction lessons (e.g., Durkin,1993).

Through the winter, our writing activities continued as before. In addition to our daily journal writing, we worked alone, with friends, in small groups, and in big groups; made little books, big books, zigzag books, and pop-up books; wrote at the computer; wrote notes to one another; thought about the beginning, middle, and end parts of stories; wrote letters to characters in folk and fairy tales we read; and more.

It was mainly in Carlos's writing that I saw the possibilities of a cognitive shift. He wrote longer journal entries and stories, and more and more often included the correct letters for sounds he could hear in words. He could tell a story back to us, like his "Three Little Pigs" story (see March 19 entry in Figure a). These writings showed more movement. In April, his writing was clearly and consistently marked by an effort to represent the sounds he heard with letters. Without assistance he would write, "I like mstBcsresmt?" ("I like my sister because she's smart") This was a big step for Carlos - it showed more development of phonological awareness and some knowledge of marking word boundaries with space and some awareness that we use punctuation and it has a function. For me, this was a longawaited step.

Roberto: Picking up speed. January 22 - I will never forget that day. We were writing in our journals.

Jean, my assistant, passed by me and whispered, "Have you seen what Roberto wrote?" I walked over, and pointing to the paper (see January 22 entry, Figure 1) with raised eyebrows said, "May I read yours? I can play in the snow.' Roberto, that's great writing! And I like your snowman too. Is that you in the picture?"

I was so excited. I thought Roberto had probably copied the words can, in, and the from our word wall, where we had put all the sight words we had so far. But he had tried to work out
play and snow on his own. This was a giant leap for Roberto, and one that would sustain itself. Roberto had largely skipped a stage that most children move through. Instead of now representing whole words with initial consonants, for example, Roberto was representing all of the sounds he heard in a word. Not only was he showing me that he knew the alphabetic principle - letters stand for sounds - there was more. By writing "plae" with an "e" at the end, as if he knew that a fourth letter belonged there, he hinted that he now realized that he should not only write what the English word sounds like, but also what it looked like. And this knowledge would signal a key turn into another writing phase.

Not long after the excitement about Roberto's pivotal journal entry came another day of excitement. I talked about it in my journal, but you need to know about "Big Water" to understand the journal entry. Early in the year, at one of the first-grade-level meetings, I asked the other first-grade teachers for some ideas for different ways to show children you were proud of them. One of the teachers told me that she would sometimes let children who had done something especially well or especially kind get a big drink of water while everyone watched. Before the school year started, I had resolved not to rely on behaviorist extrinsic motivations, so I was not keen on this suggestion. Also, at the time, I could not imagine my students being particularly impressed by drinking water. But I had run out of ideas, and I was desperate. One day during a math lesson, when the kids were looking pretty bored, I tried it. It was amazing. The first few children to work out a problem correctly got water. The whole class would wait for a child to walk proudly across the room, chest out and chin up, and everyone would watch. Generally, the child would take a long drink. This came to be known as "Big Water."

Today in Roberto's reading meeting, I thought I'd try to do another minilesson on the compare-contrast strategy, even though not many of the children seem to be getting it yet, I started writing "at, fat, sat, mat" up on the dry-erase board. Roberto raised his hand, and he said, "I can do them:" I said,"You can do them?" and he nodded. He read right lickety-split through them - "at, cat, mat" - the whole long list. I had every at word that you can possibly have on there. Well, all the children in the group were just in awe. They were just staring at him, they couldn't believe it. He finished, and there was this big silence. Before I had a chance to say anything, Manuel leaned over beside me, all wide-eyed and grinning, and whispered, "He's a gonna git a BEEEEG water!" It just cracked us all up. I said,"Yes he is," and Manuel had a big smile on his face. (Tape-recorded journal entry, February 14)

And we all admired Roberto as he walked to the fountain to drink a long drink and then walked back. These few moments signaled a remarkable turning point. Roberto could now use a sophisticated reading strategy think of a known look-alike sight word for the new word, take the sight word he could already read, break it into parts, compare those parts to pieces in the new word, and then rhyme them to get the new word. Each day brought wondrous new insights for Roberto. He had lingered so long in the earlier stage. But suddenly, he was changing rapidly. How long, I wondered, before he would move on to the next level?

The Finish
Roberto: In full bloom. As it turned out, Roberto grew rapidly in his English reading and writing through the whole spring semester. It was as if the world opened up for him. By the end of the year, Roberto had come so far. His oral language had grown rapidly, too, but it was not near the level of his reading and writing achievements. He had moved from Level A to B on the oral language assessment - from non-English speaking to limited English speaking - and he usually seemed to understand much of the oral conversations in the classroom. His vocabulary was growing some, but slowly. He could now correctly identify 39 words (more than twice that of midwinter) on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn, 199 0), but this still ranked him in the zero percentile compared to native-English-speaking children his own age. He could only identify two more words than in midwinter on the Definitions Task (Snow et al, 1995). On informal measures of listening comprehension of novel passages, he could not listen and understand some passages even at preprimer level. I continued to think of his sense of the pragmatics of language as a big asset for Roberto, and a final go-round on Snow's Definitions Task also suggested one other notable improvement. He had now gained considerable syntactic knowledge. He attempted to use a relative clause in every one of his responses, like this: "Flower is a uh uh uh a thing that that you put uh sh sheeds [seeds] in the g grass n you put it on, and they grow up." His Formal Definitions score (5.8) was above the mean (3.7) of first graders reported in the earlier Snow et al. (1995) study.

Interestingly, when Roberto was also asked to do Snow's measures of decontextualized language in Spanish, his performance, though far more fluid, was substantively not much different than his performance in English. In fact, in Spanish, his scores for Formal Definitions and Picture Description were slightly lower than in English. For example, he could define in a limited way two more words in Spanish than in English (knife and nail), but he knew umbrella in English and not in Spanish. He relied more on informal definitions (and less formal syntactic structure) when giving definitions in Spanish. His Picture Description score was slightly higher in English (6) than in Spanish (4), mainly because he used more vocabulary central to the picture (balloon and ticket) in English. Roberto's oral English had certainly improved, but he would need a lot more time, teaching, and English immersion to grow more. However, I now ranked Roberto 8th of 26 in my class for both reading and writing ability, and 3rd of 14 Hispanics. He scored at the first-grade level on one sight word list (the San Diego Quick Assessment, LaPray & Ross, 1986) and at the middle of the third-grade level on another (the Slosson Oral Reading Test, Slosson, 1963), reading 72 words.

In reading meetings and other times during the day when Roberto volunteered to read aloud, his confidence and competence had been growing throughout the spring. One day in May, my assistant Jean said to me,"Try to watch the video Peter made today of Roberto reading with Kenny. It's great!" Months later, I watched. Kenny, one of the best readers in the class, sat quietly on the floor beside Roberto. Kenny had his book in hand, poised for his turn to share. Roberto started off, pointing to the words as he read, and Kenny looked sideways at the words and pictures. Once, when Roberto hesitated on a word, Kenny quietly said,"more." As Roberto picked up speed, he used his finger to keep his place less and less, and Kenny's gaze became more persistent and less distracted:
"I am so good. I will not stop. Five, now six, now seven on top. Seven apples up on top. I am so so good. They will not drop. Five, six, seven. Fun, fun, fun. Seven, six, five, four, three, two, one." (Reading from Dr. Seuss's Ten Apples Up on Top [LeSieg, 1961]; video, May 16)

The boys really looked like they were enjoying the book. And Roberto could read it; this was an easy book for him.

His running record from a second-grade passage on the Bader Reading and Language Inventory (Bader & Wiesendanger, 1994) showed fantastic growth (see Tables 2 and 3). He read with a high rate of accuracy. His sight vocabulary knowledge was strong, and an analysis of his use of different language cueing systems showed he usually tried to use meaning and syntax cues to guess at words. For example, up to the miscue, his substitution of "went" for "wanted" was meaningful and syntactically acceptable. I noticed also that when the same substitution disrupted meaning soon after, Roberto may have been confused about the sense of this part as he tried hard to work and rework over the word "sing." This sort of "try, try, retry" implied that he was cross-checking the sense and syntax of "sing" with other parts of the sentence, perhaps not only looking backward in the sentence, but maybe also looking forward. But still, some of Roberto's miscues did disrupt meaning, like "rabbit" for "ribbit;" and were syntactically incorrect, like "heard" for "hear." Roberto's use of the graphic cues on the page was a clearly strong reading strategy. Almost all of his codable miscues suggested he was using the graphemes on the page to work out the words, for example, "never" for "near;" and "flow-flowers."

I was pleased with how Roberto worked at getting the words on this passage, and his self correction was great. This running record verified what I already knew - that not only had Roberto's phonological awareness developed significantly, but he had also learned a lot about what sounds, various letters, and combinations of letters could represent. He knew how to use consonant sounds, short and long vowel sounds, consonant blends, the "ow" diphthong, and other rules like the "final e" rule. The running record also showed me that Roberto was not just relying on sounding out or "decoding" words to read. He had developed several other strategies. He was using English meanings and syntax to make guesses and consider possibilities. After all, in addition to the evidence of strategic use of meaning and syntax, he offered seven "memories" of the text, showing good understanding.

I could not believe that the analysis of his reading of the next passage, the third-grade level passage, showed a nearly identical profile for percentages of miscues, revealing use of semantics, syntax, and visual cues, and for self-corrections. In addition, his accuracy rate on that third-grade passage was also high, with io "memories" - good comprehension!

Since late February, Roberto wrote longer and longer pieces and more consistently showed that he knew words had to look certain ways, not just sound certain ways (e.g., March 22 entry in Figure 1). He was also spelling some words correctly on his own. He had clearly moved into the transitional stage of spelling development.
Carlos: The blossoming. Was I in for a surprise. On the one hand, Carlos's oral language still did not seem to have shifted much, and final oral English-language assessments affirmed this. He could correctly identify eight more words on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn, 1996) than he could in the fall, yet when compared to native-English-speaking children his own age, he only ranked in the 50th percentile. He scored at the same Limited-English-Fluency level (B) on the ESL Teacher's test (Dalton, Tighe, & Ballard, 1991) as he did the past August. He could listen to and understand passages on the Bader Reading and Language Inventory (Bader & Wiesendanger, 1994) though at the fourth-grade level. On the Snow et al. (1995) Picture Description Task, his score of 9 was approximately the same as in January (8). Like Roberto, when asked to do the Snow Definitions and Picture Description Tasks in Spanish, Carlos did about the same as in English. No notable quantitative or qualitative differences appeared.

At the end of the year, Carlos still ranked low on literacy knowledge in my class, though his ranking had improved some since February. I placed him 22nd in reading and asst in writing of 26 children and 9th and 9th in reading and writing of my 14 Hispanics. But, in the last 6 weeks or so of school, Carlos's literacy knowledge took a giant leap. It was dramatic, and it was something to see. In early May, I talked in my journal about the turning point:

(Most of the lower level readers] are just starting to ... use the initial sounds to try to think about what the word might be. Carlos ... has the least confidence, and every time he looks at a word and says the word, he looks at me. I started working with him to say,"I'll tell you if it is not right. You just keep right on going and don't look up at me." But when he is not totally sure he still is kind of looking for support and wanting to make sure he is right. I definitely do see ... [him] using those beginning sounds, and Jean has been doing short vowel sounds with them for a couple of weeks now ... I think some of ... [the lower readers] now are getting very excited that they find themselves actually being able to read some of the words in new material that we haven't read before ... they can point to the words and keep track of them and go left to right and follow along, which is a huge, huge step for them ... They are at a place now where they could really blossom. I just wish I had them for another year. (Tape-recorded journal entry, May 9)

Carlos's writing from late April to the end of the school year showed important changes in his literacy knowledge. He was moving from one spelling phase to another. He could hear more and more sounds in words and could represent more and more of those sounds when he wrote.

As I walked by, Jean was writing as she said, "Carlos, we will miss you very, very much too! We hope you will do good work in school in Mexico." And Carlos said, "Well, I'm coming back here for school next year." "Oh! I'm glad you will be coming back!" I looked down at his paper. "Wow!" I thought to myself as I compared this in my mind to his midyear journal entry on liking Mexico. (Compare December 18 and June 3 entries in Figure 2.)

When it came time for our end-of-year running records and other assessments, I knew that Carlos would barely be able to do them. In fact, he could only read three words on the San Diego Quick Assessment (LaPray & Ross, 1986) list of sight words - me, look, and can. And he
struggled through the preprimer passage, the easiest one on the Bader Reading and Language Inventory (Bader & Wiesendanger, 1994; see Tables 2 and 4). But I was pleased that he now could actually read some of it on his own. And then, when I analyzed the passage, I was taken aback. His reading of this passage looked just like Roberto's reading at the midyear point (see Table a). He read with about the same accuracy, and his percentages for use of meaning, syntax, and visual cues, and for self correction were nearly identical to Roberto's earlier ones. Everything I had said to describe Roberto's midyear reading, I could now say about Carlos's reading. How I wished I could be around for the burst that promised to come.

Working out the wrap up. Well, time was running out now School was almost over. Just a couple of weeks left. As I drove back and forth to school,

I rehearsed what the last day would be like, how it would feel, trying to prepare myself for the separation I did not want to come. Even unconsciously, I was working out the finish.

[Last night] I had one of my recurring dreams. Well, it has become a recurring dream this year. It is a dream where, well, the first couple of times I had it this year I was driving in a car, my old Quantum, and all of a sudden I came to a place in the road that just was a vertical climb. I don't know how you say - a 90-degree slope. I mean vertical. All of a sudden, I had to go straight up this thing in my car and toward the top it turned to the right and angled around, not unlike driving in West Virginia in the mountains. In my dream, the first couple of times, I'd get so far up the hill, and there would be traffic in front and traffic behind and somebody in front of me would stop. So I had to stop and put the clutch in, and as soon as I did that the car started slipping backwards and backwards and backwards, and then I would wake up. Last Friday night I had the same dream, but in this dream I kept going? There were no cars in front and no cars behind, and I kept going and going and going and finally turned that corner, and just as I went around the corner, woke up ... It was a fairly transparent dream, I think. (Taperecorded journal entry, May 30)

On my` way home on the last day of school, I revisited the day through my tape recorder. One of the most striking things about the day for both Jean and me was that many of our Hispanic children did not seem to realize what "the last day" meant.

As we were getting ready to leave reading meeting this morning, Carlos said, "Can we read this again tomorrow?"and I smiled and said, "Sweetheart, this is the last day of school. There isn't going to be any tomorrow"... I hope they will all be all right. (Tape-recorded journal entry, May 21)

Reflections

There was no tomorrow for Carlos and Roberto and me. But I am still learning from them. They have shown me that reading and writing can in fact be great ways to bring young second-language learners into English. Both children made progress in learning to read in English, and they made progress within classroom instruction that was carried out from a firstlanguage reading perspective. Roberto taught me how dramatic the possibilities of
emergent ESL literacy development can be. Carlos taught me that Roberto's pattern of development could be initiated by others, although crucial early turns in the pattern might happen much later, and the stay in portions of the path might be more drawn out.

This tale celebrates the successful learning that can occur for EsL children who are taught in classrooms where instruction is based on a nativeEnglish perspective of reading. To our knowledge, this tale is unique in its focus on the cognitive emergent English reading development of ssL learners.

I can now look back to the professional understandings I took to school with me and ask, "How do Carlos's and Roberto's developmental paths mesh with those earlier understandings?" I think about the controversies I was a part of. Could an early reading model developed for first-language learners explain EsL learners' processes or is a second-language reading model needed? Do tenets of emergent literacy based primarily on firstlanguage learners apply to EsL learners or do EsL learners need some considerable amount of oral development before they begin to read? Because Roberto and Carlos were successful in their English reading progress, and because they made progress in a classroom based on a first-language reading outlook, I would say Roberto and Carlos and I have added fuel to the fire. As I think back to Adams' (1990) landmark synthesis of research on early reading and her vision of the first steps in beginning reading, Roberto's and Carlos's developmental paths fit well with many of her basic conclusions from the research with native-English speakers. I am thinking, for example, of how Adams noted the importance of early phonological awareness as a predecessor to significant word learning. How necessary it was for Roberto and Carlos to figure out how to point to printed words in a sentence as they were spoken aloud. In retrospect, their ability to match correct letters to sounds was entangled with their ability to separate words in speech. As for emergent literacy tenets, I now marvel at the extent to which Roberto's fuller and Carlos's incomplete pathways paralleled the routes typically taken by native-English-speaking emergent readers as described in other literature (see Teale & Sulzby,1986).

We might well wonder how much of Roberto's and Carlos's pattern of development was natural and how much was formed by the classroom instruction. In our case, we can not really say for sure. It could very well be that each child would have taken the same path under totally different instructional circumstances. Or it might be that my outlook on how best to facilitate their growth did interact with their growing cognitions and in some sense affect their routes. Perhaps the question of natural versus enhanced ESL emergent literacy development might be a next research step.

I now also examine Roberto's and Carlos's English reading development in light of the assumptions and biases I held. During the year, I never questioned my cultural or language learning outlook. When Roberto and Carlos were on plateaus and moving slowly, I had some vague sense that I was failing at something, but only fine-tuned the analysis of my failure along Vygotskyan lines. I decided I had failed to take my instruction to their zone of proximal development. Now as I look back, I wonder how very limiting certain aspects of my lenses and biases might have been. For example, how much more progress might Roberto and Carlos have made if I had more insight into their families, culture, and values, and if I had been more
capable of arranging their instruction to accommodate that culture and value system? How much more progress might they have made if they had greater access to instruction in Spanish in the classroom? To what extent did my requirement that they fit into my classroom instruction hinder or limit their progress?

Further, I look back at my understanding of word getting as the main work (though not the only work) of beginning reading and my firm belief in the importance of frequent diagnosis of children’s reading levels and knowledge. The former is apparently uncontested in the reading research community. The latter is deeply connected to constructivist notions of locating children’s zones of proximal development as a preliminary to scaffolded instruction to move the children forward. I continue to perceive both of these areas as extremely important, but I now wonder how these lenses limited my vision about other possible learning. I was trying very hard to see the children’s cognitive development as it related to known phases for first-language learners. This might be a strength of my work, but could it simultaneously be a limitation? What might I have seen if I had looked through different lenses that were not so word focused or so diagnosis focused? Or, importantly, what might I have seen if I looked through the children’s eyes?

For myself, I have to say that, as I lived with Roberto and Carlos as their first-grade teacher, I certainly thought that my beliefs and the way I set up instruction affected them. I hold onto this thought now on my college campus as a teacher of teachers. Though I did not compare the methods used in my classroom to any others and, consequently, have no evidence that these methods worked better or less well than others might have, Roberto and Carlos strengthened my belief that what we know from research on early reading in general, and what that research implies for early reading instruction, can also apply to early ESOL readers. Also, their development took place within the context of a balanced approach to reading instruction, an approach generally conceived as applicable to the mainstream classroom. I will try to pass these thoughts on to prospective and in-service teachers.

And although I knew in my head before going to first grade that my aspirations for Roberto and Carlos would be important to what and how much they learned, I now know that more intensely. Both children taught me the importance of holding onto my high aspirations for them. But persisting high aspirations and a plan for how to achieve them were not enough. Roberto and Carlos also taught me intensely about the necessity to moderate plans and about the potential of an instructional push when fitted to an emerging reader’s momentary place. As I said at the outset, I had known about Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development. But my year in first grade really drove the idea home. Through the long, seemingly dry, periods when Roberto or Carlos or both of them showed little outward sign of cognitive change, I could have waited. I could have said, "They’re not ready" or "They haven't learned enough English yet: And maybe they would have made the same progress they actually did make. But I think not. I believe that through those periods they were knocking me over the head to get me to see what they really needed, what they really knew and did not know about reading, about words especially. And I was slow at times to figure it out. Like Carlos’s early lack of movement in writing. In retrospect, he probably could not hear the separate sounds. I took too long figuring out where he was. When I finally got around to saying words for him
and pushing him to guess at sounds, he started to make some movement. And like when I had Carlos and some other children looking at My Mom Travels a Lot (Bauer, 1981) for a couple of weeks when it was way too hard for them. There were other times too. But I do believe that once I identified the critical needs, poking and pushing with explicit instruction helped when it was the right fit with their instructional level and functioned well to call attention to the next place to be.

Now almost 3 years have gone by since I left Roberto and Carlos. I have visited them on the playground and in their classrooms several times since I conducted this study I continually wonder how they are doing, what their teachers say about them, how their reading and writing are moving along. A year of being with them just was not enough. A year of following their literacy development was a start, but it would have been nice if I could have found the time to keep up with them across teachers for 2 or 3 or 4 years. It would have been nice to poke at their perspectives of their own learning, or to look at the junctures and disjunctures between school and home that limit and enhance their literacy learning. These sorts of research would help us to learn even more.

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1 Names have been changed throughout the article.

2 The child's real name was misspelled.

3 Villenas (1996) documented the centrality of moral and civil conduct to the definition of good education for the Hispanic families in the community I worked in.

4 My first assistant resigned for personal reasons about 6 weeks into the school year, at which time Mrs. James was hired.

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