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# "I hear you, but I don't understand you": the effects of peer tutoring for helping secondary ESL students achieve academic success

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“I HEAR YOU, BUT I DON’T UNDERSTAND YOU”:  
THE EFFECTS OF PEER TUTORING FOR HELPING SECONDARY  
ESL STUDENTS ACHIEVE ACADEMIC SUCCESS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
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Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures.....	ix
Glossary of Acronyms.....	x
Abstract.....	xi
Introduction.....	1
Context for Study.....	1
Celeste: How One Student Battled With Accountability .....	3
A Brief Outline of the Situation at HSH.....	3
The Importance of Teacher-As-Researcher.....	4
Predictions for This Study.....	5
Endnotes.....	7
Chapter One: ESL Students in Texas.....	8
A Brief History of Texas Immigration.....	8
Testing and Accountability in Texas.....	10
ESL Testing.....	13
ESL Difficulties: Historical, Familial, and Academic Barriers to Success.....	18
Tackling the ESL Dilemma.....	26
Further Questions.....	29
Endnotes.....	29
Chapter Two: Methodology.....	30
Overview.....	30
Definition of Literacy.....	37
Methods.....	40
Planning.....	44
The Student Tutees and Tutors.....	56
The Tutees.....	57
The Tutors.....	64
Looking Forward.....	71
Endnotes.....	72
Chapter Three: Adriana and Karla.....	73
Overview.....	73
Semantic Breakthroughs.....	76

Grammatical Breakthroughs.....	82
Syntactical Breakthroughs.....	87
Gains in Social Capital.....	89
Adriana and Karla: A Story of Success.....	90
Endnotes.....	91
Chapter Four: Leah and Zena.....	93
Overview.....	93
Social Breakthroughs.....	94
Rhetorical Breakthroughs.....	96
Grammatical Breakthroughs.....	100
Syntactical Breakthroughs.....	105
Leah and Zena: A Positive Outcome.....	106
Endnotes.....	107
Chapter Five: Ricardo and Karen.....	108
Overview.....	108
Word Identification / Reading Breakthroughs.....	110
Speaking Breakthroughs.....	116
Writing / Grammatical Breakthroughs.....	117
Listening Breakthroughs.....	118
Ricardo: What We All Learned.....	119
Conclusion.....	121
Re-Examining My Original Research Questions.....	121
Future Research.....	124
General Conclusions.....	125
Works Cited.....	129
Appendix A: Eleventh Grade English TEKS.....	135
Appendix B: Parental Permission Form.....	142
Appendix C: Confidentiality Agreement.....	149
Appendix D: Tutor Application.....	150
Appendix E: Tutee Questionnaire.....	152
Appendix F: Daily Tutoring Log.....	153
Appendix G: Maze Procedure.....	154

Appendix H: Attitude Assessment.....	156
Appendix I: The Picture of Courage.....	158
Appendix J: Verb Tense Continuum.....	159
Vita.....	162

## LIST OF TABLES

1. 2004, 2005, and 2006 TELPAS Scores.....	15
2. 2004 Demographics of Students and Teachers at HSH.....	37
3. Initial Budget.....	46
4. Grade Level 5 Maze Test Results.....	55
5. Grade Level 6 Maze Test Results.....	55
6. Oscar May 2004 9 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	58
7. Oscar May 2005 10 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	58
8. Ricardo August 2005 10 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	59
9. Ricardo May 2006 10 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	59
10. Gladis May 2005 11 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	60
11. Jennifer May 2006 11 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	60
12. José August 2002 10 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	61
13. José May 2003 10 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	61
14. José May 2004 10 <sup>th</sup> grade (repeat).....	61
15. José May 2005 11 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	61
16. José May 2006 12 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	61
17. Mary September 2004 9 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	62
18. Mary May 2005 9 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	62
19. Mary May 2006 11 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	62
20. Maricruz November 2003 10 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	62
21. Maricruz May 2004 10 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	62

22. Maricruz May 2005 11 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	63
23. Ofelia May 2005 11 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	63
24. Leah August 2004 9 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	63
25. Leah May 2005 9 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	63
26. Leah May 2006 10 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	63
27. Adriana August 2002 9 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	64
28. Adriana May 2003 9 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	64
29. Adriana May 2004 10 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	64
30. Adriana May 2005 11 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	64
31. Adriana May 2006 12 <sup>th</sup> grade.....	64
32. Mad <sup>3</sup> .....	81
33. Said <sup>3</sup> .....	81
34. Long and Short Vowel Chart Made in Tutorials.....	87

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Total TEKS versus TEKS Tested.....	12
2. Jim Cummins' BICS and CALP.....	39
3. Jim Cummins' Communication Framework.....	42

## GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

1. AMAOS: Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives
2. AP: Advanced Placement
3. BICS: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
4. CALP: Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
5. ELA: English Language Arts
6. ESL: English as a Second Language
7. FAIR: Federation for American Immigrant Reform
8. FES: Full English Speaker
9. HOCS: Higher-Order Concerns
10. HSH: Hawthorne Senior High
11. IPT: Idea Proficiency Test
12. LEP: Limited English Proficient
13. LOCS: Later-Order Concerns
14. LOR: Length of Residence
15. LPAC: Language Proficiency Assessment Committee
16. NAC: New Arrival Center
17. NCLB: No Child Left Behind
18. NES: Non-English Speaker
19. PEIMS: Public Education Information Management System
20. RPTE: Reading Proficiency Test in English
21. SIOP: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol
22. TAAS: Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
23. TAKS: Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.
24. TEA: Texas Education Agency.
25. TEKS: Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.
26. TELPAS: Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System
27. TOP: Texas Observation Protocol.

## ABSTRACT

When I began teaching 11<sup>th</sup> grade English in Houston, Texas, I quickly discovered that students who speak English as a second language are sometimes drastically under-prepared for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test, the state's high stakes test required during the 11<sup>th</sup> grade year. The result of their inability to pass the test is that they do not graduate, which limits their future career and academic choices.

In a semester-long research study at a typical high school in Houston, Texas, I explored the possibility of assisting ESL/LEP students transplanted to Houston as they struggled with English proficiency through a peer tutoring program. I outline the difficulties these students face, including personal and familial difficulties with acclimation to a new environment, repeated testing, and special needs (both personal and academic). I also examine the difficulties I faced with accountability and misunderstanding from other teachers, administrators, and the students themselves as I tried to develop a program to help these and future students become fluent in English.

To conduct this study, I designed a tutoring program for ten ESL/LEP students and seven tutors, and we found that discovering who we were as a center was a never-ending process. Though not a typical writing center, our "space" was a place based on typical writing center philosophy, and our goal was to assist these students, through tutoring in English, as they prepared for their futures. Our center was originally intended to serve those LEP students who had taken and failed the test at least once, but these case studies show how we had to change that conception as we struggled with class sizes, scheduling, budget cuts, teacher and administration misunderstanding, and time constraints.

Although the results of this study seem negative, as only two of our students passed the TAKS test at the end of the year, the case studies presented show that peer tutoring can and does work for increasing the language proficiency of ESL students. Test scores did not necessarily show the students' progress, but progress is evident in their development of social capital and through their linguistic gains.

## INTRODUCTION

### Context for Study

When I accepted a position at Hawthorne High School<sup>1</sup> (HSH) in Houston, Texas, as a first year 11<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher in August 2003, I was a bit overwhelmed by the lack of English proficiencies of the school's 51% Hispanic population. While I had assumed that the Hispanic students were bilingual speakers, at least at the high school level, I found many of them were actually Limited English Proficient (LEP), and I was unprepared for the challenges that these students presented. As an English teacher held accountable for my students' success during the state's high stakes testing, I found the students who spoke only limited English to be very intimidating, not because they were behavior problems in my class or because they didn't want to learn, but because I didn't know how, as an exclusively English-speaking teacher, to teach those students, to meet them at their level and help them succeed in a curriculum, school, and community dominated by English. How would I teach someone to use personal experience in an essay when he/she could barely write a comprehensible sentence in English? How would I teach someone to read a grade-level selection and use evidence from the selection to answer questions when he/she could not understand even the most basic selection? How would I teach a literature-based English Language Arts course to a student who had to have the entire class discussion translated into his/her native language by a classmate? My biggest concern was how to teach them the "regular" curriculum in a way that fostered their second language development, a problem I did not encounter with native speakers. While reading comprehension and essay structure, for example, are concerns applicable on some level to all students, LEP students, as Marian Arkin explains in her book on methods and strategies for tutoring ESL students, "may [have] academic difficulties similar to those of native speakers, . . . [and] they may have additional problems relating directly to their linguistic and cultural displacement" (4). I quickly found that I was not even sure that the LEP students in my classes could understand what I was saying.

I did not realize how easy I had it that first year. I only had one truly LEP student, Helena. At the time, ESL students at HSH had two options: substitute the ESL reading / writing courses for English credit, or sign—with their parents' permission if the students were under eighteen years old—a waiver of ESL services, thereby mainstreaming the students into a regular English classroom and using the ESL classes only for support. While ESL technically stands for English as a Second Language and constitutes *any* student for whom English is a second language, for the purposes of this study, I am making the following distinctions: ESL will refer to any student still enrolled in the ESL program, and LEP will be those ESL students who are classified as Limited English Proficient based on the Reading Proficiency Test in English (RPTE, which measures reading level) and the Idea Proficiency Test (IPT, which measures listening comprehension), whether they are enrolled in the ESL program or not. Helena and her parents elected to sign the waiver of ESL services; Helena was, therefore, in both regular English III for English credit and ESL Reading and Writing for elective credit. Helena

spoke almost no English; in fact, another student translated my entire class for her. Unfortunately, she did not pass the state-mandated test required to graduate. At the end of her senior year, unable to pass the test, Helena got married and dropped out of high school.

At the beginning of the 2004-2005 academic year, the ESL program at HSH was modified. Instead of ESL classes substituting for regular English credit, those classes became forced “electives” (classes counting as elective credit that the ESL students were required to take), originally designed to be support for content-area teachers. All of the ESL students, therefore, were mainstreamed into regular core classes with the belief that surrounding the ESL students with as much “correct” English as possible would be a vital part of their English language acquisition. While Linda Harklau suggests in her study on the learning environment for ESL students in secondary schools that “many in the general public as well as many educators in American public schools hold a folk belief that ESL students will learn English simply by surrounding them with native English peers” (50), she goes on to note that many students do not or cannot learn English through this type of limited immersion because, as was the case in my classroom, there were enough bilingual speakers to provide a security blanket of sorts for them, and at home, their families only spoke the native language. As a result, the students did not learn enough English to survive in the regular curriculum, and a large number of ESL / LEP students chose, like Helena, to drop out of high school. If we, as educators, expect them to succeed in upper-level English classes and on high-stakes tests, we have to provide additional support for these students, and so far, secondary ESL classes are not enough for many of them.

Federal and state laws compound the problem by forcing schools and districts to maintain accountability for students’ success on high-stakes testing. Some aspects of federal and state education reform are beneficial for students, such as the mandate that each classroom must have a highly qualified teacher. Most would agree that highly qualified teachers are in the best interest of the students. But far from leveling the playing field, Margo Gottlieb explains the dangers of evaluating ESL students and native speakers with the same assessments. In her study, she argues that assessments and state and federal mandates such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have separated ESL students even farther from their English speaking peers:

[W]ith the dawn of the era of educational accountability in the 1980s, school reform initiatives have become centralized around the provision of academic standards that serve as a yardstick for student, school, district, and state performance. The centerpiece of this movement has been student assessment, . . . the battle has been most rigorous in secondary schools, where high-stakes assessment as a graduation requirement has often impeded linguistically and culturally diverse students from equal education opportunity. (176)

These mandates do not help the ESL students “catch up” to their language majority peers; instead, they have heightened the problem they attempted to solve by increasing the gap between language majority and language minority students. In order to understand how, it is necessary to look at some problems facing ESL students in secondary schools. The

following story of Celeste, a senior in my English III class during my first year teaching, highlights some of the problems and difficulties ESL students face on a daily basis with testing, accountability, and schooling.

### Celeste: How One Student Battled With Accountability

Celeste was a senior in one of my regular English III classes during the 2003-2004 academic year. Because she failed English III during the 2002-2003 school year, she was re-taking the class during the 2003-2004 school year; and because she had not yet passed the exit-level TAKS test, she was taking a remedial TAKS preparation course to substitute for her English IV credit.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Celeste was enrolled in the ESL reading and writing class.

Celeste came to the United States from Mexico in February 2002, and she enrolled at HSH as a ninth grader. All new arrivals take the Idea Proficiency Test (IPT II, which measures speaking and listening) and the Reading Proficiency Test in English (RPTE, which measures reading). Upon arrival, the IPT II classified her as a non-English speaker (NES)<sup>3</sup> at the lowest level (A) of six levels. On the test, Celeste was unable to answer most questions. At that point, she was placed in the New Arrival Center by the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee<sup>4</sup> (LPAC), an assessment system required by the Texas Education Code to assess the academic progress of non-native speakers of English (LPAC). In March of that semester, she took the RPTE; she answered 40 of 60 questions correctly and was classified as an intermediate English reader, meaning she could read and understand simple texts but would have trouble reading and understanding texts written for native speakers at her grade level.

In May 2002, as a result of her RPTE scores, Celeste was removed from the New Arrival Center and placed in the ESL program, and she was re-classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). When she entered tenth grade, she was still classified by the IPT II test as LEP, but her score level increased from A to B. In May 2003, she was designated a limited English reader by her IPT and RPTE scores. Those designations held during her junior year (May 2004), and during her senior year Celeste's test scores were holding steady, so she was still classified as LEP. But Celeste was unable to pass the TAKS test required for graduation, even though she passed all of her classes. She was issued a certificate of completion, but she will not receive a diploma unless she can pass the TAKS test before she turns 21.

### A Brief Outline of the Situation at HSH

As a teacher devoted to success for all students, I find it frustrating that our educational system failed Celeste and other students like her so completely. After two years in the United States in a mainstreamed, English-speaking curriculum, Celeste had not progressed any farther with her English skills than she had after three months in the United States because we do not have a system in place to adequately meet her needs. It is needs like Celeste's that this study is attempting to address, but unfortunately the trends found in Celeste's story are representative of a large number of secondary

students, both at HSH and across the state.

During the 2005-2006 academic year, HSH alone enrolled 141 LEP students; roughly eight percent of students enrolled, therefore, found themselves in a situation similar to Celeste's. Because of the pressures of accountability, teachers and administrators have to ensure that these students pass the high-stakes test required for graduation as soon as possible; the problem, however, is that many of them have not been in the United States long enough to have developed the language skills necessary to pass a test in English. Since students take the TAKS test each year after the third grade to advance to the next grade level, teachers at other levels feel the pressure as well when students do not pass; but students at every level except the eleventh grade level who have recently moved to the United States may receive a one-year exemption from the test to give them extra time to prepare. Realistically speaking, then, a student could move to the United States from a non-English speaking country in the middle of the eleventh grade year having never spoken English and be required to take the TAKS test; when he/she does not pass the test in the year-and-a-half left before graduation, he/she would not graduate. The system is not fair and equitable, but as long as we, as educators, are working within the system, we have to find a way to help these students within those constraints.

The solution thus far at HSH has been to place all students who do not pass the TAKS test into a remedial TAKS class designed to focus exclusively on TAKS (read: to teach to the test) so that they can pass and graduate. Unfortunately, the class does not work for all of the students. In addition, HSH has instituted a system of random pull-outs, where students who have not passed TAKS in any area of the test are pulled out of other classes for intensive, one-on-one training with a specialist in that area. Of course, when students are pulled out of a class for TAKS training, they are missing the material for the course they are pulled out of, so that is not an effective solution. HSH also pays teacher to stay after school to teach at Starcatchers, an after-school tutorial program to help students pass the TAKS test; unfortunately, many of the students who need the tutorial time cannot stay after school. Thus far, a truly effective solution has not been found.

#### The Importance of the Teacher-As-Researcher

When I realized the extent of the difficulty for ESL students, I began to look for solutions quickly. Dissatisfied with my inability to communicate with these students during class and on paper, I turned, like Carolyn Walker and David Elias suggest in their analysis of writing conferences, to conferencing as a way to help them. I tried to persuade my ESL students to come to tutoring sessions after school, but they always had reasons they could not come. Either they worked, or they baby-sat, or they did not have transportation if they missed the bus. During the 2004-2005 academic year, after struggling with these students for three semesters trying to persuade them to meet me after school for additional tutorial support, I finally realized what I felt was the major reason for their reticence. Celeste, whose struggles were outlined at the beginning of this chapter, told me that she would not come to tutorials because it was too hard to make me understand what she was saying, and she could not understand what I was saying. In

short, the language barrier was frightening to her, and she did not want me, her teacher, to see her struggle, especially if that struggle was unsuccessful, to overcome that barrier. Not only, then, had the standardized test excluded her from both the dominant, English-speaking culture of the United States and her own culture, but also I and my class made her and others like her feel more isolated from their native language peers through our inability to break the language barrier.

As I struggled to come up with a way to help my own students in my own English III class, I began to have the ESL students collaborate with the fully native speakers to increase their fluency, and I hit upon the idea of peer tutoring. Wondering if a peer tutoring program would work to help ESL students gain proficiency in English to pass the TAKS test and graduate on time with their classmates, I began to research and draw up plans for my own tutoring program at HSH. I began to plan for a center based loosely on a typical university writing center but specific to the needs of HSH.

I found myself, therefore, in a unique position at HSH: I was a teacher, but I was also a researcher, and this dual position forced me to consider solutions to what I saw as a crisis in secondary education in Texas. As a teacher-researcher, I can bring valuable information to the study of ESL secondary education because I am a participant in that field of work and study. Some change is necessary since, according to Deborah Short in her explanation of effective sheltered instruction, the secondary ESL dilemma is growing: “The number of these language-minority students continues to grow exponentially, but their level of academic achievement lags significantly behind that of their language-majority peers and appears to be worsening” (107). As teachers, we need to invest time researching solutions to these lags in achievement. Teachers overcome obstacles to classroom success every day, but the solutions we find to the challenges we face rarely get shared outside of our own teaching teams or, at best, our schools. I concur with Miles Myers, who claims that teacher research “is one of the most urgent needs for making schools better places for teaching and learning” (2). In their narrative account of a year of teaching that argues for the teacher-as-researcher movement, John Loghran and Jeff Northfield claim that, as teachers, we should focus on “personal practice and experience . . . [to] undertake genuine inquiry that leads to a better understanding” of the complexities involved with classroom teaching ESL students (ix). The teacher-as-researcher movement has been gaining momentum; Loghran and Northfield further explain that “educational literature has shown a move towards incorporating the teacher’s voice as a way of better acknowledging the importance of teachers’ own views in, and descriptions of, episodes and events” (133). Because of my position as teacher / researcher, therefore, I have a chance to examine a problem in my own school and share my results with the wider body of teachers and scholars of English and English as a Second Language.

#### Predictions for This Study

Obviously, many factors affect ESL and LEP achievement. There are social factors: The children themselves are often pulled in competing directions based on their parents’ and families’ needs and desires and their own peer groups. While their parents generally want them to succeed, many students experience real needs and pressures to

begin working, and most do not have the peer or adult support necessary to negotiate the tension. There are economic factors: The communities around schools and districts receiving high ratings are rewarded as property values go up, and different district personnel are rewarded based on increasing TAKS scores. And, in Texas, there are additional factors for students, teachers, and administrators to grapple with in the face of accountability. As a result of NCLB, every student must take and pass the TAKS test required for graduation; in order for a school to receive an exemplary rating, a high percentage of LEP students need to pass TAKS. But every LEP student who passes TAKS, receives a score of advanced high on the RPTE, and receives an F on the IPT is exited out of the ESL program and into monitored status, which results in decreased school funding. In other words, schools lose status if enough students do not pass the TAKS test, but as ESL students pass and are exited out of the ESL program, schools also lose funding for that program. While some administrators receive accolades if a majority of LEP students pass TAKS, there is a conflict of interest because, if those students drop out of school before graduation, they are not counted in the number of students who fail to pass the test. In short, if they cannot pass and graduate, some would rather them drop out because then they are not counted in the test failure rate. The tension facing students, teachers, and administrators often seems insurmountable, and the main goal of public education—educating students—often gets lost as people try to protect their jobs.

In this ethnographic study, I attempted to find a way teachers could work within the administrative constraints of their schools to help ESL students become successful. I wanted to find out if an intensive peer tutoring program in addition to or in place of “regular” ESL classroom instruction could help LEP students increase their language proficiency quickly so that they could be successful students within the educational system in Texas. Based on the framework for learning language outlined by Jim Cummins, I designed a peer tutoring program and studied ten LEP students throughout the course of one semester at HSH. In Chapter One, I further outline the immigration and accountability issues in Texas and examine the difficulties ESL students face. In Chapter Two, I discuss my proposed solution to the problem and demonstrate how I attempted to solve it. I also briefly outline the demographics of each tutor and tutee involved in the program in terms of test scores and motivation to succeed. In Chapters Three, Four, and Five, I tell the stories of three student tutees. While these stories are only the stories of three students, I believe they are representative of what generally happens to many ESL students, and they also highlight how peer tutors learn about their own languages and about working with other students. In Chapter Six, I outline the major insights I have gained as a teacher-researcher through this study, and I make recommendations for aiding secondary ESL students in the future.

Several points are important to remember when reading. First, these students are tested regularly. They take the regular 11<sup>th</sup> grade tests (the ACT, the PSAT, the SAT, and TAKS), and they also take a battery of tests yearly to assess their academic growth for accountability purposes. The stress of so much testing increases the students’ frustrations at times, making them feel even more isolated from the “regular” curriculum and students. Second, the situation in the district and in the state keeps changing. Every year,

a new test or a new teaching procedure is added, increasing the workload of already burdened teachers. Also, the argument over the ESL dilemma is growing; as I write, new state and federal mandates are being passed to help teachers, administrators, schools, and districts cope with the frustrations of high-stakes testing and accountability.

Finally, when working with this group of both ESL / LEP and regular education students, I began to realize that teaching ESL / LEP students and having an honest desire to help them meant more than just teaching them. It meant listening to them, solving their problems and teaching them how to solve them in the future, and becoming an advocate for them in a system that frequently denies them access to the help they need and deserve. I watched them smile and laugh when they finally figured out a concept, but I also watched them get angry when their teachers and counselors ignored them; I watched them shut down when they were told by teachers and administrators they would never go to college; and I watched them cry as they dealt with normal teenage issues coupled with the social and familial pressures associated with moving to a new country. There is no easy solution for these students, especially with testing and accountability issues. They struggle every day, sometimes much more so than their language-majority “peers.” A better system needs to be in place to help them enjoy success, both personal and academic.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>I have used pseudonyms for the students, the school, and the district to protect the students’, the teachers’, the counselors’, and the administration’s privacy.
- <sup>2</sup>In order for these students to gain maximum exposure to TAKS material and help them pass as soon as possible, HSH has created TAKS remedial classes for students who fail to pass any portion of the TAKS test. For the English portion of TAKS, the remedial class actually functions as a substitute for English IV. Students gain credit for English IV when they take the remedial class, but they only do TAKS work in the class instead of English IV work.
- <sup>3</sup>These ratings are controlled by the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS).
- <sup>4</sup>The LPAC was deemed necessary by section 39.023 (m) of the Texas Education Code, which “requires [the Texas Education Agency] TEA to develop procedures for language proficiency assessment committees (LPACs) to follow to ensure that exempted LEP students are administered the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) at the earliest practical date.” For more information on LPACs or to view the LPAC manual, see <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/guides/lpac/index.html>

## CHAPTER ONE: ESL STUDENTS IN TEXAS

### A Brief History of Texas Immigration

Although the ESL students at Hawthorne constitute a wide range of generational immigration, roughly 83% of the LEP students during the 2005-2006 academic year were first generation immigrants. The general definition of immigrant postulated by Xue Lang Rong and Judith Preissle, scholars who have studied the challenges of educating immigrant students, is “an alien who has voluntarily moved from one society to another” (3), but many immigrants come to the United States not out of a desire to move to the U.S. but to escape political, social, and economic impoverishment. In their 1998 study of the effects of immigration, Rong and Preissle note that at the national level, “[o]ne of every two foreign-born children in the United States has been here less than 5 years, and one of three has been in this country less than 3 years” (24).

ESL theorist Angela Valenzuela, Texas historical scholar Margarita Melville, and the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) all briefly outline the history of immigration in Houston. Houston was founded at the birth of the Republic of Texas in 1836, and Texas was annexed to the United States in 1845. When the United States won the war with Mexico in 1848, all Mexican citizens in the area acquired by the United States became American citizens. The beginning of the Civil War in Mexico and the establishment of major railroad lines in and around Houston in the early 1900s brought many more immigrants from Mexico and South Texas into Houston. As the need for low-skilled laborers on the railroads, in warehouses, and in ship channel construction grew, so did immigration from Mexico. By 1908, there were 2,000 Hispanics of Mexican descent living in Houston, and they began forming their own communities in downtown Houston. People living in the all-white communities in downtown Houston began moving away from downtown, and in the first decade of the 1900s, the first all-Mexican neighborhood—called a *barrio*—was established in downtown Houston, creating a distinctly working-class district known today as the Second Ward. The number of Hispanic workers in inner-city Houston rapidly grew; the 1930 census shows 14,500 Hispanics of Mexican descent living in Houston, and by 1940, over 20,000 immigrants from Mexico had moved into downtown Houston (Valenzuela 35; Melville; *FAIR*).

As Houston grew, so did the number of Mexican-Americans living there. According to Valenzuela, “The population [of Mexicans] had doubled by 1950 and increased to 75,000 in 1960. By 1970, the population had doubled again, nearing the 150,000 mark. Dramatic increases were also evident through the 1980s and into the 1990s, when the population grew from 280,691 to 442,943” (35). In addition, the population of Hispanics in Houston had grown from “less than 1 million at the turn of the century to 22 million in 1990. . . . a growth rate of 48% per decade, or 4% per year for 90 years” (Rong and Priessle 2). But respect for these people did not grow as rapidly as the population. Hispanics, specifically Latinos/as, have always populated the inner-city, with the largest numbers residing in the urban, economically disadvantaged sections of Houston. During the Great Depression, jobs for unskilled laborers went to white people,

many of whom blamed the lack of resources, money, and jobs on the influx of Mexicans before the open border policies of the 1920s were stopped. Competition for jobs resulted in an elitist attitude held by Houston's white population toward Hispanics of Mexican descent (Melville).

In response to the increases in immigration, the United States began passing laws to stabilize the numbers. The Federation for American Immigrant Reform (FAIR), a non-profit organization dedicated to immigrant reform that serves the interest of the general American public, briefly outlines the history of immigration reform in the U.S. In 1952, the United States Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act, which granted residency based on national origin. But this act was seen as discriminatory because it allowed countries to admit enough immigrants to match the original ethnic mix in the U.S., and it only allowed members of an accepted immigrant's nuclear family to immigrate. Some countries, specifically Asian countries, could not admit as many people as others as a result. In 1965, Congress passed amendments to the 1952 legislation. The amendments reflected the attitudes and issues of the growing civil rights movement. Now, immigrants' entire extended families were eligible for immigration. Any person related to the immigrant, however distantly, was eligible to come to the U.S. In 1990, other amendments were passed; this time, Congress increased the limit on the number of immigrants coming to the U.S. by almost 40% (FAIR).

As a result of immigration reforms, the U.S. is in the midst of what FAIR calls "mass immigration." Over one million immigrants, both legal and illegal, enter the U.S. each year, and school enrollment has increased by well over ten percent because of immigration according to the U.S. Census Bureau (FAIR). In 2000, for example, over 28,100,000 people reported speaking Spanish at home to the Census Bureau. Immigrants from Mexico counted for more than ¼ of the foreign-born immigrant total in 2000 (FAIR). Such mass immigration has a large impact on the economy, housing, natural resources, the environment, health care, and retirement, but especially on U.S. schools as many students immigrate from foreign-speaking countries without the compulsory attendance laws we have in the United States.

The influx of Hispanic people into the United States continues to grow today, and current immigration legislation does not present any relief for U.S. schools. According to Rong and Priessle, "The United States is in the midst of a wave of immigration with no sign that it will slow down. Immigration is and will be one of the most critical demographic factors in this country for the next 50 years" (4). Of course, this poses a unique problem for U.S. schools, as they struggle to keep up with the challenges and changes immigration brings. In Texas and California especially, the number of English Language Learners continues to grow exponentially: According to the Census Bureau, "In 2000, the percentage of the school-age population speaking a different home language than English in California was 42.6%, and in Texas it was 32.4%" (Klinger and Vaughn 183); in Houston, that number is 41.3% (FAIR). In Texas, the total enrollment of students K-12 in 2002, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, was 4,128,429, an 11.1% increase in the last decade; LEP students, with a population of 601,791, report a 74.5% increase in that same time span. By 2007, the U.S. Census Bureau expects an immigrant

enrollment increase in Texas public schools of 414,000 students. The result of the influx of students is a teacher shortage; one in four teachers in Texas is not qualified to teach the subject he/she is assigned to teach (*FAIR*). The implications, as Janette Klinger and Sharon Vaughn note in their study of teaching students with literacy difficulties, are that “[e]very teacher must be prepared to teach students who are English-language learners” (183), a new challenge for many educators who have not been trained to teach this special population of students.

### Testing and Accountability in Texas

The accountability debate has continued to dominate discussions of Texas education. While I will not argue the issue of accountability, I will discuss some of the issues surrounding *Texas*-style accountability. In Texas, the gatekeeper for graduation is the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. Regardless of a student’s academic performance, if he/she does not pass the TAKS test before graduation, he/she will not graduate.

While enormous pressure is placed on teachers to follow the state-mandated curriculum and thereby, in theory, to ensure that all of their students pass the TAKS test and that their ESL students make progress in English every year, school administrators also face accountability pressure. Since 1993, Texas schools have been ranked by the Texas Accountability System. Schools and districts are rated as exemplary, recognized, acceptable, or unacceptable. Campuses and districts are evaluated based on TAKS scores (schools receive exemplary ratings when at least 90% of students pass in all four subjects; recommended when at least 70% pass all four areas; and acceptable when at least 50% pass reading, ELA, writing, and social studies, at least 35% pass math, and at least 25% pass science), the State Developed Alternative Assessment II, given to special education students in grades 3-10 who are exempt from TAKS (the acceptable scores vary by student), graduate completion rate (schools receive exemplary ratings when at least 95% of students graduate, recognized when at least 85% graduate, and acceptable when at least 75% graduate), and dropout rate (schools receive exemplary ratings when less than 0.2% drop out, recognized when less than 0.7% drop out, and acceptable when less than 1% dropout) (*Texas Education Agency*). In addition, schools are ranked and rewarded based on the number of students from special sub-populations who pass the TAKS test; in her study of how high-stakes testing is much less equitable than it seems, especially for Latino youth, Linda McNeil explains that “[f]or a school to receive an ‘exemplary’ or ‘recognized’ rating, rather than a mere ‘acceptable’ or worse, the accountability system requires that a certain percentage of children in all three ethnic categories [Hispanic, African American, and White/Other] attain a certain level of score” (62). She goes on to outline the social and economic factors, for the schools, districts, and campus administrators affected by accountability:

Improved school ratings based on student scores can earn principals up to a \$10,000 annual bonus. Superintendents receive bonuses upward of \$25,000 for having their school district’s overall passing rate go up, or an increase in the number of schools listed as exemplary or recognized. Huge

signs are posted outside exemplary and recognized schools so that all going by can see their school rating. These ratings are used by realtors to sell parents on the property values in neighborhoods where the local school is ranked exemplary or recognized. (64)

Ironically, one might suspect that the test and how many students pass have become more important for political, social, and economic reasons, to district administrators, campus administrators, and teachers, than the actual students taking the test.

### The TAKS Test

The TAKS test was designed to test the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) established in Texas in 1998, when the TEKS curriculum was launched in Texas. According to the manual of the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC), the committee formed to assess LEP students' performance and ensure they take TAKS as early as possible, the TEKS were created to improve the level of learning in Texas (LPAC). The TAKS test replaced the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test in 2003 to test the TEKS curriculum more thoroughly. Every grade level of every course taught in Texas, both core subjects and electives, has a list of TEKS to follow; in English, as in the other core subject areas, the TAKS test assesses the student's academic abilities within the discipline as applicable to the TEKS, so the exit-level TAKS assesses the students' knowledge of the TEKS from all prior grade levels (see Appendix A for a list of all 11<sup>th</sup> grade English TEKS). TAKS tests are administered yearly to most students after third grade.

It is important to note that there are many more TEKS than there are objectives tested on the TAKS test, and every year the TEKS chosen to be tested on the TAKS test change. The figure on page 12 makes the relationship clearer. The larger box represents all of the TEKS for any given subject area or grade level; the smaller boxes represent the TEKS tested in any given year. Sometimes the TEKS tested in given years may overlap, as seen in the years 2005 and 2007, and sometimes they may not.

The ELA portion of TAKS is composed of a reading section and a writing section.<sup>1</sup> At its most basic level, the reading section is designed to test a student's reading comprehension. The reading section is divided into three parts: a fiction selection, a non-fiction selection, and a visual representation (a cartoon, an advertisement, etc). The students must answer twenty-five multiple choice questions about the reading selections (consisting of several questions about each selection in particular and several crossover questions that look for similarities between the selections) and three multiple choice questions about the visual; students must also answer three open-ended responses, which require them to write a short paragraph in response to questions about the two passages. Open-ended questions are designed to test a student's reading comprehension, not writing ability. The open-ended responses are scored holistically on a scale of 0 to 3. A zero response is ineffective because it offers an incorrect answer, an answer that is so vague that its correctness cannot be assessed, or plot summary; these answers are characterized as "lacking clarity." A one response is only partially sufficient because it offers an answer to the question but fails to support that answer with relevant evidence from the

selection; these answers are characterized as “unclear or vague.” Score point two responses are sufficient and offer an answer to the question with *relevant* textual evidence; these answers are characterized as “clear and specific.” Score point three responses are exemplary in that they offer a “particularly thoughtful or insightful” answer to the question and support it with accurate, relevant textual evidence (*Texas Education Agency*).

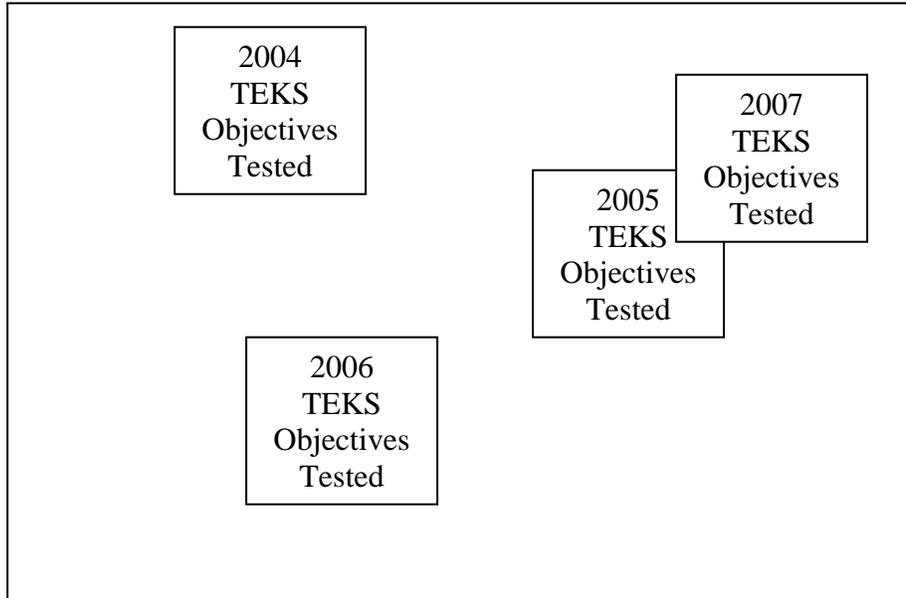


Figure 1: Total TEKS versus TEKS Tested

The writing section of TAKS consists of an essay in response to a prompt that is thematically linked to the two reading selections and a revising and editing section consisting of two passages and twenty multiple choice questions that test students’ editing skills. The essay responses are scored holistically on a scale of 1 to 4 based on five objectives: focus and coherence, organization, idea development, voice, and conventions. Students’ raw scores on the multiple choice, the open-ended responses, and the essay are converted to a scaled score to determine whether or not they pass, but there is one stipulation: Regardless of their scores on the rest of the test, students must score a two on the essay to pass TAKS.

For writing, there are five objectives related to the TEKS that guide classroom instruction:<sup>2</sup>

- writing for a variety of purposes,
- using a recursive writing process,
- using conventions of English grammar to write clearly,
- using writing as a tool for learning, and
- evaluating writing.

For reading, there are eight objectives related to the TEKS:

- acquiring an extensive vocabulary through reading,
- developing methods to enhance reading comprehension,
- reading for different purposes from varied resources,
- reading to increase cultural awareness,
- expressing and supporting responses to various texts,
- analyzing literary elements,
- critically evaluating text and source authority, and
- reading as a means to researching topics.

For viewing, there are three objectives related to the TEKS:

- understanding and interpreting visual messages,
- analyzing and critiquing the effectiveness of visual messages, and
- preparing visual representations as a way to communicate with others.

For testing purposes, these objectives are grouped into six major TAKS objectives. While each TAKS objective is tested every year, all of the TEKS objectives and sub-objectives may not be tested every year. For example, the first three reading objectives listed above are grouped under the larger objective of “demonstrating a basic understanding of culturally diverse texts.” While that larger objective will be tested every year, not all of the three objectives that comprise it will.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the open-ended items test the student’s ability to demonstrate an understanding of literary techniques and the ability to critically evaluate culturally diverse texts. The writing portion of the test examines a student’s ability to write for a specific purpose, following correct conventions of written English (*Texas Education Agency*).

### ESL Testing

ESL students are required to take a battery of tests every year to gauge their progress in English. Two of those tests, the RPTE and the IPT, are very important to assess student progress and affect teacher, school, and district accountability. Since accountability continues to be an issue in Texas, and since the Texas model of accountability has been used as a model for other states, it is important to understand all facets of the test, including its history. As Jorge Ruiz de Velasco notes in his explanation of the genesis of federal reforms such as NCLB and his argument for national reforms to assist ESL students in the face of accountability, massive education reforms began in the mid-1980s, when

[f]ollowing the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, school reform advocates in many states began calling for higher curriculum standards, more ambitious instructional frameworks, and new student assessments tied to the new, more rigorous standards. Moreover, most reformers thought that schools should be held accountable for student results on the new assessments.

(34)

He goes on to explain that, under the Clinton administration, Congress noted that “schools serving large numbers of poor, minority, and limited-English-proficient students

set lower standards for their education and thus ratified lower expectations for their performance” (35), so it passed laws that “require[ed] all states to implement comprehensive accountability systems for schools receiving federal funds under Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act” (35). Since “[t]he new law required states to hold all students to the same performance standards and to hold schools and districts accountable for student performance[, m]ost states subsequently developed performance-based accountability systems for a wider number of core subjects and for all public schools. Some states went a step further and attached high stakes to performance-based assessments” (35). In 2001, Congress acted again, this time passing the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which “mandates annual testing of every child in grades three to eight and strengthens requirements that states hold schools and districts accountable for student performance, including, specifically, minority and economically disadvantaged students, as well as those with limited proficiency in English” (35).

In order to counteract the dilemma facing students, teachers, and administrators, federal and Texas laws have been enacted to monitor ESL students through a series of checkpoints designed to assess their progress. Following is a discussion of several of these major assessments.

#### The TELPAS Score

Each year, under Title III of NCLB, ESL students must be monitored and their progress reported to ensure they are meeting the requirements for NCLB. ESL students in Texas are monitored under the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System, or TELPAS. The students’ TELPAS scores are a combination of scores from two other assessments: The score they receive on the Reading Proficiency Test in English (RPTE) and the score on the Texas Observation Protocol (TOP).

The RPTE test is designed specifically for LEP students to test their reading ability in English while taking into account second language learning. The test consists of reading selections with questions that test four levels of reading ability. Students who take the RPTE are classified as Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, or Advanced High proficiency. Every ESL student takes the RPTE test every year until he/she receives an Advanced High rating. The other half of TELPAS, the TOP, is a new rating system that came fully into effect during the 2004-2005 school year; the TOP is a holistic assessment of a student’s English language proficiency level, and it is based on a teacher’s direct classroom observation of the student (*Texas Education Agency*). The TOP score is a rating of the student’s ability to listen, speak, and write within the context of the classroom.

During the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 academic years, teachers at HSH were trained for one hour on TOP procedures; the state of Texas, however, determined after auditing the scores and the students that the ratings were not consistent, and they re-designed the training system for the next year. During the 2005-2006 academic year, English teachers were required to attend a one-day workshop to learn how to rate a student’s writing ability based on the TOP measurement, and all rating teachers were required to pass a test to become a certified TOP rater; any trained teacher who could not

pass the test faced possible disciplinary action from his/her school. Students were rated on the same four levels used in the RPTE test, with the following descriptions: Beginning students have little to no ability in English; Intermediate students have ability with simple language structures and routine contexts; Advanced students have grade appropriate ability with support; and Advanced High students have grade appropriate ability with minimal support (*Texas Education Agency*). English teachers were required to gather five writing samples from teachers across the curriculum to use as part of the rating in the TOP. Both of these scores—the RPTE and the TOP—are combined to determine a student’s overall TELPAS score.

For the school to meet the requirements for NCLB and accountability, each ESL student must show increasing achievement each year. To measure student success, the state has adopted Annual Measureable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs), outlining the range of necessary achievement for ESL students. There are three AMAOs. The first measures a student’s progress in learning English; the second measures how well the student is attaining English proficiency; and the third measures whether the student has met Adequate Yearly Progress in reading and math. ESL students must meet certain targets in all three areas yearly for the school to meet its Adequate Yearly Progress goals.

In 2004, the TELPAS scores were recorded and reported by the Texas Education Association for 304,304 Texas LEP students from third through twelfth grade (scores for kindergarten through second grade were not reported in 2004). In 2005, the TELPAS scores were recorded for 607,853 students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade. In 2006, TELPAS scores were recorded for 634,840 LEP students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade. The following chart shows the scoring trends for students statewide for each testing year. As the table shows, the number of beginning students has increased while the number of advanced students has dropped. According to the information teachers were given at TOP training in 2005, the changes in scores were a result of inadequate teacher training; in other words, teachers had not been trained well enough during the first year of the TOP and had graded the ESL students too easily, resulting in scores on the TELPAS that were too high and did not adequately reflect the students’ abilities.

Table 1: 2004, 2005, and 2006 TELPAS Scores

	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
2004	12%	15%	38%	34%
2005	30%	22%	28%	20%
2006	29%	21%	29%	21%

#### The Idea Proficiency Test (IPT) Test

The Idea Proficiency Test (IPT II) measures an ESL student’s aptitude in all four domains of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students are required to take the test when they enroll in school in the United States, at the end of their first year

of school in the United States, and once a year every year thereafter. The IPT test does not have any bearing on the TELPAS score; it is a separate test intended solely for school use. Many oral tests are available, and districts have the ability to adopt the test of their choice.

#### TAKS and Accountability for ESL Students

Accountability in Texas came to its present form when George W. Bush was governor, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to the public education information management system (PEIMS), at least 660,000 LEP students attended school in Texas in public schools during the 2004-2005 academic year (*LPAC*). At HSH alone, 141 LEP students were enrolled in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades for the 2004-2005 school year; in the 2005-2006 academic year, 136 were enrolled. Since school districts must also follow the guidelines of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, we must work to ensure that most of HSH's students pass TAKS in a timely manner, and the LPAC works to enforce NCLB. As of the spring 2004 test administration, 28% of HSH's senior LEP students had passed all parts of the TAKS test, but only 44% had passed ELA, leaving 56% of LEP seniors to take the ELA test again, some for the fourth time. The numbers for juniors and seniors together were more startling: Only 19% of LEP juniors and seniors met the minimum requirements for TAKS in 2005, and only 24% passed in 2006.

Originally, the TAKS test was not meant to be the determiner for high school graduation. In a one-year case study of Seguin High School in Houston, Angela Valenzuela investigated factors affecting a student's graduation. She explains, "HB 2008 and HB 2570 explicitly addressed the need for *multiple alternative* assessment tools by proposing provisions to allow teacher recommendation, average grades in core subjects, and other test score information to compensate for poor performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test" (6). In order for students to graduate, they have to "pass the TAAS/TAKS; they must maintain a 70 grade-point average; they must accumulate a specific number of credits for graduation; and they must attend school a certain number of days annually" (6).

From my experience, however, the TAKS test is still the primary gatekeeper for graduation. Teachers face incredible pressure to pass students, especially seniors, as long as the student has put in minimal effort. For example, teachers cannot give lower than a 50% for any given grading period (according to unwritten policies), even if the student has not done one assignment for the entire grading period. The reason? Administrators do not want teachers to jeopardize a student's chance to pass for the semester based on one bad six weeks. Technically, the student can do nothing for an entire grading period and still pass for the semester. It is that same brand of thinking that ensures most students pass their senior year. Of course, none of this is written down, and there are some students who do fail for the semester because they do absolutely nothing, but senior teachers are expected to "bump seniors up" if they are close to passing. In addition, teachers at HSH were told repeatedly that an acceptable pass rate is 5% - 10% according to the policies outlined in the handbook, and we were not to go over that. If we did, we could face possible disciplinary action. So, at the end of any grading period, if a teacher

found her/himself above the appropriate 10% failure rate, it was possible that he/she would go in and change some grades, especially borderline grades, to avoid being disciplined by the administration.

As for the requirement that students must attend a certain number of days annually, schools must also give students the opportunity to make up any days over the limit of days they can miss, which is ten. So, for example, student A misses eleven days of school. At HSH, if the student did not have extenuating circumstances, the system they had in place to allow students to make days up was called credit recovery, and it took place on Saturdays from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. Students who had “lost credit” went to credit recovery and sat in a room all day; as long as they sat there and followed the rules, whether they did any work or not, they had made up their days and would receive their credit; the missed days, in effect, would be wiped from their records. If the student did have extenuating circumstances (such as a lengthy sickness), some of the days could be waived. Obviously, therefore, students could maneuver through the other requirements for graduation, making TAKS the gatekeeper for graduation because it is the one thing that the state controls totally.

Of course, the TAKS requirement occurs to the detriment of LEP students, many of whom have not had adequate time to develop the necessary skills to pass the test because of a short length of residence in the United States. LEP students are often stuck because they can pass the classes with the support of the teachers in tutorials, but they cannot pass the test because they do not have the same help during testing. Valenzuela contends that Texas-style accountability strips immigrant students of their cultural identity:

Supporters of accountability claim that it promotes equity by making schools teach poor and minority children who have been historically neglected by our public school system. Opponents, . . . argue that the Texas system of educational accountability has failed—and will continue to fail—Latina/o and other minority youth and their communities. We interpret Texas-style accountability as exacerbating historic inequities, mainly through the collateral effects of state policy, but also through a systemwide failure to accommodate the needs and abilities of English-language learners. (1)

Valenzuela is not claiming that accountability is wrong, just that the model of accountability in Texas is flawed because it does not allow many immigrant students the chance to show what they *can* do; it merely points to the fact that they do not have the English skills of their English-speaking peers, a fact that should be obvious and accounted for. Valenzuela documents just how detrimental the system is for minority students: “87 percent of all students who fail the state’s high school exit exam are either African American or Latina/o” (Valenzuela 5). In light of the state’s adoption of the TAKS test, schools, administrators, and teachers often find their hands tied in a no-win situation, and attempts to prepare these students as much as possible are time consuming, prohibiting an examination of new, unique solutions to the problem: “However appropriate accountability assumptions may be for the typical classroom, they generally

do not hold true for ELL classrooms. What would work best for ELL students remains uncertain” (de Velasco 33). As long as we have accountability, we need to have a parallel drive to ensure the success of students from other cultures.

### ESL Difficulties:

#### Historical, Familial, and Academic Barriers to Success

ESL students, particularly those of Hispanic origin, face the regular pressures of being students and of maturing into adults coupled with the social, historical, familial, and academic pressures of overcoming a language barrier and developing a cultural identity in line with both their new home and their cultural and familial history. The following briefly describes some pressures ESL students face.

#### Historical and Familial Barriers

Families place pressure on many Hispanic ESL students to enter the work force early to increase the family’s financial income. But immigrants also face problems specifically related to their linguistic and cultural displacement, problems propagated by their bicultural background and their difficulty in achieving English proficiency. Jim Cummins, advocate and writer for ESL equity in elementary and secondary schools, notes that historically and socially, these immigrant children are behind and in danger of failing before they can even start because of a multitude of barriers to their success:

[T]he dominated status of a minority group exposes them to conditions that predispose children to school failure even before they come to school. These conditions include limited parental access to economic and educational resources, ambivalence toward cultural transmission and primary language use in the home, and interactional styles that may not prepare students for typical teacher/student interaction patterns in school. Bicultural ambivalence and less effective cultural transmission among dominated groups are frequently associated with a historical pattern of colonization and subordination by the dominant group. This pattern, . . . characterizes . . . Hispanic, Native, and black groups in the United States. (“Empowering” 22)

In addition, for first- and second-generation immigrants, language use in itself becomes a problem. Since many of their parents, often first-generation immigrants themselves, only speak Spanish, the students often speak only Spanish at home. With their friends, they can also often fall back on Spanish. But at school, they are required to read, listen, write, and speak in English in class. Guadalupe Valdés, in a study of the way Mexican-Americans use language, explains that “a single language (either English or Spanish) does not suffice to meet all of their communicative needs” (109); clearly, they can use their L1 during informal situations but must use the L2 in the classroom setting and other more structured situations. The result is often an unstable identity that occurs because the students are required to communicate effectively in two different worlds.

Ironically, the situation does not improve for third- and fourth-generation students. By the third- and fourth-generation, we can see a language shift from Spanish to

English, with English basically replacing Spanish in daily speech. Valdés argues that “immigrant bilingualism in the United States follows a specific pattern that . . . leads to monolingualism by the fourth generation” (115). Valdés further outlines the four stages of language shift, starting with the initial stage, where immigrants learn enough English to function in the workplace, and ending with the fourth stage, where “English has displaced the mother tongue in all except for the most intimate or private domains” (115). While it would seem obvious that the more English students learn, the better they will perform in U.S. schools, that belief has been proven wrong repeatedly for Mexican-American students. In a study examining the role peers play in the schooling of Mexican youth, Margaret A. Gibson, Patricia Gándara, and Jill Peterson Koyama observe that “Mexican-origin youth whose home language is English may perform as poorly or even more poorly than those for whom English is a second language” (2). They blame peer and familial pressure to remain loyal to Mexican culture for lack of success with U.S. born Mexican-Americans. And Valenzuela shows that “among Mexican and Central-American students, . . . first- and often second-generation students academically outperform their third- and later-generation counterparts. . . . research on generational attainments points to an ‘invisible ceiling’ of blocked opportunity for Mexican people” (4).

It would seem, then, that Mexican-American students begin motivated to succeed but are stopped somewhere along the way. Valenzuela accounts for the decline in achievement among third and fourth generation immigrants by explaining the theory of subtractive schooling:

Before dismissing urban, U.S.-born youth as lazy underachievers, it behooves researchers and practitioners to first examine the school’s role in fostering poor academic performance. Bringing schools into sharper focus, . . . reveals that U.S.-born youth are neither inherently antischool nor oppositional. They oppose a schooling process that disrespects them; they oppose not education, but *schooling*. My research suggests that schools . . . are organized formally and informally in ways that fracture students’ cultural and ethnic identities, creating social, linguistic, and cultural divisions among the students and between the students and the staff. (5)

In their study of several misconceptions about childhood L2 acquisition, Stefka Marinova-Todd, D. Bradford Marshall, and Catherine E. Snow explain that, as a result of the pressure to replace their home culture with American culture, older immigrant students “are more likely to structure heavily L1 environments for themselves, thus retarding their own L2 exposure and acquisition” (26). Yet even as these older students learn more English and are better able to function in an English environment, they still have difficulty adapting to the specifics of English. In a chapter devoted to tutoring ESL students in writing centers, Muriel Harris explains that “the tendency of Spanish-speaking students to write overly long sentences in English can be understood in light of the length of typical sentences in Spanish” (*Teaching* 99); she goes on to explain that ESL students will have typical ESL problems, most notably “inflection of nouns, verbs, and adverbs; count and non-count nouns; prepositions; tenses, definite articles; and word order” (99). When it comes to reading, ESL students have problems as well because, as Andrew

Cohen and Rosalind Horowitz explain in their analysis of an ESL student's reading process, the ESL students are struggling to decode the words and cannot move on to higher-level thinking skills: "Bilinguals may use fewer strategies when reading a content area text on a test than monlinguals because they are struggling with decoding and lack automaticity" (41).

Part of the third/fourth generation lag may have to do with cultural displacement. ESL students face many pressures as they try to assimilate into the dominant culture of the United States. Rong and Preissle explain that learning English—a difficult enterprise often undertaken at the expense of a student's home culture—"may be seen by immigrant students as the first step in rejecting the original homeland and may consequently be resisted, consciously or unconsciously, by immigrants themselves or, in the case of children, by their parents" (41-42). Parents of immigrant students also have their own cultural agendas. Learning English may create a rift in the family, as "[p]ain and frustration occur within immigrant families because of the loss of effective communication between native-speaker parents and English-only-speaking children (42-43), which can in turn cause problems because of the value the Hispanic culture in general places on the family unit. In addition, as Patricia Gándara, Susan O'Hara, and Dianna Gutiérrez note in their study on peer and familial influences on academic achievement, the goal of high academic achievement in the United States may produce a conflict for many Hispanic students:

Many of these adolescents may believe they must choose between mainstreaming their ethnic identity and striving for high academic achievement, which to their peers may be viewed as acting superior or 'acting White.' Once an adolescent has identified with a particular group, the group's standards become internalized and incorporated into his or her own sense of self. Therefore, adhering to the norms and standards of the group does not feel like succumbing to peer pressure; it feels more like an expression of one's own identity. . . . having low aspirations for schooling can come to be seen as an inherent characteristic of being Mexican American. For the high-achieving Mexican-American student who chooses to 'hang with his homeboys' and who goes to a school in which Mexicans have been typed as low achievers, this can produce a significant dilemma. (43)

#### U.S. Academic Barriers to Success

The problem facing ESL students becomes not just a linguistic one but also a humanistic one. It is not enough to teach them English; we also have to "show them the ropes" so to speak, so that the divisions Valenzuela discusses dissolve. But any school system immersed in the politics of high stakes testing is necessarily subtractive in nature for immigrant students:

The rigidity and narrowness of test-practice and test-score production on a standardized test by definition structure out possibilities for the expression of and affirmation of cultural identities. Otherwise, it would not be a

standardized test. By rendering the extraordinary, awe-inspiring diversities inherent in our children into a single indicator, a test score, the system can function as a control system. . . . the system has to de-personalize, has to exclude, has to structure out personal and cultural identities to claim objectivity. It has to silence differences, whether cultural, developmental, or idiosyncratic, or it loses its potency. *The system has to be subtractive or it cannot function as a generic, standardized system.* . . . The standardization forces schools to speed up children’s readiness for tests in English, in doing so subtracting from one of their most powerful learning tools, their home language and all the understandings it embodies. (McNeil 93-94)

In Texas, the high-stakes test required for graduation makes no exceptions for those students who do not speak English at the exit level. And while the reading passages on the tests sometimes have immigrants and their successes as a subtext, the prevailing message is American in nature.

In addition to establishing a balance between maintaining a cultural identity and mainstreaming into the dominant culture in the United States, immigrants have to learn about American academic expectations. They have to negotiate what Valenzuela calls their dual frame of reference (15). When students begin to assimilate into American culture—whether consciously or unconsciously, willingly or reluctantly—educators need to remain sympathetic to this dual reference. For example, the demands of Spanish and English discourse are very different, and students and teachers must be aware of both. In her outline of the techniques and strategies for undergraduate writing center tutor training, Muriel Harris cites Edward Hall, who makes general distinctions between American and Hispanic cultures based on context. He describes the Hispanic culture as a high context culture where participants in a conversation can “communicate less directly . . . because they assume that much of what they think and mean can go without saying. This is possible in a high-context culture because of an extensive information network among family, friends, coworkers, and clients, who keep each other informed and reduce the need for context (or background information)” (qtd. in *Teaching* 91-92). He distinguishes such high context cultures from American culture, a low context culture requiring more direct methods of communication. Obviously, this would pose problems for students of Hispanic background trying to maneuver through the American school system. They must be taught, somewhere along the way, how to relate context and meaning so that they understand “the rhetorical expectations and standards of English discourse. And when their writing does not immediately seem to improve, we also have to realize the difficulty involved in adjusting to the mental frameworks that go with such new standards” (93).

Another academic barrier facing immigrant students of any ethnicity is the lack of preparedness of teachers to teach in a mixed-language and mixed-ethnicity classroom. I know that, in my own classroom, it is often hard to consider all of the differences among the students. In addition to accounting for differing learning abilities and learning styles, teachers find themselves faced with the task of educating regular education students—

ranging from those who should be in an Honors or Advanced Placement class to those with learning disabilities to those with emotional disorders—in addition to students who do not speak English well or at all. It is a daunting task, even for the most seasoned teacher, but according to Klinger and Vaughn, the reality is that “the overwhelming number of teachers are ill-prepared to teach reading to English language learners. . . . the majority of teachers have little or no knowledge or experience in effective practices for enhancing the literacy skills or text learning of adolescent English language learners” (184). With ESL students alone, factors such as the number of languages spoken, level of education in the home language, and language spoken at home all affect classroom learning and “may require different kinds of interventions, teaching strategies, and curricula” (de Velasco 38). Without proper training, regular education teachers may find themselves unable to cope with the demands that ESL students bring to the classroom.

The Department of Education notes that “only 30% of public school teachers instructing limited-English students nationwide reported receiving any special training for working with these students” (de Velasco 40). Luckily, during the 2005-2006 school year, HSH provided training for teachers working with ESL students; indeed, during the 2005-2006 academic year, teachers were required to attend several workshops on differentiating instruction to meet the needs of ESL learners. Because most of my students and I are native English speakers, my tendency has been, as Harklau suggests, to forget “to make adjustments in input that [I] might make if [I] were speaking exclusively with non-native speakers” (44). This year, however, with the state raising the standards for assessing immigrant progress to better align itself with No Child Left Behind, our district has adopted the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, or SIOP, method of teaching students. Sheltered instruction was developed in the mid-1990s by Jana Echevarria, Mary Ellen Vogt, and Deborah J. Short, who embarked on a mission to define sheltered instruction, then known as Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (xi). SIOP is a model designed for “teaching content to English learners (ELs) in strategic ways that make the subject matter concepts comprehensible while promoting the students’ English language development. . . . Teachers guide students to construct meaning from texts and classroom discourse and to understand complex content concepts by scaffolding instruction” (2, 10).

A true SIOP lesson consists of eight parts, but in an attempt to help all students in every content area, the district adopted a four-part SIOP plan as shown below.

- See. Teachers first allow students to see something related to the topic at hand. It might be a picture, a graph, part of a movie, or any other visual item. One favorite strategy used by many teachers at HSH is the reveal strategy. The teacher takes a transparency with a photo related to the topic at hand and covers up important parts of the photo. As she reveals certain parts, she guides students to talk about what they can see and make inferences about what remains covered. When the entire photo is revealed, students and teacher talk about the meaning of the photo.
- Connect. Teachers ask students to connect the topic to their own lives. One easy way to do this is by using a KWL (what I already Know, what I Want to learn, and what I Learned) chart. The KWL chart asks students what they already know

- about a topic and what they want to learn; after the lesson, students add in what they actually learned. This strategy allows students to actually track their knowledge and make connections to other disciplines and events in their lives.
- Discuss. Students are given time to discuss the topic with each other. The belief here is that it is only through talk that the lesson and topic will become concrete in students' minds. I usually try to focus this time around some tactile activity that students can do together.
  - Apply. Application is the most context-reduced part of the lesson, and it is the first place students should read. Now they have the appropriate background to actually do the reading and make meaning of the reading.

The SIOP training was a new district initiative during the 2005-2006 school year, begun for teachers of all disciplines, that is supposed to, in theory, increase language learning for ESL students if used effectively and regularly.

But ESL students present special concerns for general education teachers, partially because they are all so different, both in terms of intellectual maturity and readiness to accept the American language and culture. The responsibility of teaching English Language Learners the English language is usually placed squarely on the shoulders of the English department, more specifically on the ESL teacher, who has to prepare ESL students linguistically for reading and writing in all of their core classes despite the fact that “most recent immigrant students in middle and high school are insufficiently fluent in English to take instruction in math, science, social studies, and reading. They have to make extraordinary efforts to keep up with their classmates. Aside from a one-hour ESL class, they rarely receive any other aids from teachers in subject fields” (Rong and Preissle 147). The problem of learning English still exists for ESL students, and no single model is going to work effectively on its own. Even if Hispanic students of Mexican descent attain enough English proficiency to perform well in school, they continue to lag behind their American peers. In a study outlining ways to teach Mexican-American children to write in English, Henry Trueba claims that “Students from language minority backgrounds, . . . often have serious difficulty writing and thinking in English” (235). It will continue to be essential for teachers to learn to teach English quickly and efficiently to ESL students. The problem, of course, is how to do that.

#### Personal Barriers to Success

Once immigrant Hispanic students are mainstreamed into U.S. schools, the problems facing them become insurmountable because many have not completed the required education in their home countries and are placed in grades in their American schools based primarily on age. Valenzuela discovers through interviews with students that “life in Mexico is much more difficult financially than it is in the United States; tight economic conditions make it impossible for most people to pursue schooling beyond the sixth-grade level (the Mexico government subsidizes education through the sixth grade)” (15). Studies show that students of Mexican descent are the least educated of all immigrants coming to the United States (Rong and Preissle 5), partially because, as Steven A. Camarota found in his 2001 report on the economic and demographic

characteristics of Mexican immigrants, “[a]lmost two-thirds of adult Mexican immigrants have not completed high school, compared to fewer than one in ten natives,” and “[t]he lower education attainment of Mexican immigrants appears to persist across the generations. The high school dropout rates of native-born Mexican-Americans are two and a half times that of other natives” (Camarota). Once in the United States, a pattern of underachievement, often the result of grade-level misplacement, emerges. While “[s]ome immigrants, . . . [are] successful at propelling their progeny into much higher status positions in society than the ones they themselves hold” (Gándara, O’Hara, and Gutiérrez 39), “this is much less common for Mexican immigrants or for students from Mexican-origin families . . . Clearly, sociohistorical factors, as well as real differences in the social and economic strength of particular ethnic communities, affect the ways and degree to which parents are able to support their children’s schooling” (39-40).

Undoubtedly, many Hispanic students are not as successful in school in the United States for several reasons. As Gándara, O’Hara, and Gutiérrez explain, “Aspirations of non-Latino students are substantially higher than those of Latino students throughout high school. By the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, almost 30% more non-Latino students than Latinos intend to go to college” (47). Many immigrants’ experiences in high school might reflect the treatment their ancestors received when first migrating to the United States; in their case study on the implications of peer pressure on school performance, Patricia Gándara and Margaret Gibson note that, shunned by the dominant white culture,

working-class youth of Mexican origin often feel unconnected to their schools and to the academic values they espouse. High school students with limited proficiency in English are especially vulnerable to feelings of marginalization. These students are often ignored or even looked down on by other students and even by teachers. Fearful of being ridiculed by English-speaking peers for their less than perfect English, they stick to themselves, forming their own peer enclaves. Schools contribute to this isolation by placing English learners together in the same classes for much of the day and sometimes for years on end with little opportunity for mixing socially with native English speakers. (177)

Because they are distanced by peers, adults, and their own feelings of inadequacy, many Hispanic students lack what Ricardo Stanton-Salazar refers to as in his study on factors affecting social achievement as *social capital*, or “those ‘connections’ to individuals and to networks that can provide access to resources and forms of support that facilitate the accomplishment of goals” (18-19); without those necessary connections, Hispanic students may “see many fewer possible selves available to them than do their middle-class mainstream peers” (Gándara, O’Hara, and Gutiérrez 42). As a result, Hispanic students occupy the lowest-achieving rung on the hierarchy of the secondary United States school, and the majority of them stay there after their ethnically different “peers” go on to college. Obviously, if they don’t go to college, they are excluded from the best jobs later on, and the pattern repeats itself in the next generation.

This pattern, of course, is for the students who actually make it to graduation. Studies on graduation rates for Hispanic students demonstrate that they are the largest

ethnic group of non-graduating seniors and dropouts. A 2003 report by Rong and Preissle shows that 55% of Hispanic students do not graduate from high school. And in her study of the futures of middle-school Hispanic students, Elaine Rubinstein-Ávila shows that the low graduation rate for Mexican American students has been a pattern for at least fifteen years: “The 1990 census data indicate that . . . Mexicans have the lowest (24.3%)” graduation rate (122). Part of the problem may be due to their education prior to entry into the United States and their subsequent marginalization: “These students depend profoundly on their academic preparation prior to immigration. Many children, however, come to school unprepared. Without considerable professional help, immigrant children who enter elementary school at Grade 4 or above have serious problems catching up with regular instruction” (Rong and Preissle 145). Secondary schools often provide little assistance with the transition, and as a result, many immigrant students choose to drop out of high school for all of these reasons, reasons that any of us can understand:

early disaffection with school programs that fail to meet their needs and subsequent poor school performance cause students and their families to look on early labor market entry as a rational alternative to continued schooling. . . . The push to leave school before graduating is particularly acute among teen ELLs (who, . . . often are further behind academically than their non-ELL peers) and undocumented students, whose path to post-secondary education is effectively blocked by limited access to financial aid and whose eligibility for higher paying jobs in the post-secondary job market is effectively barred by law. (de Velasco 44)

In Texas, all of these barriers are compounded by the TAKS test. Standardized tests were originally conceived as a way to “even the playing field” for all students: “Its proponents also claim that under this system, the achievement gap that separates Anglo students from Latino and African American students is closing, thus making schooling more equitable. . . . these claims, sadly, are false” (McNeil 57). In theory, standardized tests and accountability for teachers and schools are positive forces behind motivating student achievement. But when accountability goes so far out of control that it pushes students of other cultures to the margins, separating them even further than their own differences can, the tests become more a detriment to education than benefit.

### Special Needs of ESL / LEP Students

ESL students face enormous pressure to adhere to and conform to the norms of American society. Because of the nature of subtractive schooling, immigrant students have few social connections to the dominant culture, and U.S. schooling maintains that hierarchy through assessment and accountability. Even ESL classes, which at the high school level function as a transition between institutions such as the New Arrival Center (NAC) and mainstreamed classes, are subtractive because “ESL programs are designed to transition youth into an English-only curriculum, [but] they neither reinforce their native language skills nor their cultural identities” (Valenzuela 26).

So what do ESL students need at the high school level to be successful both in core classes and on the state-mandated test required to graduate? ESL students need to

learn English, as quickly as possible but not in opposition to their own language, to be successful in American schools and society. Some would question this assertion, arguing that, because of the way English is usually taught to immigrants, it is inherently subtractive in nature and may, therefore, do more harm than good. But the social and economic landscape of America changed drastically in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas at the turn of the century “only 6% of America’s children finished high school, and most job seekers were able to obtain manual-labor positions that required little schooling” (Gibson, Gándara, and Koyama 1), now a high school diploma is necessary for the success of the masses: “Today, four out of five jobs require a high school diploma, and those individuals without a high school education have limited kinds of work available to them. Better paying positions generally require a college degree. In most cases, there is a direct relationship between years of formal education and one’s employment opportunities” (Gibson, Gándara, Koyama 1). Rubenstein-Ávila further outlines the importance of English language learning for students’ future careers and success in the United States:

the adolescent immigrants from the current great immigration wave, which started after the Immigration Act of 1965 and peaked in the 1990s, face social and economic realities that differ sharply from those of their predecessors a century ago. Today’s adolescent ELLs (first and second generation immigrants) are confronted with a different economy, one that has been described by using the hourglass as a metaphor: The skilled and educated workers enter top-level jobs, while unskilled workers are relegated to repetitive, badly paid jobs with little, if any, security and opportunity for upward mobility. In today’s economy an adolescent with a high school diploma and only mediocre academic literacy skills is much less likely to achieve middle-class status as an adult. Therefore, in order to succeed in the current economy, adolescent ELLs need to obtain much higher levels of education and develop solid academic proficiency in English. (124)

Language, it would seem, is one of the largest barriers to success for ESL students, but it cannot be taken by itself as the main determiner of success or failure for ESL students. Language acquisition is problematized by the family, academics, peer struggles, economics, social capital, and accountability; all of these must be accounted for as we struggle, as educators, to help ESL students negotiate the American high school.

### Tackling the ESL Dilemma

After examining the requirements thrust upon immigrants to the United States, it becomes clearer why the problems facing ESL students often seem insurmountable. Many times, a student will move to Texas with inadequate time to develop the requisite skills to pass the high-stakes test required for graduation. Students moving to the United States must stay mainstreamed in a regular curriculum to meet the guidelines of NCLB and Texas’s accountability standards, but two things hinder a new arrival’s progress: lack of English proficiency is the obvious reason, but the amount of formal schooling received prior to immigration may also be a concern. Ofelia Garcia, a theorist who has studied

several ways to teach Latino students, suggests that the best thing is for these students to focus entirely on English before learning other subjects because “[b]ilingual programs that focused on continuing an education while teaching English were clearly inadequate for many students whose education had been interrupted” (63) by a move to the United States. With all of the laws regarding education, particularly grade-level testing, in the United States, however, it would be impossible to think of continuing these students’ education only after they have acquired enough English to understand the basic curriculum. In addition, as Garcia notes, some students have little to no formal schooling before they arrive in the United States to begin high school (63). So, if a student from Mexico stops attending school in the sixth grade and is placed in a ninth grade class upon arrival in the United States based purely on age, that student is going to have a problem because he/she does not have the basic education necessary to make it in the ninth grade.

Because they are thrust into a system that requires too much of them in too little time, our LEP students often find themselves trapped, disempowered by a system that claims to give them power but does not. Our secondary school systems reject their home culture while requiring them to struggle through a curriculum and a testing situation that values a language many of them cannot understand: “Students exiting from ESL courses are now being expected to write well in English and even to compete with their English monolingual peers using standards established for writing in English as a native rather than a second language” (Valdés 108).

Effective solutions to the ESL dilemma are scarce. At HSH, the solution has been to mainstream all ESL students into regular English classes and to enroll them concurrently in ESL reading and writing classes for extra support. The ESL classes were originally intended to be tutoring classes for the content-area classes, but instead, they became classes with their own curriculum and were no longer a support for content-area teachers. The change in focus was primarily due to the emphasis in Texas on the TEKS; each grade and subject area must follow its own TEKS, and ESL classes have their own TEKS, so they cannot become tutoring classes or support classes. ESL programs in Texas, therefore, are caught in a grey area. The administration at HSH wanted the ESL program to become one that could realistically help students with their content classes, but the program had to adhere to state guidelines for English Language Arts instruction. The situation made the classes ultimately inadequate for increasing the language proficiency in general and in the content areas specifically. One result of the inadequacy of ESL programs as they exist today is, as Short explains, that “language-minority students have higher dropout rates and are more frequently placed in lower ability groups and academic tracks than language-majority students” (107) because, as Jan Cummins notes in her article on the ways ESL students are disempowered by testing, “[t]here is little evidence that the reforms [for educational equity in the last 20 years] have been effective in reversing the pattern of widespread failure among minority students” (19). In Texas, we have a unique situation because of the large number of Hispanic students, whom Short identifies as “the most undereducated major segment of the U.S. population—they tend to enter school later, leave school earlier, and are less likely to complete high school or participate in postsecondary education” (107). As a profession, it

is up to all of us to find a solution, to help these students become successful despite the state and federal guidelines that often hinder their progress.

As is becoming obvious, obstacles exist at every turn. There is literally almost no way to reach the LEP students in a regular academic class, and a class full of twenty-five to thirty purely LEP students can be just as daunting. Yet schools and districts have to find a way to help these students to stay within federal guidelines for education.

These students, those like Celeste, became the focus of my study. Even with programs like SIOP, it was difficult, if not impossible, to teach her the same curriculum as the other twenty-five English-speaking students in her class. If I had each student in a small class, I might have been more successful; however, English classes were capped at HSH at 30 students with most classes averaging 25. My own course load for the 2005-2006 school year was approximately 132 students in my English III classes, or an average of 26 students per class. While I did have students for an hour and a half every other day, there were enough other general classroom concerns that my time with the ESL students was very limited. In addition, the enrollment in each class included several LEP students as well as students who should have been placed in an Honors / AP curriculum. Students varied from those who were never in trouble to those who missed most days of class because they were being disciplined at some level. Some of my LEP students had other students translate the class for them because they simply could not understand and because, like many other ESL students, they had problems with listening. Listening, as Arkin observes, is one of the most difficult but necessary skills for ESL students to develop because “it is particularly difficult to control the listening experience. . . . It is all the more difficult for ESL students to remember what they are listening to, even *while* they are listening, because they are trying so hard to work out the meaning of new ideas” (11). My concern was that having another student translate did not help LEP students in the long run and also took away from the translating student’s learning. Most days, however, even though I understood the dangers of having another student translate, I welcomed the help because, as Loghran and Northfield argue, “[t]he continual need to manage the class and the teacher’s responses associated with this need can be quite incompatible with the expectation of accepting more responsibility for learning” (127). These LEP students were not in an optimal learning environment, but I believed that, given the right circumstances, they could be successful, both in the English classroom and on the exit-level test; the problem they faced was finding the place and the people able and willing to help them in the right environment on a regular basis.

LEP and ESL students need a non-threatening environment where they can learn English and gain control over their education. Once they feel in control over their education, Jim Cummins asserts that ESL students will “develop the ability, confidence, and motivation to succeed academically . . . [but] the reform movement as conceptualized and implemented will contribute to the disempowering of students, particularly minority students” (“Empowering” 20). Since I had worked in a Writing Center before, I began to wonder if peer tutoring could realistically help high school students such as these become literate enough in English to be academically successful. The questions that guide my research, then, are these:

- Can peer tutoring meet the language needs of ESL students to give them the requisite background knowledge necessary to attain grade-level proficiency?
- What barriers to success—social, academic, emotional, administrative—will both the tutors and tutees face in a high school setting?
- As an ESL student’s language proficiency increases, will he/she show an increase in social capital and a more positive attitude towards school?
- How can high school peer tutors be prepared to work with ESL students?
- How does the work of Jim Cummins and other ESL literacy theorists help teachers understand the challenges of teaching ESL students?

#### Further Questions

Attempting to tackle the literacy problems of ESL / LEP students can be frustrating. Passing TAKS has become a focus of many schools so that any “regular” curriculum is thrust to the wayside. Because I was working with a subpopulation of students that was at risk for graduation, I felt pressured to help them pass the TAKS test; and because my tutors felt the same pressure, they often worried they were not doing enough to help the students pass TAKS. I had to continuously remind myself and the tutors that TAKS was not our main goal, but the reminders, at times, were hard to recall for all of us, especially as testing time drew nearer. The tutees were worried about TAKS too, and they often tried to steer us back to TAKS-related subjects during sessions.

When TAKS started to creep in, I would ask myself the following question: What can we do to increase the tutees’ *literacy* for their lives? Of course, that begs the following: Can we realistically, within a school year, do *anything* to help increase their literacy? We were not sure. But what we learned is that literacy encompasses more than just reading and writing; becoming more literate in a language also validates the student around speakers of the language, giving him/her equal footing socially and emotionally. What we were doing, therefore, was attempting to give the tutees an academic and social foothold in a society that was, to varying degrees, foreign to them.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Because of the length of the TAKS test, I did not include a copy of it in an appendix.

For a complete ELA exit-level TAKS test, go to the TEA website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/>. Click on TAKS Released Tests, and click on the link for any Grade 11 Released Test.

<sup>2</sup>All objectives consist of sub-objectives as well. For a complete list of the objectives, go to <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/ch110c.html#110.44>. Scroll to section 110.44, English III.

<sup>3</sup>For a more in-depth understanding of the testing objectives, see the scoring guide at [http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/release/taks/2004/gr11tak\\_skey.pdf](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/release/taks/2004/gr11tak_skey.pdf).

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

### Overview

In order to best study the literacy gains of the student tutees, I decided to perform a naturalistic study within the context of the school. Although I always knew in the back of my mind that close observation of both the tutors and tutees during tutoring sessions was the best way to determine if our literacy goals were being met, I also had to remind myself many times that I was not interested in numbers and test scores. As a teacher, I observe every day to see if my students understand our daily objectives, so the switch from teacher observer to teacher researcher was not difficult. I chose to write in case study format so that readers could see the growth—academic, emotional, and social—these students experienced in the course of one semester.

One thing I discovered as I was working students, teachers, and administrators, is that no matter how much planning I did, I still had to remain flexible enough to accommodate the needs of all of the people involved. This chapter outlines how and why I planned the way I did, but it also addresses the problems and frustrations I encountered as a result of working with other people. One of the most important lessons I have learned through teacher research is that, while I had my own agenda, it frequently did not match the agendas of the rest of the school. While yes, it would seem that helping students would be at the top of the school's agenda, my project helped so few students that many times it was seen as secondary to other needs and concerns. I had to continue reminding the administration at HSH that this was a preliminary project that could develop into a larger project; however, the promise of "maybe" was often not enough, and I had to constantly work around problems in scheduling, teacher accountability, and misunderstanding.

### Philosophy of Peer Tutoring

Because I have worked in two university writing centers, my original idea was to create a writing center at HSH, a place where students could go for extra help when their class work was finished or before / after school. I believe in the power of writing center tutoring, and so I did have some initial bias towards the effectiveness of peer tutoring; however, the situation at HSH was going to be so different from the those at Southeast Missouri State University and Louisiana State University in terms of administration and daily obstacles but also in terms of who the tutors and tutees were and what they had to offer that I was not sure whether peer tutoring would be as effective—or effective at all—in the high school setting. Any bias that I had, therefore, served only to give me direction in planning and organizing the work we would be doing.

Working from what I know, I looked to typical university writing center philosophies, which often proclaim some version of Stephen North's now famous quote: "writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction. . . . [the tutor's] job is to produce better writers, not better writing" (438). Most university centers have moved beyond the notion of the center as a lab where students take their writing to

get it fixed; North goes on to argue that a writing center should not be “some sort of skills center, a fix-it shop” (435). Harris takes this idea one step farther, maintaining that “[w]riting centers do not and should not repeat the classroom experience and are not there to compensate for poor teaching, over-crowded classrooms, or lack of time for overburdened instructors to confer adequately with their students” (“Talking” 27).

A lab that functioned independently of the classroom experience, however, was impossible at HSH; we *needed* a skills center merely because these students were so far behind in their skills; we *needed* a place that could compensate for over-crowded classrooms and overburdened teachers. But I was not completely opposed to the idea of a traditional high school writing center; in fact, I thought that most of these students were so far behind in their academics that we would be teaching them good writing techniques at the same time we were teaching them the skills they were not learning in class because of the language barrier. In effect, we would be combining the “fix-it shop” model with the “writing as process” model of the writing center in our attempt to match the center to the needs of HSH students.

I perceived our center to be what Harris calls a “haven” (“Talking” 27) for these struggling students. I wanted students to feel comfortable during tutoring, because only when they felt empowered by a system that values them as learners would true learning begin. I knew that in my class, all I had time for was pointing to the students’ errors, which took the burden of error recognition completely off the students. In my classroom, therefore, students did not even really have to understand; they just had to fix the problem. Because tutors work at a slower pace with only one student, Willa Wolcott asserts in her study of writing center conferencing that “writing center tutors [can] deliberately tr[y] to have the students make the changes” (20) so that “students [can] *understand* in order to be able to find their own answers” (21). These tutored students could become, with practice and help geared to their specific needs, what Loghran and Northfield call “active, independent and purposeful constructor[s] of knowledge” (123) because learning would become, finally, something done by the student, not something done to the student.

#### Benefits of Peer Tutors over Classroom Teachers

Part of making these students feel comfortable was allowing them to work with their peers. Jan Cummins notes that ESL students have been disempowered in the traditional classroom because “[t]he process of top-down control is, almost by definition, disempowering for those being controlled” (26). But the notions of comfort and power and control are difficult, if not impossible, to measure, and much of the research on writing centers has been, therefore, anecdotal. Although writing centers have “been around,” as North notes, since the 1930s (437), the research supporting writing centers is largely in the form of stories and anecdotes of student success and empowerment after using the various centers. It follows, then, that the benefits for using peer tutors also comes from anecdotal evidence, outlined in vast collections of stories and case studies from high school and university writing centers across the United States.

Tutoring in general works to help students because the tutor can meet the

individual needs of a student by working one-on-one with that student, something that is next to impossible in the classroom because, as Arkin asserts, “[c]lassroom instructors typically have twenty to thirty students to teach [at one time]. Their main responsibility is to instruct their students in the subject matter; they probably will not be able to cater to the individual needs of their students, except where they coincide with those of the majority” (4). Many studies have shown that tutoring gives marginal students participating in tutoring an edge over other marginal students not in tutoring because of its individual nature; students perform better in English class specifically, they function better in high school and/or college in general, and their drop out rates decrease significantly (Harris, *Teaching* 16-17). In addition, as Harris notes, the goal of any conference is to “make the student a skilled, knowledgeable practitioner of the field. . . . To make writers self-sufficient, able to function on their own, we have to shift the burden to them, not an easy task for students conditioned to wait for a higher authority to pass judgment on what they should do” (Harris, *Teaching* 28).

Also, as Toni Bearden explains in her outline of how peer collaboration can raise standards in the high school classroom, tutoring empowers students because students respond differently to tutors than they do to teachers: “However successful teachers are, . . . they will still be perceived in a different light from [tutors]” (116). Peer tutors cannot offer grades and cannot condemn the student, but can “empathize with the learner . . . [and appreciate] how it feels to be confused about the topic. The peer teacher understands the learner’s perceptions of the subject matter and can identify the patterns of thinking and the difficulties being experienced, and find ways around the difficulties that have worked in his or her own experience” (117). As a result, rather than being an evaluator, a tutor can be what Harris calls “someone to help [the student tutees] surmount the hurdles others have set up for them” (“Talking” 28) instead of someone who creates hurdles. Peer tutors, since they exist on the hierarchical ladder between teacher and student, can serve as a mentor and friend for the student. Wolcott agrees, saying that “[t]he tutors themselves occupy a unique position in writing center context. Unlike course instructors who generate the assignments, center tutors are ‘middlemen,’ hearing about assignments secondhand” (15). But meeting the student’s needs directly and leveling the power structure are goals that can be accomplished by *any* tutoring session, not a peer tutoring session specifically.

I knew, from my own teaching experiences, that I often had trouble meeting my students at a common place of understanding. Because our cultures, our languages, and our ages are so different, we often had trouble understanding each other. I knew that they sometimes felt like they should just “do it my way,” and I wanted to give them back some of the power over their own writing and learning. Empowering students became my main goal, and since I was having trouble reaching the students in my own tutorial sessions, I wanted to see if peer tutoring was a realistic way to empower them. I wanted the tutees to learn English so that they could be successful, both in school and in the larger society; but I also wanted them to feel like they had some control over what they learned and how they learned it, and I wanted them to feel like they were a part of the school. I also wanted to give the tutees the tools to help themselves and others in a collaborative

situation. Because I am not a peer, however, I could not offer the same insight into schooling and learning that the tutors could. In an explanation of the roles of tutors in secondary schools, Michael Marland and Richard Rogers describe the task of the tutor, which is to “enable the pupil to grow gradually but consistently, and through that learning of self, to learn better how to understand others, relate to them, to make good use of the school, and gradually to prepare to take place in wider society. The tutor empowers the tutee” (13-14). While connections to adults are important, it is the connections to classmates that most theorists agree will have the largest impact on the students in the moment.

Stanton-Salazar defines empowering students as developing their social capital, which he identifies as “those ‘connections’ to individuals and to networks that can provide access to resources and forms of support that facilitate the accomplishment of goals. . . . It has the potential utility to explain how educational achievement and attainment are closely associated with access to supportive relationships and networks” (18-19). Peer pressure, therefore, can have a positive effect for both the tutors and the tutees if the tutors know and understand how the school functions and can form a bond with the tutees. As Stanton-Salazar explains, “Social capital can be represented as a storehouse of different types of resources, embedded in social relations, that can be mobilized when an individual or group wishes to increase the likelihood of success in a purposeful action. Access to this storehouse of resources and support begins with person ‘connections’ to an individual” (25). We found many ways for the tutors to increase the tutees’ social capital every day. For example, if the tutees could not pay for the SAT, the tutors knew where to get fee waivers. If the tutees were having problems with a teacher, the tutors knew the appropriate assistant principal to go to for help. If the tutee didn’t understand an assignment, the tutor went to the appropriate person to find the answers. The tutor, therefore, became a positive force for helping the tutee solve problems, thereby increasing the tutee’s social capital within the school and demonstrating that peers *can* have a positive effect on academic performance under the right conditions.

The tutees were not the only ones who demonstrated an increase in social capital, however. The process normally went something like this: Tutor group A needed help getting a fee waiver, and they did not know the appropriate person to go to in the office to obtain the waiver. The tutor would come to me and ask me for help. I would either tell the tutor where to go or find out for the tutor. When I told the tutor and sent the group on their way, I increased the tutor’s knowledge, thereby increasing her networking ability within the school. When the tutor took the tutee to the office and got the fee waiver, the tutor became the teacher, which firmly established that new knowledge as part of that tutor’s repertoire. In short, the tutor had, by definition, an increase in social capital. The process repeated itself with the tutee, who could then, if the situation presented itself in the future, get the information on his/her own or even, in the best case, help another student find the information. In short, students were learning how to help students, and while I was the original person they went to for help, after that, they were able to perform on their own.

Increased social capital has results further than just help in an academic class: It

has been shown to “reduce the probability of dropping out of high school, and increase the probability of more years of schooling. . . . as an *outcome* variable, [it] has also been shown to be associated with high school grades, educational attainment, occupations, and high levels of bilingualism” (19). Social capital is not something that these students, termed “low-status students” by Stanton-Salazar, can achieve by themselves; they must have the “key forms of support,” such as tutoring, to “master the academic curriculum or decode the hidden curriculum” (25-26).

The question, however, is what it means to truly be a peer, and that is a question that has plagued writing center research for years. Peer tutors are, very often, peers in terms of their shared status as students, but that is where the conflict begins. As John Trimbur explains in his exploration of the contradiction between the terms “peer” and “tutor,” “[a]s a rule, tutors are highly skilled academic achievers: they are independent learners, they get good grades, they know how to ‘psych out’ a course, they are accustomed to pleasing their instructors . . . . At the same time, however, the traditional model of teaching and learning tells new tutors that they are not qualified to tutor” (22). He further outlines the struggle many tutors face: “If I am qualified to tutor, then I am no longer a peer to those I tutor. On the other hand, if I am a peer to my tutees, how can I be qualified to tutor?” (23).

To respond to this conflict, I would agree that yes, especially in the tutoring situation I would be establishing, the conflict between peer and tutor would be great. After all, the students we would be tutoring would be learning or have just learned English, while the tutors would not only be fluent in English but would be upper-level English students. But the contradiction is not troubling for me when I stop looking at each term individually, peer and tutor, and look at it as one term, peer tutoring. Any oxymoron is the same; take, for example, the term “bittersweet.” Yes, “bitter” and “sweet” appear to be opposites when taken separately, but considered together, they create a new meaning. “Bittersweet” is not a contradiction; instead, it is a new term that exists entirely on its own, occupying its own space with its own definition somewhere between the two terms that make up its separate parts. “Peer tutoring” is the same. We should not, therefore, look at peer tutoring as two separate ideas that cannot work together; instead, we should look at peer tutoring as a situation that involves peers and tutors at the same time (Trimbur 25).

“Peer” is also a troubling term because, after all, since the tutors were fluent speakers of English enrolled in Honors and AP classes who were involved in extra-curricular activities and who were going to college, and since the tutees were *not* those things for the most part, some might argue that the tutors were not really peers. I would agree, however, with Peter Carino, who examines the role of authority in the peer tutoring session. He states that “to pretend that there is not a hierarchical relationship between tutor and student is a fallacy, and to engineer peer tutoring techniques that divest the tutor of power and authority is at times foolish and can even be unethical” (98). Obviously, since we were going to be teaching these students English, I had to have “authorities” in English as tutors. So no, on some levels they were not peers, but they were the same age, they had been through some of the same tests, and many of them had

felt the struggles of being bilingual. On many levels, therefore, they were peers, and on many other levels, they were authorities. I was comfortable with that distinction.

Working one-on-one with peers gives ESL students several advantages. First, it gives them the opportunity to learn the language from someone who knows it, which is important because “[t]he role of talk and face-to-face interaction is vital for language learning. It is imperative that ELLs be given ample opportunities to interact academically with peers as often as possible. They should be encouraged to work with fluent English-speaking peers” (Rubenstein-Ávila 130). Second, tutoring empowers students because it gives them opportunities to interact with students who can share their social capital, thus allowing the tutees to become part of the dominant language community and culture of the school. But peer tutoring does not just help the tutees. The tutors gain many of the same benefits as the tutees. They gain confidence in themselves as they learn how to teach, how to answer questions, and how to find answers to questions. They also experience their own gains in social capital as they, themselves, learn to navigate through the social and administrative landscape of the school.

### Advantages of Tutoring Compared to Classroom Teaching

Because tutors can reach students in ways that teachers cannot, tutoring can also supplement any classroom experience, partly because, once again, tutors can react during a one-on-one conference to the needs of the student in ways that are almost impossible for the classroom teacher. Bearden argues that students learn more “when they receive more instruction, when they are given more individual help, and when their questions are answered quickly” (116). Writing center tutees received more instruction because the instruction was tailored to their exact needs. They received more individual help because they were working with tutors for an hour and a half, which was much more help than I or their teachers could give them during any one class period. And they had their questions answered more quickly because, when they finally gained the confidence to ask questions, they did not have to compete with twenty-five other students for their teacher’s attention.

In addition, the individual help they received was customized to their particular needs at the time. Tutors and I regularly communicated with each other to see what each student’s particular needs were because, as Ralph J. Melarango contends in his handbook for establishing a tutorial centers in schools, “[t]o be effective, instruction must be tailored to the individual needs of students. Every student is unique, . . . [which] is difficult [to handle] in a setting with large numbers of students with wide-ranging abilities” (8) but easy to accommodate during a tutorial.

Finally, tutees gained practice in all areas of discourse: writing, speaking, listening, and reading. Because students get very little practice speaking in the classroom, and because their listening skills in class are often hindered by the language barrier, the tutoring environment effectively taught the tutees all four of these skills in ways that the classroom teacher cannot. Since I wanted the tutees to be able to express themselves to their best ability, at the beginning I allowed them to speak in limited Spanish as needed, with tutors showing them how to express themselves by repeating the phrases and

sentences in English. Tutors, however, were trained to speak in English as much as possible.

### Institutional Goals

The goal for students at HSH was read during the morning announcements every day: “to develop marketable, productive citizens who respect others and appreciate life and knowledge.” Unless students understand the dominant language of instruction, however, they will not appreciate knowledge at this level because they have been kept from that knowledge by a language barrier that teachers seem unable—or in some cases unwilling—to cross. Sinclair Goodlad, in his study on using students as tutors, warns writing center directors to “always see student tutoring and mentoring as solutions to specific problems” (3); the problem, the need of the ESL students at HSH, was their limited proficiency in English that prevented them from participating in the dominant language of the school and of the United States. Until we overcame that obstacle, HSH would, I believed, continue to fall short of its larger goal as stated in the school’s mission.

Because HSH’s goal was to make its students marketable and productive, learning English is critical. As Harris notes in her discussion of fitting the writing center philosophy to the goals of the institution, any writing center “must closely fit its particular student population, writing program, and institution, not a nearby writing center” (“Diverse” 1). Working for several years in writing centers at Southeast Missouri State University and Louisiana State University tempted me to rely solely on typical writing center philosophy, but the philosophy of this center would have to be manipulated in order to meet what Paula M. Wolfe and Christian J. Faltis describe in their article on the influence of gender in the ESL classroom as “[t]he role of the high school . . . [which] is to initiate these students into academic English discourse and to expand their proficiency in conventional English” (83). While traditional writing center philosophy focuses on making the writer—and not necessarily the text in question—better, I knew I needed to focus on overcoming the unique obstacles specific LEP students bring to the high school classroom. This was *not* to be a typical writing center; instead, it was repeated one-on-one tutoring sessions with several students identified as needing extra help. In her study of the goals of high school writing centers, Amy K. Levin argues that “to the extent that a center may offer remediation, it can also help fill a second important institutional goal, especially in states with required competency tests. A writing center can offer tutorial assistance for students who need to pass such exams in order to graduate” (25). Though tutoring at HSH did not focus on the TAKS test specifically, my goal was to help LEP students become proficient enough in English so that passing TAKS and graduating became a possibility.

### Demographics of HSH

During the 2004-2005 school year, there were 1,765 students enrolled at HSH; 976 were eleventh graders, and 789 were twelfth graders. During the 2005-2006 school year, there were 1,827 students enrolled at HSH; 974 were eleventh graders, and 853 were twelfth graders. Table 2 on page 37 represents the demographic breakdown of the

students enrolled and the teachers employed in 2004-2005; all information was taken from the Texas Education Agency website. Unfortunately, during the 2005-2006 school year, HSH was combined with the 9<sup>th</sup> /10<sup>th</sup> grade campus, and the numbers on the website reflect that combination. Any demographic comparisons between 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 would not, therefore, be accurate.

Table 2: 2004 Demographics of Students and Teachers at HSH

	Number	Percentage
African American	580	32.90%
Hispanic	860	48.70%
White	268	15.20%
Native American	2	0.10%
Asian	55	3.10%
Economically Disadvantaged	940	53.30%
LEP	141	8%
At Risk	1,132	64.10%
ESL	106	6%
Gifted / Talented	103	5.80%
Special Education	197	11%
Staff	127	
Teachers	108	
Average Experience	12.2 years	

#### Definition of Literacy

Literacy is a difficult construct to define because, as education theory and pedagogy have changed, so too have definitions of and methods for teaching literacy. I had originally conceptualized literacy as the ability to read and write; after all, someone who is *il*-literate can speak and listen but cannot read and write. But Sandra Lee McKay, in her outline and definition of literacy, argues that “[i]lliteracy is a highly charged term, one that is often contrasted with *literacy*, as if individuals either are or are not literate. Such a dichotomy is a tremendous oversimplification. . . . Furthermore, it is important to qualify literacy in reference to a particular language” (2).

Literacy theorist Carol Edelsky, in her book arguing for a whole-language approach to literacy, outlines three major trends in literacy theory. The first divides reading into separate skills (decoding, word attack, comprehending); theorists in this category posit that practicing these skills is the same as practicing reading (89). The

second theory claims that literacy is a social practice; the study of literacy, then, is the study of how literacy is used in social settings (89). The third theory argues that literacy is a social practice involving print (89). Based on these three theories, Edelsky outlines her own theory of literacy; she claims that defining literacy “requires a look at who else is involved and how, and at the role and power of the literate in relation to the role and power of the other(s)” (86). According to her theory, it is futile to think of literacy in terms of the individual, as in “this student is literate” or “that student is illiterate” because literacy is social and political, not individual (87). She argues that

Whenever language is used, it is used in events—events that capture and create relationships among people and between people and objects (material and otherwise) in the culture. What is learned when people learn language includes all those relationships that were part of the events carried out through language use. The language used within these events is usually used for some purpose other than instruction or evaluation of the language use itself . . . Though language is learned *through* using it, it is not usually used consciously and deliberately *for* learning it. (91)

Literacy, then, is not just the ability to read and write; instead, it accounts for the social and political context of communicating verbally and non-verbally. In order to help our tutees become literate, then, we would use the framework outlined by Jim Cummins above to help them move from highly contextualized material, material they could understand readily because the context was given, to material where they had to create their own context; in other words, they would have to be culturally literate to create a context for their own understanding.

The ability to produce different communicative acts (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) is a part of whole language literacy, which pushes students to think about the context of a given act in order to understand it. Jim Cummins clarifies the distinction between different communicative acts and the length of time required for proficiency by explaining that “some aspects of language proficiency, such as reading skills, are strongly related to cognitive and academic development, whereas others involving such basic interpersonal communicative skills as oral fluency and phonology, are less related to cognitive and academic development” (“Age on Arrival” 132). He identifies the difference between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) as an important distinction because it takes less time to acquire conversational fluency (BICS) than academic fluency (CALP): “Conversational fluency is often acquired to a functional or peer-appropriate level within about two years of initial exposure to the second language whereas at least five years is typically required to catch up to native speakers in academic aspects of the second language” (“BICS and CALP” 322). But, while a teacher may often assume a *speaker* of English is fluent, the diagram on page 39 shows that BICS are only the tip of the communication iceberg.

In addition, Jim Cummins notes that age on arrival plays a crucial role in the development of English literacy:

A number of large-scale studies have reported that, on the average, at least

five years is required for ELL students to attain grade norms on academic aspects of English proficiency. . . . [Collier] reports that children who arrived in the United States between ages eight and twelve, with several years of L1 schooling, required five to seven years to reach national norms in reading, social studies, and science. Those who arrived before age eight required seven to ten years to attain national norms, while those who arrived after age twelve often ran out of time before they could catch up academically in language-based areas of the curriculum. (“Assessment and Intervention” 119)

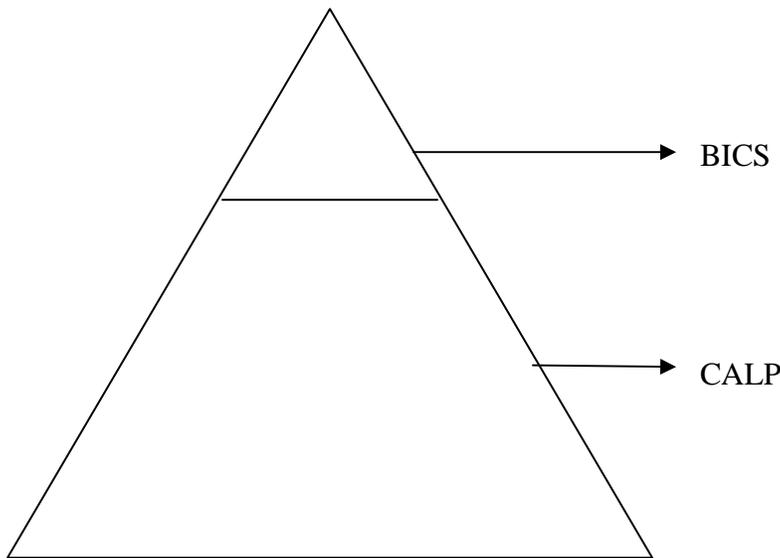


Figure 2: Jim Cummins' BICS and CALP

When assessing the literacy needs of developing L2 learners, ignoring the political and social context of communicative acts (discussed by Edelsky) and the language maturity issues (discussed by Jim Cummins) can be detrimental to their language maturity. I know that I have mistakenly assumed that, because an ESL student can speak relatively fluent English, he/she should also be able to read and write fluently in English as well. Of course, if I were confronted with an L1 student who could not read and write but could speak English, I would not be surprised at the discrepancy between speaking / listening and reading / writing, so the contrary expectations are troubling for those teaching second language students. But according to Jim Cummins, such misconceptions occur regularly: “It is frequently assumed that language minority students have become ‘English proficient’ when they have acquired relatively fluent and peer-appropriate face-to-face communicative skills. . . . this misconception operates to impede the academic progress of language minority students” (“Role of Primary” 6). The effects of this misconception can be harmful, resulting in the child being labeled a special education student, or, in severe cases, resulting in failure for the student to progress

academically. And, according to Jim Cummins, the problem worsens as the child grows older because

[i]t is commonly observed that students classified as ‘English proficient’ after a relatively short stay in a bilingual program and then exited to an all-English program often fall progressively further behind grade norms in the development of English academic skills. Because these students appear to be fluent in English, their poor academic performance can no longer be explained by their English language deficiency. Policymakers and educators are also reluctant to blame the school for minority students’ performance because the school has accommodated the students by providing a bilingual program. Once again, the academic deficiency will be attributed to factors within the child. (“Role of Primary” 6)

Even though L1 and L2 speakers probably develop literacy skills similarly, with speaking and listening learned before reading and writing, “it takes considerably longer for immigrant students to develop age-appropriate academic skills in English (five-seven years [length of residence] LOR) than it does to develop certain aspects of age-appropriate English communicative skills (approximately two years)” (“Role of Primary” 9).

For the purposes of this study, I will define literacy by combining the theories of Edelsky and Jim Cummins; when I discuss literacy, I will be referring to how much context is necessary for the student to understand the communicative act. A student can, for example, be literate in a set of words or phrases focused on one social act and not understand those same words or phrases when they are mixed up and used in a new context (think, for example, of homonyms. An L2 speaker who knows about dogs may know that one term for “dog” is canine; if you apply that term to the canine teeth, he/she may not know what you are talking about). To be literate, in other words, is to understand a social act in the given context and to be able to create that context when necessary.

## Methods

### Analyzing Data

Because this was an ethnographic study, my analysis focused mainly on qualitative data generated from the tutoring sessions. I also, however, examined test scores and reading scores to detect improvement in those areas. At the end of each day of tutoring, I had a variety of materials to analyze. To help me organize my observations, I kept a journal where I recorded breakthroughs I observed in conferences and in the materials generated by all of the conferences. Originally, I believed three things would help me gauge the effectiveness of the center: classroom teacher responses, materials generated by the students in the center, and test scores. I found that classroom teachers, however, had little to say about the gains the student was making. Either they did not have time to talk, or they would give me vague responses like “Yes, she seems to be getting better.” When pressed for specifics, most teachers said they needed time to find the work before they could answer. So I relied almost exclusively on the students’ test scores and conference materials.

Because we received a detailed summary of all students' TAKS tests that outlined the multiple choice questions they missed and the objectives they did not meet on the essay, I was able to analyze Benchmark scores and final TAKS scores to determine progress as well.<sup>1</sup> I selected three tutees to focus on as case studies throughout the course of the semester; while I studied all of the tutees to measure their growth, I used the case studies for specific evidence of increased language proficiency. Also, I requested that tutors tape each tutorial session for analysis and evidence of growth.

I chose three tutees to focus on in my case studies: Adriana, Leah, and Ricardo. I chose Adriana because she was one of the kinds of students I originally wanted to work with; she was a senior who needed to pass TAKS. She was a fairly fluent speaker and reader, and she should have made good progress with tutoring. I thought she would be easy to work with. I picked Leah to focus on for a case study because, in only two short years, she had progressed farther than most of the other tutees who had lived here much longer. I was intrigued about what had pushed her to succeed so rapidly, and I wanted to see if we could help push her even farther. Ricardo was the exact opposite of the profile I originally wanted, but we had several students like him in tutoring because of the situation for the ESL teacher. I picked him to focus on because he was so different from what I originally intended.

On the tutoring tapes, I listened for breakthroughs in several areas. I looked for grammatical, syntactical, and semantic breakthroughs to determine evidence of learning. I focused on times when the tutees had "a-ha" moments, times when they finally understood a concept that they had been working on for a while or made a connection to a previously learned concept.

#### Framework

Once I had identified breakthrough areas on the tapes, I analyzed them according to the framework outlined by Jim Cummins in "The Role of Primary Language Development in Promoting Educational Success for Language Minority Students." Jim Cummins discusses communicative proficiency, which combines Michael Canale and Merrill Swain's communicative competence and communicative performance. Canale and Swain describe communicative competence as "the relationship and interaction between grammatical competence, or knowledge of the rules of grammar, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of the rules of language use" (6); they identify the ability to utilize these competencies as communicative performance (6). Communicative proficiency, then, is the act of using language correctly in terms of grammar and in terms of context.

Jim Cummins outlines the basic prerequisites for a framework for communicative proficiency for second language acquisition. He claims that the framework

1. must "incorporate a developmental perspective so that those aspects of communicative proficiency mastered early by native speakers and L2 learners can be distinguished from those varying across individuals as development progresses";
2. should "permit differences between the linguistic demands of school and those of

interpersonal contexts outside the school to be described”;

3. and ought to “allow for the developmental relationships between L1 and L2 proficiency to be described” (“Role of Primary” 11).

The framework Jim Cummins describes considers literacy as only one part of communicative proficiency; communication, according to Jim Cummins, cannot be separated from context, and context occupies one-half of the framework because “the more reading and writing instruction can be embedded in a meaningful communicative context, the more successful it is likely to be” (“Role of Primary” 14). Basically, then, the framework allows us to study the interrelationship between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), giving us a scaffold to examine both in terms of communicative proficiency.

A drawing of the framework appears below.

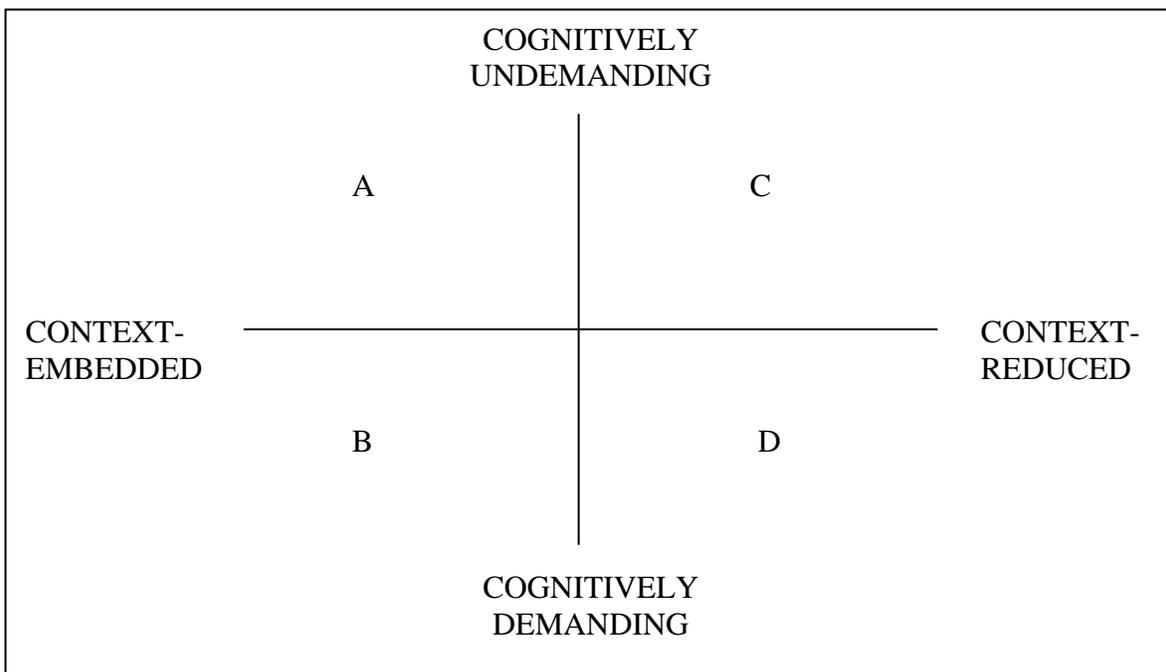


Figure 3: Jim Cummins' Communication Framework

Before continuing, some words require defining. Along the horizontal continuum (and Jim Cummins is sure to remind us that these terms exist on a continuum, not as polar opposites) are the terms context-embedded and context-reduced. Context-embedded communication has a high degree of relevant context for the communicator, allowing him/her to actively negotiate meaning based on prior experience with the topic at hand; in addition, the language itself is supported by situational and other non-verbal cues (“Role of Primary” 11). Context-reduced communication, on the other hand, relies purely on linguistic cues for meaning; communicators have little to no context for the message and must determine the meaning from the message itself (“Role of Primary” 11). As Jim

Cummins further asserts,

context-embedded communication derives from interpersonal involvement in a shared reality that reduces the need for explicit linguistic elaboration of the message. Context-reduced communication, on the other hand, derives from the fact that this shared reality cannot be assumed and thus linguistic messages must be elaborated precisely and explicitly so that the risk of misinterpretation is minimized. (“Role of Primary” 11)

Thinking in terms of a typical classroom, where “many of the linguistic demands . . . reflect communication that is closer to the context-reduced end of the continuum” (“Role of Primary” 12), it is clear that the failure of teachers to differentiate between context-embedded communication and context-reduced communication can cause difficulty and even failure for many ESL students *if and when* those teachers thrust students into context-reduced environments without training in a context-embedded atmosphere first. In communication with their families and peers, students most often use context-embedded communication; when they come to class, therefore, they try to use those same strategies to understand communication that is context-reduced. A classroom environment, much like the ones outlined by the SIOP model, that is more responsive to their needs would begin by embedding communication in context for students and working towards a more context-reduced classroom, one where students are able to make meaning for themselves because they are trained to do so. While we should not begin with context-reduced classroom tasks, therefore, our goal should be, through practice, to get our students to a level of capability in context-reduced communicative environments.

The vertical portion of the framework represents another continuum important for developing communicative competence. Cognitively undemanding tasks “consist of communicative tasks and activities in which the linguistic tools have become largely automatized (mastered) and thus require little active cognitive involvement for appropriate performance” (“Role of Primary” 13). Cognitively demanding tasks, on the other hand, are “tasks and activities in which the communicative tools have not become automatized and thus require active cognitive involvement. . . . In these situations, it is necessary to stretch one’s linguistic resources . . . to the limit in order to achieve one’s communicative goals” (“Role of Primary” 13). Again, our goal should be to push students and give them the necessary tools to advance to a level of communicative competence where they can function in an environment requiring cognitively demanding communicative tasks.

It is important to note here that my goal was not to make tutees necessarily capable of understanding all context-reduced, cognitively demanding communication. Such a goal would be impossible to accomplish in the short time we had together. Instead, I want to give these tutees the tools for successfully negotiating environments that are more context-reduced and cognitively demanding. That way, they become independent learners and thinkers who may still have difficulty with but are no longer hindered by a language barrier because they can first determine their own context for reading. Context is important because “[a] major reason why language minority students have often failed to develop high levels of L2 academic skills is that their initial

instruction has emphasized context-reduced communication insofar as instruction has been through English and unrelated to their prior out-of-school experiences” (Jim Cummins, “Language proficiency” 125), but, as Cohen and Horowitz note, “[a] study with Turkish students learning Dutch in the Netherlands found that if third graders read . . . *culturally appropriate texts* that were *linguistically complex*, there was no significant difference in performance between the Turkish and Dutch students” (43). If students can determine context, therefore, they can read more complex texts. Using Jim Cummins’s framework helped me determine what it means to be proficient in English and to monitor the tutees’ progress toward quadrant D.

But the framework also produced some hardships for me. Because each tutee/tutor group moved at a different pace, tutors and I had to work closely together to determine a tutee’s readiness to progress towards quadrant D as a result of growth. Determining growth and readiness to advance can be difficult because “[t]he location of any particular language task or activity on the vertical and horizontal continua is a function not only of inherent task characteristics but also of the level of proficiency of the language user. Thus, tasks that are cognitively undemanding for a native speaker . . . may be highly cognitively demanding for an L2 learner” (Jim Cummins, “Language proficiency” 123). I found that keeping detailed notes and tapes, and monitoring and reviewing each student’s progress daily was necessary to determine readiness to advance.

### Planning

#### Approval

Before I could begin any curriculum planning or tutoring hiring, I had to gain approval from several different places to work with human subjects who are minors. In order to conduct research at HSH, I received an exemption from the Louisiana State University Instructional Review Board for using human subjects. I also had to have approval from the district’s Office of Research, Evaluation, and Dissemination to conduct research with students on campus.

In addition, I had each interested student, both tutors and tutees, take home a parental approval form that explained the study I was completing and what the tutors and tutees could expect from the study (see Appendix B). The form was available in both English and Spanish since many of the parents did not speak English. Each student had to return the form before being allowed to participate as either a tutor or a tutee. All of the tutors and seven of the tutees were minors, so their parents had to be involved in signing the waivers. Three of the tutees, Ricardo, Jennifer, and Mary, were eighteen or over, but I still wanted their parents to sign the waivers because, since none of the parents spoke English, I wanted them to be fully aware of the curriculum their students would be following. I did not want them to feel in any way left out of their children’s academics.

In addition, I had the tutors and their parents sign a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix C). I knew that the tutors might sometimes have access to confidential testing, demographic, and grade information about the tutees, information not normally available to students when they were helping me make copies and file; also, they obviously knew that all of the tutees had failed the TAKS test at least once. I wanted the tutors to

understand that the information they would have access to could not be repeated to anyone except me or a campus administrator; they understood that they would be immediately terminated if they repeated the information even to another teacher on campus. While some people on campus said that was a bit overboard, I knew that the tutors did not necessarily understand what types of information were ok to say to whom, and I did not want anything that happened in tutorials repeated to the wrong person. Several times during the semester we had to refer back to these agreements when the tutors forgot and I heard that they had been talking to people about the sessions, so I knew it had been a good idea for me to have them sign the agreements.

### Session Location and Scheduling

I decided to hold the tutorial sessions in my classroom. The classroom where we met typically housed classes of twenty-five to thirty students, though I did have several classes with up to thirty-two students during my time at HSH. While the classroom was large enough for thirty-plus students in a classroom setting, it was not ideal for seven tutoring sessions at once. In a classroom setting it is ok if students work together and are noisy, but in a tutoring setting both tutors and tutees need relative quiet to work effectively. Because of the close quarters, sometimes both the tutors and the tutees were distracted by another group. Again, the classroom was not ideal, but in order for me to observe the conferences, we had to work within the constraints of the school setting.

Although we would be cramped, I decided to hold the tutorial sessions in my classroom for several reasons. First, an adult teacher must be present any time students meet in the school building. Second, I wanted access to my materials and computers at all times. And third, we really had no other viable options. We could have potentially gone to the computer labs, but computers offer distractions for students, and we could not take up an entire computer lab every day for a semester. Any empty classroom was not feasible because it would pose the same problems my classroom had in terms of space. In the library, we would have been too spread out, and classes regularly coming to the library to do research would have been a distraction. So, although it was loud sometimes, I had all six or seven tutoring sessions happening at once. Sometimes, one group would go out in the hall and one would go to the library, but this was not ideal because I could not observe the conferences that were not in my room.

HSH was on a block schedule during the 2005-2006 academic year. Periods one through four met on A days for an hour and a half each, and periods five through six met on B days for an hour and a half each. We held tutoring sessions during fourth period, so we met every other day for an hour and a half.

### Budget

My initial proposed budget is on page 46. Immediately, I found that I had to drastically reduce my budget. Originally, I hoped to receive a \$3000 private grant from a friend with hope of a matching \$3000 grant from that individual's place of employment. I had also applied for \$750 from the International Writing Centers Association, and in the fall, I wanted to apply for the Foundation grant from the district. However, the matching

grant did not come through, and the Foundation was disassembled due to problems with grant distribution. I did receive \$175 (which was used to buy copies of *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*) from the International Writing Centers Association, and the private grant was raised to \$4000, giving me a total of \$4,175.

Table 3: Initial Budget

<b>Product</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Unit Price</b>	<b>Total Price</b>
Books			
<i>The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring</i>	6	\$29.40	\$176.40
Spanish / English dictionaries (Oxford UP)	6	\$11.53	\$69.18
Locking file cabinet	1	\$139.00	\$139.00
Three-ring binders (6)	6	\$3.78	\$22.68
Printer cartridges (2)	2	\$24.99	\$49.98
Paper (2 reams)	2	\$28.79	\$57.58
Pens (5 boxes)	5	\$7.19	\$35.95
Hanging folders (1 box)	1	\$5.55	\$5.55
Manila folders (2 boxes)	2	\$5.55	\$11.10
Sony M-450 Microcassette Recorder	6	\$24.99	\$149.94
Sony M-2020 Transcription System	1	\$249.99	\$249.99
Microcassette Tapes (pack of nine)	65	\$8.19	\$532.35
<b>Supply Total</b>			<b>\$1,499.70</b>
Tutors			
55 days tutoring at 1.5 hours each	82.5	\$7.00	\$577.50
19 staff meetings at 1.5 hours each	28.5	\$7.00	\$199.50
Total price for one tutor			\$777.00
<b>Total price for six tutors</b>			<b>\$4,662.00</b>
<b>Total Budget</b>			<b>\$6,161.70</b>

So I cut about \$2000 from the budget immediately. The first thing I did was recalculate my tutoring hours. I decided to budget for only the fall in the beginning, just in case the tutoring did not carry over to the spring. Instead of the total price for tutors being \$4662.00, it dropped to \$1953.00. After I added the seventh tutor, the total price for

tutors went up to \$2110.50. I also had to purchase an extra tape recorder and tapes, and I purchased some necessary books. At the end of the first semester, I had used all of the money from the private grant and from the International Writing Centers grant.

### Selecting Tutors

Once I received permission to work with students, I began selecting tutors in May 2005. I hired six students, several of whom were Spanish / English bilingual, and I chose AP and / or Honors students because they tend to be dedicated to their education. Originally I wanted to hire college-level tutors from the nearby San Jacinto Community College, but after some careful consideration of the problems associated with college-level tutors (training, permission to be on campus, lack of true “peer” status, etc.), I decided to hire only senior-level students attending HSH. All senior-level students who have passed all four sections of TAKS can have a filler class, or a free period where they may leave campus,<sup>2</sup> during first and fifth or fourth and eighth periods, so I made sure all of my tutors had a fourth period filler and would be willing to remain on campus during their filler period for tutoring.

To begin tutor selection, I made presentations to the junior-level Honors and AP classes in May, telling students the purpose of tutoring and how they would be compensated for their work. During the short presentations, I asked interested students to come to my room during the second week of May to pick up an application. Applications asked students to list their tentative class schedules for the 2005-2006 school year, their GPA, important demographic information, any previous tutoring experience, and college plans. Interested students also had to secure two references from other teachers and write a short paragraph about why they were interested in tutoring ESL students. Each application also contained a release form for tutors to sign, enabling me to ensure that the applicant had passed all areas of the TAKS test and giving me permission to check his/her grades (see Appendix D for application forms).

Senior tutors were ultimately more valuable to work with than college-level tutors for several reasons. I could monitor their grades more easily, I did not have to get special permission for them to be on campus, and they were closer in age and, hence, more readily approachable than college tutors. But also, two things happened toward the end of the semester that I had not anticipated with the tutors. First, they were able to use their tutoring experiences on college and scholarship applications. Although many students these days can say on applications that they have completed community service hours, not many can say that they are dedicated to solving second language issues for secondary students, having been hired, trained, and paid to tutor ESL students to help them increase their L2 literacy. Second, the tutors experienced and demonstrated their own increase in social capital. By watching me help them work through the sometimes complex administrative system to accomplish our goals, the tutors learned as well to persist until they accomplish their own goals. They learned not to take no for an answer, and they learned that that there is almost always an answer for, or a solution to, a problem, even if finding that solution means working through or thinking about the problem and solution in new and different ways. In short, they became valuable, productive members of their

own communities. I was glad I had chosen to work with high school tutors because, after watching them work and witnessing their progress, I saw that they grew as students and teachers in ways that might not have been possible otherwise. Although I had worked with tutors before at LSU, I had not seen these kinds of personal and social gains.

### Training Tutors

Originally, I wanted to have both male and female tutors because, as Martha Maxwell proposes in her explanation of the effect of tutor and tutee ethnicity during conferencing, tutor selection should “reflect the ethnic diversity and the distribution of males and females in the population [the tutors] will serve” (14). Hispanic students seem also to have special needs related to gender; in a similar study on gender cited by Maxwell, House and Wohlt found that Hispanic students “attended more sessions when working with male tutors” (quoted in Maxwell 16). If possible, therefore, I wanted to employ more male than female tutors to adequately serve the targeted population. I also wanted to hire mostly Hispanic tutors because for the 2005-2006 school year the targeted population was Hispanic. I wanted to “make special efforts to hire minority tutors as mentors because of the evidence suggesting that minority students relate better to minority tutors” (16). I wanted tutors to have been, at some point, in a similar position as the students they are serving so that the tutees feel a connection to the tutors.

As is often the case with research, the real does not always match the ideal; hence, things did not go as planned. After I read the applications, I interviewed the students. During the interviews, I explored the students’ strengths and weaknesses and delved more deeply into their desire to tutor. I also made sure they understood the time commitment involved with tutoring. Originally, six female students showed up for interviews, and I hired all six of them. During the summer, however, two students—Ashley and Jasmine—called to say that they could not tutor. When school started, therefore, I was two tutors short, but two of my former students said they would be interested. At this point, I had hired six tutors: Sarah, a monolingual African American Honors student; Zena, an Israeli Honors student who is bilingual in English and Arabic; Amber, a monolingual American Honors student; Karla, an Hispanic AP student who is partially bilingual in English and Spanish; Maira, an Hispanic AP student who is fully fluent in English and Spanish; and Karen, an Hispanic AP student who is fully fluent in English and Spanish. Midway through the first semester, because I needed another bilingual tutor, I hired Miriam, a bilingual Hispanic / English Honors student.

Originally, I wanted to have four workshops during the summer to train tutors. But because of scheduling problems with the tutors, I decided to postpone training until we got back to school. It takes two to three weeks to finalize schedules, so I knew pushing back our starting date would not be a problem since I had not chosen (and would not be able to choose) tutees until the third week of school. We held our first tutor training meeting the first day of school. The rotating block schedule would allow us to meet five times during weeks one and two.

At our first meeting, we accomplished several goals. We discussed tutoring in general and professional ethics in particular, and I distributed parental permission forms

and textbooks. I chose the *Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring* by Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner as our textbook for two reasons: I had been trained as a student tutor at Louisiana State University with that text, and I believe it is a strong text that is easily accessible for students because it is based on real-world examples and illustrations instead of vague theoretical principles. I supplemented the readings from *Allyn and Bacon* with selections from *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*, edited by Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth, a text chosen for its realistic, easy-to-read and understand examples. I also made sure, at that first meeting, to express to tutors that the reading they would be doing would be about a writing center, which was slightly different than what we would be doing in the tutoring sessions. Finally, we discussed chapters one and two through a jigsaw approach to reading. Students each read a portion of chapters one and two of the *Allyn and Bacon Guide* (“Why We Tutor” and “The Writing Process”). After each student read, she taught the rest of us about her section so that we would all understand it. The jigsaw strategy accomplished two goals: It allowed us to get through two general chapters easily, and it allowed me to see the teaching strengths of each tutor immediately. We concluded our first meeting with a discussion of different writing processes, noting the differences between all of our individual processes.

At the second meeting, students had read chapters three and four (“The Tutoring Process” and “Examining Expectations”) before the meeting. We talked about how they do not have to be language experts, even though they would be perceived as such. One of their largest concerns during this session was what to do if they didn’t know an answer to a question; even though they know grammar, for example, they often don’t know why things are the way they are or the “correct” grammatical name for something. We also talked about their first session and how to open it. In their discussion of what to do during the first tutoring session with a new student, Kelly Chandler-Olcott and Kathleen Hinchman explain that the first meeting is a time to get to know the tutee: “As you begin your tutoring, it’s helpful to know something about your student’s hobbies, musical tastes, friendships, sports, family, favorite books, school performance, and career aspirations. It is also important to discover what you can about your tutee’s attitudes and understandings about reading, writing, and schoolwork” (40). I told them, therefore, that I wanted them to spend time talking with the tutee at the first session to find out about him/her, and we decided that, at the next meeting, we would develop a questionnaire for use at the first tutoring session. Tutors were to think of questions to ask at the first session. We concluded by talking about the difference in higher-order concerns (HOCs) and later-order concerns (LOCs) and why it makes sense to address HOCs first.

From chapter four, we addressed the subject of setting goals during a conference, and I explained that, since they wouldn’t often have a paper to work on during conferencing, I would set main goals for them but they would have leeway within those guidelines. For example, in one two-week session, tutors worked on writing a personal narrative as their main goal (set by me), but they could work on any element of writing (correcting grammar, choosing a subject, brainstorming, etc.) that was necessary at the time with their particular tutee.

By the third training session, students had read chapters six and seven (“Tutoring Practice” and “Reflecting on the First Session”), and we discussed those chapters briefly. We specifically noted, again, that they needed to let the tutee do his/her own work, and we talked about how to salvage a “bad” conference. Then tutors created a list of questions to have tutees answer during the first conference as a way to get to know the tutees better. They typed the questions and printed copies for each group (see Appendix E). I showed them the daily tutoring log they would use for reflection (see Appendix F) after every conference and explained the importance of keeping it current. The reflection log was a place for tutors to record and explore their reactions to the conferences and to document their conference concerns for me to address.

In addition, we talked about the curriculum they would follow during tutoring. One of the requirements for writing papers at HSH is that the text be written—from rough draft to final draft—in the classroom, the idea being that, during TAKS, students would not be able to either type their papers or take them home to work on them; this also eliminates the chance of the student losing or forgetting the papers or copying from another student’s work. I knew, therefore, that we would not have the opportunity to work on authentic essays during tutoring and that I would be responsible for creating a curriculum. Originally, I wanted to use the same curriculum students were working on in their ESL classes, but I knew that would require a lot more work by the tutors; they would have to read, for example, the novel the ESL teacher had her students working on. Instead, I designed a series of short, two week mini-units based on the SIOP model of teaching (the SIOP model asks students to “See” the material, “Connect” the material to something else they know, “Discuss” the material with another student, and “Apply” the material to the new reading). Tutors also knew that they would be able to identify weaknesses for the tutee early on, and they should work on those issues as well.

During the fourth session, tutors and I skimmed through chapter eight, “Working with ESL Writers,” and chapter thirteen, “What If...” Since several tutors were bilingual, we were able to talk specifically about the unique challenges ESL writers will bring to the sessions. By this point, I knew that some of our tutees would be non-English speakers, and we discussed in depth how to help these students become more proficient in English. The tutors were able to see that passing TAKS was probably not going to be a concern for someone who cannot speak English, but they knew that, given time, they could help the student learn a significant amount of English. It was during this training session that I saw the tutors really begin to empathize with the tutees. The stories told by the bilingual tutors visibly upset all of them, and I could tell that they all had a much firmer commitment to helping than they had previously.

During the fifth session, we traveled to the Writing Center at the University of Houston at Clear Lake to meet with trained graduate student tutors. Each of my tutors met with a practiced tutor, and they were allowed to ask questions, to watch conferences, and to talk about concerns. If they were at all scared before this session, I know that they felt relieved afterwards. It was calming, and they all left feeling that tutoring was something they could do realistically.

In addition to the initial training, tutors and I engaged in training sessions throughout the school year. Originally, I wanted us to meet once every other week to discuss problems and solutions they had come up with. But we experienced scheduling problems when I realized that we would not be able to meet after school because the tutors had other commitments. For our first two training meetings, we let the tutees watch a movie and answer questions about it while the tutors and I met during class. These meetings were the most productive. At the first meeting, we spent the entire hour and a half discussing problems and solutions. The major problem we discussed was with one of the tutees, José. His tutor, Amber, had begun to feel like he didn't want to be in tutoring. He refused to do the work she presented him, and he would engage in conversation only occasionally. As a group, we discussed ways to engage him more in the sessions, and I told her that I would talk to him outside of the sessions. In addition, the tutors were concerned because they needed more materials more regularly. They told me what kinds of issues they were working on (subject / verb agreement, forms of verbs, reading dictionary entries, etc), and I requested they keep a running list for me to help them better.

Their request for materials led to the agenda for the second meeting, when I reserved the computer lab. In order to help the tutors be more in control of the types of assignments and activities they were using, I showed them websites such as Purdue University's online writing lab and Louisiana State University's Writing Center homepage, and they printed resources from sites such as those to use during tutoring. Afterwards, the tutors claimed that this was the most productive day they had because they found a plethora of useful material on topics ranging from writing processes to specific grammar concerns; tutors would sometimes show up for session with materials they had printed off on their own at home, which showed me that they were taking ownership of their sessions. The problem, of course, with these class-long meetings was that we lost entire tutoring days; after that, we had weekly ten- to fifteen-minute meetings at the end of a conferencing day where I would discuss what they were each doing and give them curriculum information for the next tutoring session. Oftentimes at these meetings, tutors would tell me they needed supplementary information to help them, for example, explain the parts of a dictionary entry, or they needed something that would show verb tenses easily, or they needed something to read that was easier than what I was providing; they would also share ideas and resources.

### Selecting ESL Students to Study

Originally, I planned to identify ten ESL students of varying abilities to study, but once again, I ran into several obstacles. I did not want students who spoke no English; I wanted senior-level students who had failed TAKS at least once but who had the potential for the most growth during the sessions. I wanted to have their schedules arranged so that they would be the only students in the fourth period ESL class. For the first 45 minutes of the class, I would take five of them for tutoring, and the ESL teacher would teach the other five; then, halfway through the class, she and I would switch students. The extra tutor would rotate, helping me with paperwork and/or helping the

other tutors. I thought that this would give me a broad range of students to work with. Unfortunately, this plan could not work. At the beginning of the year, the ESL teacher was told that her class load would increase from 60 students to 125 students. The jump in class size was attributed to two factors: an influx of “new” ESL students directly from their home countries, and a surprisingly large population of tenth grade ESL students coming from the high school that had not been anticipated by HSH. Since the ESL teacher only teaches five classes total, her other classes would be too large to limit her fourth period class to ten students. Even though the study I was conducting could have had great potential for both the students and the administration at HSH, and even though the ESL students are one of the most monitored sub-populations of students taking the test, I was told that due to other concerns, tutoring was not a priority for the administration. Instead of being able to hand-pick students, therefore, I was forced to work within the constraints of HSH’s scheduling, picking students whose schedules allowed them to be in ESL during fourth period.

My next plan was to take ten of her students and teach her curriculum to the five not being tutored; halfway through the class, I would switch tutees with the tutors and would teach her curriculum to the other five tutees. That way, they would be in my classroom the entire class period but would only be tutored for half of the period. Again, once I looked at my schedule honestly, I knew that I would not be able to add an additional class preparation time to my work day. Instead, I decided to take six tutees from her class and tutor them for the entire hour and a half. Students would still be enrolled in her class, but they would meet with me every day, and I would be assigning grades based on the work they did during tutoring. I planned also to find six or seven after-school tutors to work for community service hours in order to fulfill their Honor Society requirements. I had these after-school tutors picked and trained before I was told that I could not have after-school tutoring because it would interfere with teacher tutorials and Starcatchers, the after-school TAKS tutoring sessions. Since Starcatchers is usually scheduled only for the two weeks before TAKS, I had not counted on it conflicting with my tutorials so early in the semester (the next testing date wasn’t until October), but I should have checked before making plans to tutor after school.

So I decided to work with my six tutors and pick six tutees. Picking tutees became more an issue of finding students who wanted to participate and who brought back the required forms than picking from a pool of interested candidates. I began by asking the Assistant Principal who can speak Spanish, Mr. Rivera, to talk to the fourth period ESL class for me. I wanted a Spanish speaker to talk to them in Spanish so that they could really understand the project. He told them the purpose of the study and explained what they would be doing every day. Potential tutees wanted to know if we could help them pass TAKS, if we could help them study for the SAT, and if we could help them get into college. I found that students are very particular about their teachers, and many of them did not want to leave the ESL teacher’s class. Finally, I had six tutees, all with permission slips signed and ready to work.

Then Hurricane Katrina hit. We immediately lost two tutees; also, we had to remove one tutee from tutoring because he was not participating in the conferences and

continued skipping fourth period. At that point, the ESL teacher began sending me students who spoke no English because she did not know what to do with them in her class. She sent me four tutees who had just moved to the United States in the last three months, so I had to hire another bilingual tutor to assist with some of the Spanish speakers.

Obviously, finding both tutors and tutees required a tremendous amount of flexibility, but that is the nature of working in a high school in general and conducting teacher research in particular. I was continuously having to re-think my procedures and plans to come up with new ways to make the tutoring work, plans that might someday be transferable to other settings and other times.

### Background Information on ESL Student Tutees

Once I accepted a student into the program and all of the required paperwork was returned, I collected that student's testing data. I wanted to know how long the student had been in the United States, how many language proficiency tests he/she had taken and the scores on each, how many times he/she had taken TAKS and where the scores were lowest, and how many years of schooling he/she had completed in his/her home country. All of this information should be found in the student's ESL folder (called the purple folder), but I had some difficulty obtaining all of this data because, while each ESL student at HSH had an ESL folder containing all of his/her demographic information, many of the folders were incomplete. I had to rely, therefore, on whatever information I could get, regardless of how complete it was. Once I got the information, I wanted to meet the tutors and create a plan for each student based on his/her individual needs. If, for example, the student was only having trouble with fluency in essay writing, the tutor and the student would work purely on fluency; but if the student was having reading comprehension problems as well, the tutoring sessions would work to help the student in that area also. What I found, however, is that the information contained in the purple folders gave me little to no information related to strengths and weaknesses. The tutors, therefore, spent the first few days getting to know the tutees, and they discovered quickly what the tutees' strengths and weaknesses were.

After the tutees were selected, each was matched with a tutor. I made one match because the tutor and tutee knew each other from another class, but I made the rest of the matches randomly based on who spoke Spanish. Three of the tutors—Karla, Maira, and Karen—spoke Spanish, though Karla did not want to engage in Spanish-only tutorials. Maira and Karen, therefore, tutored the two students who only spoke Spanish, while Karla tutored a student who spoke rough English. The other tutees were placed with random tutors. The tutee met with the same tutor daily as long as there was progress and no problems arose between them. If I saw a problem, or if the student or tutor requested a change (which only happened once), I changed the student to a new tutor. Student tutees stayed with the same tutor as much as possible to create an atmosphere of trust and continuity.

Once students and tutors were matched, each tutee was given a reading comprehension test (see Appendix G). The test was a standard maze test, often used to

determine L2 reading ability, outlined by Lee Gunderson in *ESL Literacy and Instruction: A Guidebook to Theory and Practice*. I provided students with a short reading passage, about 100 words. I did not change anything in the first and last sentences so that students would have a context for the passage. Every fifth word was removed, and students had a choice of three words to choose from: the correct word, an incorrect word that is the same part of speech, and an incorrect word in structure and meaning. Students were to circle the word they believed was correct. Gunderson scores the results of the test as follows. If the student answers at least 85% of the words correctly, he/she is operating at the independent level for that reading level, which means that the student “needs *no* help from the teacher. She will comprehend the text” (35). A student who answers 60-75% of the words correctly is operating at the instructional reading level, which means that “the teacher will have to provide help. This is the ideal level” (35). A student who answers less than 50% correctly is operating at the frustration level, which means “no amount of help from the teacher will enable the student to comprehend the text; it is simply too difficult” (35).

All tutees were given reading tests at the third, fifth, and sixth reading levels at the beginning of the semester and again at the end. I originally wanted to test their reading ability at every grade level to obtain an accurate measure of their reading ability, but I found the test was not as reliable as I originally thought. To determine text grade level, I followed the advice of our campus librarian, who referred me to *Renaissance Learning*, a web site that lists grade levels for books commonly held in school libraries. I typed in the title of the book, and the website showed me the level. After the tests, tutors knew their tutee’s reading level, and following Chandler-Olcott’s and Hinchman’s advice in their guide for student tutors, “the bulk of [our] sessions [were] spent interacting with texts that [were] relatively easy for [the] tutee to navigate” (69). Sometimes tutors brought their own books, sometimes they used my books, and sometimes they went to the library to find books. Tutors and tutees both liked books of short stories that could be read and discussed in the hour and a half, and most of them read stories from what became their favorite series, the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series, specifically the books aimed at high school students. They liked these books because they contained short, easy-to-navigate stories that were motivational and contained a positive message for high school students. For tutees who recently arrived in the United States from their home country, tutors often used children’s books as a way to increase their daily vocabulary.

Tables four and five on page 55 outline the results from the maze reading test for each student and highlights why the maze test might not be the most reliable indicator of reading ability for ESL students. Scores are recorded for each student at the fifth grade reading level and the sixth grade reading level two times during the semester, September and December. Students with a score of N/A were not present for the second test. Some students were not present for tutoring in September because they joined later, so they took the test during their first day of tutoring. The first column (labeled “Raw Score” represents the number of questions answered correctly out of 14. The second column (labeled “%Correct”) is the percentage of answers the student answered correctly. The third column (labeled “Level”) is the student’s reading level; according to Gunderson’s

levels, a score of “F” is Frustration, a score of “Inst” is Instructional, and a score of “Ind” is Independent.

I did see one weakness with the maze reading procedure when used in this context. Though used frequently to assess reading proficiency and reading level, I did not feel like the tests accurately reflected the tutees’ reading abilities. For example, Maricruz was by far our most literate English speaker and reader, and her scores show an increase from the frustration level at the beginning of the semester to an independent level at the end of the semester.

Table 4: Grade Level 5 Maze Test Results

	September Raw Score	% Correct	Level		December Raw Score	% Correct	Level
Oscar	0	0%	F		n/a		
Ricardo	2	14%	F		5	36%	F
Ofelia	7	50%	F		n/a		
Leah	5	36%	F		9	64%	Inst
Jennifer	4	29%	F		5	36%	F
José	7	50%	F		n/a		
Mary	4	29%	F		4	29%	F
Maricruz	5	36%	F		9	64%	Inst
Adriana	8	57%	F		7	50%	F
Gladis	6	43%	F		6	43%	F

Table 5: Grade Level 6 Maze Test Results

	September Raw Score	% Correct	Level		December Raw Score	% Correct	Level
Oscar	0	0%	F		n/a		F
Ricardo	3	23%	F		7	54%	F
Ofelia	4	31%	F		n/a		F
Leah	6	46%	F		4	31%	F
Jennifer	5	38%	F		3	23%	F
José	4	31%	F		n/a		F
Mary	8	62%	Inst		7	54%	F
Maricruz	9	69%	Inst		11	85%	Ind
Adriana	9	69%	Inst		10	77%	Inst
Gladis	4	31%	F		4	31%	F

But Maricruz was the only student who showed that type of reading gain, and while many of them stayed at the frustration level throughout the semester, several actually regressed in their reading level from September to December, which is backwards. Adriana, who was also very literate in English, showed a decrease in the number of questions answered correctly about the fifth grade text in December, and while she was operating at the frustration level for the fifth grade text in both September and December, she was operating at the instructional level for the sixth grade text in both September and December. I know, from my interactions with the tutees and tutors, that Mary and Adriana were operating at a much higher level than their scores showed. While I believe that the test can be a good one for native speakers, I do not think it is a good one for L2 speakers because it cannot account for L2 reading difficulties.

I also wanted to measure tutee attitudes toward school and their teachers to see if I could perceive a change throughout the semester. Using techniques for constructing attitude scales from Allen Edwards in *Techniques of Attitude Scale Construction*, I developed my own scale to measure the students' attitudes (see Appendix H). As Lewis R. Aiken explains in his article on affective assessment, though "a child will develop a positive attitude toward schoolwork if the child's school-related efforts are rewarded. In much the same way, the child will tend to develop a negative attitude toward a particular person or group of people if interactions with that person or group are unpleasant or punished" (15). For the most part, the attitude scale I used demonstrated this type of dissatisfaction with school and teachers. My attitude scale contained forty-four questions related to five subjects: the tutees' view of their ability to learn English, the tutees' analysis of the attitude of their teachers, the tutees' belief that English will be necessary for the future, the tutees' ability to interact with other students, and the tutees' strengths in English (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Each question was stated several times in several ways, both positively and negatively, to account for any problems in translation and to ensure accuracy.

During each tutee's first and last day (if possible) of tutoring, he/she took the attitude survey. Depending on the strength of his/her English, the survey was administered in a variety of ways. The survey was not translated into Spanish on paper, so if the student did not speak English, the tutor translated the survey out loud and recorded the answers. If the tutee spoke limited English, the tutor read the survey out loud in English and explained any difficult parts. If the tutee spoke relatively fluent English, he/she read the survey and asked for help as necessary. Though I know that I won't be able to make any conclusive statements about *why* their attitude changed because there are many variables to consider, results from the scale should provide an interesting look into how attitudes can change as social capital grows.

### The Student Tutees and Tutors

The students involved in this study, both tutors and tutees, came from a variety of backgrounds. In this section, I will outline the following information for the tutees: demographic information (age, grade, length of residence, etc), testing information, and results from the reading inventory (discussion of the reading inventory results will come

later). For the tutors, I will summarize demographic information. All of the information for the tutees was generated through the tutorials or in the students' purple folders (though much of it is incomplete), and all of the information on the tutors was generated through their interviews or conversations with me.

Testing information and acronyms can be confusing, so the following are acronyms used in this section.

- IPT: The Idea Proficiency Test. The IPT test consists of four sections: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Students receive a score from A to F, with A being the lowest and F being the highest.
- RPTE: The Reading Proficiency Test in English. Each ESL student takes the RPTE test each year until he/she scores the highest rating, Advanced High (AH). Once a student scores AH and passes the ELA portion of the TAKS test, he/she is exited out of the ESL program.
- NES: Non-English Speaker. For testing purposes, students designated NES will be scored at level A on the IPT.
- LES: Limited English Speaker. For testing purposes, students designated LES will be scored at levels B, C, D, or E on the IPT.
- FES: Fluent English Speaker. For testing purposes, students designated FES will be scored at level F on the IPT.
- TELPAS: Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System. The TELPAS is a combination of the scores from the RPTE and the Texas Observation Protocol (TOP), or scores in listening, speaking, and writing given to the student by the student's English teacher. The TELPAS score is purely used to determine accountability. Each student must show adequate yearly progress on the TELPAS score for the school and district to meet Texas accountability standards.
- AP: Advanced Placement. AP students are enrolled in AP classes and take the AP exams for college placement.
- Honors: Honors students enroll in Honors-level classes. Honors classes are for students who are not or do not feel ready for the AP exams but who seek the challenge of an advanced class (versus a regular class).
- EX: Exempt from testing for that testing period.

### The Tutees

Just as the tutors and I were not working with an ideal tutoring situation, we were also not working with a homogenous group of tutees. Our tutees came from varied backgrounds, had various motivations, and had diverse skills in English prior to tutoring.

Of the ten tutees, four had been in the United States for one year or less. Of course, this was not ideal; originally, I wanted tutees who fell closer to Jim Cummins' 5-7 year range of development, but that was not possible due to scheduling constraints. Two of the tutees had been in the US for three years, two for four years, and two for five or more years. Of the ten, four were advanced in age for their grade level. Six of them

came from homes where Spanish was spoken exclusively, and four of them came from bilingual or partially bilingual homes (two from a truly bilingual home, one from a home where only two siblings speak English, and one from a home where only one parent speaks Spanish). Seven of the tutees were limited English speakers (LES) at the beginning of the fall semester, and three of them were non-English speakers (NES).

Three of the tutees—all female—reported working outside of school to help support their families. Two of them were married, and both of them had babies. Three of them found motivation for academic success in their families, and six of them found motivation in their future careers and/or college goals. Three tutees were involved in extra-curricular activities.

It is important to remember that these students were removed from regular classroom instruction for testing on a regular basis. The tests reported here only represent a fraction of the tests these students take each year, and the ESL tests listed here do not include tests the entire school and / or all other juniors take (TAKS, the PSAT, the SAT, the ACT, etc.).

### Oscar

Oscar came to the United States from the Mexican Federal District, a self-governing city that is not part of the Mexican states but is the seat of the Mexican government, in November 2004. At that time, he was classified as a freshman, but there was no testing information available that semester. At the beginning of the fall semester 2005, Oscar did not speak English and was therefore placed with Karen for Spanish tutorials. In September 2005, he was 17 years old and registered as a sophomore. He lived at home with his parents and younger sister, all of whom spoke Spanish exclusively; nobody in the home could speak English.

Oscar wanted to join the tutoring program because, despite his age and the obstacles against him, he wanted to learn English to go into the military or the medical field post-graduation. But he was also pushed into the program by the ESL teacher, who didn't know how to teach a Spanish-only speaker. Unfortunately, Oscar moved from Houston after Hurricane Rita in September, so no final testing information was available for him. It is evident from his test scores, however, that he made no measurable progress during his 9<sup>th</sup> grade year; he remained an NES for the duration of the academic year.

Table 6: Oscar May 2004 9<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
NES	A	BEG	BEG	BEG	BEG	EX	EX	EX	EX	

Table 7: Oscar May 2005 10<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
NES	A									

Ricardo

After Oscar left Houston, Ricardo took his place with Karen. Ricardo was an 18-year-old tenth grader who came to the United States in late August 2005 from Nuevo Laredo, a city just on the Mexican side of the border between the United States and Mexico. When he arrived in the U.S., Ricardo was placed at the New Arrival Center. Like Oscar, Ricardo came from a home with his parents where Spanish was spoken exclusively. He claimed that his most difficult subject was English, and he joined the program because, in his own words, “they made me.” Also like Oscar, Ricardo was pushed into tutoring because his ESL teacher did not know how to teach a Spanish speaker. The chart below shows that Ricardo did make some progress during his 10<sup>th</sup> grade year (the tutoring year), moving from an NES to an LES.

Table 8: Ricardo August 2005 10<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
NES	A									

Table 9: Ricardo May 2006 10<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	B	INT	BEG	BEG	INT	EX	EX	EX	EX	

Gladis

Gladis came to the United States from Aguas-Calientes, Mexico, in 2002. She was a 17-year-old senior, and she was married with a one-year-old child. She lived with her nuclear family and her husband, and though her two younger brothers spoke English at home, the rest of the family spoke Spanish exclusively. Although Gladis had some testing information for the spring 2005 semester, her folder did not have any demographic information prior to the spring semester of 2005.

Gladis wanted to learn English so that her son would be proud of her. In her words, her goals were to “perfect my English, get a good part-time job so I can take care of my son.” At the time of the study, she worked at a local grocery store, and early in the fall, she found out that she was pregnant with her second child. Her ESL reading class was her favorite class at school, but she had trouble practicing English outside of school because so many people in her house spoke Spanish. She did want her son to be fluent in both English and Spanish, which was part of her motivation to do well in school.

Because of her family situation and pregnancy, Gladis missed a large number of school days, and she had to leave early from tutoring most days. On the days she was absent, her tutor, Maira, tutored Jennifer or worked with another tutor. Unfortunately, Gladis was absent on most testing days, so her testing information was incomplete, making a preliminary determination of progress based on test scores impossible.

Table 10: Gladis May 2005 11<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
NES	A									

Jennifer

Jennifer came to the United States from Morellos, Mexico, in August 2005. At the time of the study, she lived with her parents, one sister, and two brothers, and nobody in the home spoke English. She was an 18-year-old junior working at a local laundry / washateria to help her family save money.

Jennifer wanted to be in tutoring to learn better English so that she could “get a job to help [her] family.” Upon graduation, she claimed a desire to go to a university to continue her education. Jennifer changed tutors frequently. She was admitted to the tutoring program when Gladis stopped coming to school because of complications with her pregnancy, but when Gladis came back to school, Maira was left tutoring two students. At that point, I hired another tutor to work with Jennifer, but because of attendance problems with that tutor, Jennifer still worked with Maira frequently. Unfortunately, we did not have any testing information from the beginning of the year to determine progress, but since she tested as an NES at the end of her first year, I would assume that she made no progress during the school year.

Table 11: Jennifer May 2006 11<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
NES	A	ABS	BEG	BEG	INT	EX	EX	EX	EX	ABS

José

José came to the United States from Monterrey, Mexico, in 2000; he enrolled at another school in Houston and moved to HSH in August 2002, where he was placed in the New Arrival Center for one semester. He was a 17-year-old senior who lived at home with his parents, three brothers, and two sisters. Only one of his sisters, his twin sister, spoke English, though she did not speak it fluently.

José stated frequently that he hated school. He had no favorite subjects, and the subjects he struggled with the most were English and math. José was frequently in trouble at school, and it is my guess that he was dissatisfied with school because of the language barrier and because his sister was largely successful in her classes. José wanted to be in tutoring purely to pass the TAKS test.

In October, I told José that he could not participate in tutoring any more. José refused to work with his tutor, and we started to suspect he was only in tutoring because he saw it as a way to get out of a “normal” class. I questioned José about his reticence to work with his tutor several times, and he always said he wanted to stay in tutoring because he felt like he was learning things he would not learn in a traditional classroom. His tutor, Amber, asked me several times to remove him, but despite her persistent

problem with him, I tried to help her work with the group to solve the problem. When he started to skip tutoring, I decided that his spot could be used better by someone else, and I told him that he would have to return to his regular class. During the 2005-2006 academic year, José was classified as a senior, but he dropped out midway through the spring semester. Although José has been in the US longer than any other tutee, his test scores show progress only in his first year in the US as a tenth grader; but when he had to repeat the tenth grade, his progress came to a stop.

Table 12: José August 2002 10<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
NES	A									

Table 13: José May 2003 10<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	B	INT								

Table 14: José May 2004 10<sup>th</sup> grade (repeat)

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	D	INT				N	N			

Table 15: José May 2005 11<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	D	INT				N	N	N	N	INT

Table 16: José May 2006 12<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
		INT	INT	INT	INT	N	N	N	N	INT

## Mary

Mary replaced José after he returned to his regular ESL class. Mary came to the U.S. from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, in August 2001, and she transferred to HSH in August 2004. At the time of the study, Mary was an 18-year-old junior who lived with her parents, two brothers, and one sister. Her home was bilingual, and her parents supported their children's education in English. She entered the tutoring program in October.

The first testing data available for Mary was in the fall of 2004, her ninth grade year. While she claimed that learning English was her greatest accomplishment, she also said that English was the class she struggled with the most. Her goals for tutoring were to learn more English so that she could go to college, and she wanted to work for the government with immigration issues in the future. She was one of the few students

involved in an extra-curricular activity—the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Mary’s scores showed progress between May 2005 and May 2006, but her RPTE and TELPAS scores reverted from Advanced High to Intermediate the same year.

Table 17: Mary September 2004 9<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	B									

Table 18: Mary May 2005 9<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	B	AH	INT	BEG	INT	N	N			AH

Table 19: Mary May 2006 11<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	C	INT	INT	INT	INT	N	N		N	INT

#### Maricruz

Maricruz came to the United States from Honduras in 2002. Like Mary, she lived in a bilingual household. She lived with her husband and their child; her husband, also an ESL speaker, was fluent in English and was part of her motivation to learn the language. She was a 17-year-old senior. Like Mary, Maricruz also wanted to go to college, and she wanted to become a nurse. She was also involved in LULAC, and she enrolled in tutoring to learn / improve her English so that she could be successful in college “for [her] baby.” Like Gladis, she considered her baby her greatest accomplishment and wanted to do well for her.

Most testing information stops for Maricruz after May 2005 because in October 2005, she took and passed the remaining sections of the TAKS test. As a result, in January 2006, she was exited from the ESL program. Her scores steadily improved during her time in the ESL program.

Table 20: Maricruz November 2003 10<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	B									

Table 21: Maricruz May 2004 10<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	C	ADV				N	N			

Table 22: Maricruz May 2005 11<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	C	AH				N	Y	Y	N	AH

Ofelia

Ofelia came to the United States from Mexico in 2001. She lived at home with her parents, one brother, and one sister, none of whom spoke any English. She was a 17-year-old senior. Ofelia transferred to Hawthorne Senior High in the fall of 2004, but her testing information did not come with her; as a result, her testing folder was incomplete.

Ofelia said that trying to learn English was her greatest accomplishment, though it was still something with which she struggled. She wanted to be in tutoring to learn more English so that she could go to college. Unfortunately, like Oscar, Ofelia moved away after Hurricane Rita, so no final testing information was available for her.

Table 23: Ofelia May 2005 11<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	B	ADV				N	Y	N	N	

Leah

When Ofelia moved away, her tutor, Zena, was left without a student to tutor. We quickly found Leah, a 16-year-old sophomore from Tamaulipas, Mexico. Leah's family moved to Houston from Mexico in August 2004. She lived with her parents, two uncles, and a sister; her sister was the only one in the household who spoke English. Upon arrival in the U.S., Leah was placed in the New Arrival Center as a ninth grader. Like most of the tutees, Leah wanted to learn to speak, read, and write more fluently in English. She wanted to go to college to become a computer engineer. Her testing information found below shows dramatic increases in her English ability in two short years.

Table 24: Leah August 2004 9<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
NES	A					EX	EX	EX	EX	

Table 25: Leah May 2005 9<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	B	BEG	INT	BEG	BEG	EX	EX	EX	EX	BEG

Table 26: Leah May 2006 10<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	C	ADV	INT	BEG	ADV	N	N	N	N	ADV

Adriana

Adriana was born in Houston, but soon after her birth, her family moved to El Salvador. At the time of the study, she had been back in the U.S. for eight years, and she attended school in a different district in Houston until her ninth grade year. She lived with her mother, her two older sisters, and her aunts; her mother was the only person in the household who did not speak English. Adriana worked at a restaurant as a cashier / hostess. She wanted to go to the University of Houston to study music and become a singer. She was involved in LULAC. She wanted to participate in tutoring to become a better writer; she identified her major weaknesses as sentence structure and verb tense.

Interestingly, Adriana's scores also showed initial improvement but then a regression between her 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade years, and those scores then held steady into her 12<sup>th</sup> grade year.

Table 27: Adriana August 2002 9<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
NES	A									

Table 28: Adriana May 2003 9<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
NES	A	INT				N	N			

Table 29: Adriana May 2004 10<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	C	ADV				N				

Table 30: Adriana May 2005 11<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	B	ADV				N	Y	N	N	ADV

Table 31: Adriana May 2006 12<sup>th</sup> grade

IPT Oral	IPT Level	RPTE	TOP Li	TOP Sp	TOP Wr	TAKS ELA	TAKS Math	TAKS SS	TAKS Sci	TELPAS
LES	B	ADV	ADV	ADV	ADV	Y	Y	Y	N	ADV

### The Tutors

#### Overview

All of the tutors I hired were seniors, and they were all female. Four were bilingual; three were English / Spanish bilingual, and one was English / Arabic bilingual. Only three reported being enrolled in an ESL program as a younger student. Although they are all involved in their school and community, only three reported any

“meaningful” extra-curricular activities, and only four had formal tutoring experience prior to August 2005.

All but one tutor had been enrolled in either my Honors English III class or my Independent Study class the previous year, so I knew their work ethic and academic ability prior to tutoring; the one tutor I had not had as a student in class came highly recommended by the AP English teacher. Three had been enrolled in AP English III, and four had been enrolled in Honors English III. Three were in the top 5% of their graduating class, two were in the top 10%, and two were in the top 20%. Even though these were top students, I checked their grades every three weeks to ensure they were passing all of their classes.

#### Karla

Karla was enrolled in my Independent Study class and AP English as a junior, and she was a senior AP student during the study. She spoke fluent English and some Spanish, but she told me early on that, even though she spoke some Spanish, she was not comfortable tutoring in Spanish. Though her schedule was filled with AP classes to prepare her for college (she is in the top 5% of her class), Karla switched some classes and dropped one to serve as a tutor. Karla was already a leader in the Hispanic community; she served on the Houston Hispanic Forum as the high school representative, and she was a member of LULAC. Karla wanted to use her experiences to become a nurse or a teacher.

Karla had tutoring experience before this project, though not in any formal sense. Although her sister was four years above her in school, Karla often tutored her on her class work, using her AP skills and strategies to help. Her ability to work with students of differing levels was what led me to hire her.

#### Sarah

Sarah was enrolled in my Honors English III class as a junior, and during the study she was a senior enrolled in a regular English class. Her only language was English. Sarah had taken some AP / Honors courses, but she was taking regular courses during her senior year and had extra time in her schedule. Sarah maintained a spot in the top 20% of her class. She had limited tutoring experience, helping her brother and cousin with their math homework, and she was looking to supplement that experience so that, after college, she could become a business teacher.

Sarah was a very dedicated student. She was in several extra-curricular activities, and she always focused on her goals to ensure her success.

#### Karen

Karen was the only student I never had as a student in class. Karen, a senior AP student who was bilingual in English and Spanish, filled a need that arose for a bilingual tutor. Karen maintained a spot in the top 5% of her class, and she planned to study medicine in college. Karen had tutored before, but not with any school-based programs.

Karen’s real strength came from her experience in an ESL program. In her words,

“In 5<sup>th</sup> grade I was enrolled in an ESL program so I know the effects of good teachers. I would be honored to . . . have the effect on others like it had on me.” It was important to me to have several tutors who could sympathize with the tutees experiences in an ESL program, and Karen was able to do that.

Zena

Zena was enrolled in my Honors English III class as a junior, and based on what I knew of her as a student, I took a chance on her. During this study, she was a senior level AP / Honors student with top grades who was very focused and motivated to do well. Zena is bilingual in English and Arabic, and though her English is not perfect, I knew she could relate to the tutees because of her own experience as an ESL student.

Zena had tutoring experience through her church with children from ten to fourteen years old and through a local elementary school. In addition, Zena had several younger brothers and sisters whom she helped with homework every day.

Amber

Amber was enrolled in my Honors English III class as a junior. During this study, Amber was a senior Honors student who maintained a spot in the top 10% of her class. Amber never had a formal interview because she expressed interest when another applicant dropped out. Amber spoke only English, and the only tutoring experience she had was with her younger brother.

Maira

Maira was enrolled in my Independent Study class and AP English as a junior. Like Amber, Maira never had a formal interview. She was a senior AP student with a spot in the top 10%, and she and Amber were both suggested by Karla when two other tutors I had hired dropped out. Maira was completely fluent in both English and Spanish, and she filled an increasing need for bilingual tutors.

Miriam

Miriam was enrolled in my Honors English III class as a junior. I hired Miriam halfway through the semester. I had doubts about hiring her because I was not impressed by her work ethic in my English class the year before, but I needed another tutor halfway through the semester who could speak Spanish, so I took a chance. Miriam was a senior student who had taken some AP / Honors classes, and when she found out I needed another tutor, she expressed interest.

Miriam had several problems during her tutoring. Though I think she was a good tutor, she got into some trouble with the school and was absent for a few days due to suspension. Also, during the last six weeks, I suspended her from tutoring for three weeks for grade issues.

Tutoring Logistics: Tutor Requirements and Curriculum Information

Reflection is an important part of good teaching. I asked the tutors to reflect every day on what happened in the conferences. To reflect, they completed two exercises on the

reflection log. The first was a detailed description of what happened during the conference. The second was an outline of any problems they encountered, any breakthroughs they stumbled upon, any questions they had, or any issues they needed help with. They kept all of these notes in their personal binder.

Originally, I wanted to have a curriculum cabinet where tutors could obtain exercises on reading and writing proficiency for the tutees as needed as well as copies of released TAKS tests. My plan was for tutees to bring work from their classes, and as they needed supplementary work, tutors could go to the cabinet to get extra exercises. For example, if Maricruz was writing an essay in class on how a positive attitude can affect the outcome of a situation (a common TAKS-style prompt) but was having trouble starting, she and her tutor could go to the cabinet and find some exercises related to invention and brainstorming. Then, as she wrote, if she had trouble with paragraphing, they could find exercises on paragraphing. As they edited, if she had problems with subject/verb agreement, they could find exercises to reinforce agreement. If she did not have anything specific to work on for class, she and her tutor could go to the cabinet and get supplementary exercises to work on to help with whatever aspect of reading or writing she needed to work on.

Unfortunately, I had not counted on the other English teachers' reticence to allow us to work with class work. Technically, we were supposed to require all writing work to be done in class to mirror the TAKS testing situation, but I thought that, given the difficulties these students were facing, their teachers would allow us to work on the class work during tutorials. I was wrong. What I found is that I had to create a curriculum every two weeks for the tutors to follow, so I used the SIOP model to create the lessons. Our district developed a modified SIOP model grounded firmly in Jim Cummins's framework outlined in "The Role of Primary Language Development in Promoting Educational Success for Language Minority Students." Jim Cummins's framework moves students through four stages, from the most contextualized material to the least contextualized material. The framework we were to use when teaching followed this pattern: 1. *See* the material, 2. *Connect* the material to something familiar, 3. *Discuss* the material with another student, and 4. *Apply* the material to the new context.

When planning curriculum, I tried to use the SIOP format as much as possible, and it frequently helped us solve comprehension problems. One of these problems we found early on when having tutees write essays is that they often didn't understand the prompt. For example, one day, I observed a one-hour conversation between tutor and tutee about courage. The tutee believed that courage meant jumping off a building, and since she never had jumped off a building, she believed she lacked courage. The tutor tried to get her to see that courage may be more than that, but it was not until the next day, when the tutor started at the beginning by showing pictures of people at war, of people participating in extreme sports, of a pregnant woman, of a child standing in front of a school, etc., that the tutee was able to make the connection between the abstract concept of courage and everyday actions. It was then that the tutee was able to take ownership of the concept, and she finally understood that, for her, coming to school everyday takes courage.

I found that it was very useful for me to create these lessons and allow tutors to move through them at their own paces because it was difficult for me to keep up with what each tutor was doing in the conferences. We also spent several days in the computer lab looking at online writing centers, and for the tutors, those were the most fruitful days. For every exercise they printed, tutors also printed a copy for me, and all of the copies went into a binder for the tutors to use when they needed supplementary activities. Combining my unit with the skill drills found on the internet became a great way for tutors to decide what would happen in the sessions.

One problem with using these websites is that tutors printed hundreds of skill / drill worksheets that did not require the skills to be used in context. My concern was that any skills the tutees learned would not be transferred to their writing. I talked with tutors about the disadvantages of using skill worksheets, and we discussed the necessity of checking for understanding in context.

Each conference was tape-recorded, and I observed several conferences each day to see how the tutor and tutee were progressing. Originally, I was going to listen to all of the tapes and transcribe the parts that indicated tutee growth, but I am a visual person and wanted to see the conferences on paper. Transcribing all of them myself was impossible, so during the fall semester I offered bonus points to my Honors English classes for transcribing, and during the spring semester I paid them to transcribe. I still, however, was not able to get all of the tapes transcribed because there was simply not enough time. I focused, therefore, on transcribing the tapes from sessions where I knew, from my notes and the tutoring logs, a breakthrough had been made; for the rest of the tapes, I listened for evidence of breakthroughs but did not transcribe them.

To pay the tutors, at the end of each two week period, I asked them to turn in time sheets listing all tutoring hours and all bi-weekly meeting hours. Tutors were paid \$7.00 an hour according to the budget outlined above. Originally, I applied for the district's Foundation research grant, but I did not receive any money from the district for two reasons. First, I was told that it was inappropriate for me to ask for money to "pay for my PhD." Second, the grant committee was dissolved because of an issue with embezzlement within the department. After speaking with Cynthia Clark, ESL specialist, I applied for money from Title IX and Title III, but again I did not receive any money from either for two reasons: I was told by my principal that I could not have any of "his" Title IX money because my dissertation was not the school's priority; and because the tutors are not considered "highly trained," the district could not use federal money to pay them for teaching. All money to pay for tutors, therefore, came from a private grant I secured, and tutors were paid in cash because, since the money was coming from a private source, I could not get the district to set up an account to pay the tutors from.

Any time a tutor was unable to show up for tutoring, she was required to call me and let me know. Most of the time tutors were responsible about calling, though a few times I was left without a tutor. Any time a tutor failed to show up, my options were limited. I could tutor the students myself, but that would defeat the purpose of having student tutors. I could hire a substitute tutor, but I did not want to bring another person into the study without training. The one thing I could not do was send the tutee back to

the ESL class because he/she had not been in there to know what was going on and would be a disruption to the class. So, when tutors were absent, I decided to put the extra tutee with another tutor. When tutees were absent, which left me with extra tutors, the tutors had a choice. They could either double up with another tutor for a tutee, or they could help me make copies and complete paperwork, or they could go home. If they stayed and worked, they would still be paid, so usually they chose to stay and help another tutor.

### Initial Hurdles

In addition to budget and scheduling hurdles already mentioned, there were contractual concerns to deal with. Originally, I wanted to have the ten tutored students enrolled in a class that I would teach so that I could be their teacher of record. I was told, however, that such a plan was impossible because, by law, each teacher has to have one conference period per day. If I had the students during 4<sup>th</sup> period, that would mean I taught all four classes on A days; I was also told by the Assistant Principal in charge of curriculum not to ask to have one of my other classes taken away to make room for tutoring because there was no way I was getting out of one of my other classes. I told the district that, if they would allow me to have a fourth class on A days, I would not ask for extra compensation for teaching a seventh class, but they denied my request for the extra class.

Furthermore, since this was an extra program that the school did not originally envision, I found myself accepting things from the school that I normally would not have accepted. In their description of the hurdles facing high school writing center directors, William A. Speiser and Pamela B. Farrell warn that “A writing lab / center should not be a people dump. It should not be a place where Ms. Nevabend can send Butch Doe, her classroom nemesis. Don’t buy that one” (22). I found, however, that I *had* to buy that one. For example, the ESL teacher had tried all year to have a class just for beginning ESL speakers, but the administration and counselors never switched the master schedule to accommodate her. So she found that she had beginners, who spoke no English, in classes with students who should have been exited out of the ESL program already. Whenever she got a non-English speaker in 4<sup>th</sup> period, therefore, she would send him/her to me, often telling me “I don’t know what to do with him/her.” If we had room and a bilingual tutor, I would take the student. Her inability to work with non-English speakers was what led me to hire Miriam during the semester. So, though I was not a people dump for the entire school, I did become a 4<sup>th</sup> period ESL student dump.

Also, because I had to have the tutoring sessions during 4<sup>th</sup> period to accommodate the tutors’ filler schedules, I had a pool of approximately 20 ESL students to choose from. Originally, I wanted to talk to all of the ESL students to see who wanted to participate and then have those students moved into the 4<sup>th</sup> period ESL class, but the counselors could not accommodate that request due to scheduling problems and constraints. Since many of the ESL students had not passed parts of TAKS, for example, they oftentimes were double-blocked in certain subjects. That meant if a student did not pass the science portion, he/she might have the TAKS remedial science class during 4<sup>th</sup>

and 8<sup>th</sup> period. I could not take students out of these double-blocked classes, so I had to choose only from the approximately 20 students in the 4<sup>th</sup> period ESL class.

Two more major problems arose during the semester of tutoring. The first dealt with confidentiality. Occasionally, I would hear things from other teachers that the tutors were saying in class about the tutoring sessions in general or the tutees specifically. When that happened, I would always remind the tutors not to talk to other teachers or students about tutoring. But one time it became a big problem when one of the tutors was talking to our department chair about what we did in tutorials during down time in AP English. Now I would have expected the department chair to be excited about the tutoring, to be happy that we might have found a way to reach this under-represented population of students. Not so. In her words, she did not think it was appropriate for the school to be “supporting my PhD,” either with money or with time. She reminded the principals regularly that tutoring was taking away from my classes (which it was not), and that my own students were not going to do as well on TAKS because I did not have as much time to work on my own class preparations (which they did not).

It turned out that this was one of those times when the tutor said the very wrong thing to the very wrong person. Of course, I could not provide a list of people for the tutors to avoid talking to, so that is why I asked them not to talk to anyone. And the tutor did not mean to cause harm; she thought, as anyone would, that the chair of the English department would be supportive and happy about what we were doing. When the department chair asked if we were working on TAKS preparation during tutoring, the tutor told her that we really were not focusing in TAKS much at all because we were just working on reading and writing in general. The tutor neglected to mention that the girl she was working with barely speaks English. She neglected to mention that all of the objectives we were working on were, indeed, TAKS and TEKS objectives. Instead, she told the department chair that we were reading children’s books and drawing pictures. This information did not sit well with the department chair or the administration, all of whom were looking for a reason to force me to stop. In the end it worked out, and I reminded the tutors, once again, not to talk about tutoring outside of the sessions. This time, I pulled out the sheets they had signed and reminded them of their agreement. I never had a problem with confidentiality again.

The last major hurdle we faced was tutor bickering, especially when I was not present. One day after I was absent from school due to sickness, Maira came to me and told me that there had been a big problem the day before. Apparently, Karen, who spoke Spanish and English, had told Zena, who spoke English and Arabic, that she was useless as a tutor for Hispanic students and should not be there. Of course, this was in front of the tutees, and an argument ensued that involved all of the tutors taking sides. The problem was not so much a language problem as a personality clash, I found out later. Zena was always kind of silly and loud, and Karen had had enough that particular day. For the most part the tutors got along well, but occasionally flare-ups did happen.

In short, I found that most of the things I expected did not happen. Even though I had carefully thought out and researched how I wanted the tutoring sessions to run, Levin cautions that “[h]igh school writing centers tend, out of necessity, to be pragmatic

institutions. Their offerings and facilities are often determined by such practicalities as the available space or the timing of the director's free periods—not by carefully researched and developed philosophies” (23). I was bound by scheduling, by budget, by contractual concerns, and by attitudes toward the tutoring, the tutors, and my graduate work from faculty and staff. As Speiser and Farrell contend, the high school writing center is hard to compare to the college writing center (13), and that is a lesson I learned continuously throughout the semester.

### Looking Forward

One of the most frustrating parts of this project was the roadblocks. It seemed like every time I turned around, someone else was telling me something I had planned would not work, and I would have to return to the planning stage to start over. The logistical problems I encountered at times seemed insurmountable. Part of my frustration came from my own university writing center experience; I expected these tutoring sessions to run as easily as I perceived the university writing center sessions went. One resource that helped me overcome my frustrations was *The High School Writing Center: Establishing and Maintaining One*, edited by Pamela Farrell. This book offered insight into the problems encountered in a high school writing center that are unique to high schools, and after reading it, I could better understand that a high school writing center—or, in my case, even tutoring sessions—are very different than university writing centers. In addition, I often posted my concerns and frustrations on the writing center listserv for high school writing centers, and the high school center directors offered tips that helped overcome most of the obstacles.

In her article on high school writing centers, Pamela B. Farrell cites four problems that are unique to high school writing centers: tight schedules, availability of students, funding, and contractual issues (1). I experienced all four of these problems from the beginning. It was very difficult to ensure the students would stay in the fourth period ESL class. Funding was also a problem, as I was unable to obtain money to continue the tutoring sessions into the second semester. On their own, the tutors discussed the funding issues and came to me, saying they would be happy to work for free with the tutees during the second semester. However, we found out that all of our tutees had schedule changes and would not be in the fourth period ESL class anymore. Unfortunately, the tutors were not interested in starting over with new students; they had formed a bond with the tutees they had worked with, and they understandably wanted to work with those students again.

Additionally, I faced contractual issues. Every teacher at HSH teaches six (out of eight) classes, three on A days and three on B days. When I approached one of HSH's Assistant Principals with my proposal, she told me that there was no way I would “get out of” one of my six classes. I had to, therefore, teach my six course load in addition to an extra course of tutoring, so I lost a one-and-a-half hour planning period every day in addition to taking on extra curriculum planning for the tutors. And, even though I was essentially teaching an extra class, the Assistant Principal told me that it is illegal in Texas for a teacher to have a day without a planning period, so the tutoring had to be

done under the table; I could not, therefore, ask for any additional money for teaching an extra class.

All of these problems, however, were insignificant when I watched the tutors and the tutees work together. They formed bonds that showed me how important and effective peer tutoring is, and they made progress that would not have been possible in a traditional classroom. Even the initially reticent students were thankful at the end of the semester. And although things did not work out all of the time like we planned with the tutees, as I will show in the next three chapters, we gave them the ability to find answers to their questions and a sense of belonging in our school.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Two times during the fall semester, students take a Benchmark test to gauge their growth in English. The Benchmark tests are released TAKS tests, and we receive their scores approximately two weeks after test administration.

<sup>2</sup>Filler classes are designed for students who are finishing the required coursework for graduation. Typical students have extra room in their schedules and, in a system without fillers, would have to take unnecessary electives. Fillers allow these students to leave when school when they are finished with their required courses for the day.

## CHAPTER THREE: ADRIANA AND KARLA

### Overview

When Adriana began tutoring, I thought she would be an easy student to work with, one who would show that peer tutoring could, indeed, help increase language proficiency in English for ESL students. Standing before me was a girl who had lived in the United States for roughly half of her life. Most of her family spoke English at home, although her mother was a Spanish-only speaker. I thought that improving her English would be easy because she had so much daily interaction in English. Her ESL teacher explained that Adriana was a very advanced speaker but could not pass the TAKS test. I chose Adriana as the focus of one of my case studies because I wanted to investigate why, with so much exposure to English, she was still lagging behind her native English-speaking peers. I would find out that Adriana's progress in English was fraught with these kinds of contradictions.

The results of Adriana's initial attitude assessment were interesting. Because Adriana still had some difficulty reading and writing in English, Karla read the attitude survey to her in English but would translate any specific words that Adriana had trouble with into Spanish so that Adriana understood what the questions meant. Adriana seemed to be very sure of herself, full of confidence that she could succeed in an English class and in classes in general. She strongly agreed that she could learn English, and she disagreed that she was not the type to do well in an English class. She agreed that she could get good grades in English. But then some inconsistencies began to arise. She answered question five, "I don't think I could do advanced English," strongly disagree originally, but she marked out that answer and marked strongly agree as her final answer; she answered question twenty-six, "I think I could handle an advanced English course," agree; and she answered question thirty-six, "I am sure I could do advanced work in English," agree. At first, I assumed that she was not understanding the questions; but then I noticed that question five is negatively phrased while questions twenty-six and thirty-six are positively phrased, which could have posed a problem for her when reading. The inability to recognize the negative phrasing points to a syntactical problem Karla and Adriana worked with frequently throughout the semester.

I thought that having the tutor translate the questions would ensure that Adriana understood the survey, but because of some contradictions that might have been due to a misunderstanding of the questions, I am not sure my assumption was correct.<sup>1</sup> Of eight questions regarding her reactions to her teachers, Adriana answered seven positively. She believed her teachers cared about her and her success in general. The only question she responded negatively to was question number eight, which stated "Getting a teacher to give me help in English is a problem." She agreed to that statement. I believe she agreed with the question because she only read the first half of the question, "Getting a teacher to give me help in English . . ." All but one of the other questions put all of the necessary information in the first half of the sentence: Question two states "My teachers are interested in my progress in English"; question eighteen states "It's hard to get English

teachers to respect me”; question twenty-three states “My teachers have encouraged me to do well in English”; question thirty states “I feel that English teachers ignore me because it’s hard for me to speak ‘correct’ English”; question thirty-five states “My teachers would not take me seriously if I told them I wanted a career using English”; and question forty states “English teachers have made me feel I can succeed in English.” For all of these questions, she responded with a positive attitude towards her teachers. But the questions are frontloaded with important information. In question two, for example, the beginning of the sentence is “My teachers are interested . . .”, to which she responded strongly agree. If she only read the first part of the sentence, she could still get that answer.

Questions eight and twenty-seven present the information in the opposite way. In question eight, she could have read the first part of the sentence and initially agreed because she believed her teachers *do* help her, instead of it being a problem for her to get help. She did not make the same mistake with question twenty-seven, “My teachers probably think advanced English would be a waste of my time,” to which she answered disagree. Again, this discrepancy could be due to a misunderstanding in the translation.<sup>2</sup>

Adriana was very consistent with questions regarding her ability in English. To question nine, “English is hard for me,” she answered agree. She was not sure of herself when she wrote in English (question thirteen) because she had a hard time writing in English (question sixteen), and she did not believe she was able to express herself well in written English (question forty-two). She did not think reading in class was fun (question twenty), and though English had not been her worst subject (question twenty-five), it was harder for her than her other subjects (question thirty-one). In terms of speaking, she reported that she was hesitant to speak out in class because she did not want people to laugh at her (question ten), though her classmates had never made fun of her attempts to speak English (question seventeen). She also felt her listening skills were good, as she reported that she normally understood what her teachers were saying (question forty-four). Her responses would appear to be in line with the BICS and CALP outlined by Jim Cummins; her listening and speaking skills, or BICS, have developed faster than her reading and writing, or CALP; she felt more comfortable, therefore, with listening and speaking than reading and writing.

Despite her problems reading and writing English, Adriana consistently answered that English is important for her future career (questions three, six, eleven, fourteen, fifteen, twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty-three, thirty-four, thirty-seven, thirty-nine, and forty-three), regardless of the positive or negative phrasing of the questions. She agreed that her English skills were steadily improving (question forty-one). Most importantly, however, she felt like she was a part of her peer group at HSH. She strongly disagreed with question twelve (“I feel like an outsider at [HSH]”), and she agreed with question twenty-one, “I fit in well at [HSH].” Her answers here say to me that, despite her problems with reading and writing, she felt like she fit in at HSH and had a positive overall attitude towards school.

I believe, however, that most of Adriana’s positive attitude might have come from a desire to please. When I met Adriana for the first time, she seemed very thoughtful,

very quiet. I noticed quickly that she did not speak frequently in English but would converse readily in Spanish, a fact that was borne out by her answers to the attitude survey. But, while her English skills did seem to be improving, she also had some very specific weaknesses with the basics of English. According to Jim Cummins, that the ability to communicate conversationally (BICS) in the L2 with peers is usually achieved after two years, while understanding and communicating in academic language (CALP) in the L2 takes roughly five years (Jim Cummins, "BICS and CALP" 322). Although I cannot account for what Adriana had learned in her English / ESL classes, either at HSH or in her previous district, I believe that after eight years in the US living in a home where English is spoken frequently she could have been farther along in her English development, particularly in basic conversations.

But despite the ESL teacher's claim that Adriana spoke well in English, and despite Adriana's self-report of comfort speaking in English, Adriana continued to rely on her L1 throughout the tutoring sessions. After analyzing her tapes, I came up with two explanations. First, she seemed very unsure of herself at times, which is evident from her answers to the attitude survey. She knows she can communicate in English, but she seems scared to fail; any time she thought she might be getting a wrong answer, she reverted to Spanish to explain herself or to get further explanation from Karla. Second, Adriana seemed slightly lazy at times. It was easier for her to communicate in Spanish, and she fell back on Spanish when English was tiresome.

When Adriana transferred to the district at the beginning of her ninth grade year, she was labeled a non-English speaker (NES). Interestingly, that year was not when she moved to the U.S.; she had been in the country for roughly four years, attending school in Houston in another district. I would have believed that after four years of U.S. schooling, she would have been more advanced than a typical NES speaker since it takes, on average, two years, according to Jim Cummins, for the BICS to develop. It was not until the end of her tenth grade year, after one year in the district, that she began to show progress. She jumped from an NES to a limited English speaker, from level A to level C on the Idea Proficiency Test (IPT), and from intermediate to advanced on the Reading Proficiency Test in English (RPTE). But after that year, at the end of her eleventh grade year, she regressed from IPT level C to IPT level B, though her other scores held strong. That was the year Texas adopted the Texas Observation Protocol, and she scored an advanced TELPAS rating and passed the math portion of TAKS. Her senior year, she was still labeled an LES, and her IPT rating was still B. But she was rated an advanced reader, listener, speaker, and writer by the TOP, and she passed all portions of the TAKS test except for science.

I am not sure what caused Adriana's slips in scoring, nor do I know why, despite her self-reported eight years of residence in the U.S., she has still not achieved full English speaker status. The theory of BICS and CALP outlined by Jim Cummins suggest that after roughly seven years, an L2 speaker should be proficient in both the BICS and the CALP in the L2. I do not believe that four years of schooling in a U.S. school would leave her at the same level as the students who have only been here for a few days, as was the case with her first district. We also saw that Adriana's problems with English were

more drastic than we first thought; the first day of tutoring, she reported that she had problems with verb tense and subject / verb agreement, but four sessions later, her tutor reported that “I’m starting to see that she has more problems than she led me to believe.” Adriana consistently demonstrated major problems with simple semantics, grammar, and syntax. But it is her breakthroughs, not her problems, that I will focus on in this chapter.

### Semantic Breakthroughs

Karla: Ok, so today...um...last time we talked about courage and remember that we, uh, read the story about Mr. Entwhistle? (pause) And remember that, uh, we um, looked up courage in the dictionary to define it? (five second pause) Remember? Ok, so today, uh, we’re going to write a short essay about...uh...what courage means to you. Uh...ok...(shuffles papers)...so what do you think courage means?

Adriana: Courage...(ten second pause) it means to...

Karla (interrupts): Look at your definition chart.

Adriana: Oh...uh...(thirty second pause)...courage means when you, ah, face something that scares you.

Karla: Something that scares you, right. So when you face...when you do something...uh...that scares you but you...uh...do it anyways, right? Ok, so...um...tell me...uh...about a time when you were, uh, when you had courage.

Adriana (pauses for fifteen seconds before answering): I never did.

Karla (laughing): You never had courage? Come on, everyone has courage. What about when you, uh, moved to the United States or Houston? What about when...let’s see...when you, uh, came to school the, uh, first time? (pause) Let me, um, show you an example of when I had courage. Um...let’s see...the first time I babysat my sister, my little sister, I was scared, but like, I did it anyways, you know? Because my parents had to go to the doctor and couldn’t take her, you know? Uh...the first time I drove a car, I was really scared but like I really wanted my driver’s license so I had to do it...you know? Um...oh, and remember the story we read last time? About Mr. Entwhistle? She...uh, what was her name? (shuffles papers)...Oh, uh, it doesn’t say...Ok, anyways, the main character, the girl, the girl in the, uh, story, she had courage, like, to stand up to the teacher, right? Does that make sense? (pause) No? Well, let’s see...Oh, tell me about something that scares you, something you wouldn’t want to do because you were, like, scared to uh, do it.

Adriana: (pause) Jump, you know, from a building.

Karla: Ok, have you ever, uh, jumped from a building?

Adriana: No.

Karla: Ok, so let’s um...think of something else. What, like, have you ever been scared to do that you still did?

Adriana: (shakes her head)

Karla: Nothing? (pause) Drive a car? Watch your little sister? Cook? Talk back to a teacher? Um...(pause)...go to school the first day? Come to tutoring? Go, um, to work the first day? Take a test? Um...(pause)...move? Uh...go on a vacation?

Um...(laughing)...sky dive? Bungee jump? Uh...parasail?  
Adriana: No, no, no, I never done anything to be scared of.

The preceding conversation took place in a conference between Karla and Adriana on September 29 during tutoring. Because SAT and TAKS prompts often have students connect personally to a term that can be difficult to define, we did a series of mini-lessons for students to learn to brainstorm those words following both the SIOP model and the framework outlined by Jim Cummins. The prompt Adriana and Karla were working with asked students to describe what courage meant to them, using personal examples to illustrate their explanations.

The story that accompanied the prompt about courage was titled “Mr. Entwhistle.” It was the story of Mr. Entwhistle, a substitute teacher who confronts a student for being disrespectful, and then it concludes with her out-of-character response to his confrontation. Instead of arguing back with him, which is in her nature, she backs down because she can see that he is really just scared of what he mistakenly sees as her defiance. The first step of the process of reading and understanding the story was to develop a context for the story; to develop a context, students and tutors talked about a time when they stood up to a teacher or other adult because they knew the adult was wrong. The following is part of the transcript taken from the conversation between Zena and Liliana that illustrates the difficulty tutors had helping the tutees understand the slang term “stand up to.”

Zena: Ok, so tell me about a time when you stood up to an adult.

Liliana: Stood up to?

Zena: Yeah, you know, when you, uh, defied a teacher.

Liliana: I don't...defied...don't know.

Zena: Defied is like, when you, uh, didn't do what they, uh, said, like, you know, when you stood up to them.

Liliana: Stood up...uh...

Zena (interrupting): Yeah, you know, like, uh, have you ever seen a fight? You know, like a fight? (mimics punches) You know when there's a fight, like, one person uh, stands up to the other? (mimics two people confronting each other) And how one person, like, or, well, nevermind. Uh, how one person gets in the other person's face?

Liliana: Yeah.

Zena: Well, that's, like, uh, standing up to the other person. Have you ever...

Liliana (interrupting): I never hit teacher.

Zena (frustrated): No, that's not what I mean. Uh, let's see, uh...(ten second pause)...uh, (to another tutor) hey, Amber, you know, when you stand up to someone, uh, like, how do you talk about that?

Amber: Uh, like when you uh, you mean, like when you do, uh, what you know is right? Like you uh...

Zena (interrupts): Yeah, like you, uh,

Amber (interrupts): Confront, maybe? Or...

Zena (interrupts): Like, you know, in the story, how she stands up, uh, to, uh, what's his name, Mr. Entwistle?

Amber: Yeah, yeah, uh, maybe resist, defy, uh...let's see...uh, challenge? Oh, oh, oh, like maybe, like to dare someone?

Zena: Like you don't do what they say...like, uh, you say "No, I won't do that," uh...

Amber: Yeah, you say "no."

Liliana: So stand up...to say "no?"

Zena: Yeah, like you say "no," like, uh, to an adult. When they tell you to do something, and like, you say "No, I won't," uh, "do that." Because it's wrong or whatever.

The preceding conversation demonstrates how hard it was for tutors to find new ways to explain words and concepts to speakers who did not always have the words to understand, especially when the words had a literal meaning that differed from the meaning in the given context. Tutors often turned to each other for help in coming up with new phrases and words to make the concept easier for the tutees.

After they had some context for the main idea of the story, Karla and Adriana read the story together out loud, defining words together that gave Adriana difficulty. Adriana and Karla read the story to discuss the many aspects of the word courage. The student in the story has a reputation for being the class clown; she says "the rest of the kids [were waiting], maybe, for me to start an argument. I often do." Instead, she courageously does the mature thing and accepts his punishment, misplaced though it is, because she can see through to the motivation for his punishment and can identify with his fear, his "wishing he could go back and start over." Karla and Adriana read the story, and then Karla had Adriana write a short paragraph about what courage meant to her. It was evident from the paragraph that Adriana did not have a firm grasp of courage; she was seeing courage too narrowly.

In order to help Adriana understand courage, Karla began by having Adriana look up the definition of courage and then try to apply it to her everyday life; but, as shown in the first conversation above, Adriana was not able to make the jump from the dictionary definition to her own life. So Karla stopped, and we discussed the best way to continue. I suggested she try a concept map, so she and Adriana went to the computers to look for pictures of courage. They looked for pictures of courage and bravery on google.com's image search, and they found some interesting ideas. The first thing they looked at was a picture of a lion, but Adriana was not able to make the connection between courage and a lion. So they kept looking, and they found a picture of a sniper poised with his gun. The caption under the image said "It takes an extraordinary person to face danger and maintain composure." Then, they found a picture of a man standing in front of four army tanks, obviously trying to get them to stop. They saw pictures of firemen, of soldiers, of rock climbers, of amputees, of astronauts, of extreme sportsmen. But because Adriana has never been in a life-threatening situation, she was still unable to make the cognitive jump from courage in a life-threatening situation to courage when doing something she was just scared to do.

That is, until they found the picture of the dog in the floatie (see Appendix I). The caption under the picture reads, “Courage is fear holding on a minute longer.” The following is the transcript from that part of the conference.

Karla: Ok, and here’s a dog in...

Adriana (interrupts): Oh, I hate to swimming.

Karla (laughing): You hate swimming? (pause) Why do you hate swimming?

Adriana: Because the, uh, the uh...wuh...what’s the word?

Karla: Water?

Adriana: Yeah, the water...I don’t like it, the water.

Karla: Why?

Adriana: One time, uh, it got in my, uh, nose, and I could, uh, breathe at all.

Karla: You couldn’t breathe? Because the water got in your nose?

Adriana: Yeah, I uh, I couldn’t breathe.

Karla: What did you, like, do? When the water got in your nose?

Adriana: I cough a lot, and I, uh, I cry.

Karla: Where were you swimming?

Adriana: Well, our person in the house next, uh, next us, he, uh, he has swimming pool.

And we go over there sometimes to, uh, swim.

Karla: Do you still, like, go swimming now?

Adriana: Sometimes. I stay, uh, where the water is, like, not full?

Karla: You stay in the shallow part?

Adriana: (nods)

Karla: So even though you, uh, you’re scared to swim, you still go sometimes? Even though you’re scared?

Adriana: (nods) Only when, uh, just two or three people.

Karla: Ok, so you, like, swim in the pool when there are just two or three other, uh, people? Even though you’re, like, scared to swim?

Adriana: Yes, sometimes.

Karla: Well, then, that’s courage. Like, to do something that you are scared of, even though, uh, you’re scared. That’s courage.

Karla and Adriana spent an entire hour and a half defining courage. Although Karla got frustrated at times, she stuck with it and continued to try new ways to help Adriana understand the term. Karla’s main concern after this conference, and it is a very legitimate concern, one that I had thought about, was what Adriana would do on the SAT or TAKS when she did not have access to a computer or someone to guide her through the definition. In our next tutor staff meeting, we brought up this concern again, and the tutors had some surprising insight. Maira suggested that learning how to work through definitions is important because it gives the tutees a broader base of words to work from during testing, and Sarah proposed that struggling to define words shows the tutees that words can have more than one definition. Karla added that she believed Adriana understood now that the words in the prompts will have some personal appeal to

everyone; she just had to find a way it meant something to her. The tutors, therefore, felt that even though defining the word had been a struggle, Adriana had learned several valuable lessons about vocabulary.

Once Karla and Adriana defined courage, they completed the concept map for courage. They divided the paper into four sections. In the upper left section, they wrote the word courage. In the bottom left section, they pasted the picture from the internet. In the upper right section, they put the dictionary definition of the word. In the bottom right section, they wrote a short outline of the story Adriana could tell about what courage meant to her. Below is the first paragraph Adriana wrote about courage. Notice the limits of her definition of courage in this example.

“Write an essay explaining what courage means to you. The word courage means to me, jumping from a building to defend someone that is in problems, or courage to stand up if you’re in debts in your businesses, have the courage to be myself. Courage means to me defending others with the true.”

By the end of the second session devoted to courage, Adriana was able to write the following edited paragraph:

“Write an essay explaining what courage means to you. The word courage means to me, to do something I am scared do. I once was scared to go in the pool because the water went up my nose when my brother, he pushed me into the pool when I was not ready. He pushed me, and I fell, and water went through my nose, and I cry and could not get my breathe. I was scared go into the pool for a long time after he did that. But then I decided to go just into the shallow part, and I was to stand there and not be scared. That is courage to me, to stand in the pool by myself but still be scared.”

Like the framework developed by Jim Cummins suggests, we had to first give Adriana a context for the word courage; using the strategies outlined by the SIOP model helped us accomplish that. Once she had a context, she was able to understand the story and the prompt and write a paragraph that showed her connection to the word courage. Without the context, she was not able to demonstrate a meaningful understanding of the word courage.

In addition to discussing the word “courage” when reading Mr. Entwistle, tutors walked tutees through an exercise called “mad to the third power.” This is a semantic exercise designed to help students look for alternate ways to communicate one idea in the story and then create their own alternate ways. Each level is considered a power; so, for example, using the base word angry, students could create a chart that looks like table 32 on page 81.

The base word in this example is angry, and students have to find three words that mean angry but are increasingly more powerful in each direction; each power means one level up (more angry) or one level down (less angry). There are no right or wrong answers as long as students can differentiate between the connotations of each word.

Table 32: Mad<sup>3</sup>

-3 <sup>rd</sup>	-2 <sup>nd</sup>	-1 <sup>st</sup>	BASE	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
upset	annoyed	frustrated	angry	livid	furious	irate

One day, students were looking for alternate forms of the verb “say” that had been used in the story about Mr. Entwhistle. Following is the chart Adriana produced for words that she can use in place of “say.”

Table 33: Said<sup>3</sup>

BASE	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>
say	babble	blurt	bluster	cheer	shout	shriek	blast	thunder

Obviously, Adriana and Karla went to many more than the three levels outlined above, and they only went in one direction, but that was acceptable because, for this part of the exercise, they had to work exclusively with the words in the story. What was interesting to me was that, as they were reading, Karla read the story with enough emotion that Adriana was able to understand the differences in meaning among the words, and she was able to repeat those differences when she read the story later. When I asked her why she had ordered the words the way she had, she told me that some of the words (babble, blurt, and bluster) were tempo words, and some (cheer, shout, shriek, blast, and thunder) were volume words. For some reason, tempo came before volume in her mind. Some of the words were a combination of tempo and volume. For example, a blast is shorter than a thunder, but it’s also less loud, so it comes before thunder.

This activity accomplished two things. First, it gave Adriana a list of words to use in place of said, words that had different connotations and could imply different things. Second, it showed her how the context created by Karla’s reading inflection helped her define what words meant. Again, this follows the framework by Jim Cummins. In the first quadrant, words and stories are put into context by the reader; Karla’s reading put the words into context for Adriana. As she progressed, she was able to begin using those contexts for herself in terms of the word say, and she was able to begin creating her own context for other words as she developed a more extensive vocabulary.

One final semantic breakthrough occurred midway through the semester, when I watched the following dialogue take place between Karla and Adriana. The conversation occurred at the beginning of the session, when Karla was asking Adriana what she had done the previous weekend. I encouraged short conversations like this, especially at the beginning of each session, because it allowed the tutees to talk freely about things that mattered to them, thereby encouraging spoken language growth.

Karla: So what, uh, so what did you do this weekend? Did your mom, um, let you go, go

to that, uh, party you talked about?  
 Adriana: Well, I told her I want to go...  
 Karla (interrupting): You wanted to go.  
 Adriana: Yeah, I wanted to go, but then she say do you have money for the club, and I say yes, and she say, uh, that I couldn't because I have my own money and can make my own decisions.  
 Karla: Wait, uh, what? She said what? She said that you couldn't...  
 Adriana (interrupting): That I couldn't go because it was my money.  
 Karla: Huh? I'm confused a little bit. Did she say you could go or, uh, you couldn't go?  
 Adriana: Yes, she said I couldn't go. Do I say it right?  
 Karla: Ok, uh, did you go to the club or not?  
 Adriana: Yes, she said I couldn't go.  
 Karla: She said you could go.  
 Adriana: Huh? She said, um, I couldn't go.  
 Karla: Do you, um, know that couldn't is, uh, how do I say this, uh...(five second pause)...couldn't is negative, like, uh, you could *not* go.

A ten minute discussion about the function of contractions followed and how “-n’t” is actually a negative contraction of the word “not.” Adriana had no idea that she was actually saying she could not go; she thought that the “-n’t” was merely a random English creation that did not mean anything. If we separated the words out—could not—she understood. When Karla just said “couldn’t” or “wouldn’t” or “didn’t” or “don’t” or any other negative contraction, Adriana had never distinguished between the positive and the negative. She thought she was telling Karla that she went.

After this day, Adriana seemed to have a grasp of contractions using “-n’t” and how they worked. It was amazing to Karla that Adriana did not know the function of “-n’t” because she could speak relatively fluent English, and for a while, Karla was stumped as she sorted out the problem. One of our biggest realizations, therefore, was that even the semantic structures we counted as common sense, as the “easy” parts of the language, were the most easily confused and the most difficult to learn.

#### Grammatical Breakthroughs

Karla: What's that? (points to word on paper)  
 Adriana: Crying.  
 Karla: Why do you have...why did you spell it that way?  
 Adriana: (shrugs shoulders)  
 Karla: Crying is spelled c-r-y-i-n-g. Why do you have it, uh, it spelled with an *a*?  
 Adriana: (shrugs shoulders)  
 Karla: Ok, well, uh, it's c-r-y-i-n-g, not c-r-a-i-n-g.  
 (Several minutes elapse)  
 Karla: Wait, let's go back to...let's, uh, go back to crying. How do you spell fly?  
 Adriana: Fly? Uh, F-l-y.  
 Karla: Ok, and uh, how do you...um, how do you spell flying?

Adriana: Flying? F-l-a-i-n-g.

Karla: And, uh, how do you spell, let's see, spy?

Adriana: What is spy?

Karla: Nevermind...uh, how do you spell buy?

Adriana: B-y.

Karla: No, like buy, like you buy something, like shampoo or something, at the store.

Adriana: B-u-y.

Karla: And, uh, how do you spell buying?

Adriana: B-u-a-i-n-g.

Several times throughout the semester, tutors would come to me with problems such as the one outlined above, problems they had no idea how to deal with because they had no idea how the problem started in the first place. How is it that a student replaces the “-y” with an “-a” and adds “-ing?” My first inclination is that, as an ESL student, she heard the rule for creating past tense, drop with “-y” and add “-ed,” and she confused it with the rule for progressives. If she were just dropping the “-y,” that might make sense. But I had no idea where the “-a” comes in.<sup>3</sup>

A similar problem occurred when Sarah told me that Maricruz said in a tutorial that conclusions for essays only have one sentence, and the sentence has to start with “In conclusion.” In addition, the words in conclusion have to have question marks on each side, so that it looks like this: ?In conclusion?.

Maricruz also told Sarah that her teacher told her never to use the word *is* in an essay. I think I understand the origin of this “rule” because in my own class, I’ve made a similar mistake. ESL students tend to be very rule-bound when it comes to learning English. One day in my class, frustrated because my students were using the pronoun “I” too much in their papers, I told them not to use “I” anymore for the day. Some of my ESL students took me literally and tried to write the whole paper without using “I,” which was not my point. The students who were not having to concentrate on my speech to figure out all of my words but could understand the words and the context together knew what I meant; those who were having to work to figure out exactly what I meant made the mistake of taking me too literally. I think the problem with the “rule” for using *is* that Maricruz reported is a similar example of a student taking a teacher too literally.

But I did not know how to combat some of the other misconceptions we were faced with. The things they were doing, like changing the “-y” to an “-a” and adding “-ing” and beginning every conclusion with “?In conclusion?,” baffled me as a teacher. I had no idea how they had learned these rules, and so I had no idea how to help them stop using them.

Fortunately, we had a staff meeting coming up, and we agreed to hold discussion on the problems until that meeting. When Karla explained what Adriana was doing, other tutors started talking about funny, incorrect “rules” their tutees had told them. I asked the tutors why they thought the tutees had these misconceptions, but we were unable to come up with a reason. When I told them we had to have a reason if we were going to fix it, Karen stopped me and asked me why. She asserted that it did not matter *why* they were

doing it; our jobs were to teach them to *stop* doing it. When I insisted that, based on writing center philosophy, knowing the reason would be a vital part of knowing the cure, the other tutors slowly began to agree with Karen. I finally told them we would try it their way and see how it went, and to my surprise, we found that giving the tutees rules just worked sometimes. Adriana learned to stop replacing the “-y” with “-a” before adding “-ing” (at least most of the time), and Maricruz learned that all conclusions do not have to begin with “in conclusion.”

I saw something important happening here with the tutors. Here was a group of high school students who were beginning to learn for themselves and to investigate methods for teaching they believed would work based on what they knew of their tutees. They were beginning to think critically instead of just mindlessly following what I said to do. I was supposed to be the expert; I was supposed to be the one in charge. And yet they said no to me because they believed they knew what they were talking about. They had worked with these students, and they believed their way would be the most successful. In the interest of experimentation, I agreed to let them try, thinking all the time that we would quickly come back to my idea when theirs failed. When their idea did not fail, I was pleasantly surprised. Here I was a researcher trying to break down traditional notions of ESL education—and education in general—by allowing students to teach students, and I was reluctant to allow my own students to do the same. My students had just learned that they did, indeed, have voices and could decide what worked best for themselves in their own situations, despite what the literature and research—and the “expert”—said worked best.

Obviously, the way we taught the tutees these rules goes against writing center practices arguing for error-analysis, which hold that, in order to produce better writers, tutors need to understand the problem and then teach tutees *why* something is wrong. In their chapter on working with ESL students in *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*, Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner spend several paragraphs on teaching grammar to ESL students. They suggest that tutors do not have to be sources of all grammar rules; when a grammar problem comes up in a conference and the tutor and tutee both are unsure of the rule, the authors say “[r]ather than spout these answers off the tops of our heads and act as living grammar handbooks, we co-consulted those handbooks with [non-native] writers, reading together those sometimes arcane explanations and examples and applying that knowledge to [non-native] writers’ texts” (123). But, in their section on whether to be direct or indirect when teaching grammar to ESL students, the authors argue that “when focusing on language with [non-native] writers, the approach of allowing the writer to spot his or her own errors doesn’t always work; it’s difficult to apply knowledge that one doesn’t necessarily have in the first place” (124-125). Sometimes, as Gillespie argues in “Is This My Job,” a chapter of *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors*, tutors need to think more in terms of teaching and less in terms of minimalist tutoring; in other words, the tutors decided that, at this point, it was more important to teach the tutees the *correct* way word or phrase in these situations than to embark upon a hunt for rules that still might not make sense.

As a tutor and teacher myself, I understand their reasoning. Sometimes, especially with ESL students, it is more effective, both in terms of time and in terms of understanding the rule, simply to tell the tutee the rule and go on, asking him/her to find additional problems concerning the rule in the paper. In terms of general peer tutoring, I believe that error-analysis is a wonderful tool for teaching and learning; however, with ESL students, I believe, as the authors above believe, that a more direct approach is sometimes necessary. Although, as a teacher, I understand the importance of knowing *why* certain rules are the way they are, I allowed the tutors to make their own choices here, and it worked.

Adriana also had a breakthrough with pronunciation. Her attitude survey shows that Adriana was very hesitant to speak up in class because she felt like people would laugh at her. She felt comfortable reading and writing but not speaking. When she reads and writes, she does not have to worry about the way things sound. She can identify words based on the way they look, not the sound they make. So when letters make different sounds, it does not matter when she is not saying them out loud.

One day during her session, Adriana was reading aloud and came across the word “celery.” Instead of using the soft “c” sound, she used the hard “c,” like in the word “cat.” Karla stopped her, and a conversation about how letters sound different in different situations ensued. Interestingly, Karla found out that Adriana had little to no knowledge about how all of the letters sounded, so they spent some time that day just going over the alphabet, Karla explaining how sometimes consonants have hard sounds and sometimes soft sounds, and sometimes vowels have long sounds and sometimes short sounds.

Next, they set to work making a chart. Their original chart just had a few words on it, like cat / celery, eat / everybody, girl / German, tough / drought, ill / hide, and policy / police. Karla quickly saw that there was more to this than she had originally thought, so they made a chart to hang on the wall that looked like the one below. Many of the words on the charts are the words they came up with themselves. They brainstormed lists of words to include in their regular chart, and then as they came across new words, they added them in. The beauty of the chart was that all of the tutees were able to use it; even the tutees who spoke no English were able to use it as a pronunciation key. And, since they were all able to add to it, the chart became an interactive learning tool that helped them all equally. In addition, I encouraged them to add words they encountered in their other classes so that they could all see how sounds change and could apply that knowledge across the board. Many times I looked up and saw a tutor / tutee group at the chart, discussing how the words sound and adding new words. See page 86 for a reproduction of part of the chart.

In addition to a vowel chart, Karla and Adriana started a consonant chart, though they were not able to finish it. On this chart, they added words whose letters look the same but sound different, like “cat” and “celery.” The repetition of these words may seem elementary, but such a systematic word study that involved all of the tutees gave them more confidence to speak out in class. It was surprising to me at the time that something as simple as learning how to pronounce words could strengthen their confidence and make them more active participants in their own learning.

At the first meeting, Adriana identified two major writing problems she has: verb tenses and sentence structure. She told Karla that she cannot tell the difference between past and present tenses and often confuses them. On the first full day of tutoring, Karla noted that “My tutee had great breakthroughs! She told me where her mistakes were and why she made them. She also told me what her major problem was which is past / present participles and sentence structure. She is very positive and learns quickly . . . One thing that would be nice to have is a list of past / present / future words.” I quickly discovered that, although the tutors intuitively knew the differences between verb tenses, they were unsure how to explain the differences or how to teach the differences. In order to combat the problem, I did three things: I bought them the book *101 English Verbs*, I bought them an ESL grammar chart, and I created a short, easy to use verb tense continuum (see Appendix J).

Table 34: Long and Short Vowel Chart Made in Tutorials

LONG VOWELS	SHORT VOWELS
A: ate, ape, gate, fate	A: sat, fat, slacker, famine
E: eager, sleep, sheep, egret	E: get, pen, fell, cell
I: ink, I, ion	I: constitution, culminate
O: oat, tornado, over, open	O: tornado, vowel
U: tune	U: under, bus

That day, Karla had Adriana write a short paragraph on her greatest fear, and then they worked on using past and present participles. For the next five tutoring sessions, Karla spent some time each day working on past and present tense, and hints of this focus emerged regularly throughout the semester. They have several short stories marked for verb tense where Adriana asked Karla to identify each verb and its tense, and they practiced making their own verb charts for irregular verbs. For a while, it did not seem like Adriana understood the difference in past and present. On one day, Karla was frustrated because she had Adriana write an essay using entirely past tense verbs, and Adriana floated between past, present, and some future verbs throughout. Karla had Adriana go back and mark all the verbs she used, and by looking at her verb charts, Adriana was able to see the problems she had created; without the verb chart and Karla’s help, however, she seemed oblivious of her verb tense problem in practice. Karla wondered what she would ever do to help Adriana be independent with respect to verb tenses. The following paragraph Adriana wrote at the beginning of the semester shows some of Karla’s problems with verb usage:

I don't like cats because they were too dangerous their hair if you eat one. I don't like cat's because when I was living in El Salvador my dad have two cats, and everytime the cat's get pregnant they ate their pet's. I don't know why. When my dad knew that the cat was eating their pet's, he decides to kill them.

Obviously, Adriana has trouble with verb tenses in this paragraph. But three weeks later, after intensive verb tense training where Karla asked her repeatedly to identify verbs, identify their tenses, and change their tenses as practice, she wrote the following in response to a question about the short story, "Mr. Entwhistle."

The author does not talk back to Mr. Entwhistle because she realizes that he is just fear. She never knew that the teacher was talking to her. The author proves that, "He was just a person. He had made a mistake and now, too late, he knew it." Now we know that she doesn't talk back to him because she knows he is fear.

Of course, there are some problems with word choice and sentence structure, but Adriana has finally grasped two ideas: first, that writing about literature should be in the present tense, and second, that her tenses should be consistent throughout a piece. The writing she did on day two demonstrated a major breakthrough in her ability to understand verb tense.

#### Syntactical Breakthroughs

One of the most difficult obstacles for the tutors was that of the very long sentence structures characteristic of writing patterns in Spanish. In English, we would count those sentence structures as run-on sentences because they contain so many clauses that they become difficult to read and understand. This was one area where we did not have many breakthroughs, perhaps because this type of writing is so ingrained in the students.

Adriana's problems with extremely long sentences did not seem to occur in short paragraphs, perhaps because of her TAKS training. For the open-ended TAKS responses, students are asked a question about a piece of literature; in response, we train them to answer the question in one sentence and provide a quote that supports the answer in another sentence. Students' answers must fit inside a small box on the test, so they know early on that they must write short, easy-to-understand sentences. But that skill did not transfer over into Adriana's longer essays, where she reverted to her long, complex sentence structures, a habit we were unable to help her break.

The following excerpt from a short essay Adriana wrote about a time when she was erroneously accused of cheating and its accompanying T-unit analysis demonstrates her problems with sentence structure.

I remember in six grade and we had to take real hard test! I study for that test days and nights to not fail since all of students fail the last test so after I got grades back I made a 100%, normally that is good thing but teacher said I cheat because all student fail but I

said I didn't. He sent me to office, I call my mother to come school and she told them I study and I am good girl and didn't cheat so, the teacher said he is sorry and I went home.

The first full sentence has two T-units, both in a standard subject-verb-object format. The second sentence is much more complex and demonstrates the difficulty Adriana had with sentence structure. The first T-unit has a traditional subject-verb-object pattern with a subordinate clause; the second also has a subordinate clause and a subject-verb-object pattern; the third is subject-verb-object; the fourth is subject-verb-object with a subordinate clause; the fifth is subject-verb-object with a relative clause. That very long sentence could be separated a variety of ways, but because of the subject, it is probably best to separate it into no less than three sentences (one that she studied, one that she made a 100%, and one that she was accused of cheating). This way, each sentence could be split into a more manageable unit. The first and second would be complex sentences, and the third would be a compound-complex sentence.

The last sentence of the essay is no less confusing. It starts with a regular subject-verb-object pattern. The second T-unit is a subject-verb-object structure with a prepositional phrase (even though the "to" is missing, we know that is what she means). The third T-unit is subject-verb-object with a relative clause. The next T-unit is subject-verb with a relative clause, and the last is subject-verb-object. Again, this very long sentence could be divided into three sentences (one that he sent her to the office, one that she called her mom, and one that the teacher apologized).

The problem with Adriana's writing is not that her T-units are too long. In fact, the average length of her T-units is eight words, with the longest being eighteen words and the shortest being four words. The problem is that she crams them all together. Syntactically, her sentences are hard to understand because there is little or no punctuation, and many of the punctuation marks are wrong. Unfortunately, this was not a problem we were able to help Adriana with. She left the last day of class making the same mistakes she had on the first day of class because she did not understand why her sentences were too long. With the piece above, we tried telling her to use short, choppy sentences with only subjects and verbs. Following is what she produced.

I remember in six grade. We had to take real hard test! I study for that test days and nights. To not fail since all of students fail the last test. So after I got grades back. I made a 100. Normally that is good thing. Teacher said I cheat. Because all student fail. I said I didn't. He sent me to office. I call my mother to come school. She told them I study. And I am good girl and didn't cheat so. The teacher said. He is sorry. I went home.

Parts of this paragraph are undoubtedly better. If everything else were perfect, the sentence "Normally that is a good thing" would stand out and show us that this is not a normal situation. The sentence "I said I didn't" establishes that she is proclaiming her innocence. But the rest of the paragraph is plagued with problems that are just as serious as the first paragraph. The sentences are shorter, but they do not make any more sense, and the paragraph is fraught with fragments and has lost the depth Adrian's use of

subordinators brought to the first attempt. Despite a lack of progress, Karla continued to work with Adriana on sentence structure. She taught her about types of sentences and how to create them. Of course, on worksheets she would be able to create the sentences perfectly; in her own writing, the skills did not cross over. If Adriana had not been an ESL student, I would have said she simply did not know the rules for creating sentences. Since she is an Hispanic ESL student, however, I must also say that I believe she was experiencing a language transfer problem, one where her native syntax interfered with “correct” English syntax.

### Gains in Social Capital

Towards the end of our semester in tutoring, several of the tutees asked for help filling out college applications and federal aid applications, so the tutors and I decided to work with those interested tutees on college application materials. At end of November, Adriana asked Karla to help her fill out her SAT registration form, and they left to go to the library to work on the computers down there. About forty-five minutes later, they returned, and Karla was visibly upset about something that happened in the counselor’s office.

Because any student on free and reduced lunch can receive an SAT fee waiver, Karla and Adriana had left the library and had gone to the counselor’s office to meet with Adriana’s counselor about the waiver. When they were admitted to the counselor’s office and explained the reason for their visit, the counselor told Adriana, in Karla’s presence, that she would never go to college because she could not even speak enough English to pass the TAKS test. She also told Adriana that she probably would not even graduate and should just get her GED and a job.

Frustrated and angry, Karla told me about Adriana’s reaction. She accepted what the counselor said, and as they left the counselor’s office, Adriana appeared defeated. Our first job was to convince Adriana that the counselor was wrong, but it was difficult to explain why the counselor would have told Adriana not to go to college unless she knew what she was talking about. Though it was relatively easy for the counselor to convince Adriana that she was not college material, it was not easy for us to convince Adriana that she *was* college material.

It is appropriate here to repeat the definition of social capital from chapter two: “those ‘connections’ to individuals and to networks that can provide access to resources and forms of support that facilitate the accomplishment of goals” (Stanton-Salazar 18-19). My first step towards increasing Adriana’s social capital was to help Karla see a solution to the problem. Karla and I first discussed sending Adriana to a different counselor, something that Karla had never thought about because students are assigned a counselor based on their last name, which makes it hard to get in to see a different counselor. Thankfully, there was a counselor who had helped me with similar issues in the past, and I knew I could count on her to help me with this as well.

Our goal was to get the SAT fee waiver for Adriana, so the next day I sent Adriana and Karla to the different counselor for help. This time, Adriana received the SAT waiver and the reassurance she needed to try the test and go to college. She was also

given a lot of information about college aid for immigrant students. Because we were there to step in, Adriana found the information she needed, and she learned that there are ways around people who refuse to help. She learned that, when one person closes a door for her, she should try someone else until she finds the person willing to help. By definition, in this situation, Adriana saw a slight increase in her social capital. She found a connection to someone through me who could provide her with access to materials to reach her goal of taking the SAT.

But it was not just Adriana who experienced a gain in social capital. Karla's goal was to help Adriana get the fee waiver and take the SAT. Since Karla was college-bound and had been for some time, she had pushed Adriana to consider college from the beginning of our tutoring sessions. When they were denied the first fee waiver, Karla suggested paying for the SAT out of her own pocket for Adriana, but I wanted them to try and solve the problem within the school themselves, so I gave Karla several options for doing so. In that way, I helped show her some ways to achieve her own goals. Yes, paying for the SAT out of her own pocket would have done the same thing, but the problem solving skills involved would have been diminished. Like Adriana, Karla found connections within the school to help her reach her own goals.

#### Adriana and Karla: A Story of Success

Despite my efforts to educate the rest of the department on my goals, the teachers were very reluctant to send class work to tutoring for students to work on. Since our department focuses so heavily on TAKS and the SAT writing, and since students involved in those writings do not have peers to read and critique their work, teachers want students to complete their work in class, under circumstances as close to the ones they will encounter during testing as possible. Adriana only brought work from her English class with her one time; it was a revision of an SAT essay that her teacher sent with her to work on. I originally envisioned the tutoring sessions to be support for the regular classroom work, but it ended up being supplementary work instead. I did not have a problem with the tutors engaging the tutees in supplementary work, but I never saw if the skills they were learning transferred to their other classes.

One problem that occurred with Adriana was her lack of enthusiasm toward the end of the semester. On September 29, Karla wrote the following in her reflection log: "I had a great time and I think my tutee did too. She seems a whole lot more comfortable and she is not as hesitant to express issues of concern with me. I feel like our relationship is great. We always work right to the bell and she is never anxious to leave so I am seeing a lot of progress." I had noticed to this point that Karla and Adriana were always the last ones to turn in their materials, and Karla was not exaggerating; while other groups started packing up sometimes as much as ten minutes early, Karla and Adriana often did work until the bell rang and then spent a few minutes cleaning up. At the end of November, however, Adriana learned she had failed the English portion of TAKS for the third time, and her motivation took a sharp downturn after that. Karla wrote that "My tutee is always falling asleep and it's becoming a problem." Undoubtedly, it was the end of the semester, and we were all tired.

But a look at her attitude survey at the end of the semester shows that something else was going on with Adriana. She no longer believed she could learn English; she circled the area between agree and disagree for that question, indicating an uncertainty, one that could perhaps be brought on by a failing TAKS grade, about success in English. She was no longer sure that English would be important for her future, which leads me to believe she had begun to accept she might not graduate and was looking for other options, ones that do not require English for success. She was no longer certain she could look to her teachers for help with English. The only thing that remained consistent on her survey was her belief that English was hard for her.

It is difficult not to feel frustrated by her change in attitude. Adriana made important strides during our semester of tutoring: She learned strategies for brainstorming a prompt; she learned how words work (connotations, contractions, hard / soft consonant sounds); she began to learn how to use verb tenses correctly; and she experienced gains in social capital. But she did not see these gains because she still failed the English portion of the test. Unfortunately, like many people in the district and in the state, she had reduced herself to a test score. As her entire attitude changed, so did her capacity for learning; her failure, therefore, became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thankfully, Adriana passed the English portion of the TAKS test at the spring administration, the last time she could take the test. At the end of the year, she still had not passed the science section, so she did not receive a diploma in May (though she did receive a certificate of completion). At that point, Adriana decided not to continue working towards passing the science portion of the TAKS test required for graduation.

Throughout our semester tutoring, Karla also experienced gains in social capital. She felt like she had a purpose at school; she felt like she was accomplishing a goal beyond herself. She told me one day that, despite Adriana's problems with English, she felt like they were accomplishing a lot together, and she could see that Adriana felt comfortable with her. Karla said that she and Adriana had begun talking in the halls, and they had even eaten lunch together on several occasions. When Adriana did not pass the ELA portion of the TAKS test, Karla felt somewhat responsible. No matter what I said, Karla felt the same pressure all teachers feel in the face of accountability: If our students do not pass, we feel that we have done something wrong. If they do not pass, we could have or should have done that one more magical, elusive thing to reach them. We all seem to believe there is that one thing out there that will help them pass, and if we can just find that one thing, they will pass and we will all be happy. Unfortunately, there is no "magical TAKS pill," so we all have to keep working with alternative ways to help achieve student success, both on high-stakes tests in particular and with academics in general. Even though Adriana did not pass TAKS, and even though she did not graduate, I count her story as a success because she learned lessons that she can carry on, both socially and academically.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Because I am no longer sure that the tutors were verbally translating the attitude survey correctly or even consistently from time to time or from tutor to tutor, if I were

doing this study again, I would have the attitude survey translated into Spanish before we got started so that each tutee could read the survey for him/herself.

<sup>2</sup>Originally, I wanted the tutoring program to span both the fall and the spring semesters, so it never occurred to me to have follow-up interviews at the end of the fall semester to ask the students about the kinds of discrepancies seen here. By the time I realized follow-up interviews would have been helpful for analyzing the tutees' responses, the year was over and I had no way of contacting them.

<sup>3</sup>At the time of this study, I went to two bilingual Spanish/English speakers, both teachers, and neither one understood why Adriana was having the problem she was having. I asked several of the bilingual tutors, and they were bewildered as well. Since none of the other tutees were having the problem, I assumed it was a simple spelling mistake. Since then, I have learned that the problem is one of L1 interference; the construction is actually one that comes directly from Spanish. This illustrates a potential problem when conducting a study if the researcher is not fluent in the language, and it was a problem I had not anticipated since I was surrounded by Spanish speakers.

## CHAPTER FOUR: LEAH AND ZENA

### Overview

After the Houston Hurricane Rita evacuation in September, we lost Ofelia, who never returned to the Houston area after the evacuation. About a week passed before her family notified HSH that they were not returning to Houston, and another week passed before we were able to complete the paperwork to replace her with Leah. Zena, therefore, helped me with paperwork and assisted other tutors in the interim.

Leah had one of the most open and engaging personalities of any of the students we tutored. She always came in ready to work with a smile on her face, and her attitude was infectious. Leah and her family had moved to the United States two years prior to the 2005-2006 school year, and she did not fit the profile I originally wanted for the tutees. I wanted to work strictly with seniors who only had two more chances to take and pass the TAKS test; Leah was a sophomore, one year behind her grade level, and had never taken the TAKS test before due to a ninth grade exemption. Leah's motivation, however, pushed her to excel at a level I had not seen with the other tutees, which is why I picked her to be the focus of one of my case studies. In only two academic years, she progressed from speaking no English to speaking limited English at level C, and she increased her scores from beginning to advanced on both the RPTE and TELPAS. Interestingly, her reading and writing, or CALP, both increased from beginning to advanced, but her BICS, which should develop faster, held steady, both her listening at an intermediate level and her speaking at a beginning level. I was not sure how to account for these results until I examined her attitude survey.

Perhaps Leah's initial attitude survey can shed some light on the dramatic increases in her CALP. On her initial survey, Leah wrote that she did not feel any connection to her peers at HSH. She disagreed with questions four and twenty-one, "I have a lot of friends at [HSH]" and "I fit in well at [HSH]," and she strongly agreed with question twelve, "I feel like an outsider at [HSH]." In addition, she indicated that she felt uncomfortable speaking; she answered question ten, "I don't talk in class because I don't want people to laugh at me," agree, and she answered question seventeen, "People make fun of me when I try to speak English," agree as well. Perhaps, as a result of the lack of connection she felt with her peers, Leah just clammed up. She could have stopped speaking English because she felt her peers shunned her because her English skills are, to her at least, sub-par. To avoid speaking to her peers, she might have focused on her reading and writing skills, making drastic increases in those areas in just two short years.

Interestingly, her attitudes toward her teachers were mixed. She felt like they were interested in her progress in English (questions two, twenty-three, and forty), but she did not feel as if her teachers were readily available to help her succeed (questions eight and twenty-seven). It is worth mentioning that, not only did she feel separated from her peers because she felt they would ridicule her if she tried to speak, but she also felt separated from her teachers based on her responses to questions eighteen ("It's hard to get English teachers to respect me," to which she answered strongly agree), question thirty ("I feel

that English teachers ignore me because it's hard for me to speak 'correct' English," to which she answered agree), and question thirty-five ("My teachers would not take me seriously if I told them I wanted a career using English," to which she answered strongly agree).

Leah's testing achievements are telling. Jim Cummins hypothesizes that it takes five to seven years to develop grade-level ability with the CALP. Here we had a student who was developing much more rapidly because she was using the CALP more than the BICS. That may mean that, for some students, the five- to seven-year hurdle can be crossed much earlier, given the right circumstances. Of course, I am not trying to imply that L2 speakers should stop talking and focus on reading and writing; instead, I believe that, given the right teachers and the right circumstances, L2 speakers can learn the CALP in the second language much more quickly than research has previously suggested. Now it is up to us, as educators, to find and/or create those "right" circumstances and "right" teachers.

The rest of Leah's attitude survey points to a very high self-esteem and belief that she can achieve her goals. Although she agreed that English was her worst subject (questions twenty-five and thirty-one), she also knew that she could learn English (question one) and that she could do advanced English (questions five, twenty-six, and thirty-six). She did admit that she had trouble writing in English (questions thirteen and sixteen), but she enjoyed reading in English (questions seven and twenty), and she could understand her teachers when they spoke in English (forty-four). Overall, she felt that her English was improving (question forty-one). Finally, she recognized that English would be very important for her future, both in college and in her career.

Zena's experience during her first conference with Leah mirrored all of these issues, from Leah's reticence with speaking to her belief that she could succeed in English to her understanding that English would be very important for her future. Zena wrote, "I feel as though we still didn't break the ice. She is quiet but seems quite willing to cooperate in this program and she seems to be very motivated to learn English." Although I hated to lose Ofelia, Leah proved a better match for Zena, who was bilingual in English and Arabic but had no training in Spanish. All of their tutorials, therefore, had to be in English, which forced Leah to work on her verbal skills. It may be easy to remain silent in a classroom full of twenty-five other students, but she could not avoid speaking in a one-on-one situation, and I believe she benefited from that experience, though it was scary for her at first.

### Social Breakthroughs

Although Leah had some of the same breakthroughs as Adriana, she also had some very different ones, ones that I feel are important to her development in English. Her first breakthrough was emotional. On her first day of tutoring, Leah was described as "quiet," and Zena noted that they had not made any kind of connection. On the third day of conferencing, Zena wrote, "My tutee started crying today during the session. She said she had a hard time this weekend with her boyfriend which seemed to have affected her. It was kind of weird and unexpected but thank God it wasn't so severe to the point I

couldn't handle [it]." After only three days of tutoring, Leah felt comfortable enough with Zena to tell her about some problems with her boyfriend. The girls spent roughly twenty minutes talking about the problem, with Zena offering advice and sympathizing. The entire conversation was in English; not once did Zena correct Leah's grammar, and Leah seemed comfortable talking to Zena, even though they had just met three days prior to this meeting. Leah, a girl who felt like an outsider in her own school, seemed to have finally found a person she could call her peer.

Zena continued to note breakthroughs in their relationship in her tutoring logs. The day after that conversation, Zena noted that "[Leah] seemed more open today and was easy to talk to. It was a very good session." Then, three days later, Leah clammed up again. Zena noted, "She really wasn't paying attention or thinking today...she kept putting her head down." At the beginning of the next session, Zena confronted her about it, and Leah became emotional again, this time about her English teacher. Leah told Zena that her English teacher made fun of her accent during the class period before the last session; apparently, teasing from this teacher had become so commonplace that other students appeared to just accept it. But when the teacher told Leah that she would not stay after school to help "a Mexican" because it would not do any good (and anyways, said her teacher, aren't you in that tutoring thing?), Leah broke down, confused, hurt, and angry.

I had a similar initial reaction upon hearing the story, so Leah, Zena, and I talked about it. Although I was angry about the teacher's comments and apparent misunderstandings about our tutoring "thing," I tried to listen to Leah because her concerns were much greater than mine. Leah had to endure an entire year with this teacher, one who did not think she would amount to anything based purely on the fact that she was from Mexico. I recalled also that I had taken several Hispanic students into my own classes from this teacher because, as the guidance counselor stated, "She just can't get along with 'them'." After listening to Leah for several minutes, I suggested she try and get her schedule changed. She told me that the counselor probably would not do it since it was the middle of the semester, so the three of us went to the counselor's office and had her removed from the class and placed with another teacher with the help of one of the assistant principals.

This situation is similar to the one Adriana encountered with her counselor. Both girls encountered an adult who was supposed to help them who would not, and both girls did not know how to help themselves. In both situations, I had enough social capital within the school that I was able to teach the girls what to do within the constraints of the school. The issue, of course, is what Leah learned from this situation. While my intention was not to teach her to give up, I also did not want her in a class with a teacher who was making all of her progress and hard work seem trivial. What I hope Leah learned that day is that, like Adriana learned in the situation with her counselor, she will encounter roadblocks because the educational system is not perfect. While I am sure she knew that she would find people who dislike her for no reason other than the fact that she is Mexican, people who refuse to help her because she is seen as one of "those" people who take all of the time and resources away from the "more deserving" (read: middle class

white) students, I wanted her to see that there is a way through that system, imperfect though it may sometimes seem. She just has to find out how to navigate a system that will continually seek to take away her power.

The change in Leah was immediate. She loved her new teacher, and she finally felt empowered. Now, she knew two things: that she can ask for help with this type of problem, and that she does not have to endure such a biased attitude from a teacher. Throughout the semester, the tutors and I intervened no fewer than fifteen times in similar situations with other tutees, situations where they felt at a loss for control in a world managed by English speaking adults. Leah did not give up; hopefully, by watching us, she learned how to deal with her problems in that world. Since developing social capital means showing her how to find and create the connections to reach her goals, and since we did both of those things, hopefully her social capital within the school was increased just a little that day, enough so that the next time in a similar situation, she will know how to handle it.

### Rhetorical Breakthroughs

One of Leah's biggest breakthroughs occurred when she learned the traditional method of English organization for her essays. From what I understand after speaking with my Hispanic colleagues, Spanish essays are organized differently from English essays. While English essays are linear, progressing from point to point in an organized fashion, Spanish essays appear to be organized in a spiral pattern, with layer upon layer of repetition until the writer reaches the main point. The following paragraph written by Leah at the beginning of the semester illustrates the traditional spiral pattern.

I have a good weekend because my friend called me every day. And he telled me the he wants to go to the movies or some place with me I'm happy because I loved him so much. But also my family and my has a good weekend because my grandspas was in Houston. They come to the Mexico I'm so happy and then my cousin telled me [Leah] you know what Francisco has a good idea because he needs to seed you and I'm happy ok he was my boyfriend. But it is no more my boyfriend but I'm happy because he wanst to see me. I'm still loves him because any way is total I'm have a good weekend.

She begins with information about the boy who called her over the weekend. Then she switches to information about her family being in town from Mexico. She relates those two ideas, showing that each made her weekend go well. She circles back to her boyfriend without a transition, and then she jumps back out of that circle and claims "it is no more my boyfriend." Again, she circles back to her main idea, that she is happy and that she had a good weekend. This type of writing, full of repetition and logical leaps, is normal for essays in Spanish but not for essays in English, and dealing with these organizational issues became a focus of many conferences.

Teaching Leah to write in a linear fashion was an uphill battle for Zena, partly because linear essays are more cognitively demanding (as they do not rely on repetition as much to prove the point) and context reduced (as they do not build the same context

for proving the point as a repetitious essay). Linear essays, therefore, are closer to the D portion of the framework outlined by Jim Cummins, the D portion being the context-reduced, cognitively demanding quadrant. Zena had to go back to the A quadrant (the context-embedded, cognitively undemanding quadrant) to help Leah build the background knowledge and skills necessary for Leah to write in a linear fashion. At the end of October, Zena began working with Leah on TAKS essay prompts specifically to teach her to brainstorm and organize in order to target organizational issues. They began by reading essays and making after-the-fact outlines to show Leah how to use transitions and how to organize so that each point built on the one before. Zena wrote in her journal log, “my tutee seemed tired and wasn’t paying attention or listening or willing to work.” So Zena switched tactics and started talking to Leah about developing a thesis statement. She showed her how to turn the question around and make it a statement, which can serve as the basics of a thesis. Leah seemed to like this tactic because it was something easy and concrete she could do, so Zena spent the rest of the class period giving Leah prompts and having her write thesis statements. The following is an excerpt from that session.

Zena: Ok, so, uh, let’s work on...do you know what a thesis statement is?

Leah: (shakes her head)

Zena: Ok, um, so, the thesis is the, it’s what your essay is about, the main idea.

Leah: What it...call...called?

Zena: The thesis. The thesis statement.

Leah: Thesis.

Zena: Right. Ok, so now, you know that, um, on TAKS, they will ask you a statement, like to...uh, tell how you, uh, feel or uh, think about something. Well, let’s find...uh...let’s find a book...where are those books? Hang on...(comes back two minutes later). Ok, so TAKS prompts...ok, um...here we go. So this one says, “Write an essay explaining the importance of accepting others as they are.” Ok, so write that down. (Leah and Zena spend five minutes writing down the prompt and defining words Leah did not understand). So, uh, has there ever been a time when you did not accept someone as they were? Or when someone did not accept you as you were?

Leah: (shakes her head)

Zena: So, nobody has ever, uh, made fun of you or anything?

Leah: (nods her head vigorously)

Zena: Ok, so tell me about it.

Leah: Uh, there this girl, her name Lisa. In English class, she, uh, she, teacher wants me to read story. Out loud to class. I say words wrong...uh,

Zena (interrupting): Mispronounce?

Leah: (nods) and Lisa, she make fun of me. The way I say words, she say them again out loud.

Zena: Ok, and how did that, uh, how did that make you feel, like did it make you feel, uh, bad, embarrassed, angry...

Leah: Yes. Bad. Angry.

Zena: Ok, so let's turn the prompt around now. To, uh, make a thesis. The question was, where is it? The question was "Write an essay explaining the importance of accepting others as they are." We already marked the, uh, main words, the words that you, like, need to have in your thesis, right? So you need to have "importance," "accepting," and "others," and the phrase "as they are." So let's tack a subject and verb on the beginning, like "It is." Then, you can go to the first major word, and you'll have to, uh, change the form to important. So "It is important." Then, what, from, uh...the other words, is it important to do?

Leah: (looks at paper for five seconds): uh, important to...uh...

Zena (interrupting): what other words to you have underlined?

Leah: accepting others as they are.

Zena: Ok, so to write the thesis, we could write something like this: "It is important to accept others as they are." See how we just, uh, took the, uh, main words and, like, switched them around to make the thesis?

Leah (nods): That's easy!

From here, Zena went on to show Leah how to add a "because" statement to the thesis they had developed to make the thesis a full statement. Several days later, they worked with taking that thesis and turning it into an outline to prepare for writing the essay.

Following are some of the thesis statements Leah produced that day with Zena's help. Some of them are edited and some are not, but they all reflect the ideas generated by Leah. Zena also had to show her that some prompts will have a subject already in them; the prompts, however, that ask about the "importance" of something would have to have a subject and verb added in for the thesis. Sometimes the logic in the statements is skewed, but Zena's point was to show Leah how to create a guiding idea for her essays.

PROMPT: Describe how the way you look influences who you are.

THESIS: How I look influences who I am because when I look good I feel good.

PROMPT: Explain what courage means to you.

THESIS: Courage means to me to jump out of a burning building because I don't want to.

PROMPT: Explain the importance of having confidence in yourself.

THESIS: It is importance to have confidence in yourself so that I can learn English.

PROMPT: Explain the importance of taking pride in your achievements.

THESIS: It is important to have proud in achievements because

PROMPT: Explain how one experience can have the power to affect a person's life in a positive way.

THESIS: One experience can have the power to affect a person's life in a positive way because they look at it as good thing.

PROMPT: Explain how your surroundings affect your daily life.

THESIS: Your surroundings affect your daily life because my own things makes me feel happy.

During the next tutoring session, Zena felt like it was time to start working with organization. She had talked during the previous session about how to organize, but she had lost Leah, who quickly got bored when she was not the one working. So instead of just talking to her and showing her samples, Zena began to work with Leah on brainstorming, showing her how to organize her essay like the samples they had examined. For this particular session, they used the prompt “Write an essay explaining how another person can affect your life.” Following is an excerpt from this particular session, where Leah outlined an essay for the first time in linear format.

Zena: Ok, so, uh, now we have the thesis and uh, let’s see, you said that, you wrote that “Another person can affect your life in a good way if they do something good for you.” That’s what you have written, right?

Leah (nods)

Zena: Ok, so why don’t you, uh, why, uh, tell me about a time when that happened, when someone did something good for you that affected your life.

Leah: Uh (pauses for two minutes). My, uh, mother (motions with her hand for farther)...the next mother...

Zena: Your grandmother? Your grandma?

Leah (nodding): Grandmother. Yes. She was our house...not now.

Zena: Your grandmother used to live with you? With your family in your house?

Leah: (nodding): yes. Grandmother live in our house. She use have snack every day for me, and help me with school.

Zena: Where do you all live?

Leah: No, this not here. This in Mexico. Grandmother still in Mexico.

Zena: Oh, so she still, uh, lives in Mexico? Do you miss her?

Leah: (nods)

Zena: That would suck. (Following is a five minute conversation about why Leah’s grandmother was not living in the United States and about how Zena’s family still lives in her home country as well). Ok, so how did it affect you...how did it make you feel, uh, when she had a snack out for you?

Leah: Make me feel, it feel, uh, good. It, uh, I wait...I want it every day.

Zena: So you looked forward to it during school?

Leah: (nods)

Zena: Ok, so let’s outline that essay. For these essays, hang on. (She calls me over to ask me about introductions for TAKS essays. I assure her that, for these essays and for timed writing in general, a long introduction is not always necessary. It is permissible to have an introduction that is only a thesis statement).

Zena: Ok, so let’s start with...let’s...your first sentence of your essay is the thesis, right here. Ok? So now I want you to tell me about your grandmother having, uh, having snacks for you. Was it just you, or was it your sisters too? (Leah nods). Ok, so, uh, tell me again about the snacks, but this time, uh, start with, uh, what a day of school was like, in Mexico, what it was like, uh, normally, usually. (They

talk for ten minutes to find a good day that Leah can focus on, a day that sticks out in her memory as a bad day. They outline the story on paper).

Zena: Ok, see, now, see how you have all of the parts of the story here? (Leah nods).

Now, let's uh, let's...go back to the prompt and your thesis. You have the story of your grandma. The conclusion needs to finish it up, to tell, to relate, uh, to finish the thesis. So, you say in your thesis that it can affect your life. So how did this affect your life?

Leah: It feel good...uh...know that she...was at home wait for me.

Zena: So it felt good to know that she was always there, uh, waiting for you?

Leah: (nods)

Zena: Ok, so let's write that as your conclusion.

Again, Leah and Zena are working in the A quadrant, but Zena is teaching Leah how to create her own context for writing by telling the story exactly as it happened. She is giving Leah a strategy for organizing in context—the context of the original time frame.

Three weeks later, Leah was able to produce the following paragraph about her horse. Notice that this paragraph is much more linear than the paragraph she previously wrote about her weekend with her boyfriend and her grandfather. This paragraph is a narrative that proceeds from beginning to end, which is what Zena was teaching her in the above example. She is learning to write more cognitively demanding, context-reduced essays.

I have a horse of my own. I call her pretty girl. The horse knows when she is going to race. How does she know? Her breakfast was scanty (She is angry about that). She does not have a saddle on her back. She is being led, not ridden, to the grandstand. She is led under the grandstand into an unusual, special stall. The horse is nervous. Sometimes she does not know what to do when a starting gate files open and the track before her. If she does not begin to run instantly, other horses are already ahead of her. During a rice, when she sees another horses just ahead of her, she will try to pass him. Sometimes jockey holds her back to save her energy for a last stretch. Eventually the horse gets to run as fast as she can.

The drastic improvements in sentence structure, grammar, and organization between this paragraph and some of her earlier work are evident. I think it is important to note here as well the impact Zena had upon Leah's learning. A lot of times as teachers, we "talk to" our students, but sometimes it is hard to stick with them, to force them to show us that they understand. Zena did just that in this series of sessions. When she saw that something was not working, she switched gears until she found something that worked. She learned that sometimes, learning does not come easy, and she learned how to negotiate new ways of learning when that happened.

#### Grammatical Breakthroughs

Leah: ...so then there was an girl there, and ...

Zena (interrupting): You mean there was a girl.  
 Leah: No, an girl.  
 Zena: I promise you that, uh, it's a girl.  
 Leah: Why a girl? I thought it, uh, an girl.  
 Zena: Well, I uh...(over her shoulder)...Hey Amber.  
 Amber: Uh, Zena, I'm tutoring. (laughing) Hang on...let me *stop* for a moment so that I can *assist you* (emphasis added to indicate sarcasm).  
 Zena: Oh,...Amber. Yeah, hey, what's the rule for using "a" and "an?"  
 Amber: Um...you mean like, uh, with nouns?  
 Zena: (nods her head)  
 Amber (laughing): Oh my gosh, Zena, I can't believe you don't, like, know that (still laughing).  
 Zena: I just forgot...(unintelligible)?  
 Amber: Yeah, remember, uh, you use "a" when, uh, the word starts with a consonant, you know, not a vowel. And you use...  
 Zena (interrupting): That's right. I remember. (Turns back to Leah). Ok, so, uh, hang on. (speaking to entire room) Does anyone know what those words are called? The "a," "an" words? (General grumbling, then Maira comes up with it. More mumbling, they all laugh, and Zena turns back to Leah).  
 Zena: Ok, so articles. They come before nouns, and when you have a noun that starts with, uh, do you know what a consonant is?  
 Leah: (nods her head)  
 Zena: Ok, so when you have a word that starts with a consonant, you, uh, use the "a." If it starts, uh, with a vowel, uh, you use the "an."  
 Leah: What about feminine (points to paper)?  
 Zena: Huh? (Maira, who speaks Spanish, leans over to help).  
 Maira (to Leah in Spanish): There are not masculine and feminine in English. It's only the vowels and consonants.

Several things happened that are worth mentioning here. First, the tutees saw that some harmless teasing is ok. The tutors frequently laughed with each other during tutorials; they were sitting so close together that they could generally hear what was going on in the other sessions. Second, the tutees saw that receiving help from others is ok, which is the entire philosophy behind writing center tutoring. Because of her own language barriers, Zena often asked for help. Sometimes it would get slightly annoying for the other tutors (as evidenced in Amber's good-natured joking about being interrupted), but most of the time, the tutors worked together seamlessly. Third, they saw that nobody has all of the answers. Because she does not speak Spanish, I am not sure how long it would have taken Zena to figure out that Leah was referring to the Spanish masculine and feminine usage, and I'm not sure whether I knew what she was talking about at first either. Maira's interruption was a stroke of luck. Her own tutee was writing something at the time, and Maira was able to listen in on what was going on around her. Because she speaks Spanish, she got to the heart of the problem very quickly.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, things did not always progress so smoothly. There were many times it took us almost the whole tutoring session to determine the origin of a problem or to communicate a complex idea. But this time, Zena was lucky to have Maira so close. There were also several times the tutors got frustrated with each other, especially the time when they ganged up on Zena, saying that she was not a good tutor. These issues are part of working with people, however, and we worked through them as they arose.

Leah's confusion in the above example came from the Spanish practice of using masculine and feminine articles before nouns. All nouns in Spanish are either masculine or feminine, and they use either definite articles ("el" for masculine and "la" for feminine) or the indefinite article ("un" for masculine and "una" for feminine). Ignoring that English also uses definite and indefinite articles as well, Maira assumed or was erroneously taught that the indefinite article "a" is masculine and the indefinite article "an" is feminine. In her brain, she thought "la chica," the word for girl preceded by the feminine article "la," and she automatically assumed that the article for use with "girl" in English must be what she thought was the feminine article, "an."

None of us could figure out where she learned this rule, but in a strange way, we could see its logic. Zena took time to explain how English nouns are different than Spanish nouns with respect to gender and the use of articles, and as they talked, they created a Venn Diagram to hang on the wall for the other tutees to see and add to. They listed the normal similarities and differences between English and Spanish nouns and articles, and they also listed as many examples as they could to show the differences. Leah definitely understood the way English nouns function after that session, and other tutors were able to build on their groundwork to teach articles in later sessions because of the Venn Diagram Leah and Zena started.

Leah's other major grammatical breakthrough occurred with a typical ESL issue: verb tense and verb conjugation. At the beginning of the semester, Leah could not conjugate in even the simple tenses. Following is a paragraph Leah wrote for a focus activity describing her weekend; it is the same paragraph that Leah wrote above, but this time I want to analyze verb problems. Zena asked Leah to write about her weekend to help her practice past tense verbs; after Leah wrote, they underlined all of the verbs and corrected the ones that were incorrect. Finally, Zena asked Leah to conjugate the verbs in past, present, and future tenses for practice.

I have a good weekend because my friend called me every day. And he telled me the he wants to go to the movies or some place with me I'm happy because I loved him so much. But also my family and my has a good weekend because my grandspas was in Houston. They come to the Mexico I'm so happy and then my cousin telled me [Leah] you know what Francisco has a good idea because he needs to seed you and I'm happy ok he was my boyfriend. But it is no more my boyfriend but I'm happy because he wanst to see me. I'm still loves him because any way is total I'm have a good weekend.

Even though we can understand the basic idea here, Leah has obviously made some mistakes with verb tense. The first sentence has both past and present tense verbs.

She knew that he “called” her, but she didn’t make the same connection for the verb “have” at the beginning of the sentence. In the second sentence, she has placed the inappropriate “-ed” ending on the verb “tell,” a common mistake with verb conjugation. The rest of the sentence is in present tense. In the third sentence, she has used the third person singular verb “has” instead of the first person plural verb “have.” In the rest of the sentence she has successfully used past tense. In the fourth sentence, she starts off with a present tense “come” instead of “came,” and she makes the same mistake she made earlier by adding an “-ed” to both “tell” and “see,” making them both “telled” and “seed.”

The last two sentences are a little confusing because of the preponderance of mistakes. Obviously, she has used the present tense verbs “am” (three times in “I’m”), “wants,” “loves,” and “is.” Once Leah and Zena began to conjugate the verbs on a verb conjugation sheet, Leah began to see that not all past tense verbs have “-ed.” Following is an excerpt of their conversation.

Zena: Ok, so, uh, let’s start with the first verb you have here, “have.” What’s the past tense of have? Do you know what it is...the past tense of have?

Leah: (shakes her head)

Zena: Ok, so let’s look it up in the book. (Gets out the book, *501 English Verbs* and turns to have). ... (Short conversation about how to use book lasts two minutes).

Leah: So, past tense...uh, h-had?

Zena: Yes. So put that on your chart. See, you, uh, have “have” here in the present tense. Now put “had” in the past part.

Leah: Ok.

Zena: Ok, now what’s the next, um, verb on your sheet? On your paragraph?

Leah: Uh (five second pause)...”called.” (One minute for them to fill in chart).

Zena: Ok, so the next verb? The next action?

Leah: Um...um...”telled.”

Zena: Right. So show me, uh, why you added “-ed” to the end. Of the word.

Leah: Well...(pause)...I add “-ed” because to make it past.

Zena: Show me another place where you did that.

Leah: (points to paper)

Zena: Right. But what about “have?” (points to paper) Did you, uh, add an “-ed” to have?

Leah: (looks at paper, shakes her head)

Zena: Why not? Do you know why?

Leah: (shakes her head)

Zena: Sometimes in English, you, uh, don’t just add “-ed” to the verbs. To make them past. Do you understand? There are some words you change but not with “-ed.” Do, uh, do you know what I mean?

Leah: (nods her head but looks uncertain)

Zena: Ok, so let’s look up tell in the book...

Unfortunately, Zena did not give Leah the best description of irregular verbs and how to conjugate them. I asked her at the end of the session why she had not gone into more detail with Leah, and she said that, as she was teaching, she had become really unsure of the rules herself and had, therefore, tried to gloss over them. We talked about it more, and I reminded her that she does not always have to be an expert. She confided that sometimes she feels like the “stupidest” of all of the tutors because she always has to ask questions, and for once she just wanted to do it herself.

This type of mistake seemed to happen rather frequently. I would listen to tapes or look at the work the tutors were doing, and I would see mistakes in things that should have been simple, things like verb tense, subject / verb agreement, etc., but things that the tutors were nevertheless missing or teaching incorrectly. The first few times, I talked individually to the tutors making the mistakes, but when it began to happen frequently with the majority of the tutors, I discussed it at a staff meeting. The tutors told me that they want to be perfect, to help the tutees as much as possible; and they said that sometimes, when they ask questions to other tutors or to me, the tutees seemed to lose faith in them. Zena said one time, when she was in the middle of a session, Leah actually turned around and asked Amber a question without even asking her first, which indicated to Zena that Leah trusted Amber more than Zena.

I was not sure how to handle this. I understood the tutors’ concerns, but I also wanted them to teach the material correctly. I finally suggested that, instead of asking each other for the answers, that they ask me. They responded by asking me what they should do if I was watching another group or if I had stepped out of the room, which I had to do frequently to take care of other school business. I had two suggestions: First, I told them to hold the question if possible, going on to something else and coming back to the issue at hand later. Then I reminded them about the resources we had available in the room. We had three different handbooks and five computers for their use, all connected to the internet. I reminded them that showing the tutees how to look issues up in a handbook would help them begin to solve their own problems, and they agreed to try it.

I feel like the tutors learned a valuable lesson that day. They had been willing to take the easy way out, to teach the wrong material rather than lose the tutees’ respect. When I confronted them, I found out that their reasons for guessing actually boiled down to two things: fear and laziness. First, they were scared to lose face with the tutees. Like any other teacher, they wanted to know the rules and be able to answer questions. Second, the tutors simply did not want to stop what they were doing, get up, and get a language book. To help combat both problems, I asked the ones who had been in my English III class if they remembered me using the language textbooks to answer grammar questions; when they said yes, I told them that, if I could use the language books because I sometimes forgot rules, they could too. After that day, I believe the tutors began to see that they did not have to know all of the rules and that using resources, and teaching the tutees how to use resources, would serve the tutees better than guessing and getting the rules wrong.

Eventually, Leah’s verb tense usage began to improve. My hypothesis is that, through repetition, she began to see patterns in regular and irregular verbs. Zena never

had her do worksheets, but she did have Leah talk to her about things she had done during the week or would do during the coming week; Zena would write the sentences, leaving the verbs out, and ask Leah to fill in the correct tenses. They had these conversations and worked on conjugations for about thirty minutes every day until it began to stick with Leah. Following is an example of a focus activity Leah completed at the end of the semester, after working just two months with Zena.

I like to draw and heard music because I think it is fun. When I draw I like to heard music because it relax me or give me an idea on what to draw. I like to listen music will I'm drawing. I think its fun duing booth thinks at the same time because I can get more ideas what to draw.

Leah's problems had not been eliminated, but she definitely made some progress. Her major problem now was with the infinitive form. She confused the infinitive "hear" with the past tense "heard" two times, and she uses the infinitive "relax" and "give" instead of the third person present tense "relaxes" and "gives." Her last two sentences, however, are perfect in terms of verb conjugation and verb tense. Notice particularly that she has fixed her problems with "I'm." She has definitely made progress; her problems with verbs now are mostly conjugation, not verb tense, problems.

#### Syntactical Breakthroughs

Zena: So, um, what did you do last night?

Leah: Well, I, ah, watch my sister (motions with her hands to indicate little sister).

Zena: Your little sister?

Leah: (nods)

Zena: How many...how many sisters and brothers do you have?

Leah: (raises two fingers)

Zena: Really? I have two too! (laughs) Ok, let's work on, uh, asking questions and talking. You ask me something.

Leah: What...uh...what you do yester...uh...yesterday?

Zena: Well, my parents went to the movies, but I stayed home.

Leah: Why you not go?

Zena: You mean, why didn't I go?

Leah: Why, uh, why didn't I go? (laughs) No, you, uh, you.

The excerpt demonstrates that one of Leah's weaknesses when speaking English was word order, specifically with questions. After this exchange, Zena approached me and asked me what to do to help Leah ask effective questions. Zena and I began by sitting down, with Leah, and examining how questions are made. I asked both Leah and Zena what the six main question stems are, and Zena identified them as who, what, when, where, why, and how. I had Leah write those down in her book.

Next, I had them write out, together, three or four simple sentences. Here is what they came up with.

- It is 1:30.
- My purse is on the chair.
- I am hungry.

I showed them how to switch the words around, in many cases, to make a question from a simple statement. They simply had to use a question stem and place the verb before the subject, switching the words around until the question makes sense. So, to ask a simple question for which the answer is “It is 1:30,” all they had to do was take the question stem “what,” switch the order of the subject and verb, and add in the word “time” to make the question make sense.

Of course, this strategy does not work for every declarative statement. One of the sentences they produced, “I went to the mall,” does not make sense by switching the subject and the verb. I told Leah to be patient and develop an ear for what makes sense, and I sent them to work on their own.

Asking questions became another one of their rituals. They would spend five minutes at the beginning of each session talking, and Zena stopped asking all of the questions and allowed Leah to ask her own. Eventually, Leah did begin to hear her questions, and she was able to produce the following question in an essay: “The horse knows when he is going to race. How does he know? His breakfast is scanty.” Leah had moved, again, toward the D portion of the framework; she was able to ask questions, on her own, without first looking at a declarative statement and switching the word order.

Although I helped very directly in this situation, I normally let the tutors and tutees work out problems on their own. I know that they needed me to help frequently, and normally I would teach Zena how to solve the issue so she could teach it herself. But this was at the beginning of a session, and I knew the problem needed to be solved right away, so I taught them both at the same time; as soon as Zena saw where I was going, she felt confident taking over the session.

#### Leah and Zena: A Positive Outcome

Zena really began to surprise me during her tutorials with Leah. She began to take initiative and work well with other people. At one point, she and Amber began to have group tutorials where they would work for thirty minutes as a group on one issue (subject / verb agreement, plurals, synonyms, vocabulary, etc). When I asked them why they were working like that, they told me for two reasons: First, it took some of the pressure off both tutors, and second, it was more fun and the tutees were learning more because they could benefit from each other’s input.

At the end of the semester, Leah’s attitude had also changed according to her second attitude survey. Although she still did not feel like she had a lot of friends, she no longer felt like an outsider at HSH, perhaps because she knew how to take care of herself and how to get the attention and help she needed. While English was still hard for her, perhaps her hardest subject, she was absolutely confident that she could learn English, and for all the questions about taking an advanced English course, she answered that she thought she would be able to handle it. Her attitudes toward her teachers seemed to be

improving as well. Though she did not feel like she could get her English teacher to help her outside of class, perhaps because of her run-in with her first English teacher, she did feel like her teachers were interested in her progress in English and that they encouraged her regularly to learn English. And most importantly, she felt that her English was still improving, like the semester in tutoring was a good use of her time.

Leah developed tremendously during the course of the semester. Every day it seemed like she was developing some new skill; though the skills did not always transfer directly into her communication, and though she did not always remember them and had to be reminded, she was learning. So much learning occurs through repetition that I know the more she hears the rules, the more they will become part of her language.

Unfortunately, Leah did not pass any sections of the TAKS test in April. She was very disappointed because she had worked so hard. When I found out, I talked to her about all of the improvements she had made and reminded her that she had only lived in the United States for two years. Zena and I went back through her folder and showed her all of the differences in her writing, and we pointed to the fact that she was much more comfortable speaking in class now that she had some confidence. Sadly, like Adriana, she saw herself exclusively as a test score and was devastated that she did not pass. Even though she was only a tenth grader and still had two years to take the test, I have since found out that she dropped out of school.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>If I were to do this project again, I would make common features of the Spanish language a part of the training, both for myself and for the tutors. We had several misunderstandings throughout the semester that might have been avoided had we all known those features of Spanish that differentiate it from English.

## CHAPTER FIVE: RICARDO AND KAREN

### Overview

Ricardo was the type of student I had not counted on having in tutoring. In late September the ESL teacher asked if I could take on a student who spoke exclusively Spanish, having just moved to Houston from Nuevo Laredo in the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico. He moved to the United States in late August and was originally placed at the New Arrival Center, and he transferred to HSH in mid September. When he moved to Houston, he was classified as an 18-year-old tenth grader. Although I wanted to tutor senior level students who were struggling to graduate, I did allow Ricardo into the program, and I focus this chapter on him because his case illustrates some of the problems with the ESL program in general and also because he shows how far a student can progress and still not meet the standards the district and state have set for graduation. Though it seems like he did not progress very far, he actually learned a great deal of English in the two and a half months Karen worked with him.

Ricardo is representative of the way the ESL system in the district does not adequately serve its population of students. During the summer of 2005, the ESL teacher asked to have her classes split into beginning ESL, intermediate ESL, and advanced ESL. She wanted the beginning class to contain non-English speaking students and the intermediate and advanced classes to serve limited English proficient students of varying levels. That way, she reasoned, she could adequately teach the non-English speaking students, who often got lost in classes of limited English speakers. Unfortunately, HSH was not able to accommodate her request because of scheduling concerns. Many ESL students have ESL reading, ESL writing, regular English, remedial TAKS English, a double block of either math or science, regular math or science, and a history class, for a total of eight classes. They rarely have room for electives because they are often making up other classes they have failed (i.e., they might take ESL reading, ESL writing, English III, English IV, and TAKS remedial English), and when they need core classes to graduate, their ESL classes become electives and are bumped from their schedules. Consequently, the counselors usually have no leeway when placing the students, and creating levels of ESL classes became difficult. Although she was promised a beginning ESL class at the very least, it never materialized.

Ricardo, who spoke no English upon entering HSH, was placed in ESL reading and writing classes with students who were much more advanced in English, and the ESL teacher did not know what to do with him in a class full of mixed ability speakers. She called me the day he entered her class and asked if I had a bilingual tutor who could take him. While I began preparations to hire another tutor, school was closed due to the evacuation for Hurricane Rita. After Hurricane Rita, Oscar, another non-English speaker, never returned to Houston, so Ricardo began tutoring with Karen when we returned to school. Although I was eager to offer any ESL student help, I knew that Ricardo was not the type of student that I wanted to work with for this study. I wanted to work with LEP

students on the verge of passing the TAKS test, students who had failed for the first year high stakes testing and needed extra help to increase their language proficiency to graduate. Ricardo did not fit that profile. Based on Jim Cummins's framework, I knew there was no way that we could give Ricardo what he needed to graduate in such a short time, but I took him into the program to see what we could do in one semester. The results of his tutoring show that, while language proficiency can happen quickly given the right circumstances, it was not quick enough to give any "real" help at Ricardo's level. As a tenth grader, Ricardo would have to pass all of his classes each year and take classes in summer school to graduate before he reached the age of twenty-one, when the state would remove him from the public education system.

Ricardo's attitude survey suggests a fairly positive attitude towards learning English, but some of his answers to the questions did not make sense, which leads me to believe he was giving us the answers he thought we wanted. Because Ricardo did not speak any English, Karen translated the survey to him out loud into Spanish, and he answered the questions in Spanish. She then recorded his answers on the sheet for him. He agreed that he could learn English (question one), and he disagreed that English was hard (question nine). He believed he could do advanced English (questions five, twenty six, and thirty six), and he felt he would do well in his English classes (questions twenty two, twenty five, thirty one, thirty two, and thirty eight). He also felt his English skills were improving, which was interesting since, at that point, he could not speak, read, write, or understand someone speaking in English. He did not think that knowing English would help him make money (question three), but he did see English as important for his future career (questions six, eleven, fourteen, twenty eight, twenty nine, thirty three, and thirty four).

I was shocked, however, at how Ricardo saw his skills in English. At that point, he could not communicate at all in English, but either he did not see himself that way or he did not want us to see him that way. In terms of his skills, he did not think reading in class was fun (question seven), but he did like to read in English (question twenty). He did not feel sure of himself when he wrote in English (question thirteen), but he did not have a hard time writing in English (question sixteen), and he felt able to express himself in written English (question forty two). He felt confident speaking in English because he said people did not laugh at him when he tried to speak English (questions ten, and seventeen), and he usually could understand what people were saying to him in English (question forty four).

He felt like he fit in well at HSH with both teachers and students. He believed his teachers were genuinely interested in his progress and would help him (questions two, eight, eighteen, twenty three, twenty seven, thirty, thirty five, forty, forty five, forty six, forty seven). He did not have a lot of friends at HSH (question four), but he did feel that he fit in well (question twenty one).

I feel that one of two things is going on here, but unfortunately, the tape from that day of tutoring was broken when I tried to have it transcribed. Perhaps Ricardo knew so little English that he was still idealistic about his learning, thinking that he was farther along than he was; or possibly he wanted to tell us what he thought we wanted to hear; or

maybe the tutor coached him into the answers that she thought he should have. I think it could have been a combination of all three. I think Ricardo wanted to be farther along and so, when the tutor translated the questions into Spanish for him, he picked up on her non-verbal cues and went with the answers that he believed she wanted to hear.

Ricardo's initial placement test scores rated him a non-English speaker at the lowest level, A. By the end of the year, he had progressed to the intermediate level in reading and writing, but he remained at the beginning level of speaking and listening. Jim Cummins's theory of BICS and CALP would suggest, again, that this is not the normal progression of language acquisition, but perhaps the academic focus of the school setting led Ricardo's CALP to develop more quickly. Because he spoke no English at the beginning of the tutoring sessions, Ricardo's breakthroughs must be treated differently than the other tutees' developments.

When Ricardo walked in to his first tutoring session, he seemed very nervous. Despite his stated desire to learn English on his attitude survey, he did not seem to ever want to be in tutoring. When Karen asked him on the first day why he wanted to be in the program, he said he was just there because "they," meaning his ESL teacher, "made" him. Even though he received the permission form at the beginning and had his parents sign it, I'm not sure he ever really understood what the tutoring was supposed to do for him. Though he participated in his tutorials, he would never do any work beyond the tutorials to complement his learning. On eleven separate occasions, Karen wrote that Ricardo was having the same problems consistently and that he needed to work on his vocabulary and verb conjugation more on his own. She assigned him homework regularly, but he never completed it. Karen was often frustrated because, though he would show some improvement from session to session, most of his progress was "two steps forward, one step back." Though I tried to tell her that was often the nature of tutoring and of learning a new language, she remained convinced that, if he worked at home, he could learn English more quickly.

Part of Karen's frustrations may be due to her own experiences learning English. Karen was fully fluent in both English and Spanish, and she wanted to tutor because "In 5<sup>th</sup> grade [she] was enrolled in an ESL program so [she] know[s] the effects of good teachers. [She] would be honored to . . . have the effect on others like it had on [her]." Karen was very motivated to learn English at that young age, and to her credit, she worked hard to instill the same values in Ricardo. I believe, however, that part of Ricardo's frustration might have come from his school placement. He was two years behind grade level, and he knew that he had little hope of catching up in time to actually graduate. Even if he did graduate in the three years he had left, he would be twenty-one, three years older than his peers. It must be difficult and frustrating to see yourself as so far behind your peers without much hope of catching up. In that situation, school becomes hard work.

#### Word Identification / Reading Breakthroughs

When Karen and Ricardo started tutoring, he did not even know the English alphabet. Karen's initial reaction to Ricardo was the following: "1<sup>st</sup> time with the tutee.

Evaluated level is VERY basic. Tutee came to the U.S. last month. He is at times apprehensive on saying he doesn't understand something." They started the first tutorial trying to read a story, but Karen quickly realized that she needed to work with him on pronunciation and actually learning the alphabet and basic English.

So they continued the first session learning the alphabet, which Ricardo seemed to pick up quickly. In that first session, they covered the alphabet and the actual sounds the letters make, vowels and consonants, hard sounds and soft sounds, and days of the week. Following is an excerpt from the conversation Karen and I had after her first day of tutorials with Ricardo. Fortunately, even though we lost the tape of Karen and Ricardo's first tutorials, part of this conversation was captured on another tutor's recorder before she turned it off.

Me: So how did uh...how did your first, uh, day with [Ricardo] go?

Karen: It was ok. He doesn't, doesn't know much of any English at all. I thought that after coming from the New Arrival, uh, place he would at least know his alphabet. But we spent most of, uh, today working on, uh, the alphabet and the, you know, the sounds they make. I, uh, I forgot how much, you know, how much there is to learn just about the letters, the alphabet.

Me: Like what? What did you work on with him?

Karen: Well, we, uh, we...(5 second pause) we, he learned the sounds each letter makes. And—

Me (interrupting): You mean just the basic sounds or you mean—

Karen (interrupting): the, uh, what's it called? The sounds, like, the regular sounds, but then also the other sounds the letters make. I can't think...remember...you know, like, how "c" makes a hard sound like in, uh, "cat," it makes a /k/ sound. But in, uh, let's see, let's see—

Me (interrupting): like "incise?"

Karen (laughing): Yeah. I never would have thought of that word. How did you think of that?

Me (laughing): I have no idea. English teacher. (laughing continues for ten seconds. Other tutors come over and ask what's going on, and Karen tells them. Conversation about Ricardo resumes in two minutes).

Me: Ok, so where were we?

Karen: We were...(giggles) talking about incising.

Me: Ok, ok, incising. So you all talked, uh, about like, hard and soft sounds?

Karen: Yeah, hard and soft sounds of vowels and consonants. He, uh, seemed to learn it pretty quickly, but it was hard for him to, like, use it.

Me: Like how?

Karen: Well, after we uh, looked at the, uh, alphabet, we talked about the days of the week.

Me: The days of the week? He didn't, uh, know them already? After being at the NAC?

Karen: Nope. So we talked about the days of the week, but, like, when we started spelling them, he couldn't do it. And we had just gone over the alphabet. So it

was kind of frustrating. Because I expected him to be able to do it.  
Me: Well, remember that it's like math—  
Karen (interrupting): I know, I know. It might—  
Me (interrupting): He won't get it at first. It takes time and practice.  
Karen: Yeah, I just never met an 18-year-old who didn't know the alphabet.  
Me: Really? So you think all, uh, 18 year olds everywhere, all over the world, know the English alphabet?  
Karen: Well, no.  
Me: It takes time, but he'll... (tape cuts off)

After the first few days of tutoring, Karen started to settle in to a routine with Ricardo. They spent the first thirty or forty-five minutes each day reading and doing supplementary exercises to enhance his reading, and they spent the remaining time working on verb conjugation and word identification. One of Karen's biggest concerns was the grade level on which they were reading. We had talked in one of our earlier sessions about trying to keep the tutees reading on grade level as much as possible, but it was not realistic to expect Ricardo to read on a 10<sup>th</sup> grade level in English when he did not even know basic words in English. Expecting a student to be able to read with other students who have been studying English for ten years is unrealistic. So they started with children's books. Once I talked to Karen, reassuring her that it was ok to start with children's books, she decided to start with Dr. Seuss because she believed the rhyming would help Ricardo learn to see how letters worked. While no, I did not and do not believe Dr. Seuss has much, if any, appeal to an eighteen-year-old, I did believe that the repetition of sounds would help Ricardo learn the alphabet and how the letters sounded, and his language development was the most important concern to me at the time.

They began with a lot of repetition. Karen would read a line, and Ricardo would repeat it. This technique, called repeated reading, helps build reading fluency (Chandler-Olcott and Hinchman 124) by allowing Ricardo to hear how the letters were supposed to sound and building a bank of words as he progressed through a text. Following is a translated transcription of one of their conferences. The translation was done by one of my Honors English students who is bilingual, and like any translation, it captures the gist of the conference but is not exactly word for word. I told the transcriber to write the transcription / translation so that it made sense in English, not word-for-word. The parts that were translated into English are indicated by italics.

Karen: *Ok, so I will read the book out loud, and I want you to read after me. Ok? And I'll point to the word so that you know what word we're looking at, that I'm saying. "I do not like them in a house." Now you go.*

Ricardo: I do not like th—, t—...

Karen: Them. *Remember, the th— together, they make a /th/ sound.*

Ricardo: I do not like th—, them—

Karen (interrupting): Right, them.

Ricardo: in a house.

Karen: Ok. I do not like them with a, *what do you think this word is? If this is house, and remember, look at the last four letters of this word. They are the same. So the words will sound the same. What does the first letter sound like?*

Ricardo: Uh...

Karen: *Right here. What is this letter? Remember?*

Ricardo: Uh, m?

Karen: *Right, and how does an “m” sound?*

Ricardo: (makes the sound for m).

Karen: *Right. /m/. And so if this is house, and you change the beginning sound to /m/, how do you think...*

Ricardo (interrupting): m—mouse?

Karen: *Right! Yes. Mouse. So this sentence will sound like this. I do not like them with a mouse. Now you go.*

Ricardo (slowly): I do not like them with a mouse.

Karen: Yes! *Good! Good job. Now the next line is...*

The above interaction shows that there was lots of praise, lots of repetition, and lots of Spanish speaking still going on. The Spanish speaking, however, did lead us to problems that I will discuss later. But for now, suffice it to say that I believed at the time it was important for Ricardo to understand concepts, and because his language skills were so low, I did not think he would understand if he was taught those concepts in English. If he could not understand even basic English, he would not understand, for example, the first part of the exchange above had it been in English: “*Ok, so I will read the book out loud, and I want you to read after me. Ok? And I’ll point to the word so that you know what word we’re looking at, that I’m saying. “I do not like them in a house.” Now you go.*” When I took French in college, I was initially in a class that was exclusively in French, and because I did not understand even basic words in French, I could not understand any of the class lecture. So I advised Karen to keep the tutorials in Spanish for a while, which eventually led to some test scores that were not what we wanted or expected.

Another problem quickly arose in the third week of Karen and Ricardo’s tutorials. By this point, Ricardo was able to read most of the books out loud by himself. One day when I was watching their tutorials, he read a simple Dick and Jane book out loud to Karen with only a little assistance, and she was thrilled. Until, that is, she asked him what he had just read, and he could not answer her. When he finished, she praised him for reading it, and when she asked him to tell her what he had read, he shrugged his shoulders. Following is the exchange between the three of us at that session.

Karen: *What do you mean, you don’t know what you read? You just read it. How can you not know what you read?*

Ricardo (looking down at the desk, shrugs his shoulders again)

Karen: *I don’t understand. You just read about Dick and Jane, and how their first day of school, and...do you not remember?*

Ricardo: shakes his head

Karen: *I don't...*(looks at me) I don't understand. You heard him read it.

Me: I'm lost. What just happened? Remember, I don't speak Spanish.

Karen: He read the whole story and doesn't know what happened.

Me: Yeah, but stop. Think. Did he read it (emphasis on read)?

Karen: Yes. You heard him. He read it. He said it all out loud.

Me: Yes, he read the, uh, the words. He said, uh, every word out loud. So what might have happened?

Karen: I don't know. He said every word. If he said it all, why doesn't he know what happened? I don't understand.

At this point, I could tell Karen was getting upset. I stopped all of the tutorials in the room, and I asked the students who needed a soda. Of course, all of them did, so we scrounged for change, and I sent all of the tutees with the money to get themselves and their tutors a soda. During their absence, we had an impromptu staff meeting. I told the girls what had just happened, and we asked for their input. Following is the transcript from that short meeting after the initial summary of the conference.

Me: Ok, so what, what do you think happened? Why was he able to say the words and didn't know what he had read?

Amber: Maybe it's like, I don't know, like when I read something I don't always remember what I read because I'm not really paying attention. Like when, like when in class...

Karla (interrupting) Yeah, like in class when someone is reading out loud. You can, uh, be reading it, but like have no idea what just happened.

Karen: Yeah, but *he* was the one reading it. It must be...It must be something we didn't do, something I didn't do right.

(All of the tutors started talking at once, saying no, that she hadn't done anything wrong).

Zena: No, no. You didn't...

Maira (interrupting): You didn't do anything wrong. It's like with me, it's like when I'm tutoring Jennifer. Sometimes she knows the words, but she doesn't know what they mean. When they're all together, she doesn't know.

Me: Remember, remember when we talked about this the other day? A few weeks ago? When they can call the words but they don't know what they mean? Remember? (They nod). Knowing the words is not bad. It's, uh, a first step in reading. Now, now what do you have to...You have to slow down and make sure he understands, like, each word. You have to give him a context he can take with him. Remember, he's interested in knowing the words, in being right, and since you've had him reading out loud, knowing the words and saying them correctly is important. Now it's time to go on. Uh, let's see...Maira, what did you do next for Jennifer? What did you, like, do once she, uh, knew the words but didn't know what they meant?

Maira: Well, we did what you said.

Me: Ok, (sigh) well tell Karen what that was silly. So that she'll know what to do now.

Maira: Well, we started to, uh, draw pictures. So like if she read the word cat. I would tell her cat in Spanish so that she knew what it was. And she would draw a picture under the word, and she would write the word in Spanish and in English so that, uh, she'd uh, know both. Now we, uh, we have lots of pages of words with pictures so that she can, like reference? So that she can go back and see them.

Me: Ok, so Karen, does that uh, does that make sense? And Maira, did you do it with all of the words? In the sentences?

Maira: Yes, oh wait, no. Because like, if the sentence was "I hate cats." It's hard to draw hate. I mean, I guess you could, but I...

Karen (interrupting): Yeah, yeah, I see. You draw the main subjects. So that they know...

Me (interrupting): So that they have a reference. (Tutees begin coming back in the room). Does that make sense?

Karen: Yes.

After that, Karen was able to help Ricardo work through the book by making a sort of storyboard about what was going on in the story. They would draw pictures of the words, and at the end she asked him to put it all together into a cartoon-like drawing of the six major events in the story. She found that using this technique helped Ricardo because he had a reference for the words that he did not know; he also was able to walk away with a strategy for comprehending the story, something he could take with him into his later classes. They were able to use the technique of drawing in later, more difficult works. Since they only had two and a half months together, Ricardo never progressed to reading on his grade level. But he did leave with several reading strategies that will help him become a more independent reader as he progresses on his own.

The tutors also understood after this session that reading is more than just saying the words. Reading, as Jim Cummins' framework shows, involves context. If a reader does not understand the context when he/she says the words, then he/she will not understand the reading. The piece Karen and Ricardo were reading was too context reduced for Ricardo to understand, so when they were reading it, he could read the words, but he could not grasp the context, so he could not understand the text. The tutors, therefore, saw how important building context is when reading a text.

Karen also had her own breakthrough here. In chapter three I explained that, when Adriana did not pass the ELA portion of the TAKS test, Karla felt responsible. Again a tutor is taking responsibility for what she saw as a failure on her tutees' part. Karen had been trying to teach Ricardo to read a text, and when he read it, she was happy. But when he could not tell her what he had read, she was frustrated with herself and wondered what she had done wrong. As a teacher, I often have the same reaction when my students do not perform well on a test or do not understand the objective I am trying to teach—I take the blame for their lack of understanding on myself. Thankfully, however, Karen had time to find a way around Ricardo's lack of understanding and teach him how to make sense of texts in the future. In other words, she learned how to teach him.

### Speaking Breakthroughs

Many of Ricardo's speaking breakthroughs occurred simultaneously with his reading breakthroughs. As we saw earlier, he was able to call words easily; in fact, he did it so well that Karen thought he knew what they meant as well. Of course, the problem came when he did not have the words in front of him and had to search through his memory for the correct word. But once he learned some basic words, he had an easier time. Following is the transcript of the second session Karen had with Ricardo. As before, the parts in italics are translated from Spanish to English by a student transcriber.

Karen: *What did you do after school yesterday?*

Ricardo: *I went home and played basketball and watched tv.*

Karen: *You went home, home and played basketball, basketball and watched television, television.*

Ricardo: (nods)

Karen: *Say it with me.* I went home.

Ricardo: I went home.

Karen: I played basketball.

Ricardo: I played basketball.

Karen: I watched television.

Ricardo: I watched television.

Karen: *Ok, so this is home* (draws a picture on a piece of paper). *See? You went home.*

I (points to herself) went (mimics walking) home (points to picture on paper). Do you understand?

Ricardo: (nods head) I went home.

Karen: *Right. Good.*

Ricardo: *So went is like walk?*

Karen: *No. Let's see. You can, uh, went is go. When you, uh, go, you can, uh, walk, run, however.*

The above exchange demonstrates how basic their conversations were and how easy it was for Ricardo to misunderstand the words Karen was trying to teach him. Their sessions continued in this manner, with Karen taking every opportunity to teach Ricardo new words and Ricardo mimicking what Karen said. They spent the first three sessions covering simple basics: the alphabet, telling time, days of the week, months of the year, numbers, and school information (supplies, course names, office staff, etc). They made lists of words that had both the English and the Spanish for Ricardo to refer to. Soon, Ricardo was able to produce short, simple sentences with little coaching. Following is a conversation he and Karen had in late November.

Karen: How are your classes going?

Ricardo: *Classes?*

Karen: Yes. In English.

Ricardo: *Classes. What do you want to know about them?*

Karen: *How are they?* How are they?

Ricardo: *They are ok. English is—*

Karen: In English.

Ricardo: They...um...ok. English class are hard to me.

Karen: *How many English classes do you have?*

Ricardo: *Three.*

Karen: In English.

Ricardo: Uh, (under his breath) one, uh, two, three. Three.

Karen: Three?

Ricardo: *Yes, two ESL and regular English.*

Karen: They are hard?

Ricardo: Yes, English class are hard.

Karen: English classes (emphasis on the plural) are hard. Say it again.

Ricardo: English classes are hard.

Karen: *Let's write it down so that you can see why.*

After this conversation, they went on to a discussion of conjugation and subject / verb agreement, which became the focus of many of their sessions. These two short transcripts demonstrate that Ricardo's speaking was getting better. He was using short, simple sentences, and he was using high frequency words, but he was beginning to be able to put them together on his own with Karen's help. Karen always talked him through what he was saying, patiently coaching him until he got the sentence correct.

#### Writing / Grammatical Breakthroughs

We found that Ricardo's writing followed the same pattern as his speaking. He could get it, but he had to be coached through sentences by Karen. Two of his biggest problems were verb usage, both conjugating and subject / verb agreement, and using articles. When he started tutoring, he could not write in English at all, so I do not have any initial writing samples in English. Karen did allow him at first to write in Spanish, just to get his thoughts out, and then translate it into English. But she found that, because he knew so little English, his translations did not make any sense, so she quickly abandoned that strategy. We frequently discussed that writing will come after speaking, so she would have to be patient and let him progress slowly. I truly believed that it was only after he knew the words and how to use them that he would be able to begin writing them. So Karen remained patient, writing words and having him write words so that he would at least know how they looked when it came time to start putting them together.

Unfortunately, we never got to that level with Ricardo. Karen worked on writing skills, and she helped him with his tenses and agreement, but she was never able to get him to write any sentences or paragraphs in English. He could write single words, but he could not put them together. In terms of writing, therefore, Karen did not have any breakthroughs with Ricardo. But in terms of grammar, Karen and Ricardo did have two major breakthroughs. First, through repetition, he began to understand verb conjugation with regular verbs. And second, he began to understand subject / verb agreement.

But here is where I think I made one of several mistakes with Ricardo. In the beginning, I was unprepared to deal with students who did not know any English. So I let the tutors, who I believed knew better than I did what had worked for them when they were ESL students, figure out a plan for teaching the newcomers. They did what many new teachers who are unsure of themselves do: They chose worksheets. They spent a day searching the websites at LSU's Writing Center, Purdue's Writing Center, and related links. They printed off a stack of verb use worksheets three inches high. Many of these sheets were actually interactive games designed for use on the computer, but the tutors wanted to print them off instead of working on the computer, and I let them do it how they wanted to. Perhaps the worksheets were comfortable for them because they knew what they were doing with the worksheets, so they continued using them despite my initial warning about the dangers of using worksheets out of context. My mistake was failing to follow up with the warnings and allowing them to continue using the worksheets as a crutch.

So Karen and Ricardo spent part of each session engaged in deciding what verb went in the blank. Ricardo became fairly adept at deciding what tense to use, which would serve him well on the standard ESL tests he had to take. But he still could not write, which was the result of the mistake I made in allowing the tutors to rely on worksheets. I should have forced them to use the worksheets only as enrichment—which was how they ended up being used with the LEP students—not as a substitute for writing.

#### Listening Breakthroughs

I made another mistake with the non-English speaking students. I allowed their tutorial sessions to be conducted in almost exclusively Spanish. I tried to remind the tutors to use English whenever possible, but I allowed them to fall back on Spanish too frequently. I know why they wanted to speak in Spanish—it was more comfortable for everyone involved. But it did not serve the tutees well because their listening skills did not improve.

Karen tried to conduct her sessions in English as much as possible, but she fell back on Spanish frequently instead of forcing Ricardo to figure out what she meant. I know the tutors were all trying to do a good job, and I know they felt that if a tutee dropped out, it would be the tutor's fault. That happened when we lost José. Despite his lack of desire to learn English, his complacency during sessions, and his own admission of hating school, Amber felt that she should have done something differently to motivate him to learn English. Maybe Karen would have felt the same if Ricardo dropped out, so perhaps she tried to keep it simple enough for him that he would still learn but also stay motivated. The result was that his listening did not improve. While his reading and writing scores increased from beginning to intermediate at the end of the year, his listening and speaking scores stayed at the beginning level.

Ricardo's scores would seem to contradict Jim Cummins' theory of BICS and CALP, but I believe I know the reason his CALP increased more quickly than his BICS. It is my understanding that BICS develop naturally while CALP must be taught. Because we were in an academic setting that was not focused on BICS, perhaps he learned his

CALP more quickly. Even though, for us, his writing did not improve, maybe the ESL teacher must have focused with him on writing during the second semester. All of this focus on CALP is part of the push toward accountability. The tests do not measure listening and speaking; they measure reading and writing. To ensure we will have jobs the following year, we have to make sure our students can read and write in English.

Of course, I was not focusing on TAKS per se during the tutoring. But in the back of my mind, it was always there. I knew that the ESL teacher was taking a chance by allowing us to teach these students because, if we “messed up,” if we taught it differently than she did, they might not pass, which would reflect on her as a teacher because they were still enrolled in her class. My agenda, therefore, was to push the CALP more strongly than the BICS, but in the end, I believe that hurt the non-English speakers.

#### Ricardo: What We All Learned

To my knowledge, Ricardo is still in school this year. He was exempt from TAKS last year because he was a sophomore, but he will not be exempt this year. Unfortunately, we did make some mistakes with him, and there are a lot of things I would do differently if I were doing this study over. My first thought is that I would insist on having the population I wanted, but then the teacher in me comes out, and I know that I would help any ESL students who needed and wanted help. But I would encourage the tutors to work just as hard on writing and on listening as they do on reading and speaking, regardless of their own frustrations. And I would work more closely with the tutors to ensure they had the materials they needed to do that instead of allowing them to work it out on their own.

But I do feel like we learned a lot by working with students like Ricardo. We learned that all four types of communication are important and need to be taught. I learned that students, no matter how motivated they appear to be, will still go with the easiest possible solution when given a choice. And I learned I sometimes do the same thing. Instead of actively working with the tutors, I allowed them to do what they wanted sometimes, which was the easiest possible solution for me. I justified it at the time by saying that, as ESL students themselves, they knew what would work; but in reality, I know that I just had no idea what to do and so I handed it over to them.

As a bilingual tutor, Karen learned many things this semester as well. She learned that sometimes, as a tutor, she had to go back to the basics and teach things that seemed very elementary to her because a new speaker simply has not had exposure to them. She learned strategies for teaching, like the storyboard, that she had never known before because, as an AP student, she had never used them. She learned that the same strategies for speaking that she had learned as an ESL student worked with Ricardo; while she knew that younger ESL students used repetition to learn sounds and words because she had done it herself in her own ESL program, she wrote in her reflection log that she did not realize that same strategy would work with older students because she thought it would be too easy. Karen learned, in short, how to really teach someone a concept, how to get to the root of the misunderstanding and correct it.

I have no doubt, therefore, that Ricardo did learn. He learned a lot of basic information that might never appear on a test but that will be the basis for future learning;

for example, he learned the alphabet and how to use the letters of the alphabet, basic word identification, strategies for reading and understanding a story, basic communication skills, and basic writing skills. Although everything he learned would be classified as context-embedded, cognitively undemanding for an English speaker, which means he did not move through the proposed framework, he did learn basic English; and I would claim that, for someone who could not initially speak English, the work he was doing was not as cognitively undemanding as it might have been with the other tutees. Perhaps, had we had another semester to work with Ricardo, we could have made some real, measurable progress. And despite my desire to have only seniors needing to pass TAKS, I am glad we worked with students like Ricardo because, maybe, we gave him the confidence he needs to succeed in his future classes.

## CONCLUSION

### Re-Examining My Original Research Questions

When I began this project, I thought it would be relatively simple. I thought I would take some middle-of-the-road ESL students, tutor them for a year, and turn them into English speakers. I envisioned some sort of fancy awards ceremony where I received accolades for helping such an at-risk population of students succeed academically. I envisioned students lining up at my door, asking to be in tutoring for the next year. I envisioned administrators patting me on the back, telling me what a good job I was doing and that I would be receiving a raise or, at best, a course reduction to continue tutoring in the future. In short, I thought I would be a hero at HSH.

How wrong, how misguided, how arrogant I was. In my teacher-as-researcher role, I learned more in one semester than I ever could have imagined about tutoring in a high school: about working with students, teachers, and administrators, about remaining flexible, about ESL and tutoring theory and pedagogy, and about the effects of unforeseen events such as Hurricane Rita. I learned how to be a better teacher, how to listen to my students and not my own agenda, and how to motivate students when things seemed tough. And I learned that even though the tutees' stories were often sad, and even though the outcomes of tutoring were not always what we wanted, there was always a positive moment to focus on if I looked hard enough.

To go back to the beginning, I want to re-examine my original research questions and succinctly answer each again. These answers will serve to summarize what was presented in depth through my case studies.

#### **1. Can peer tutoring meet the language needs of ESL students to give them the requisite background knowledge necessary to attain grade-level proficiency?**

Peer tutoring meets an ESL student's language needs by allowing him/her to practice all four domains of communication: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In a one-on-one setting, the tutee cannot rely on other students for knowledge and completion of work, so he/she must do it. When no other students are present, the tutee has to carry the conversation with the tutor, a situation that forces the tutee to practice communication. The tutorial arrangement also allows the tutee to practice in a supportive environment, with a tutor to encourage, explain, or correct without the presence of a whole class to wait impatiently or laugh at mispronunciations or misunderstandings.

In addition, peer tutors can work with tutees to discover and solve their unique problems. In a classroom, a teacher does not have time to troubleshoot problem areas for all of her students; with the demands and pacing of a statewide curriculum to attend to, he/she only has time to briefly review past knowledge and skills before moving on to new subject matter. In a tutoring session, by contrast, the tutor can take the time to discover the lapses in background information before moving on. For example, if the student tutee is having trouble with using commas between independent clauses, the problem might actually be that he/she does not know the difference between independent and dependent clauses or the difference between coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. To help

solve the problem, the tutor can take the time to get the tutee to grade level with that skill before troubleshooting the next problem.

In addition to working with these types of later-order concerns that teachers can assume most students already know if the curriculum is vertically aligned, the tutor can take the time to focus on higher-order concerns, as we saw in the example of defining courage in the chapter on Karla and Adriana. As an eleventh grade English teacher, I would assume that most eleventh grade native English speakers would know how to define courage; in my classroom, if one student—ESL or not—did not know how to define courage and actually asked, I would do one of three things: tell him/her to look it up in the dictionary, give him/her a cursory definition and move on, or ask him/her to come by after school to discuss it in tutorials. I might define it and then, if I could tell the student did not understand, ask him/her to come by after school. I would not spend an entire class period discussing the definition of courage with one student because it would take away from the other twenty-five students in the class. In a tutoring session, however, the tutor can, and should, spend the time to make sure the tutee knows how to attend to these types of higher-order concerns.

Obviously, however, time is an issue. In one semester, we were not able to get Ricardo to grade-level proficiency because he was so far behind his grade level peers in the L2. Additional studies could address the time involved with new speakers of the L2 attaining grade-level proficiency.

## **2. What barriers to success—social, academic, emotional, administrative—will both the tutors and tutees face in a high school setting?**

Obviously, there are too many to mention again here. Suffice it to say that the tutors and I encountered all four types of barriers during the semester we were involved with tutoring. The important thing to note, however, is that we overcame many of them to different degrees. Obviously, we cannot overcome the issue of testing fairness for ESL students because we did not and do not have any control over that variable; but we were able to control many issues that impacted us. All of us—tutors, tutees, and myself—exhibited flexibility and a willingness to achieve, no matter what the challenge. That drive is perhaps one of the most important lessons all of us learned during the semester.

## **3. As an ESL student's language proficiency increases, will he/she show an increase in social capital and a more positive attitude towards school?**

There are two issues here: social capital and attitude, and they do not always both have an influence on, nor are they both influenced by, language proficiency. The first issue, social capital, is nebulous and hard to measure. At first, I believed that social capital would naturally increase as the student could speak the language; in other words, as the tutees learned English, they would naturally be better able to communicate with the people who could help them. However, I found that, as far as social capital was concerned, the tutees still needed help learning how to navigate the landscape of the school despite their gains in the L2. When Adriana did not know how to get a fee waiver, I needed to step in (as a person familiar with the school, a person who already had the

social networks necessary to get her what she needed) and show her how to accomplish her goal. When Leah's English teacher refused to help her, I did the same thing. So it was not their language proficiency that caused the increase in their social capital; it was knowing someone else who had both social capital in the school and a vested interest in their success. Since I had both, I was able to show them how to reach their goals. Once they learned how to help themselves, they began to see that they could work within the constraints of the school to get what they wanted and needed.

Evidence of the tutees' increased social capital happened every day. When Maricruz found out at the end of the fall semester that her schedule had been changed, and her new English teacher was the same one that Leah had been removed from during the fall, Leah, Zena, and Maricruz went to the counselor's office and had Maricruz transferred to Leah's new English teacher. When Maricruz and Mary wanted to take the SAT and needed fee waivers, Adriana and Karla were able to show the girls how to get them. When Jennifer's father lost his job and she needed to be placed on the free lunch system, Ricardo and Karen were able to help her because the same thing had happened in Ricardo's family. When Maricruz almost lost credit due to absences, Jose and Amber were able to help her get into credit recovery. So while the tutees did not necessarily show an increase in social capital based on their language proficiency, they did show an increase in social capital in general based on the networks they were forming within the group and within the school. Unfortunately, we cannot conclusively connect any increase in social capital to an increase in language proficiency. The tutorials did show, however, that the tutees wanted to learn, and they seemed pleased, relieved, and many times thankful to know that someone was taking the time to help them. They were learning to negotiate hurdles, and they were learning to like school more (as a group).

Their literacy, based on the work we were doing and seeing in tutorials, was increasing at the same time. But then, after TAKS, their attitudes toward school, their teachers, and English in general, based on their attitude surveys, became more negative (again, as a group). Unfortunately, their attitudes were still tied to their academic performance on the test perhaps because an increase in literacy does not mean that the students will be successful academically. Take, for example, Adriana. Her tutor and I saw her make strides with language proficiency throughout the semester, but when she failed the ELA portion of the TAKS test in November, she did not feel personally successful, as demonstrated in her attitude survey. She was eventually successful in ELA, but she was never successful in science. Sadly, I would not say that Adriana felt personally or academically successful, regardless of her increases in language proficiency. No matter what gains we saw with literacy development and learning, the test scores still matter the most to students; they serve as the definitive measure of learning.

#### **4. How can high school peer tutors be prepared to work with ESL students?**

High school peer tutors must be prepared differently for working with ESL students than college-level peer tutors. At the college level, the responsibility for learning still rests almost solely with the student; the peer tutor is there merely for support. In my experience, when a college-level student comes to the Writing Center with a paper, the

tutor is much less directive, offering support to the writer and not necessarily teaching the writer. For example, if I were working with a student in a university Writing Center on a paper that did not have enough development, I might take one paragraph and walk the student through ways to develop the paragraph more, and then I would have the writer show me, in a second paragraph, how he/she would use the same strategies to make that next paragraph stronger. That way, I would know that the writer understood what I was saying and could take the strategies I had just taught him/her and apply them to the entire paper.

At the high school level, especially in the face of accountability, peer tutors are responsible for more direct instruction, for teaching skills and concepts that college tutors are not; for example, we found ourselves working with all four domains of communication, which is not something most university centers are concerned with. In the situation outlined above, I would instruct the high school tutor to walk the student through the entire paper, not just a few paragraphs, to ensure the student really understood the concept. High school tutors, therefore, have to be led more consistently and thoroughly through a curriculum grounded in the best teaching practices and objectives. They have to be taught, for example, strategies for teaching reading and writing so that they can teach those same strategies to the tutees. They also have to be reminded of their own social capital; in short, they have to be reminded that they do know the answers to administrative and teaching questions and can help the tutees find those solutions.

### **5. How does the work of Jim Cummins and other ESL literacy theorists help teachers understand the challenges of teaching ESL students?**

The work of literacy theorists can help teachers understand that teaching ESL students must occur in stages. It is unrealistic for us to expect a student who moves to the U.S. in the eleventh grade and who has had no formal schooling in English to read and understand a text at the eleventh grade level. We must work to scaffold and differentiate instruction constantly for those students, to put the work in context so that they can understand along with other students in the class. Of course, they will not necessarily understand all aspects of the text that a student who is a native speaker of English understands, but if they can understand the basics, then we have made progress.

Several times in this study, we saw CALP developing before BICS, which would seem contrary to the work of Jim Cummins. Because this study is limited in both number of subjects and time, it does not in any way contradict the work done by Jim Cummins. I would not suggest, as some theorists would, that the CALP should be taught at the expense of the BICS while students are in school. Basic communication skills are critical for a successful life in the United States, and that is why the tutors began each session with a short dialogue with the tutee. Further study of BICS and CALP literacy development, especially at the high school level in an academic setting, is warranted.

#### Future Research

Carol Edelsky points to a central irony with standardized testing and

accountability: As educators, we promote literacy to empower ESL students, to give them options, but we give them school literacy exercises (read: standardized tests) that disempower them (Edelsky 87). We talk about decentering the classroom, giving students control over their learning, and differentiating instruction; none of that, however, is important when what we do at the end—the test—takes away everything they have worked for by stripping their cultural identity. I said in my introduction that I was not going to argue the rights and wrongs of accountability and high stakes testing, and I'm not. But I do want to emphasize that there has to be a better way to educate and a fairer way to assess the learning of these students, and one necessary direction for future research is to find a way to work within the basic guidelines of federal mandates such as No Child Left Behind to actually empower these students, to allow them to learn a new culture without having to forget their native one.

Further examination of peer tutoring in the high school setting, therefore, needs to explore the possibility of accomplishing both the goal of learning to meet state and federal mandates and the goal of letting a child retain his/her heritage while learning a new language and culture. A typical English classroom does not promote learning for many of these students because there are too many distractions and too many crutches that prevent real learning. ESL students need to work one-on-one with someone who is their own age, who can help them negotiate their problems, and who can encourage the growth of their strengths. That someone just might be a peer tutor supported by a classroom teacher.

In addition, in two of my case studies, the CALP developed more quickly than the BICS, which is contrary to studies by Jim Cummins on language acquisition. Maybe these students developed CALP more quickly because they were in a school setting, or maybe, like Mayra, some students who hesitate to speak in class develop their CALP language skills more quickly. I would not in any way contradict the extensive research into BICS and CALP done by Jim Cummins based on two case studies, but a question for further study may be how formal ESL instruction can affect the acquisition of the CALP and whether or not, for academic purposes, learning the CALP more quickly is beneficial.

### General Conclusions

My time at HSH was not a positive one, largely because of the frustrations I faced during this study. I felt like I had a valid idea grounded in research for helping ESL students, but I could not get anyone who *could* have helped me to listen. Sadly, only one assistant principal ever came by to see what the tutors and tutees were doing. I sent out several invitations to administrators, inviting everyone from assistant principals at HSH to the superintendent of the district to come by and visit to see how well the tutees were progressing. Nobody else ever showed up. I am now, however, at a different high school teaching senior English. Though the people are different, and though the way they deal with problems may be different, the reality of high-stakes testing remains the same.

Despite its problems, the ESL tutorial program at HSH was successful on several levels. First, we did help the tutees with language acquisition. The student tutees we were working with were not of below-average intelligence. They were not, for the most part,

discipline problems in the classroom. They were, however, a special population of students without special help for their needs. Although I was a bit unrealistic about this tutoring program at first, I know now that high school writing centers are not general fix-it centers. They cannot solve all problems, especially in the face of high stakes tests and general accountability, because there are too many variables to consider. But now I know that we did help our LEP student tutees with language acquisition, partially because they were more engaged in their learning. They had to be. There can be no refusal to participate in a one-on-one conference because, if there is, the conference will not work, as we saw with José. When he refused to participate with Amber, he was not learning, and we had to replace him with Mary.

Though they were learning, the tutors and I shared some doubts about how successful we were that semester. When Adriana passed the ELA portion of TAKS in the spring, I made it a point to find Karla and tell her because I felt like Karla was a part of that success. What she said was disappointing and it troubled me because it was a fear I had felt myself; she looked up at me from her seat in her English class and said, “What if she would have passed earlier? I mean, what if I hurt her, and she would have passed if she hadn’t been in tutoring? Why did she pass when she went back to her real class?” At the time, as I was disrupting another teacher’s class and could not believe that Karla had the same fears I had, I could not respond.

It was only later, when I thought about it, that I knew the answer. No, we cannot conclusively prove that we helped Adriana pass the TAKS test in April. But we cannot conclusively prove that we hurt her chances of passing it in October either. At that point, she had only been in tutoring with us for two months; when she took the test in April, she had two more months of tutoring under her belt, plus another semester of English and an ESL class. Perhaps, then, the answer is not that tutoring works better than class or that class works better than tutoring but that, when best teaching practices are combined with peer tutoring, students will feel important, they will feel cared about, and they will learn.

Second, the tutors gained valuable, life-long teaching / tutoring experience. They learned more about themselves, about teaching, and about English. They became valuable members of their educational communities. I will never forget the day that Karla came running into class, out of breath and furious. When I asked her what was wrong, she said that her AP chemistry teacher had made a joke about none of the AP chemistry students having to take the TAKS re-test with “those ESL students who can’t pass it the first time.” Karla, normally a quiet, reserved student, stood up to her teacher, asking her if she had any idea what it was like to move to a country, not speak the language, and have to take a test in that language to graduate. Karla was livid, and after that day, she and the other tutors really began to see the social dilemmas many of the ESL students face. They became advocates for “their” tutees. When they would talk about the tutees they worked with, they sounded like teachers, saying “*my student did this today*” and “*my tutee wants to go to college now.*”

Third, my study reinforces the importance and value of teacher research. It can be as valuable as theorist or administrator research simply because teachers are in the classroom and can report what works and what does not work there. Teachers see what

happens in the classroom; we see how our students react; we see what solutions work. Teacher research has largely been ignored until recently because, while

[a]ll teachers think about what happens in the classroom, . . . these thoughts are largely undocumented and unreported, and if they are reported they are usually anecdotal . . . teacher research, because it is unplanned and undocumented, has no institutional standing, . . . thus education is one of the few professional where expertise in *how* to do its tasks is assigned to people who do not in fact do them. (Myers 2)

And finally, this program is applicable to and can easily be exported to other urban centers with minor adjustments: “Locally produced knowledge for use in the particular writing center where it was conducted can—and often does—contribute to the profession at large” (Harris, “Diverse” 3). Perhaps my findings can help other high schools, especially those in Texas, cope with the large influx of non-native speakers of English, and hopefully this knowledge will be useful to universities as they struggle to cope with the ever-changing face and background of the college student and as they prepare undergraduates to enter the teaching profession. Although it is admittedly cost-prohibitive in its present form, a program where tutors volunteer for community service hours or for classroom elective credit could be ideal.

Interestingly, new legislation has cropped up since I began this study. The “new” policy (it was actually passed in forty states in 2004 but has been offered to all of the states now), proposed by the U.S. Department of Education, gives schools the right to exempt recent immigrants’ scores from their records for accountability purposes. The problem has always been having adequate time to prepare the students without hurting the school’s ranking, which in turn helps the schools avoid penalties. The new policy allows all states to exempt a student’s math scores (even though the student must still take the test) for one year; it also allows students to be exempt from taking the reading test altogether for that first year of residence. The number of exempted students must be disclosed to the public. Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings explains, “We recognize that there are legitimate issues when students move to this country not speaking English, . . . They do need to have some sort of adequate time to get up to speed” (Feller). Of course, the question is whether or not the one year is enough time for students to adequately prepare for and pass the test. My study suggests otherwise.

Legislation like this, though it does not solve many individual student’s problems, does show that the U.S. Department of Education is aware of the increasing need for solutions to the ESL dilemma, especially since 5.4 million students currently speak English as a second language (Feller). But it is not enough. As long as the government cannot take steps to ensure that all schools have adequate funding, teachers, and resources to educate the students in a differentiated classroom, teachers must shoulder the responsibility themselves.

As a teacher, I strive for success every day with my students. I want them all—from the AP student who does everything perfectly to the one in the back row who never turns anything in—to be as successful as they can be. The stories presented here are positive stories, though they do not always appear to be. The tutors and I were working in

a system of teachers and administrators that fought us at every turn, and we still made progress with “our tutees.” Although the progress was not always measurable with test scores, the stories presented here show that we did make progress with

At the end of the semester, one day really stuck with me, and that was the day Leah and Zena worked on thesis development. Zena had been in my honors English III class, and one day in class I ran out of things to do with thirty minutes left. Since we were working on the research paper, I took them through almost the same exercise Zena took Leah through for thesis development. Of course, many of them did not need what they saw as remedial, “regular” work, but I asked them to do it anyway. When I saw Zena use that same technique with Leah, I felt validated as a teacher because I knew she had just given me the highest compliment she could ever give me by modeling my own teaching behaviors during tutorials. All of us—tutors, tutees, and I—learned that semester about how to help others, how to negotiate through a difficult, unforgiving system, and how to show the people around us that we care about them and respect them no matter what our differences were.

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APPENDIX A:  
ELEVENTH GRADE ENGLISH TEKS

Source: TEA Website,  
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/ch110c.html#110.44>

**110.44. English III (One Credit).**

**(a) Introduction.**

(1) Students enrolled in English III continue to increase and refine their communication skills. High school students are expected to plan, draft, and complete written compositions on a regular basis. Students edit their papers for clarity, engaging language, and the correct use of the conventions and mechanics of written English and produce final, error-free drafts. In English III, students practice all forms of writing. An emphasis is placed on business forms of writing such as the report, the business memo, the narrative of a procedure, the summary or abstract, and the résumé. English III students read extensively in multiple genres from American literature and other world literature. Periods from American literature may include the pre-colonial period, colonial and revolutionary periods, romanticism and idealism, realism and naturalism, early 20th century, and late 20th century. Students learn literary forms and terms associated with selections being read. Students interpret the possible influences of the historical context on a literary work.

(2) For students enrolled in English III whose first language is not English, the students' native language serves as a foundation for English language acquisition.

(3) The essential knowledge and skills as well as the student expectations for English III are described in subsection (b) of this section.

(4) To meet Public Education Goal 1 of the Texas Education Code, 4.002, which states, "The students in the public education system will demonstrate exemplary performance in the reading and writing of the English language," students will accomplish the essential knowledge and skills as well as the student expectations in English III as described in subsection (b) of this section.

(5) To meet Texas Education Code, 28.002(h), which states, ". . . each school district shall foster the continuation of the tradition of teaching United States and Texas history and the free enterprise system in regular subject matter and in reading courses and in the adoption of textbooks," students will be provided oral and written narratives as well as other informational texts that can help them to become thoughtful, active citizens who appreciate the basic democratic values of our state and nation.

**(b) Knowledge and skills.**

(1) Writing/purposes. The student writes in a variety of forms, including business, personal, literary, and persuasive texts, for various audiences and purposes. The student is expected to:

(A) write in various forms with particular emphasis on business forms such as a report, memo, narrative or procedure, summary/abstract, and résumé

- (B) write in a voice and style appropriate to audience and purpose; and
  - (C) organize ideas in writing to ensure coherence, logical progression, and support for ideas.
- (2) Writing/writing processes. The student uses recursive writing processes when appropriate. The student is expected to:
- (A) use prewriting strategies to generate ideas, develop voice, and plan;
  - (B) develop drafts both alone and collaboratively by organizing and reorganizing content and by refining style to suit occasion, audience, and purpose;
  - (C) proofread writing for appropriateness of organization, content, style, and conventions;
  - (D) frequently refine selected pieces to publish for general and specific audiences; and
  - (E) use technology for aspects of creating, revising, editing, and publishing texts.
- (3) Writing/grammar/usage/conventions/spelling. The student relies increasingly on the conventions and mechanics of written English, including the rules of usage and grammar, to write clearly and effectively. The student is expected to:
- (A) produce legible work that shows accurate spelling and correct use of the conventions of punctuation and capitalization such as italics and ellipses;
  - (B) demonstrate control over grammatical elements such as subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, verb forms, and parallelism;
  - (C) compose increasingly more involved sentences that contain gerunds, participles, and infinitives in their various functions;
  - (D) produce error-free writing in the final draft; and
  - (E) use a manual of style such as Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), and The Chicago Manual of Style (CMS).
- (4) Writing/inquiry/research. The student uses writing as a tool for learning. The student is expected to:
- (A) use writing to formulate questions, refine topics, and clarify ideas;
  - (B) use writing to discover, organize, and support what is known and what needs to be learned about a topic;
  - (C) compile information from primary and secondary sources in systematic ways using available technology;
  - (D) represent information in a variety of ways such as graphics, conceptual maps, and learning logs;
  - (E) use writing as a study tool to clarify and remember information;
  - (F) compile written ideas and representations into reports, summaries, or other formats and draw conclusions; and
  - (G) analyze strategies that writers in different fields use to compose.
- (5) Writing/evaluation. The student evaluates his/her own writing and the writings of others. The student is expected to:
- (A) evaluate writing for both mechanics and content; and
  - (B) respond productively to peer review of his/her own work.

(6) Reading/word identification/vocabulary development. The student acquires an extensive vocabulary through reading and systematic word study. The student is expected to:

- (A) expand vocabulary through wide reading, listening, and discussing;
- (B) rely on context to determine meanings of words and phrases such as figurative language, connotation and denotation of words, analogies, idioms, and technical vocabulary;
- (C) apply meanings of prefixes, roots, and suffixes in order to comprehend;
- (D) research word origins as an aid to understanding meanings, derivations, and spellings as well as influences on the English language;
- (E) use reference material such as glossary, dictionary, thesaurus, and available technology to determine precise meaning and usage;
- (F) discriminate between connotative and denotative meanings and interpret the connotative power of words; and
- (G) read and understand analogies.

(7) Reading/comprehension. The student comprehends selections using a variety of strategies. The student is expected to:

- (A) establish and adjust purpose for reading such as to find out, to understand, to interpret, to enjoy, and to solve problems;
- (B) draw upon his/her own background to provide connection to texts;
- (C) monitor his/her own reading strategies and make modifications when understanding breaks down such as by rereading, using resources, and questioning;
- (D) construct images such as graphic organizers based on text descriptions and text structures;
- (E) analyze text structures such as compare/contrast, cause/effect, and chronological order for how they influence understanding;
- (F) produce summaries of texts by identifying main ideas and their supporting details;
- (G) draw inferences such as conclusions, generalizations, and predictions and support them with text evidence and experience;
- (H) use study strategies such as note taking, outlining, and using study-guide questions to better understand texts; and
- (I) read silently with comprehension for a sustained period of time.

(8) Reading/variety of texts. The student reads extensively and intensively for different purposes and in varied sources, including American literature. The student is expected to:

- (A) read to be entertained, to appreciate a writer's craft, to be informed, to take action, and to discover models to use in his/her own writing;
- (B) read in varied sources such as diaries, journals, textbooks, maps, newspapers, letters, speeches, memoranda, electronic texts, and other media;
- (C) read American and other world literature, including classic and contemporary works; and
- (D) interpret the possible influences of the historical context on literary works.

(9) Reading/culture. The student reads widely, including American literature, to increase knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements across cultures. The student is expected to:

(A) recognize distinctive and shared characteristics of cultures through reading;  
and

(B) compare text events with his/her own and other readers' experiences.

(10) Reading/literary response. The student expresses and supports responses to various types of texts. The student is expected to:

(A) respond to informational and aesthetic elements in texts such as discussions, journal entries, oral interpretations, enactments, and graphic displays;

(B) use elements of text to defend, clarify, and negotiate responses and interpretations; and

(C) analyze written reviews of literature, film, and performance to compare with his/her own responses.

(11) Reading/literary concepts. The student analyzes literary elements for their contributions to meaning in literary texts. The student is expected to:

(A) compare and contrast aspects of texts such as themes, conflicts, and allusions both within and across texts;

(B) analyze relevance of setting and time frame to text's meaning;

(C) describe the development of plot and identify conflicts and how they are addressed and resolved;

(D) analyze the melodies of literary language, including its use of evocative words and rhythms;

(E) connect literature to historical contexts, current events, and his/her own experiences; and

(F) understand literary forms and terms such as author, drama, biography, myth, tall tale, dialogue, tragedy and comedy, structure in poetry, epic, ballad, protagonist, antagonist, paradox, analogy, dialect, and comic relief as appropriate to the selections being read.

(12) Reading/analysis/evaluation. The student reads critically to evaluate texts and the authority of sources. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze the characteristics of clearly written texts, including the patterns of organization, syntax, and word choice;

(B) evaluate the credibility of information sources, including how the writer's motivation may affect that credibility; and

(C) recognize logical, deceptive, and/or faulty modes of persuasion in texts.

(13) Reading/inquiry/research. The student reads in order to research self-selected and assigned topics. The student is expected to:

(A) generate relevant, interesting, and researchable questions;

(B) locate appropriate print and non-print information using text and technical resources, including databases and the Internet;

(C) use text organizers such as overviews, headings, and graphic features to locate and categorize information;

- (D) produce reports and research projects in varying forms for audiences; and
  - (E) draw conclusions from information gathered.
- (14) Listening/speaking/critical listening. The student listens attentively for a variety of purposes. The student is expected to:
- (A) demonstrate proficiency in each aspect of the listening process such as focusing attention, interpreting, and responding;
  - (B) use effective strategies for listening such as prepares for listening, identifies the types of listening, and adopts appropriate strategies;
  - (C) demonstrate proficiency in critical, empathic, appreciative, and reflective listening;
  - (D) use effective strategies to evaluate his/her own listening such as asking questions for clarification, comparing and contrasting interpretations with others, and researching points of interest or contention; and
  - (E) use effective listening to provide appropriate feedback in a variety of situations such as conversations and discussions and informative, persuasive, or artistic presentations.
- (15) Listening/speaking/purposes. The student speaks clearly and effectively for a variety of purposes. The student is expected to:
- (A) use the conventions of oral language effectively;
  - (B) use informal, standard, and technical language effectively to meet the needs of purpose, audience, occasion, and task;
  - (C) communicate effectively in conversations and group discussions while problem solving, and planning;
  - (D) use effective verbal and nonverbal strategies in presenting oral messages;
  - (E) ask clear questions for a variety of purposes and respond appropriately to the questions of others; and
  - (F) make relevant contributions in conversations and discussions.
- (16) Listening/speaking/evaluation. The student evaluates and critiques oral presentations and performances. The student is expected to:
- (A) apply valid criteria to analyze, evaluate, and critique informative and persuasive messages;
  - (B) apply valid criteria to analyze, evaluate, and critique literary performances;
  - (C) use praise and suggestions of others to improve his/her own communication; and
  - (D) identify and analyze the effect of aesthetic elements within literary texts such as character development, rhyme, imagery, and language.
- (17) Listening/speaking/presentations. The student prepares, organizes, and presents informative and persuasive messages. The student is expected to:
- (A) present and advance a clear thesis and logical points, claims, or arguments to support messages;
  - (B) choose valid proofs from reliable sources to support claims;
  - (C) use appropriate appeals to support claims and arguments;
  - (D) use language and rhetorical strategies skillfully in informative and persuasive

- messages;
- (E) make effective nonverbal strategies such as pitch and tone of voice, posture, and eye contact; and
  - (F) make informed, accurate, truthful, and ethical presentations.
- (18) Listening/speaking/literary interpretations. The student prepares, organizes, plans, and presents literary interpretations. The student is expected to:
- (A) make valid interpretations of a variety of literary texts;
  - (B) justify the choice of verbal and nonverbal performance techniques by referring to the analysis and interpretations of the text; and
  - (C) present interpretations such as telling stories, performing original works, and interpreting poems and stories for a variety of audiences.
- (19) Viewing/representing/interpretation. The student understands and interprets visual representations. The student is expected to:
- (A) describe how meanings are communicated through elements of design, including shape, line, color, and texture;
  - (B) analyze relationships, ideas, and cultures as represented in various media; and
  - (C) distinguish the purposes of various media forms such as informative texts, entertaining texts, and advertisements.
- (20) Viewing/representing/analysis. The student analyzes and critiques the significance of visual representations. The student is expected to:
- (A) investigate the source of a media presentation or production such as who made it and why it was made;
  - (B) deconstruct media to get the main idea of the message's content;
  - (C) evaluate and critique the persuasive techniques of media messages such as glittering generalities, logical fallacies, and symbols;
  - (D) recognize how visual and sound techniques or design convey messages in media such as special effects, editing, camera angles, reaction shots, sequencing, and music;
  - (E) recognize genres such as nightly news, newsmagazines, and documentaries and identify the unique properties of each; and
  - (F) compare, contrast, and critique various media coverage of the same event such as in newspapers, television, and on the Internet.
- (21) Viewing/representing/production. The student produces visual representations that communicate with others. The student is expected to:
- (A) examine the effect of media on constructing his/her own perception of reality;
  - (B) use a variety of forms and technologies such as videos, photographs, and web pages to communicate specific messages;
  - (C) use a range of techniques to plan and create a media text and reflect critically on the work produced;
  - (D) create media products to include a seven- to ten-minute documentary, ad campaigns, political campaigns, or video adaptations of literary texts to engage specific audiences; and

(E) create, present, test, and revise a project and analyze a response using data-gathering techniques such as questionnaires, group discussions, and feedback forms.

*Source: The provisions of this 110.44 adopted to be effective September 1, 1998, 22 TexReg 7549.*

APPENDIX B:  
PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM FOR TUTORS AND TUTEES

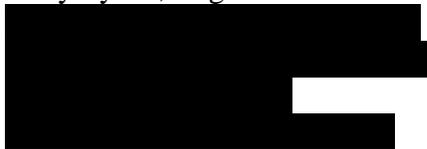
Parental Permission Form

Project Title: The effects of peer tutoring for English language development with high school English as a Second Language (ESL) students.

Performance Site:



Investigator: The following investigator is available for questions, Monday - Friday, 7:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.  
Mary Pyron, English III Teacher



Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this research project is to determine if peer tutoring is an effective method for assisting secondary ESL students with overcoming the language barriers in high school, both in mainstream classes and on the state's high stakes testing (the TAKS test).

Inclusion Criteria:

Senior ESL students who have not passed all parts of the TAKS test, and senior native English or bilingual speakers (as hired by the investigator).

Exclusion Criteria:

ESL students who are not seniors (and therefore have not yet taken the exit-level TAKS test), or ESL seniors who have passed the English / Language Arts portion of the TAKS test.

Description Of Study:

Participants who will be tutored will be enrolled in an ESL English course during their fourth period class (the last period of every other class day). Students will be pulled out of that class for forty minutes to be tutored by a senior native or bilingual English speaker on their English coursework and TAKS materials. Students will then return to their fourth period class for regular instruction.

Participants who will serve as tutors will have a filler class scheduled during fourth period to work with two ESL students each class period.

Tutoring will begin during the third week of school and will continue through the end of the 2005-2006 school year. All tutors will be trained in tutoring theory and practice prior to any tutoring sessions.

**Benefits:** Participants will have the opportunity to learn English from another student who can understand their struggles with language acquisition. Participants will benefit from the one-on-one instruction that is impossible in most secondary classrooms. Tutors will gain valuable tutoring / teaching experience.

**Risks:** There are no known risks.

**Right to Refuse:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Students will only become part of this study, either as tutors or tutees, if both student and parent agree to the student's participation. At any time, participants may withdraw from the study or the participant's parent may withdraw him/her from the study without penalty. The study will have no impact on any student's grades or class standings.

**Privacy:** The participants' (both tutors and tutees) school records (including class grades, TAKS scores, or other test scores) will be reviewed by the investigator. Results of the study (including school records as they apply to the study) may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included with the results. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

**Financial Information:** There is no cost for participation in the study.

**Signatures:** The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator (Spanish speakers: please direct questions to Mr. [REDACTED], Assistant Principal, Hawthorne Senior High School). If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact [REDACTED]. I will allow my child to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this form.

---

Signature of Parent / Guardian

---

Date

Child Assent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to be in the study to determine if peer tutoring will help increase my proficiency in English.

I understand the following:

- Inclusion in this study does not substitute for regular class work;
- I will not be given any additional homework from the tutors (though I may work on extra / supplementary work during tutoring);
- This study will not necessarily affect my course grades or TAKS scores, either positively or negatively;
- I will work my tutor either on class work or TAKS work;
- I will follow all classroom and school rules while I am being tutored and during the transition from ESL classroom to tutoring classroom;
- I can stop being in this study at any time without penalty;
- My parents, the investigator, or school administrators may remove me from the study at any time;
- The tutors and the investigator will discuss my progress during training, and the investigator will discuss my progress with my regular classroom teacher and the ESL teacher, but no personal information will be discussed outside of the tutoring and/or training environment.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Permiso del Padre o Tutor

Título del

proyecto: La utilidad de la asesoría en pareja con los alumnos de inglés como segundo idioma a nivel preparatoria.

Sede:

[REDACTED]

Investigador: Mary Pyron, Maestra de inglés - nivel III

[REDACTED]

Objetivo

del estudio: El propósito de la presente investigación es determinar si la asesoría en pareja resulta ser un método productivo en cuanto a la facilitación de la integración lingüística a nivel preparatoria de los estudiantes de inglés como segundo idioma provenientes de nivel secundaria. Lo anterior es necesario tanto en las clases cotidianas así como en los exámenes estatales del TAKS.

Perfil del

participante : Los estudiantes de último año que no han pasado exitosamente todas las secciones del examen TAKS, y también los alumnos de inglés como lengua nativa o anglohablantes así como los alumnos bilingües seleccionados a la discreción de los investigadores.

Perfil del

no

participante: Los estudiantes de inglés como segundo idioma que no pertenecen al último año y por lo tanto no han presentado el examen TAKS como requisito de salida o los alumnos de último año que han pasado exitosamente la sección del dominio del lenguaje inglés en dicho examen.

Resumen

delestudio: Los participantes que recibirán asesoría serán inscritos en un curso de inglés durante la cuarta hora(es decir, la última hora de cada horario escolar de cada tercer día). Los participantes serán solicitados y saldrán de esa clase por una duración de cuarenta minutos. Estos alumnos serán asesorados en el contenido de su clase de inglés así como en el contenido del examen TAKS, por alumnos nativos de habla inglés o por alumnos bilingües que pertenecen al último año de la preparatoria. Posteriormente,

los alumnos regresarán a la clase de la cuarta hora y seguirán con la instrucción normal.

Los participantes cuya función es de asesor tendrán programada una clase de reemplazo durante la cuarta hora para trabajar con dos alumnos de inglés como segundo idioma.

Las asesorías darán inicio durante la tercera semana del semestre y durarán hasta finales del año escolar 2005 a 2006. Todos los asesores serán capacitados en la teoría de los métodos de asesoría y tendrán oportunidades de práctica y ensayo antes de comenzar las sesiones oficiales.

**Beneficios:** Los participantes tendrán la oportunidad de aprender el idioma inglés a través de otro alumno que se identifica con las dificultades de aprendizaje de un idioma extranjero. Los participantes aprovecharán la posibilidad de recibir la instrucción personalizada e individual que es imposible recibir en la mayoría de los contextos educativos de la secundaria. Los asesores obtendrán experiencia muy valiosa en la enseñanza y la asesoría.

**Riesgos:** No existe ningún riesgo evidente.

**Derecho de no aceptar:** La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Los estudiantes se integrarán en el estudio en calidad de asesor o en calidad de alumno sólo con el consentimiento del alumno mismo y del padre o tutor del alumno. Los participantes guardan el derecho de salir del estudio en cualquier momento sin gravamen. El estudio no afectará de ninguna forma las calificaciones o nivel del alumno.

**Discreción:** El historial académico (tales como las calificaciones obtenidas en las materias, resultados del TAKS, u otros resultados) de los participantes (tanto los asesores como los alumnos) serán analizado por el investigador. Los resultados del estudio (esto incluye el historial académico en cuanto a su relevancia al estudio) podrían ser publicados sin divulgar la identificación del participante. La identidad del participante permanecerá guardada a menos que la divulgación del participante sea exigida por la ley.

**Costos:** No hay costo ninguno.

**Refrendos:** Los detalles de este estudio me han sido explicados y cualquier duda ha sido aclarada. Puedo dirigir cualquier otra pregunta del estudio al investigador (Los hispanohablantes pueden dirigir sus preguntas al Sr. [REDACTED], director asistente de la preparatoria [REDACTED]).



Formato de asentimiento del alumno

Yo, \_\_\_\_\_, acepto participar en el estudio que tiene fines de investigar si la asesoría en pareja es una herramienta útil para mejorar mi competencia en el idioma inglés.

Yo entiendo y estoy de acuerdo con lo siguiente:

- 1 La participación en este estudio no sustituirá el trabajo normal de mis clases;
- 2 Los asesores no me asignarán tarea (pero durante la asesoría puede ser que haya trabajo adicional);
- 3 Este estudio no indica que afectará mis calificaciones de forma negativa o positiva, ni en mis cursos cotidianos ni en los resultados del TAKS;
- 4 Enfocaré las sesiones de asesoría, en el contenido de mis clases o del TAKS;
- 5 Respetaré todo reglamento del salón de clase tanto como el reglamento de la escuela en general, mientras asisto a las sesiones de asesoría y también durante el traslado del salón de inglés como segundo idioma al salón de asesoría;
- 6 Guardo el derecho de abandonar el estudio sin cualquier gravamen;
- 7 Puedo ser excluido del estudio en cualquier momento a petición de mis padres, el investigador o por la administración escolar;
- 8 Los asesores y el investigador analizarán mi progreso durante el estudio y el investigador lo analizará con mi maestro/a de salón y con mi maestro/a de inglés como segundo idioma. La información de calidad personal no será divulgada fuera del ambiente educativo.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del alumno

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del testigo

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

APPENDIX C:  
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Confidentiality Agreement

Tutors: Please read, sign, date, and return the following confidentiality agreement.

As a bilingual tutor at [REDACTED] during the 2005-2006 school year, I understand that I will have limited access to confidential information about the student(s) I will tutor. I hereby acknowledge that I will not repeat any of the information made accessible to me, either as a result of the tutoring process or from the tutee him/herself, to any person at [REDACTED] with the exception of Ms. Mary Pyron or a campus administrator. If any other person asks me about the program, I will direct their questions to the appropriate staff on campus. I understand that confidential information consists of, but is not limited to, the following types of information:

1. Names of the students in tutoring,
2. TAKS or other standardized test scores of the students in tutoring,
3. Numeric or letter grades of the students in tutoring,
4. Problems I encounter with students when tutoring,
5. Successes I have with students in tutoring, and
6. Demographic data of students in tutoring.

I understand that I will be immediately terminated should I divulge any of this information to any other students or teachers at [REDACTED]. My signature below indicates that I have read and understand this agreement.

I also give Ms. Pyron permission to access my course grades, and I understand I will be suspended from the program should I not fail to maintain passing grades in all of my classes.

Finally, I understand that this is a job, and the students I tutor depend on me to be present when I am supposed to be. I know that, if I am absent, I will place undue hardship on other tutors. I acknowledge that, if I am going to be absent, I will call Ms. Pyron to let her know as soon as possible so that she can make other arrangements for the day.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX D:  
TUTOR APPLICATION

Tutor Application

Thank you for your interest in tutoring! Please complete the following application. Applicants who leave out information will not be considered for employment. Please return your application no later than Monday, May 2, 2005, to Ms. Pyron in room [REDACTED].

<u>Demographic Information</u>	
Name: _____	Date of Birth: _____
Address: _____	Phone Number: _____
Language(s) spoken fluently: _____	
Approximate GPA: _____	

2005-2006 Course Schedule	
1 <sup>st</sup> : _____	2 <sup>nd</sup> : _____
3 <sup>rd</sup> : _____	4 <sup>th</sup> : _____
5 <sup>th</sup> : _____	6 <sup>th</sup> : _____
7 <sup>th</sup> : _____	8 <sup>th</sup> : _____
Note: All tutors <i>must</i> have a filler during 4 <sup>th</sup> period.	

Please answer the following questions as thoroughly as possible.

1. Do you have any tutoring experience?

2. What are your plans after [REDACTED], both in college and beyond?
  
3. Why do you want to be a tutor?
  
4. What is your biggest strength? Your biggest weakness?
  
5. What other activities are you involved in?

In addition to completing this application, you will need to obtain references from two teachers who know you, both as a student and as a role model for other students.

Release Form

My signature below indicates my permission for Ms. Pyron to examine my TAKS scores to ensure I have passed all parts of TAKS. In addition, I give her permission to verify my grade point average and any other demographic information necessary to ensure my acceptability for employment as a tutor.

\_\_\_\_\_

Student Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

APPENDIX E:  
TUTEE QUESTIONNAIRE

**Basic Information**

Where are you from?  
How long have you lived here?  
Do you have any family living here with you?  
What other language is spoken at home?  
Does anyone at home speak English?

**Personal Information**

How old are you?  
What do you do for fun?  
Do you read?  
What is your favorite book?  
What is your favorite movie?  
What do you watch on TV?  
What type of music do you enjoy?  
Do you work? Where?  
Who is your role model?  
What has been your greatest accomplishment?

**School Related**

What is your favorite subject?  
What subject do you struggle with the most?  
Are you involved in any school activities?  
Why did you join this program?  
What do you expect to get out of tutoring?  
What are your goals after high school?

APPENDIX F:  
DAILY TUTORING LOG

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Tutor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Tutee Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Is this your regular tutee?    Yes                      No

What kind of communication did you focus on today? (Circle all that apply)

Reading                      Speaking                      Listening                      Writing

Describe the types of assignment(s) you worked on with the tutee.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Were these assignments part of the specific work for a course?    Yes                      No

Did you stop in the middle of an assignment?                      Yes                      No

Describe your reactions to the conference. Did the tutee make any breakthroughs? Do you have specific concerns that need to be addressed immediately? Is the tutee having a specific problem that you aren't sure how to handle? How can I/we help?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX G:  
MAZE PROCEDURE

Reading Level: 6 UG (*The Chocolate War*)

Brother Leon was getting ready to put on his show. Jerry knew the symptoms—all the guys knew them. Most of them were \_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_ and had been in Leon's \_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_ only a month \_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_ so but the teacher's \_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_ had already emerged. First, Leon \_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_ them a reading \_\_\_\_6\_\_\_\_. Then he'd pace up \_\_\_\_7\_\_\_\_ down, up and down, \_\_\_\_8\_\_\_\_, sighing, wandering through the \_\_\_\_9\_\_\_\_, the blackboard pointer poised \_\_\_\_10\_\_\_\_ his hand, the pointer \_\_\_\_11\_\_\_\_ used either like a \_\_\_\_12\_\_\_\_'s baton or a musketeer's \_\_\_\_13\_\_\_\_. He'd use the tip to push around a book on a desk or to flick a kid's necktie.

Directions: Circle the word you believe is correct for each blank.

- |    |                                   |     |                                   |     |                                  |
|----|-----------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|----------------------------------|
| 1. | animals<br>freshmen<br>beautiful  | 6.  | assignment<br>talking<br>vacation | 11. | he<br>she<br>dogs                |
| 2. | class<br>abrupt<br>dreams         | 7.  | or<br>it<br>and                   | 12. | conductor<br>gymnast<br>twirling |
| 3. | and<br>or<br>if                   | 8.  | restless<br>relaxed<br>into       | 13. | stick<br>walking<br>sword        |
| 4. | whereabouts<br>reading<br>pattern | 9.  | running<br>aisles<br>classrooms   |     |                                  |
| 5. | passed<br>cat<br>gave             | 10. | beautiful<br>above<br>in          |     |                                  |

Reading Level: 5 MG (*A Wrinkle in Time*)

The haunted house was half in the shadows of the clump of elms in which it stood. The elms were almost \_\_\_\_\_1\_\_\_\_\_, now, and the ground \_\_\_\_\_2\_\_\_\_\_ the house was yellow \_\_\_\_\_3\_\_\_\_\_ damp leaves. The late \_\_\_\_\_4\_\_\_\_\_ light had a greenish \_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_ which the blank windows \_\_\_\_\_6\_\_\_\_\_ in a sinister way. \_\_\_\_\_7\_\_\_\_\_ unhinged shutter thumped. Something \_\_\_\_\_8\_\_\_\_\_ creaked. Meg did not \_\_\_\_\_9\_\_\_\_\_ that the house had \_\_\_\_\_10\_\_\_\_\_ reputation for being haunted. A \_\_\_\_\_11\_\_\_\_\_ was nailed across the \_\_\_\_\_12\_\_\_\_\_ door, but Charles \_\_\_\_\_13\_\_\_\_\_ the way around to \_\_\_\_\_14\_\_\_\_\_ back. The door there appeared to be nailed shut, too, but Charles knocked, and the door swung slowly outward, creaking on rusty hinges.

1. unfurnished  
bare  
running

6. pondered  
reflected  
table

11. board  
scarf  
throw

2. around  
between  
moving

7. An  
A  
Several

12. red  
seemingly  
front

3. in  
with  
sitting

8. besides  
else  
enter

13. led  
sun  
controlled

4. daybreak  
shining  
afternoon

9. think  
wonder  
desk

14. a  
the  
run

5. cast  
range  
shed

10. some  
an  
a

APPENDIX H:  
ATTITUDE ASSESSMENT

**ATTITUDE ASSESSMENT**

Directions: Read each of the following statements, and decide whether you agree or disagree with each. Mark your answers using the following scale:

- If you agree strongly, mark SA (strongly agree)
- If you agree, but only “sort of,” mark A (agree)
- If you disagree strongly, mark SD (strongly disagree)
- If you disagree, but only “sort of,” mark D (disagree)

Do not spend too much time on any statement, and remember to answer every statement honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. If you get confused, think about the things that have happened to you to help you decide.

1. I am sure that I can learn English.	SA	A	D	SD
2. My teachers are interested in my progress in English.	SA	A	D	SD
3. Knowing English will help me make money.	SA	A	D	SD
4. I have a lot of friends at [REDACTED].	SA	A	D	SD
5. I don't think I could do advanced English.	SA	A	D	SD
6. English will not be important in my life's work.	SA	A	D	SD
7. Reading in English class is fun.	SA	A	D	SD
8. Getting a teacher to give me help in English is a problem.	SA	A	D	SD
9. English is hard for me.	SA	A	D	SD
10. I don't talk in class because I don't want people to laugh at me.	SA	A	D	SD
11. I'll need English for my future job.	SA	A	D	SD
12. I feel like an outsider at [REDACTED].	SA	A	D	SD
13. I am sure of myself when I write in English.	SA	A	D	SD
14. I don't expect to use English after I graduate.	SA	A	D	SD
15. I would talk to my English teacher about a career that uses English.	SA	A	D	SD
16. I have a hard time writing in English.	SA	A	D	SD
17. People make fun of me when I try to speak English.	SA	A	D	SD
18. It's hard to get English teachers to respect me.	SA	A	D	SD
19. English is a worthwhile, necessary subject.	SA	A	D	SD
20. I don't like to read in English.	SA	A	D	SD
21. I fit in well at [REDACTED].	SA	A	D	SD
22. I'm not the type to do well in English.	SA	A	D	SD
23. My teachers have encouraged me to do				

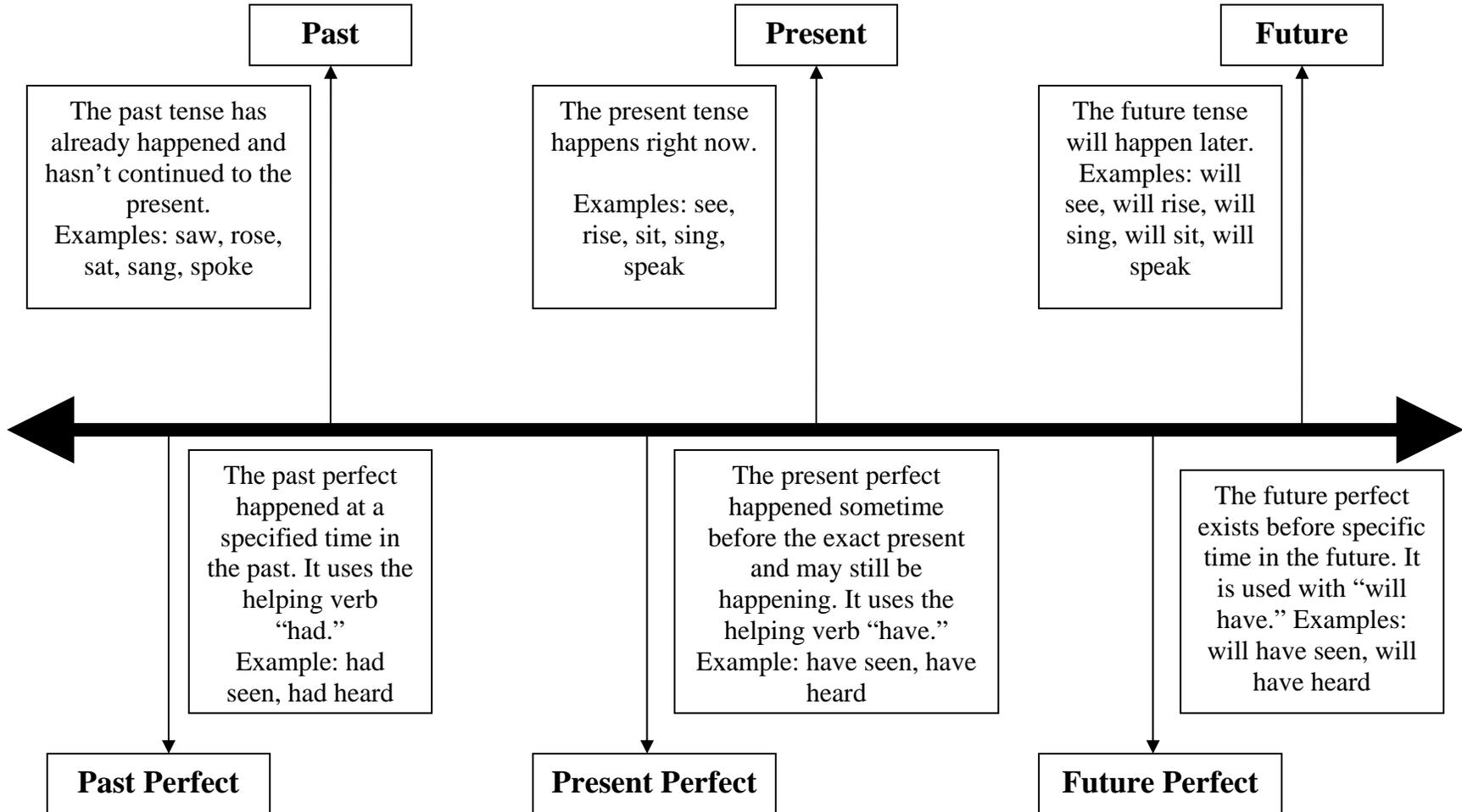
well in English.	SA	A	D	SD
24. Taking English is a waste of time.	SA	A	D	SD
25. English has been my worst subject.	SA	A	D	SD
26. I think I could handle an advanced English course.	SA	A	D	SD
27. My teachers probably think advanced English would be a waste of time for me.	SA	A	D	SD
28. I will use English as an adult.	SA	A	D	SD
29. I see English as something I won't use after high school.	SA	A	D	SD
30. I feel that English teachers ignore me because it's hard for me to speak "correct" English.	SA	A	D	SD
31. I can handle other subjects ok, but I have a hard time with English.	SA	A	D	SD
32. I can get good grades in English.	SA	A	D	SD
33. I'll need a good grasp of English for future work.	SA	A	D	SD
34. Doing well in English is not important for my future.	SA	A	D	SD
35. My teachers would not take me seriously if I told them I wanted a career using English.	SA	A	D	SD
36. I am sure I could do advanced work in English.	SA	A	D	SD
37. English is not important for my life.	SA	A	D	SD
38. I'm no good in English.	SA	A	D	SD
39. I study English because I know how useful it is.	SA	A	D	SD
40. English teachers have made me feel I can succeed in English.	SA	A	D	SD
41. My English skills are steadily improving.	SA	A	D	SD
42. I am able to express myself in written English.	SA	A	D	SD
43. Having a high school diploma is important to me.	SA	A	D	SD
44. I usually understand what my teachers are saying in the classroom.	SA	A	D	SD

APPENDIX I:  
THE PICTURE OF COURAGE



Image found at <http://careforthesoul.com/unframed.html>.

APPENDIX J: VERB TENSE CONTINUUM USED IN TUTORIALS



## Verb Tense Explanations

1. Principal parts of verbs: All verbs are derived from these parts!
  - a. Base form or infinitive (~~bring, sing, hurt~~)
  - b. Present participle uses a form of “be” or “have” (bringing, singing, hurting)
  - c. Past (brought, sang, hurt)
  - d. Past participle uses a form of “be” or “have” (brought, sung, hurt)

Note: Present participle and past participle require helping verbs (forms of *be* and *have*) to form tenses

Note #2: The English suffix *-ing* is equivalent to the Spanish *-ando* and *-iendo*.

Note #3: The English suffix *-d* or *-ed* is equivalent to the Spanish *-ado* or *-ido*

Examples: I sing in the shower. (~~infinitive form of verb~~)  
I am singing in the shower. (present participle)  
I sang in the shower yesterday. (past)  
I have sung in the shower (past participle)

A participle is a verb tense that can be used as an adjective.

The forms of the verb “to be” are: am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been

2. The progressive tenses
  - a. Each of the six tenses on the other side of the page has the progressive form, which expresses continuing action or state of being. It consists of the appropriate tense of *be* plus the present participle of a verb.
  - b. Present progressive: am seeing, is seeing, are seeing
  - c. Past progressive: was seeing, were seeing
  - d. Future progressive: will be seeing
  - e. Present perfect progressive: have been seeing, has been seeing
  - f. Past perfect progressive: had been seeing
  - g. Future perfect progressive: will have been seeing
3. The six tenses
  - a. Present tense: an action that is occurring now, in the present.
    - i. Martina **shoots** the ball (present)

- ii. The fans **are cheering** wildly (present progressive)
- b. Past tense: an action that occurred in the past and did not continue into the present.
  - i. The runner **fell** and **injured** his knee (past)
  - ii. He **was trying** to break the record for that event (past progressive)
- c. Future tense: an action that will occur—uses the helping verb *will* or *shall*.
  - i. The president **will return** today (future)
  - ii. We **will be holding** a press conference at noon (future progressive)
- d. Present perfect tense: an action that occurred at an indefinite time in the past—uses the helping verb *have* or *has*.
  - i. They **have entered** the information into the computer (present perfect)
  - ii. Who **has been using** this computer? (present perfect progressive)

Note: Do not use the present perfect to express a specific time in the past. Use past tense.
- e. Past perfect tense: an action that ended before some other past action—uses the helping verb *had*.
  - i. He **had traveled** several miles today (past perfect)
  - ii. He discovered he **had been misreading** the road map (past perfect progressive)
- f. Future perfect tense: an action that will end before some other future occurrence—uses *shall have* or *will have*.
  - i. By the time school starts, you **will have saved** enough money (future perfect)
  - ii. By then, you **will have been working** for a year (future perfect progressive)

There are sample exercises for each of these tenses in the yellow *Elements of Language* books on pages 644-671.

## VITA

Mary Pyron received her Bachelor of Arts in English from Lyon College in Batesville, Arkansas, and her Master of Arts in English from Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. She served at a secondary school named here as Hawthorne Senior High (HSH) for three years, where she taught regular and honors English III, creative writing, and independent study. While at that school, she served as the literary magazine sponsor for one year, as the assistant debate coach for one year, as a member of the curriculum committee for two years, as a new teacher mentor for one year, as the University Interscholastic League (UIL) literary criticism coach for two years, and as a member of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (A.V.I.D.) site team member for one year. She was also named two times to the Who's Who Among American High School Teachers, and she was honored once with the Nobel Prize for Teaching. She is currently a secondary English IV teacher another secondary school in Katy, Texas, a suburb of Houston.

Through her master's and doctoral work, Mary worked in the writing centers at both Southeast Missouri State University (as a tutor) and Louisiana State University (as the assistant director). This early influence on peer tutoring led her to design her own teaching pedagogy based on a peer tutoring model, and she used those experiences in the writing centers as a basis for this study.