English-Language Learners’ Reading Achievement: Dialectical Relationships Between Policy and Practices in Meaning-Making Opportunities

Mariana Pacheco
University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

ABSTRACT
This case study of reading activity in third-grade bilingual classrooms at a state-sanctioned “successful” school examines the influences of the California accountability framework—Proposition 227, No Child Left Behind, and the federal Reading First program—on shifting beliefs and practices around what “counts” as reading. The researcher used cultural-historical theoretical perspectives on the socioculturally mediated nature of teaching and learning to examine the joint construction of reading activity as well as account for the institutional constraints within which teachers and their students accomplished this work. Specifically, she employed participant observations and video recordings of Spanish and English language arts instructional periods, in-depth teacher and administrator interviews, a collection of student work samples, and a collection of relevant school and district documents to examine the mediation of reading activity across school, district, and state and federal policy contexts. To examine the dialectical relationship between policy and practice, she analyzes two bilingual classrooms in depth through heuristic tools that illuminate how particular discourse patterns and participation structures align broadly with policy-sanctioned notions of what counts as reading. Analyses of narrative texts and transcripts illustrate that this alignment had significant implications for English-language learners’ meaning-making opportunities. This analysis contributes a theoretical conceptualization of reading activity as implicated in the dialectical relationships between policies, practices, resources, and beliefs around what counts as reading across institutional contexts and how these processes affect English-language learners’ reading potential.

While reading researchers and practitioners continue to grapple with ways to enhance the capabilities of young struggling readers, recent far-reaching educational reforms in California have raised concerns about the consequences of these reforms on the academic potential for millions of English-language learners (ELLs). Over the past decade, the convergence of state and federal policies has institutionalized constructions of reading that emphasize discrete reading skills and subskills (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary). Whereas some reading researchers argue that these skills and subskills are essential aspects of the reading process (Adams, 1990; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), others have expressed concerns about how narrow skills-based reading approaches might negatively affect ELLs from nondominant communities (Butler, Orr, Gutiérrez, & Hakuta, 2000; Gándara et al., 2000; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009; Olson, 2007).

In 1998, California voters approved Proposition 227, an initiative that virtually eliminated primary language use in public schools and significantly altered the few bilingual programs in existence (Gándara et al., 2000). Within several years, the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and its state reading grant program institutionalized an accountability framework that relied primarily on students’ performance on English standardized assessments, penalizing schools and districts if subgroups (e.g., ELLs) failed to demonstrate adequate yearly progress. Together, this framework coalesced around standardized approaches to learning English, to the teaching and learning of reading, and to assessment (Abedi, 2004; Gutiérrez, Asato, & Baquedano-López, 2000; Wright, 2005).
Still, research has illustrated that even in restrictive policy contexts, practitioners employ some flexibility in curriculum decision making and draw on their beliefs, expertise, experiences, and ethos in their organization of reading practices, particularly for young struggling readers (Coburn, 2006; Diaz & Flores, 2001; Hoffman & Pearson, 2000; Olson, 2007). To explore how the accountability framework constrained or enhanced this flexibility, I undertook a case study of reading activity in bilingual classrooms at a state-designated "high-achieving" school that maintained its English–Spanish bilingual program even after Proposition 227 mandated English only. This context allowed for an examination of how teachers coordinated reading practices for ELLs with a broad range of English- and Spanish-language capabilities, reading achievement levels, and schooling experiences in a shifting reform landscape.

This study was informed by cultural-historical theoretical perspectives on the socioculturally mediated nature of human learning and development (Cole, 1996; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Informed by this view, research questions centered on the sociocultural organization of reading practices in classrooms where ELLs were being transitioned to English-only reading. As cultural-historical approaches conceptualize learning as "stretching across social and material environments" (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 189), research questions also explored alignments or misalignments between bilingual classroom reading practices and school, district, state, and federal policy contexts through in-depth interviews with school and district practitioners, as well as supporting school and district documents.

For analytic purposes, I discuss these layers of context independent of one another; in the final discussion section, I draw connections between classroom reading practices and policies and practices across broader institutional contexts. Thus, this theoretical approach guided an analysis into the dialectical relationship between policies, practices, resources, and beliefs about the extent to which what "counts" as reading affected ELLs' reading potential (Coburn, 2006; McDermott & Varenne, 1999; Olson, 2007; Roth & Lee, 2007; Smith, 2004).

In my discussion of the findings, I first elaborate on how local interpretations of the current English-only accountability framework promoted an alignment between high-stakes assessments, curriculum standards, and the district's reading program and classroom reading practices—in Spanish and English. Next, I analyze reading practices, employing Gutiérrez's (1993) characterization of classroom scripts as a heuristic tool to illuminate how the highly complex social interactions afforded sense-making opportunities for ELLs and expanded their academic potential. Broadly speaking, analyses of bilingual classroom reading events (e.g., comprehension-based discussions) demonstrate that the realization of what counts as reading across social and institutional contexts resulted in narrower approaches to reading skills and dispositions. Finally, I conclude this discussion with implications of this research for practitioners, administrators, teacher educators, and reading researchers.

The Policy Context: A Brief Overview

In this section, I begin with a brief overview of state and federal accountability systems, reading policy, and English-only policy to contextualize how social actors made sense of these convergent policies at Pacific Elementary School in the Alvarez School District (all names are pseudonyms) and how local practices substantiated this framework. The timeline in Figure 1 illustrates this convergence.

The trend toward educational policies that mandate particular curriculum programs, emphasize particular reading approaches, and privilege norm-referenced assessments in a high-stakes context has its roots in the standards movement, whereby schooling was redefined in relation to a nation perceived to be "at risk" (Apple, 2001; Pinar, Reynolds, Slatery, & Taubman, 1995; Smith, 2004; Spring, 2001). In California, the public school landscape changed with "back-to-basics"
reading policies in the 1990s (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1999) and the spawn of legislation that made (English) standardized tests and the state's curriculum standards the centerpiece of the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) system (California Department of Education, n.d.).

In essence, California used standardized exams and standards-based tests to evaluate students' academic progress, including student subgroups (i.e., ELLs), as reflected in school rankings determined through the Academic Performance Index (API). The STAR system, then, meant that high-poverty, high-ELL schools faced more restrictions in their testing of student subgroups and simultaneously faced increasing visibility as "low-" or "high-ranking" schools in accordance with the API. In 2001, for example, Pacific was ranked a 5 in overall comparisons and a 9 in comparison to schools with similar demographics on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest rank. At the time of this study, however, these rankings had begun to decline.

This accountability framework coincided with the 1998 passage of Proposition 227, the "English for the Children" initiative that virtually eliminated the few programs that provided ELLs with some form of primary language instruction and support. As discussed earlier, researchers have examined the consequences of Proposition 227 on ELLs' schooling experiences (Gándara et al., 2000; Green & Heras, in press; Gutiérrez et al., 2000; Parrish et al., 2002). Only a few years later, in 2002, NCLB provisions regarding reading approaches and adequate yearly progress intensified the high-stakes, English-only framework for ELLs and their teachers. While the state STAR system mandated academic progress, the federal system ratified a distinct framework for adequate yearly progress (see www2.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/apy/edpicksthtm?rc=inc). In particular, the Reading First component discussed earlier provided federal grants for state programs that corresponded with phonics-based approaches, namely those that promote mastery of discrete skills, such as phonemic awareness, believed to affect successful reading in later grades (Adams, 1990; NICHD, 2000; Snow et al., 1998).

These provisions created particular challenges for nondominant ELLs, since phonics-first approaches facilitate reading skills that are necessary but not sufficient for long-term reading success and neglect their unique language and schooling circumstances (August & Hakuta, 1997; August & Shanahan, 2006; Butler et al., 2000; Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003; Ramírez, 2000). Specifically, the issues raised by the institutionalization of reading approaches for monolingual English-speaking readers to Spanish-dominant students from nondominant communities transitioning to English-only reading were addressed in this study. Namely, I examined how third-grade bilingual teachers negotiated the increasing political stakes around reading achievement with their ELLs' social, academic, and linguistic needs.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study was informed by previous scholarly work that has examined the extent to which outcomes-based accountability frameworks and reforms have promoted skills-based, remedial approaches to the teaching and learning of literacy, particularly for struggling students from nondominant communities (Apple, 2001; del Carmen Salazar, 2008; Gutiérrez et al., 2002, Gutiérrez et al., 2009; Smith, 2004). At the same time, ELLs continue to underperform on national tests of reading achievement (Fry, 2009; Gándara et al., 2003); in 2005, for example, analyses of ELLs' reading achievement levels showed that 47% of them struggled behind their white English-speaking counterparts (Fry, 2007). Given the persistence of these students' reading underachievement, numerous researchers have addressed the consequences of remedial approaches for these struggling readers, especially at a time when accountability frameworks have become increasingly punitive.

In California and other English-only education states, for example, school practitioners are significantly constrained by policies that regulate their expansion of ELLs' social, cultural, linguistic, and intellectual capabilities in their first and second languages. As the challenges faced by ELLs and their teachers are intensified when students' primary languages are restricted, the propensity toward simplified, remedial approaches to English reading can be exacerbated (Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Moll, Diaz, Estrada, & Lopes, 1992; Olson, 2007). Moreover, instructional approaches that hone discrete, isolable reading skills and tasks significantly limit the potentially meaningful ways that students and teachers can utilize reading, language, and literacy (Block & Pressley, 2002; Campano, 2007; Cole, 1996; Freire & Macedo, 1989; Green & Heras, in press; Gutiérrez, 2008; Jiménez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1995, 1996; Luke, 2003). In particular, these approaches overemphasize "lower-level" skills, including a focus on unit-based analyses of language, vocabulary instruction, decoding, and fluency, and simultaneously draw students away from participation in social systems that facilitate expanded interpretations of the world (Cole & Griffin, 1983).

Gutiérrez et al. (2009) argued that a history of difference as deficiency has resulted in remedial courses, approaches, and curricula, and particularly where edu-
ators seek to “fix” nondominant students’ deficiencies, an ideology of remediation prevails. For these students, instruction is organized around individually accomplished tasks with generic or minimal assistance, narrow forms of assessment, “homogeneous” grouping, and an overemphasis on basic skills with little connection to content or the practices of literacy.... In the cases of California, Arizona, and Massachusetts, remedial instruction is delivered in a language other than the home language. In these states, we see how various ideologies of difference are indexed in pedagogies, practices, and assumptions about students from nondominant communities.... This ideology of remediation has potent policy implications. (p. 225)

An ideology of remediation founded on deficit-based views denies the rich sociocultural and linguistic diversity (e.g., hybrid languages, registers, codes, vernaculars, specialized vocabularies, dialects) that nondominant students practice in their homes and communities (Ek, 2008; Fought, 2003; Gee, 2004; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999; Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003; Zentella, 2005). Thus, ideologies around nondominant students’ deviation from dominant group norms are reflected in policies that promote academic achievement within a standardized English-only, skills-based, outcomes-driven framework.

For ELLs whose Spanish reading, transitional English-Spanish reading, and progression in English reading have not been sufficiently examined (August & Hakuta, 1997; Bialystok, 2007; García, 2000; Handsfield & Jiménez, 2009; Jiménez et al., 1995), policy-sanctioned remediation further jeopardizes meaning-based approaches that have been shown to build on and expand their social, cultural, intellectual, and linguistic toolkits (Gutiérrez, 2008; Martínez-Roldán & Sayer, 2006; Moll & Dworin, 1996). For example, research has demonstrated that the concern over ELLs’ linguistic (in)capacities has exacerbated the broad misperception that English-speaking ability precedes reading comprehension (García, 2000; Jiménez et al., 1995, 1996; Olson, 2007).

One revealing study by Moll et al. (1992) compared bilingual students’ participation across English- and Spanish-language reading groups. In the Spanish-language group, the students participated in qualitatively richer discussions in part because their bilingual teacher honed deep meaning making through consistent use of higher order discussion questions. In contrast, students’ participation in the English-language reading group was affected by their still developing, albeit limited, English capabilities and their English-monolingual teachers’ belief that these limited capabilities necessitated oversimplified discussions. Thus, the organization and quality of reading practices were substantially affected by teachers’ conflation of language capabilities with the quality and rigor of reading discussions. This research raises concerns about the long-term consequences of ELLs’ schooling circumstances. That is, their limited participation in deep meaning making potentially extends their construction as struggling readers, since, in policy and practice, they are denied substantial opportunities to develop the sense-making capabilities they will need across their academic trajectories.

This historical backdrop of deficit-based ideologies and their salience in social and educational policies (Valencia, 1997) impelled a theoretical framework that, rather than viewing particular linguistic and cultural forms as deficient, conceptualizes the fundamental role these forms play in human learning and development. Cultural-historical theoretical perspectives have been applied to literacy teaching and learning, and reading in particular, and conceptualize that literacy learning occurs through participation in joint activity mediated by social, cultural, and linguistic resources and tools (Cole, 1996; Cole & Griffin, 1983; Engeström, 1999; Trueba, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978, Wertsch, 1991). This view contends that individual literacy learning and development must be understood and examined as an emerging outcome of a whole activity system as participants, tools, and artifacts—as artificially organized social systems—mediate literacy and affect how students make sense of texts.

Cultural-historical, sociohistorical approaches to reading as a basic activity conceptualize a holistic, socioculturally mediated reading process that engages the social, cultural, and linguistic resources of students and teachers. Cole (1996) and his colleagues (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1982) have distinguished the cognitive consequences of a remedial approach to learning that ignores the role of social context in human learning versus an approach that “re-mediates” learning. Cole and Griffin (1983) proposed a conceptualization of reading as a basic activity system that re-mediates reading instruction and emphasizes the skills as well as the social organization of activities and contexts that facilitate semiotic mediation:

Skills are always part of activities and settings, but they only take on meaning in terms of how they are organized. So, instead of basic skills, a socio-historical approach talks about basic activities and instantiates those that are necessary and sufficient to carry out the whole process of reading in the general conditions for learning. (p. 73)

They argued that sign systems (e.g., language, reading) must function within larger basic activities to take on meaning and develop students’ conscious awareness of reading skills as components of the whole process of reading. Furthermore, the notion of mediation frames and orients assistance by teachers or expert peers as a form of re-mediation, or strategic social systems
reorganization, as opposed to the remediation that prevails for underachieving students.

Activity-based views of reading emphasize semiotics and meaning making as the object of teaching and learning through multiple mediational artifacts, both material and ideational, and rather than locate understanding solely in the teacher or in the (English) learner, these views privilege coconstructed, facilitated sense making. They emphasize the purpose and function of basic skills and the sound–symbol relationships of language(s), as well as the broader objectives of strategically coordinated, jointly constructed reading activities and contexts. Moreover, these views emphasize meaning present at the onset those skills and capabilities that are the object of reading activity; that is, reading comprehension and reading for meaning are not suspended until students master a predetermined skill set.

Several bodies of inquiry have applied Vygotsky’s (1978) conceptualization of socioculturally mediated human learning and development to literacy learning activity. Across learning environments, these inquiries have deliberately challenged deficit-oriented ideologies through the use of nondominant ELLs’ English, Spanish, bi/multilingual, and bi/multicultural toolkits and, rather than “fixing” them, explored how they have expanded students’ academic potential (Díaz & Flores, 2001; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999; Jiménez, 2000; Jiménez et al., 1995, 1996; Martínez Orellana, Pacheco, & Carbone, 2008; Moll et al., 1992; Pacheco, 2009; Pacheco & Nao, 2009; Reyes, 1992).

Martínez-Roldán and Sayer (2006), for example, investigated how Latino students exploited their bilingual/bidialectal capabilities to retell English and Spanish narrative texts in both languages to examine the affordances of such cross-linguistic tasks. Specifically, they found that in spite of the researchers’ organization of English- and Spanish-designated texts and discussions, these bilingual students nevertheless deliberately and appropriately employed their Spanglish—a kind of linguistic borderlands—into their reading retellings in fluid ways, that is, their Spanglish enabled unique forms of talk and participation.

In the study presented here, cultural-historical theoretical perspectives were employed to examine reading activity, the unit of analysis, and the ways local processes around the implementation of a standardized English-only accountability framework affected teachers’ shifting notions around the organization of reading (Pacheco, 2005). These perspectives provide processual, semiotics-driven views of reading, and while reading activity can be organized around expanded understandings of the world, it is also essential to examine the ways texts are used to decode, interpret, analyze, and interrogate the social world (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Luke & Freebody, 1997). Specifically, regarding the long-term effects of young readers’ meaning making, Luke and Freebody (1997) argued that it is essential to interrogate “whose meanings” classroom reading practices and discourses reproduce, as explained in the following:

All texts represent cultural positions, ideologies, and discourses. Many psychological models of reading have failed to take up the question of “whose meanings” will count in private and public forums. Where these questions are not raised, classrooms run the risk of a reproductive model of meaning, where teaching comprehension is about cultural assimilation and colonization, about bringing readers’ social epistemologies into critical alignment with those of a canonical corpus of texts. (p. 215)

This analysis of bilingual third-grade reading practices, then, took up the question of whose meanings counted across classrooms, teachers, and normative reading practices with a particular focus on how engagement with texts promoted the reproductive consumption of texts to the determined understanding of them as indexes of particular worldviews and political agendas. Thus, I examined how teachers expanded students’ meaning-making repertoires around school-based texts in their social organization of reading activity, particularly their emphasis on “lower-level” decoding and fixed meanings.

Teachers and students jointly mediate reading activity through normative forms of talk, interaction, and discourse. These participation structures, however, are not merely “contexts that surround” (Cole, 1996, p. 132); rather, they are the very sources of language and literacy learning. To describe and examine the social and cognitive affordances of particular participation patterns that different teachers organized, I drew on Gutiérrez’s (1993) elaboration of classroom scripts as a heuristic tool. Although she developed these categories based on her analysis of classroom data, these scripts are not exhaustive. In her ethnographic analyses of writing-process classrooms, she documented a range of scripts that participants constituted locally and over time: “A script is defined by identifying recurring patterns of activity within and across events in a classroom that members’ actions indicate are stable ways of engaging with others” (p. 341). In these classrooms, recitative scripts limited social interaction to enduring forms of initiation-response-evaluation (IRE), whereas teachers’ organization of responsive scripts attended to students’ emerging contributions during literacy events, but rarely employed them deliberately in curriculum decision making.

In comparison, responsive/collaborative scripts build on and expand students’ meaning making, as the goal of curriculum decision making is collaboratively determined between teachers and students through
unanticipated questions, challenges, and interests. Here, I employ these categories as heuristic tools to describe and analyze how classroom participation structures (Au, 1980; Erickson & Schultz, 1997; Phillips, 1972) facilitated collaborative teacher–student dialogue that expanded literacy learning opportunities.

**Methods**

**Approach to the Study**

Drawing on the work of Merriam (1998) and Yin (1989), Creswell (1994) explained that case studies involve a process by which

the researcher explores a single entity or phenomenon ("the case") bounded by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution, or social group) and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time. (p. 12)

The case in this study was reading activity, a daily practice in bilingual classrooms that was negotiated by social actors across policy, district, school, and classroom contexts. At Pacific Elementary School, this case was unique: (1) teachers in bilingual third-grade classrooms transitioned ELLs from Spanish-only to English-only reading; (2) in 2000, this high-ELL, high-poverty school was deemed successful by state criteria; and (3) the school still provided Spanish-language support for its high-ELL population despite the state's English-only mandate, Proposition 227.

Thus, bilingual third-grade classrooms at this "successful" school provided a unique opportunity to document reading activity across languages, particularly because third grade is considered an important predictor of students' future academic success (Pearson & Duke, 2002; Snow et al., 1998). Teachers delivered language arts in Spanish at the beginning of the school year and switched to English-language instruction mid-year regardless of ELLs' academic and English-speaking capabilities. In this study, I collected data from four bilingual third-grade classrooms but focused the present analysis on two classrooms, those of Mrs. Nylund and Mr. Webber. I chose these focal classrooms because, relative to their colleagues, these teachers organized a representative continuum of reading practices that reflected the concern for improved test scores to avoid punitive NCLB measures. Finally, the school's success contradicted the perception that substantial primary language support impedes English-language development and equitable schooling for ELLs (Bennett, 1985/1992; Porter, 1998, 2000).

**Studying Classroom Reading Activity**

I used ethnographic methods to study reading activity in the bilingual third-grade classrooms during the 2002–2003 school year (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1998). Research questions focused on how teachers organized reading activity for ELLs during both periods of Spanish- and English-language instruction and, moreover, on the quality of learning opportunities during the teaching and learning of reading. I observed and videotaped language arts instructional time blocks during the delivery of Spanish and English literacy to capture how teachers coordinated reading activity for a complete unit, which on average lasted between one and one-and-a-half weeks.

Across the four classrooms, teachers typically covered one story from the district anthology for a week consistently across Spanish- and English-language instruction. At times, assemblies, computer lab visits, library visits, and holidays interrupted the school week such that units either extended into the following week or were reduced by a day. Thus, I undertook participant observations for approximately two weeks per classroom, at the beginning and end of the year when teachers taught in Spanish and English, respectively. Videotaping varied across classrooms, however, because some teachers felt comfortable being recorded while others did not. To be clear, I videotaped portions of language arts time blocks to supplement my participant observations; these recordings resulted in, specifically, 12 one-hour tapes, or 12 hours of video recordings. I collected student work samples to examine whether assignments revealed insights about the learning opportunities that teachers created through assigned language arts tasks.

The study of classroom reading activity was supplemented with in-depth interviews of one to two hours each with the four third-grade bilingual teachers to examine their views about bilingual education and the role of primary language instruction and support, and their reading goals for ELLs. Additionally, I sought insights about teachers' reading practices before the recent onset of English-only and testing pressures, particularly given their student demographics, and to determine, from their perspective, how the recent convergence of educational policies had shifted their reading practices.

**Examining Dialectical Relationships**

Cultural-historical theoretical perspectives and methods informed an examination of the classrooms, school, district, local community, and accountability framework as a unique but dialectically constituted activity system, albeit laden with contradictions (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1986; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). In his elaboration of the dialectical relationship between individual
activity and broader social contexts, Engeström (1986) asserted,

Human activity is not only individual production. It is simultaneoulsy and inseparably also social exchange and societal distribution. In other words, human activity always takes place within a community governed by a certain division of labor and by certain rules. (pp. 26–27)

Analyses of individual learning and development, then, require a serious consideration about the broader contexts that do not merely surround individual activity but instead weave together its defining tools, artifacts, roles, division of labor, relevant communities, and rules. While macrolevel contexts (e.g., social institutions) provide the constraints and resources that coordinate, organize, and affect individual activity in particular ways, these contexts simultaneously yield the unique tools and artifacts that individuals can potentially exploit to (re)produce or transform each idiosyncratic situation (Cole, 1996).

This study took up the notion that literacy activities in classroom contexts are woven together across the sociocultural and institutional contexts of Pacific Elementary School, the Alvarez School District, the local community, and the state reform landscape (see Green & Heras, in press). This approach required gaining entry into a range of social spaces and gaining access to a range of study participants. Thus, I initially became a member of the school community through my three-month volunteer experience across grade levels, teachers, and languages of instruction during the summer of 2002 to familiarize myself with staff, students, and parents (researcher memos, June 15, 2002, September 28–30, 2002, September 7, 2002, October 5, 2002). This experience included my participation as a teacher assistant in the four bilingual classrooms that were part of the broader study. In the spirit of reciprocity, I also volunteered throughout the school year as a reading intervention teacher for struggling readers at the request of several teachers. My unique participation in the school community afforded an opportunity to ascertain the degree to which the reading practices I documented in third-grade bilingual classrooms resembled those I observed during my volunteer experiences.

To begin to weave together the effects of convergent school accountability, reading, and language policies on everyday classroom practice (i.e., NCLB, Reading First, and Proposition 227), I conducted participant observations of staff meetings, grade-level meetings, and lunchroom staff dialogues, collected school and district memoranda, and conducted in-depth interviews with school and district administrators. These methods also corresponded with a triangulation strategy to substantiate the perspectives of individuals across institutional settings (i.e., students, distinct groups of teachers, school administrators, district administrators, and community members; see Table 1).

I conducted in-depth interviews of one to two hours each with three Pacific administrators, two Alvarez District administrators, three community volunteers, and the bilingual teacher charged with helping his colleagues implement the new English-language development assessments. Specifically, I examined why the school and district implemented policies in particular ways and how these data illuminated the dialectical relationship between bilingual classroom reading practices and the policy context—and how policies affect and were affected by local practice. Finally, I gathered relevant documents that might provide unique insights into how reading activity was negotiated across classrooms, schools, and the district (e.g., professional development flyers, staff meeting agendas, announcements).

The School

Pacific Elementary School is located in the large suburb of Alvarez, California, and is home to a majority working-class populace of Mexican immigrants and immigrants, Mexican Americans, Chicano, and Latinos, although recent gentrification has shifted these demographics. Pacific reflected the city's ethnic composition: It had a student population of 870, which included a Latino majority from low-income and working-poor families, and was one of 20 elementary schools in the Alvarez School District. Specifically, 86% were Latino, 4% were European American, and 10% were African American, Asian American, Filipino, or other. That 85% of these students qualified for free or reduced-cost meals reflected the community's low-socioeconomic character. Pacific experienced a considerable amount of student mobility (8%), and to accommodate these shifts, the school instituted a year-round, four-track schedule that included 16 Spanish–English bilingual, 15 mainstream English, and nine English-immersion classrooms. All bilingual teachers possessed a California bilingual teaching credential.

ELLS comprised 62% of the student body, and approximately 53% of these ELLs participated in the transitional bilingual program, or "alternative" language program under the English-immersion provisions of Proposition 227. The program used mostly Spanish in kindergarten through third grade and gradually incorporated English content area instruction beginning in kindergarten with the teaching and learning of music, physical education, and art, then science, social studies, and math by third grade. The program included English-language development periods, during which ELLs honed their oral English skills and emergent English literacy by reciting poetry, reading short stories, singing songs, and performing short plays (researcher memos, June 15, 2002, September 28–30, 2002; school
Table 1: Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom teacher</th>
<th>Days of observation (total hours)</th>
<th>Hours of video recordings</th>
<th>Total hours per classroom</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Nylund</td>
<td>6 (11.5)</td>
<td>5 (10)</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Mr. Ortiz</td>
<td>5 (7)</td>
<td>6 (10)</td>
<td>17.0</td>
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<td>Ms. Palacios</td>
<td>7 (13)</td>
<td>5 (9)</td>
<td>22.0</td>
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<td>Mr. Webber</td>
<td>7 (11.5)</td>
<td>4 (6)</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>25 (43)</td>
<td>20 (35)</td>
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<th>Classroom teacher</th>
<th>Student work</th>
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<td>All</td>
<td>California standards tests, California Achievement Test (CAT/6), Spanish Assessment of Basic Education (SABE/2), and copies of weekly plans from the teacher's manual (S-E) that accompanied the district language arts program adoption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Nylund</td>
<td>Weekly spelling packet (S-E), spelling and dictation tests (S-E), writing samples (S), and reading and grammar worksheets (E)</td>
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<td>Mr. Ortiz</td>
<td>Writing samples (S) and reading and grammar worksheets (E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Palacios</td>
<td>Weekly spelling packet (S) and reading and grammar worksheets (E)</td>
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<td>Mr. Webber</td>
<td>Writing samples (S-E) and reading and grammar worksheets (S-E)</td>
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<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Additional data</th>
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</table>

**Note:** Classroom teacher names are pseudonyms. The days of observation include the hours of video recordings. **(S)** = Spanish; **(E)** = English.

principal, personal communication, February 21, 2003; learning director, personal communication, April 21–22, 2003. As mentioned earlier, third-grade bilingual teachers transitioned ELLs to English-only instruction mid-year. However, the district did not prescribe the amount, type, and use of Spanish and English across bilingual classrooms, but in recent years, had reduced Spanish-language instruction by an academic year (school principal, personal communication, February 21, 2003). Thus, K–3 bilingual teachers used Spanish and English in various ways to accomplish distinct goals and used Spanish and English curriculum materials to varying degrees.

Typed field notes, typed researcher memos, transcribed video recordings, and transcribed interviews were coded manually several times, consistent with the cultural-historical theoretical emphasis on the semiotic mediation of student learning that occurs in and through everyday practices, which includes both material (e.g., books) and ideational (e.g., character analysis) tools and artifacts (Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978, Wertsch, 1991).

First, I categorized the everyday language arts practices in individual bilingual classrooms, generating descriptive codes for the tasks, activities, and routines documented during Spanish and English language arts time blocks at the beginning and end of the school year, respectively (see Table 2). Second, I sought to determine the normative practices that constituted reading activity in particular—or the sociocultural organization of ELLs' engagement with and around the texts teachers used. That is, in addition to describing how language arts time blocks were routinely organized, my aim was
to generate a typology about how particular “ways with texts” constituted local notions of reading and reading achievement. Third, I used analytic coding to examine closely the reading practices that involved engagement into, through, and beyond texts, including strategies, extension activities, and workbook tasks.

Finally, further in-depth coding examined the meditational tools and artifacts that teachers used to organize reading activity, but I also drew on conceptual categories to analyze the affordances, consequences, and outcomes related to the practices that constituted reading activity. Specifically, I examined the use of Spanish- and English-language instruction and the teaching of phonics, phonemic awareness, spelling, vocabulary, analytical, and critical thinking skills, discourse practices, participation structures (Au, 1980; Erickson & Schultz, 1997; Phillips, 1972), and interactional patterns. I also analyzed the range of ELLs’ sense-making opportunities (e.g., the forms of assistance, use of students’ cultural knowledge, meaning-making emphases, shifts in expert and novice roles; Gutiérrez Baquedano-López et al., 1999; Rogoff, 1994). At the same time, I drew on my ongoing analysis during data collection of individual students identified with varied reading achievement levels (i.e., low, middle, high) to analyze if and how their experiences differed from those of their peers.

In my analysis, I combined data from both the Spanish- and English-curriculum periods, because according to bilingual teachers, reading goals did not change across languages as long as they emphasized reading skills and comprehension, which would help their ELLs transition to English reading (field notes, October 22, 2002, October 28–31, 2002, November 6–7, 2002, November 12–14, 2002, November 20–22, 2002). For example, when I asked a teacher if reading groups changed from Spanish to English instruction, Mrs. Nylund stated, “No, there wasn’t—actually, there was not” (personal communication, June 23, 2003). Across languages and classrooms, discussions were well represented, and this initial observation informed the type of analyses I later present in this article. During small-group and whole-class discussions, bilingual teachers typically centered their talk and interaction on some response to or analysis of text. Typically, they lasted between 20 and 30 minutes several times per week, during which teachers selected students to read specific passages aloud and immediately thereafter asked summary questions about the passages most recently read.

All documents were uploaded into NVivo 2 qualitative research and data analysis software (QSR International, 2002) and coded using program tools in accordance with the analytic codes I had initially generated manually, which were then used to determine the differences, consistencies, and relationships between the teaching and learning practices that teachers organized during Spanish and English language arts instructional time blocks. NVivo 2 enabled me to construct the various tables and figures presented in this article, as the program facilitates the easy retrieval of codes to generate particular themes and patterns within and across bilingual classrooms and bilingual teachers. This retrieval also allowed me to count instances, practices, and events, which I then transferred to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet; I then used Excel tools to create tables and figures that represented raw numbers or percentages of the raw data provided.

Finally, based on participant interviews, I examined how institutional (i.e., state, district, school, classrooms) beliefs and practices influenced teachers’ alignment or misalignment with policy interpretations across the contexts that wove together reading activity for ELLs. Initial coding of 10 in-depth interviews with teachers and administrative personnel were undertaken to distinguish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Mrs. Nylund</th>
<th>Mr. Webber</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment (EF)</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment (S)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free time (E)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Vocabulary (S)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Classroom teacher names are pseudonyms (EF: English, S: Spanish, S-E: Spanish-English)
the extent to which bilingual classroom reading activity aligned with ways the school and district interpreted and implemented practices related to Proposition 227, school accountability, and reading policy. Subsequent coding examined the specific aspects of the current reform context that affected how the school and district oriented its local practices and procedures, goals and objectives, and the particular views that informed these local instantiations—which ones persisted, which ones were abandoned, and which ones were adapted.

**Analyzing a Continuum of Reading Activity**

As mentioned earlier, this article focuses on two classrooms—those of Mrs. Nylund and Mr. Webber—since they reflected a continuum of reading activity, which allowed for an analytic “zooming in” on sociocultural practice. These analyses were based on 21.5 hours of participant observations (including 6 hours of video) across 11 days in Mrs. Nylund’s bilingual classroom and 17.5 hours of participant observations (including 1 hour of video) across 11 days in Mr. Webber’s bilingual classroom (see Table 1). The discrepancy in participant observation hours (including video) is attributable to the tendency that Mrs. Nylund had a more fixed language arts block schedule, whereas Mr. Webber sometimes implemented language arts before or after the morning recess. Thus, Mr. Webber dedicated comparably less time to language arts activity.

In my analysis of these two classrooms, the categorization of scripts (Gutiérrez, 1993), in particular, helped typify—not explain causally—the microgenetic structures of participation and discourse. These script categories provided the heuristic tools to analyze the discursive terrain that afforded ELLs with particular opportunities for the type of intellectual engagement that students need across their academic trajectories. In line with Gutiérrez’s designation of patterns of language use and orientations that characterize recitative, responsive, and responsive/collaborative scripts, I recoded reading practices in Mrs. Nylund’s and Mr. Webber’s classrooms to capture differences and similarities across scripts that afforded or constrained meaning-making opportunities.

To substantiate the data analysis presented in this article, I used these numerous analyses to construct charts representing reading practices (Figure 2), discussion themes teachers covered (Figure 3), and teachers’ organization of scripts (Figure 4). Specifically, I selected two representative reading practices in the form of narrative extracts and transcripts of classroom discourse (i.e., a story preview and character analysis) to examine the microgenetic construction of students’ meaning-making opportunities. I reconstructed these narrative extracts from field notes taken during participant observations in bilingual classrooms when video recordings of the events were not available. Additionally, I obtained transcripts of classroom discourses from either detailed field notes or transcriptions of video recordings of language arts instructional blocks. The goal was not to compare teachers but to analyze how the instantiation of reading activity affected ELLs’ meaning-making opportunities.

I turn now to a discussion of the findings, which begin with a description of how social actors negotiated policy mandates and instantiated particular notions of what counts as reading.

**Findings**

**Making Sense of Policy at Pacific Elementary School**

This section discusses how convergent educational reforms were interpreted and implemented locally and how these reforms served as resources for particular actions, or constrained them. Although Proposition 227 and the English-only reading approaches promoted through NCLB significantly diminished programs that used students’ primary languages, some districts with substantial numbers of ELLs, like Alvarez School District, maintained their bilingual programs and provision of primary language support. At Pacific, teachers and administrators strongly supported the district’s English–Spanish bilingual programs, despite the dismantling of bilingual programs occurring around them and across the state (bilingual teacher focus group, February 11, 2002; school principal, personal communication, February 21, 2003, April 21–22, 2003; migrant education specialist, personal communication, May 1, 2003).

At the same time, however, the reductive notions of English literacy implied in policies, standardized assessments, and curriculum adoptions informed teachers’ and administrators’ narrow expectations of success. Across participant observations and formal and informal interviews, practitioners identified “success in English” as the primary goal of their transitional bilingual program “so that [ELLS] achieve as well as anybody who’s in any program” (bilingual teacher focus group, February 11, 2002). Thus, teachers and administrators defined success partly by how well the school’s bilingual program and its bilingual teachers facilitated English literacy for its large ELL population. Of relevance, third-grade teachers added that reading comprehension, broadly defined, in English and Spanish was the most important indicator of success and also claimed that it was the one area “where most of them [ELLS] need the most work” (personal communication,

Moreover, the accountability framework guided the approaches, strategies, modifications, and practices that teachers and administrators adopted to mitigate ELLs' achievement. For example, teachers believed that being data driven partly explained their ranking as a "high-achieving" school, since these data helped delineate the skills they needed to reinforce in their language arts curriculum. Thus, they relied on standardized test score data to inform their teaching and learning practices, which a second-grade bilingual teacher explained:

One thing that was really helpful was when we would analyze the test scores from the year before and see the second graders on the whole. What were the difficult parts? What did they all not do well in? Then, [teachers] would really get together and plan activities to really work on those areas, like vocabulary or rhyming words or whatever it was. (Bilingual teacher focus group, February 11, 2002)

Bilingual teachers used standardized literacy and language assessments to both determine how well their current language arts practices prepared ELLs to demonstrate a particular skill set and make subsequent decisions about modifications to their classroom practices related to the teaching and learning of reading. These decisions also drove the collaboration and curriculum planning in which bilingual teachers within and across grade levels participated. Of importance, school administrators organized and facilitated these practices. During one staff meeting, for example, the learning director reminded teachers that they would get "kicked in the butt" if test scores did not improve (field notes, staff meeting, March 3, 2003). Oftentimes, this "data analysis" drove staff development meetings, and while administrators at times lamented these "unfair" assessments (Mr. Webber, personal communication, April 21–22, 2003), the district's professional development exacerbated these reform-driven approaches.

The district explicitly sought continuity and coherence across the battery of state and district assessments, curriculum programs, and state standards, according to the manager for staff development, Ms. Knight (personal communication, June 27, 2003). At the time of the study, the district had begun implementing Real Reading Solutions (pseudonym), a recently adopted supplemental reading assessment program considered by participants to be a uniquely comprehensive model of "what literacy looks like." According to Ms. Knight, the three-pronged approach of these teacher-driven, teacher-developed assessments facilitated teacher collaboration, provided useful data, and emphasized a valuable skill set:

[Real Reading Solutions] is built on three pillars. First of all that teachers collaborate and they speak at grade levels about what literacy looks like. [Second], they have data collection when the teachers give these assessments. What does the test say? This will give a true picture of who the students are. And [third], they work with phonemic awareness, fluency, accuracy—all the components of reading. No matter what grade level you teach, you still are a teacher of reading. (Ms. Knight, personal communication, June 27, 2003)

This instrument guided the district's professional development efforts, because it provided tangible indicators that could then guide teachers' collaborative work around ways to modify their teaching and learning practices in the area of reading. Even though Ms. Knight believed testing provided only a "snapshot" of students' learning, she nevertheless believed Real Reading Solutions was consistent with the current accountability framework and provided a "true picture" (personal communication, June 27, 2003) of the specific skills that teachers needed to hone and improve, particularly for ELLs.

The district's assessment-driven orientation substantially the narrow definitions of reading implied in convergent educational reforms, as teachers and administrators evaluated, modified, and shifted their goals and practices in accordance with the policy landscape. Moreover, participant observations at staff meetings, grade-level meetings, lunchroom dialogues, informal interactions with teachers, school and district memoranda, and in-depth interviews revealed that assessments—rather than bilingual teachers' knowledge of their students, curriculum, and literacy learning across two languages—drove future actions. In sum, reading activity in bilingual classrooms was interwoven with the tensions that teachers and administrators experience given the increasingly contradictory schooling circumstances for ELLs. Teachers and administrators struggled with the punitive imposition of state standards, privileging of test scores, diminishing worth of ELLs' primary languages, and state and federal funding practices, but reconciled these contradictions in their narrow, reductive goals of improved English test scores by which they and their ELLs were evaluated.

**Shifts in Teaching: More Pressure, More English, More Skills**

In third-grade bilingual classrooms in which ELLs began their transition to English reading, a privileging of the skills relative to assessment programs emphasized teacher-driven discourses that honed decoding and narrow comprehension-based practices. Specifically, the two bilingual teachers on which I focus in this paper, Mrs. Nylund and Mr. Webber, expressed that the current accountability framework—particularly high-stakes assessment and standards-driven curriculum
programs—have significantly affected their increased use of English and skill-based approaches. While I focus on these two bilingual teachers here, they reflected the views and perspectives of their third-grade bilingual colleagues in formal, in-depth interviews and informal discussions (Pacheco, 2005). In essence, Mrs. Nylund and Mr. Webber explained that the recent English-only accountability framework had increased English, decreased Spanish, provoked "entertaining" strategies that made learning "fun" (Mr. Webber, personal communication, April 21, 2003), increased skills-based approaches, decreased enrichment activities, focused instructional goals, fostered higher expectations, and limited their school days to reading, writing, and math (personal communications, April 21, 2003, June 23, 2003).

In her formal interview, Mrs. Nylund believed the accountability framework promoted skills-based reading strategies, assessment-driven instruction, and higher expectations and overemphasized reading, writing, and math at the expense of enrichment activities (e.g., art, music, physical education). Regarding the teaching and learning of reading, she stated,

> During the most recent years, there has been such an emphasis on teaching to the standards, on preparing the children to do well on the standardized tests, that I have become much more focused on teaching skills, particularly the skills that we know are going to be tested. (personal communication, June 23, 2003)

While her teaching had become standards- and assessment-driven, Mrs. Nylund also acknowledged that skills-based approaches to reading had diminished whole-language and literature-based approaches. Across her 24 years of teaching experience, she had come to understand that "a balanced approach is the best way to teach reading" (personal communication, June 23, 2003) for mainstream students and ELLs. Still, she believed that teachers are "caught in the middle, because the materials...are obviously focused in whatever direction the pendulum is swinging," and teachers are expected to promote "what the state wants." At the same time, however, she recognized that "standards...have forced [teachers] to raise our expectations" and that ELLs have consequently demonstrated higher achievement. While Mrs. Nylund's extensive teaching experience had informed her belief that a balanced reading approach was most effective, she also believed that the advent of skills-based standards and accountability had "forced" her to raise her expectations of ELLs and be a more "focused" teacher.

On the other hand, Mr. Webber explained that prior to the accountability framework, his teaching was "dis-integrated" (personal communication, April 21, 2003), relied on more Spanish-language support for ELLs, and helped him organize his teaching in a way that was accessible for his students. For him, the "good side" of high-stakes accountability was the "increased pressure on me to [have] a curriculum map, a long-range plan, as I definitely feel that in some ways I have a dis-integrated teaching style." He also elaborated that since "everybody's pushing for English, maybe I should go all the way and write instructions in English [and] cut back on explanations in Spanish." However, he also espoused efforts to teach the "average" student, even before the accountability framework started influencing his practice:

> Every year I know a little bit more about what the average student can do, especially in terms of behavior. That's always been key, but generally the range falls into that bell-shaped curve. Once you learn that students can get two definitions written down in only five minutes before the bell rings, then you never lower that standard. (personal communication, April 21, 2003)

Thus, while Mr. Webber openly criticized English-language testing as "useless" and "too hard," the accountability framework affected his ability to "pace" the class and be more "entertaining" by regularly using the overhead projector and incorporating more current events (personal communication, April 21, 2003).

In the following sections, I demonstrate how the accountability framework influenced Mr. Webber's and Mrs. Nylund's organization of reading activity in their bilingual third-grade classrooms, then examine how the discursive constitution of these practices expanded or constrained ELLs' meaning making around texts. Specifically, I draw on classroom narrative extracts and transcripts of discourse to analyze how teachers' mediation of reading afforded learning opportunities for ELLs.

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**Reading Practices in Bilingual Classrooms**

To examine how the current accountability framework informed the organization of reading activity, I first describe the social practices that reflected particular notions about what counts as reading in the bilingual classrooms of Mrs. Nylund and Mr. Webber. Figure 2 represents the reading practices documented during four weeks of participant observations across Spanish and English language arts instruction that involved teacher-selected texts in these two classrooms.

These practices reveal an important finding. Through the lens of these two classrooms, it is evident that ELLs participated overwhelmingly in interpretation-based discussions that were grounded in textual evidence, as this focus comprised slightly over 60% of documented reading practices (see Figure 2). Furthermore,
Figure 2. Reading Practices of Two Bilingual Third-Grade Teachers

![Graph showing reading practices]


Some discussions occasionally revolved around supplemental texts, such as newspaper articles. For example, Mr. Webber sometimes selected Los Angeles Times articles as a local text at the beginning of the school day to facilitate a discussion. Although he did not read the articles verbatim, he used them to foster ELLs’ comprehension, as this field note excerpt illustrates:

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Showing a front-page photograph of a tanker that spilled oil into the coastline of northwestern Spain, Mr. Webber began, “This is what it looks like when older people make mistakes... What do you think is contained in these oil tankers?” He instructed students to think about it and share their thoughts with a neighbor for 15 seconds.

He then asked for ideas, and Ramon said, “Gas?”

Mr. Webber replied, “You’re close, you’re so close.”

Debbi uttered, “Smoke!”

Mr. Webber wrote, “tanker = gas” and “petróleo” [petroleum] on the dry-erase board.

He turned back to Debbi and asked, “Would we fill up a tanker with smoke and ship it across the ocean? Would your mom say, ‘Debs, look, I got this great price on smoke today?’”

No one answered, but Sara finally guessed, “Oil!”

Mr. Webber then proceeded to explain that oil tankers transport oil we need for gasoline and sometimes cause environmental catastrophes. (Field notes, November 20, 2002)

Although this news story did not parallel the week’s reading unit, this example illustrates Mr. Webber’s tendency to engage ELLs in discussions that emphasized the relevancy of current events to students’ lives (i.e., the effects of oil tanker disasters on the environment). Moreover, the open-ended use of current events as reading texts provided unique learning opportunities for students to explore less structured forms of knowledge construction.

To extend the meanings of texts, Mr. Webber and Mrs. Nylund facilitated activities that required students to apply these meanings to another situation or context. For example, Mr. Webber facilitated his students’ appropriation of reading content in their reenactment of a story in their anthology, which required them to monitor the accurate chronology of the story’s major events.
(field notes, October 22, 2010). Finally, Figure 2 reveals some relative tendencies across these two classrooms. Mrs. Nylund typically organized the majority of small- and whole-group discussions, reading strategies, picture walks, and previews. Mr. Webber organized and facilitated a wider range of practices, such as extension activities, informal conversations, and partner read-alouds, but fewer discussions relative to Mrs. Nylund. Student work was particularly helpful in substantiating these differences. Mrs. Nylund tended to assign more writing tasks requiring students to relate themselves to a text (e.g., retelling an experience from a character’s viewpoint), whereas worksheet assignments (e.g., fill-in-the-blank) were more visible in Mr. Webber’s classroom.

**Discussion Themes**

While Figure 2 provides a landscape of day-to-day reading practices, closer analyses of predominant discussions reveal that they provided distinct opportunities for ELLs and their teachers to engage in a broad range of skills and dispositions. Thematically, the discussions explored vocabulary development, summarizing texts, taking the perspective of subject positions (e.g., being a king), and reading strategically during group discussions, including the routine story previews and character analyses I explore in a later section. During the discussions I coded as “general,” the teachers concentrated on author biographies, illustrations, and story length, for example. Even across the more than four weeks of participant observations in these two classrooms, reading practices in general and discussions in particular provided a range of language and literacy learning opportunities.

Moreover, Figure 3 reveals that Mrs. Nylund shared a substantial amount of these interpretation-based discussions and facilitated meaning-making opportunities through a much wider range of topics, themes, and strategies. At the same time, she tended to minimize her thematic focus on vocabulary development and personal connections, whereas Mr. Webber organized these themes in his reading discussions. Specifically, he favored tasks in which students located and defined difficult words and concepts that students encountered in classroom texts and on occasion encouraged ELLs to draw personal connections between themselves and story characters (e.g., “How would you feel?”). For example, one of the ongoing discussions that Mr. Webber organized to engage students in the folk tale for the week, *Nine-in-One, Grrl Grrl A Folktales From the Hmong People of Laos* (Xiong & Spagnoli, 1989), was about the

![Figure 3: Discussion Themes in Two Bilingual Third-Grade Classrooms](image)

**Figure 3: Discussion Themes in Two Bilingual Third-Grade Classrooms**

- Characters
- General
- Inferences
- Opinions
- Personal connections
- Perspective-taking
- Predictions
- Reading strategy
- Summaries
- Vocabulary

Mrs. Nylund
Mr. Webber

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word *folk tale*, as documented in this short field note excerpt:

Mr. Webber reviewed the meaning of *folk tale* and asked the class to write the definition in their *diarios* [journals]. He asked Sofia and Sara to distribute student dictionaries as he wrote *folk tale* on the dry-erase board and asked the class to illustrate the word after writing the definition. (field notes, June 17, 2003)

During whole-group discussions around this particular story, he reviewed relevant vocabulary, facilitated tasks that honed limited amounts of information and knowledge (i.e., the definition of folk tale), and relied on outside sources of information (i.e., dictionaries).

I turn now to a close examination of two particular discussion themes that these two bilingual teachers coordinated during language arts instruction to explore later how local interpretations of what counts as reading across institutional contexts informed classroom practices—and how classroom practices in turn sustained such interpretations.

**“Zooming In”: Teachers’ Social Organization of Reading Activity**

In this section, I analyze reading practices to highlight ELLs’ opportunities to acquire and appropriate the mediational means to participate successfully in teachers’ sociocultural organization of reading activity. Teachers afforded these opportunities through the social organization of scripts (Gutiérrez, 1993) of the forms of recitative, responsive, and responsive/collaborative discourses that characterize normative patterns of participation. To be clear, in using Gutiérrez’s elaboration of these scripts, I sought to capture the patterned sociocultural features that extended meaning-making opportunities for ELLs at a time when their home languages were being increasingly diminished, and broad notions about what counts as reading were shifting across state, district, and school contexts.

Figure 4 represents the scripts that Mrs. Nylund and Mr. Webber facilitated through everyday reading practices with respect to the discussions they organized in their classrooms (field notes, October 22, 2002, October 28–31, 2002, November 6–7, 2002, November 12–14, 2002, November 20–22, 2002, March 9, 2003, March 11–14, 2003, June 16–19, 2003; video recordings, October 10, 2002, October 17, 2002, November 8, 2002, November 22, 2002, March 5, 2003, March 10–13, 2003, April 1, 2003). To construct Figure 4, I recoded the practices that comprised interpretation-based discussions in the earlier section (see Figure 3) in accordance with those socioculturally mediated practices that facilitated de/coding, reading comprehension, and extension activities (103 instances).

I classified these practices according to these categories to demarcate, for analytic purposes, the distinction between practices that promoted the de/coding of texts, the interpretation of texts, and the extension activities requiring ELLs to extend the meanings of texts. Typically, these extension activities solicited a text’s main idea(s), central theme(s), and conflict resolution(s).
Based on these classifications, I then conducted a more in-depth analysis of the discourse patterns that teachers and students co-constructed to organize said activities and tasks, examining those sociocultural strategies and tools that the teachers and students jointly made available and took up during discussions.

The data in Figure 4 show that comprehension-based discussions were a predominant practice in these two classrooms and, relatively speaking, that Mrs. Nylund organized extension activities whereas Mr. Webber organized de/coding activities. Of greater importance, in-depth data analyses illustrate that Mrs. Nylund tended to coordinate responsive scripts in her classroom, providing in a broad sense flexible opportunities to participate in and contribute to collective meaning making. Mr. Webber’s skills-based de/coding practices coincided with his coordination of recitative known-answer scripts, but he also used recitation to mediate comprehension-based practices. That is, participation structures in Mr. Webber’s classroom changed very little when classroom activity changed (e.g., from worksheet to joint discussion). Thus, although comprehension-based practices were well represented in these two classrooms, how the teachers organized reading activity—through particular topics, participation structures, orientations, and discourses—created distinct opportunities and contexts for ELLs to participate more fully in the co-construction of meaning making.

In the following sections, I examine further the effects of the English-only, reform-driven context on the microgenetic co-construction of reading activity. I analyze two representative, comprehension-based practices that both Mrs. Nylund and Mr. Webber coordinated in their classrooms: story previews and character analysis. The goal is to show how teachers socioculturally mediated sense making for ELLs and, specifically, the ways the teachers deliberately exploited students’ emerging contributions and attempts at sense making.

**Story Previews: Teachers’ Facilitation of Background Knowledge**

In this section, I analyze story previews to examine how teachers facilitated students’ background knowledge, as these previews allowed students to exploit their personal experiences and cultural resources about relevant concepts in the service of text interpretation. Story previews were rather typical events that teachers organized to introduce the new story for the week, which generally occurred on Monday mornings during the language arts block. In these classrooms, these events were generally marked by the distribution of basal readers or individual books, a review of illustrations, a definition of the genre in question (e.g., folk tales), a review of key vocabulary, and a series of predictions based on an initial overview of the text. They generally ended when the teacher requested that students read a particular passage and transitioned the group into more interpretation-based talk.

Story previews were particularly essential, as they provided teachers the opportunity to introduce, explain, elaborate, or review key information that might enhance students’ interpretations; simultaneously, these previews allowed students to express their musings, make guesses about upcoming story events, and draw on their current knowledge base in a relatively risk-free context. I coded story previews as comprehension-based practices precisely because during these activities, teachers typically encouraged students to consider how titles, illustrations, and concepts might come together in a story before actually reading it. Next, I analyze a story preview narrative extract from Mrs. Nylund’s classroom and a transcript of classroom discourse from Mr. Webber’s classroom to illustrate how the coordination of the story preview, not the story preview per se, affected students’ meaning-making opportunities.

**Narrative Extract 1: With Other Eyes**

Mrs. Nylund asked students to read the new unit title: “Con otros ojos” (“With Other Eyes”). She continued, “Why do you think these stories are in here?”

Students flipped through their anthology, and after a long pause, Ramon said, “Because you have to see the pictures differently.”

Mrs. Nylund then asked students to participate in an activity, but reminded them to “not be silly,” explaining that they will use a lupa [magnifying glass] to look at different classroom items, and encouraged them to get out of their seats to do it. Once students received a lupa, they got on the floor, squatted, and lay on their backs to look at the carpet, baskets, their arms, their desks, the classroom door, and the ceiling.

Mrs. Nylund interjected, “OK, I want you to look at the ceiling, look at the windows, look at the jack-o’-lantern bulletin board, look at the calendar.” After several minutes, she asked students to share how things looked through the lupa. Jaime commended, “It looks pretty far to get from here [ground] to there [ceiling] for an ant.”

Mrs. Nylund requested that students return to their seats and imagine that they were birds flying over Pacific Elementary School: “Close your eyes and use your imagination... What does the school look like?... What do the children in the playground look like?”
One student commented, "It [the school] would look like the Twin Towers."

Mrs. Nylund asked the class to do a one-minute picture walk, and students began to thumb through their anthologies quietly. (field notes, October 28, 2002)

In this particular story preview event, Mrs. Nylund organized a range of mediational means to help students understand conceptually the abstract notion of "seeing" from our own and others' perspectives, which was central to comprehending the text. Through the strategic use of a magnifying glass to see differently, text illustrations, and the familiarity of the classroom, she facilitated the notion of seeing the familiar from distinct perspectives, particularly as an ant. She facilitated this experiential approach by encouraging students to examine a range of objects from various angles, and with open-ended questions that allowed them to draw on their cultural knowledge in the service of meaning making (e.g., the Twin Towers). Of import, the story preview was an opportunity for ELLs to engage in sense making in a way that deliberately employed their experiential and cultural knowledge. Finally, Mrs. Nylund made explicit how particular genres coalesce thematically and made explicit the conceptual understanding (i.e., seeing with other eyes) needed to participate in subsequent comprehension-based discussions.

Mr. Webber similarly used the story preview to facilitate the background knowledge his ELLs might need to fully comprehend the main ideas and central themes related to the new story for the week. Discussion 1 captures the discourses he coordinated during a Monday morning preview of Nine-in-One, Grr! Grr! A Folk tale From the Hmong People of Laos (Xiong & Spagnoli, 1989). This Hmong folk tale centers on how a clever bird kept tigers from overpopulating and hence exploiting the land so that all animals could thrive in it. This was the first time the class had encountered this particular folk tale.

**Discussion 1: A Laotian Folk Tale**

Mr. Webber: This week we're going to be reading a new story about felines, Nine-in-One, Grr! Grr! [wrote felines, then drew two arrows to cats and tigers] These animals belong to the family of felines. Does anybody know what family dogs belong to? [pause] Talk with your partner.

[Most students turned to talk with a nearby peer. In the meantime, Mr. Webber retrieved a container of tongue depressors with student names written on them.]

Mr. Webber: [drawing a tongue depressor] Perlita?

Perlita: Coyotes?

Mr. Webber: Olivia?

Olivia: Canines?

Mr. Webber: That's right. And cats belong to the feline family. And why do you think cats lick their fur?

Daniel: To clean themselves.

Mr. Webber: Let's check that answer. Could it be to take off their fleas? [simulated pulling fleas from his body] Victoria?

Victoria: To take off their fleas!

Mr. Webber: So, this week we'll be reading a story about felines. It's a story from Laos. Here, let me show you. [pulling a roll-down world map] Let's see... Okay, here's Laos. [wrote Laos on dry-erase board] It's surrounded by all these countries: Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, China. They're all located in Southeast Asia. [wrote Southeast Asia on dry-erase board] This is the continent where all of these countries are located. [wrote place where Laos is located on dry-erase board] Take out your journals. I want you to write this down.

[Students retrieved journals from their desk and began writing]

Mr. Webber: So, what continent is Laos in? Can anybody remember? We've talked about this several times now. You should remember what continent this is.

Lino: America?

Mr. Webber: Not quite.

Sofia: Asia?

Mr. Webber: That's right. And [pause] is China bigger than the United States?

Students: [in unison] Yesss...

Mr. Webber: [nodding] You know, China has the largest population of people in the world. So, Laos is very close to China, and Laotians speak Hmong. [wrote they speak Hmong on dry-erase board] How do you pronounce this [pointing to Hmong]?

Sofia: Ha-mong?

Sara: Hmong?

Mr. Webber: Yeah...tomorrow I'm gonna ask you. Who remembers the name of the country?

Perlita: Laos.

Mr. Webber: Okay, take out your books.

(field notes, June 16, 2003)

This discussion illustrates that story previews in Mr. Webber's classroom were organized around skills and discrete pieces of content knowledge and did not emphasize the relationship between the topics and themes addressed in the story. In particular, he initiated ways
to engage in the text: as he prompted questions about canines (lines 5–14), animal behavior (lines 15–22), the location of Laos (lines 24–47), facts about China (lines 46–52), and pronunciation (lines 53–58). The specific skills this preview promoted were correct pronunciation (i.e., Hmong in lines 52–56), copying (lines 34–37), and information recall (lines 5–16, 39–49, and 57–59). The content knowledge that Mr. Webber provided centered on knowledge about species classification (lines 3–24), knowledge about distinct regions of the world (Southeast Asia in lines 25–30 and 39–47), and unique facts about specific countries (Laos in lines 24–31, 39–45, and 51–59; China in lines 29 and 46–51).

At the same time, he broadened ELLs’ exposure to worldly knowledge through an emphasis on facts related to animal science, geography, cultural differences, and non-English languages. In this preview, moreover, he made available unique opportunities for students to make connections between previously acquired knowledge, as it was quite possible that they had some prior knowledge about dogs, cats, Laos, the Hmong, the continents, and China that they might have recalled in this context. He also used a range of mediational tools, including the dry-erase board, student journals, and the world map—a staple of Pacific Elementary School classrooms, although few teachers appeared to use it. Finally, he indexed a range of purposes for the knowledge being discussed: journal writing (lines 34–38), an academic obligation (“We’ve talked about this... You should remember...” in lines 39–42), and preparation for future discussions (“tomorrow I’m gonna ask you” in line 57). Furthermore, this transcript illustrates the recitative scripts that Mr. Webber tended to organize during comprehension-based practices (see Figure 4) and were evidenced in the IRE sequences in lines 4–21, 39–49, and 52–58, as reflected in Table 3.

To some extent, Mr. Webber hypermediated (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2002) problem solving among students, constraining opportunities for them to draw on their cultural and experiential knowledge. For example, after he asked students why they think cats lick their fur (lines 16–17), Daniel ventured, “To clean themselves” (line 18). Rather than evaluate Daniel’s response, Mr. Webber suggested they confirm that answer (line 19), but hypermediated by asking the leading question, “Could it be to take off their fleas?” (lines 19–20) and simulating pulling fleas off of his body (lines 20–21).

This brief example shows that this hypermediated assistance constrained the joint problem solving that might have potentially occurred between this teacher and his students. These discourse practices, thus, had consequences. They constrained ELLs’ opportunities to participate in student-centered and student-initiated discussions and to think and talk jointly about the content knowledge that Mr. Webber introduced during story previews. Moreover, these normative practices constrained the type and amount of information that he could potentially glean from relatively more open-ended questions and discussions, minimizing his facilitation of students’ comprehension of this Hmong folk tale.

Across these classroom ecologies, subtle differences emerge. Closer analyses of bilingual teachers’ provision of the background knowledge needed to fully engage in the new text for the week illustrate that how teachers organized mediational tools and artifacts (i.e., topics, themes, discourses, participation structures, texts, illustrations, magnifying glasses) affected students’ meaning-making opportunities. Story previews in Mr. Webber’s classroom tended to hone skills (e.g., continent names), emphasize facts, foster information recall, and constrain students’ ongoing contributions to text-based sense making and interpretations. Mrs. Nyland’s organization of story previews employed mediational tools (e.g., imagination, magnifying glass) in ways that enabled students to build conceptual understandings from concrete experiences (e.g., seeing the world from different perspectives), participate in more open-ended discourse practices, and embed language and thinking skills within semiotics-driven contexts.

While these story previews reflected these teachers’ emphasis on enhancing reading comprehension for their third-grade ELLs, their distinct instantiations of story previews in particular reflected their reported shifts in curriculum practices in the current English-only accountability framework. Mr. Webber’s mediation was likely to foreground rote skills and seemed to reflect

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<th>Table 3. Mr. Webber’s Use of Initiation-Response-Evaluation During a Story Preview</th>
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<td>Question</td>
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<td>&quot;Does anybody know what family dogs belong to?&quot; (lines 5–6)</td>
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<td>&quot;So, what continent is Laos in?&quot; (line 39)</td>
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his approach to teaching and learning for the "average" student, as his IRE-centered story preview was accessible and "entertaining," since he readily "tested" the knowledge that he believed students should know (personal communication, April 21, 2003).

On the other hand, Mrs. Nylund's organization of story previews perhaps reflected the high expectations that, in her view, the accountability framework had recently enhanced, as well as the focused approaches and strategies that informed her increased reading skills emphasis. In the next section, I analyze how both teachers organized another comprehension-based practice, character analysis. The goal is to illuminate how teachers distinctly and strategically enhanced the potential for students' participation in expanded meaning making, which illustrates how they exercised flexibility in their mediation of reading activity, even in a constraining policy context.

**Understanding the Social World Through Character Analysis**

One characteristic feature of reading discussions across these two bilingual classrooms was the occasional interpretation of key characters' actions, decisions, qualities, and dispositions, which were not necessarily restricted to "correct" answers but rather varied ones contingent on textual evidence. Bilingual teachers' coordination of character analysis allowed students to draw on their emerging understandings of chronological events, think critically about characters' actions in relation to story events, and draw on their joint experiences to analyze others' actions and decisions. However, the degree of character analysis during reading discussions differed significantly across these two classrooms.

Figure 4 illustrates that relative to Mr. Webber, Mrs. Nylund focused on characters and their actions, dilemmas, and personalities more often over more than four weeks of my participant observations in these classrooms. Even though Mr. Webber focused less explicitly on characters or character analysis, in this section, I draw on one specific instance during which he facilitated text-based inferences that required students to consider a character's attempts at resolving a serious dilemma. This instance, then, provides a bounded event through which to examine how Mr. Webber coordinated ELLs' deepened understandings about their social world and the social actors (i.e., characters) that affect it. Thus, in this section, I analyze a video recording transcript of a small reading group discussion in Mrs. Nylund's classroom and a narrative extract from Mr. Webber's classroom, reconstructed from field notes. These analyses show how the discursive constitution of character analysis discussions expanded ELLs' opportunities to engage in deep sense making.

Discussion 2 reflects an exchange between Mrs. Nylund and a small reading group about a folk tale, *The Magic Fish* (Littledale, 1966/1985), during the latter part of the school year when teachers had already transitioned ELLs to English-only reading instruction (field notes and video recordings, March 11–13, 2003). In this folk tale, a magic fish offers an extremely poor fisherman three wishes, which he initially rejects; when his wife learns about it, she repeatedly forces her husband to rescind his decision to demand more wealth (i.e., dwellings) and power (i.e., royalty). Discussion 2 specifically captures a dialogue between two students, which centered on an analysis of the personal qualities of the fisherman's wife:

**Discussion 2: "What Does Evil Mean?"**


Gael: That the wife doesn't care now about his...his...about his...about his...He doesn't care that...that the fisherman...She only cares about...she...

Mrs. Nylund: About herself? Who agrees with Gael? Fernando, would you like to add something to that?

Fernando: That...that...she's...she's kind of a little bit evil.

Mrs. Nylund: Oh, what means do we have that...?

Jonas: Teacher, not actually evil, because if she was evil, she would have a little green thing right here. [holding his hands out in front of him, palms up]

Mrs. Nylund: A little green thing? [mimicking Jonas's gesture]

Jonas: In a laboratory and all those things...to be evil.

Mrs. Nylund: Do you think everyone who is evil has something like that?

Students: Nooo...

Mrs. Nylund: What does evil mean?

Jonas: Evil means when they kill people and...

Fernando: Nooo...?

Mrs. Nylund: Okay, Fernando, what do you think evil means?

Fernando: Like when somebody's bad?

Mrs. Nylund: Evil means someone is very bad. That's right.

Jonas: But—

Mrs. Nylund: And Jonas, I think what you're thinking of, that would be one—

Jonas: Teacher?
Mrs. Nylund: Go ahead.

Jonas: I...I think that...because, like, people that are evil...he...because he does...what I mean is because the person is not evil. She just...she just, like, she just wants everything, but that doesn't mean that she's evil.

Mrs. Nylund: So you don't think she's quite evil?

Jonas: No.

Mrs. Nylund: Can you think of a word that would describe how you think she is? A word that...for somebody that wants everything or wants a lot more than they have?

Jonas: Um...

Mrs. Nylund: There's a really good word for that. Maybe you can add this word to your vocabulary. [pause] Okay, the word is *greedy*.

Jonas: That's what I was thinking.

Mrs. Nylund: Have you heard that word before? *Greedy* means no matter how much you have, you want *more*. (video recording, March 11, 2003)

Mrs. Nylund focused her questions on students' perceptions of the fisherman's wife, textual evidence to support their perceptions, and vocabulary development; although, importantly, the focus on vocabulary emerged in the context of their explications of their perceptions of the wife. When Gaei stated that the fisherman's wife “only cares about...she...” (line 7) and Fernando added that she was “kind of a little bit evil” (lines 11-12), Mrs. Nylund asked students to use text-based “means” to substantiate these views (line 13), which then redirected the discussion back to the evidence they were employing in their thinking.

Given this new direction, Jonas interrupted that the wife was “not actually evil,” because she did not “have a little green thing right here,” and used a verbal as well as a physical strategy (palms facing up) to substantiate this notion of evil (lines 14-17). When Mrs. Nylund probed (lines 18-19), Jonas inferred that being and doing evil was associated with “a laboratory and all those things” contained in laboratories (line 20), referencing the methods used by mad scientists and villains who contrive their conspiratorial schemes in popular media cartoon culture. After Mrs. Nylund challenged this notion (lines 22-23), other students agreed (line 24) that not “everyone who is evil” has “a little green thing” in a laboratory somewhere, and she attempted to reconcile students’ discrepant understandings of the word evil (lines 26, 30, and 38-43). Her decision resulted in a student-to-student challenge when Jonas proffered that evil people “kill people” (line 26), and Fernando responded, “Noo...?” (line 27).

After Mrs. Nylund verified Fernando’s suggestions that evil meant “somebody’s bad” (lines 28-30), Jonas repeatedly vied for a turn (lines 33 and 36), which inevitably shifted the course of the discussion, although Mrs. Nylund had first attempted to explain his reasoning on his behalf (lines 34-35). Specifically, Jonas elaborated a complex sequence that applied the notions of being and doing evil, which he appropriated from his participation in popular cultural media, drew on his understanding of The Magic Fish, and refuted Fernando’s characterization of the wife as evil. He shifted the discussion in that Mrs. Nylund legitimized his contention and sought “a really good word” (line 51) that accurately captured Jonas’s view that the fisherman’s wife was greedy, but not necessarily evil.

Mrs. Nylund promoted deep interpretations through her re-mediation, or “social systems reorganization” (Cole & Griffin, 1983), of students’ challenges, negotiations, and sense making in a rigorous, text-based discussion that required a reexamination of cultural positions. Her request for textual evidence (line 13), inquiry into students’ sense making (lines 1-3, 8-10, 18-19, 22-23, and 46-49), facilitation of abstract concepts (lines 25, 28-29, 34-35, and 44), and use of new vocabulary (lines 46-49, 51-54, and 56-58) evidenced her instructional goals. Her sociocultural organization of comprehension-based practices facilitated student-to-student and student-to-teacher negotiations, as well as expanded understandings of the social world (i.e., being and doing evil). Furthermore, unknown vocabulary was context embedded and context dependent; namely, the word greedy emerged from a discussion that students—not their teacher—initiated.

At the same time, she used IRE sequences toward the end of the discussion (lines 28-32 and 44-58) in her search for the “correct” word that describes someone who wants everything or wants a lot more than they have, which her ELLs could not provide. First, the use of IRE sequences at this particular juncture in the discussion emerged as a consequence of a much lengthier discussion that was both enabled by this teachers’ organization and coconstructed with her students in a way that positioned her students as knowledge producers.

Second, the discussion might have ended with the following exchange, which in effect resolved the studentsto-student contention around the nature of being and doing evil and its application to describe the wife:

Mrs. Nylund: So you don't think she's quite evil?

Jonas: No.

While Jonas’s “no” in effect resolved the disagreement, Mrs. Nylund nevertheless extended this exchange with
questions about a word that perhaps more accurately describes the fisherman's wife, given the small group's joint negotiation. Thus, IRE sequences emerged as a consequence of meaning making, rather than functioning as an orienting principle of reading discussions.

In Mr. Webber's classroom, meaning-making opportunities emerged through a discussion that centered on ELLs drawing inferences from texts and, in particular, reasoning with and through a character's actions and decisions to substantiate these inferences. Here, I analyze a narrative extract of a reading group discussion, reconstructed from field notes, to illustrate how the discourse practices were organized during discussions. Leading up to Narrative Extract 2, the class had read parts of a play about an elderly king whose ailing condition impels him and his personal advisor (el consejero) to identify which of the king's two sons shall become his successor. The king's advisor develops a plan to determine which son is best suited for the throne, and the king executes it. In what follows, Mr. Webber asked the class to draw inferences about how the king's conflict was resolved, including a deeper examination of his sons' actions.

Narrative Extract 2: Exploring Dilemmas

Mr. Webber asked the class to explain the problem in the play, but the class remained quiet. He then began, "El problema es que [el rey] está viejo, y su casa se va a morir. [The problem is that he (the king) is old and about to die.] So, he makes a plan to see who's going to be king."

He asked the class to identify who specifically made the plan, but the class remained quiet again. He then asked Roberto to select a classmate to answer his question; Roberto selected Sofia, who explained that the consejero [advisor] made the plan.

Mr. Webber continued, "Being a king is hard. 'Cus people wanna kill you. They want your money. They want what you have."

Olivia retorted, "Not if you're nice."

Immediately, Mr. Webber responded, "No, because they want what the king has. Have you seen seagulls at the beach fighting for food? People need their food, so they are willing to get that food."

He then asked students to explain why the first son, Jame, failed the king's test. After a short pause, he added, "Show me the one sentence that tells us why he didn't get it right," adding the following fill-in-the-blank representation next to the word Jame on the dry-erase board: _______ _______ _______. After another pause, he inserted, "Me divertí mucho [I enjoyed myself very much] in the three blank spaces.

He then explained, for example, that if he tested a student, Jorge, by sending him outside to check if the grass is too wet, but Jorge went outside to play soccer, eat lunch, and then checked the grass, he would fail. He prompted, "How many of those things were right?"

Grace answered, "One."

Mr. Webber replied, "Right. He wasn't supposed to play soccer and everything else. He's supposed to check the grass! So, when Jame is sent to see the city, to see what the word on the street is, what sentence tells us that he did more things, fun things than that?"

Several students replied, "¡Me diverte mucho!" (field notes, October 22, 2002)

This particular narrative extract illustrates that short recall-response questions characterized some of Mr. Webber's discussions and that at times, students' observable attempts at sense making were diverted in favor of hints that might enhance students' participation.

First, the questions that coordinated the participants required short answers with a specific focus on analyzing characters' problems, actions, and decisions, although Mr. Webber's mediation of students' responses was nevertheless oriented toward the "correct" answers for what was the problem, who made the plan, and what did the son do wrong. When students could not or did not answer, he provided explanations and examples; when students participated, he did little to build effectively on their sense-making attempts. For example, during his explanation about why the king had a problem ("being a king is hard"), Olivia retorted, "Not if you're nice," which created the potential for an expanded discussion. This was one of the few instances when students challenged their teacher (or peers) in this classroom, similar to the way Jonas challenged Fernando's working notion of evil in Mrs. Nyland's class. In Mr. Webber's classroom, its occurrence suggests that student-initiated utterances appeared on occasion and had the potential to affect teaching and learning outcomes. However, in this case, Olivia's point was not taken up by her teacher or peers. Moreover, her utterance extended the potential for sense making beyond the recall-response questions that characterized this particular reading discussion.

Alternatively, it is possible that Mr. Webber was merely emphasizing a distinct notion of a king under siege to contextualize the story, as this particular framing justifies the king's need for a consejero [advisor] as well as his need to devise a manipulative plan to test his sons and their viability as heirs to the throne. The argument can be made that this contextualization, moreover, facilitated reading comprehension, since the weight of the outcome—one son fails the test, while the other impresses his father—relies highly on this framing. That is, it lends a sense of gravity to the king's situation. After all, this particular discussion was introduced with a request for an explanation about "the problem in the play," which no one answered, although it was unclear why. Further, the pointed contextualization of school texts is particularly critical for ELL and bilingual students' successful comprehension (Gee, 2004; Jiménez et al., 1995, 1996; Olson, 2007). In this particular discussion,
Mr. Webber’s response, “No, because they want what the king has,” redirected the discussion away from the direction implied in Olivia’s response back toward identification of the central problem (field notes, October 22, 2002).

Mr. Webber’s mediation of students’ participation in this discussion tended to rely on discrete cues. For example, when students could not explain why the first son failed the king’s test, he asked students to find “the one sentence” that contained the answer and then provided a three-word fill-in-the-blank sentence on the dry-erase board as a cue. Additionally, he used the following familiar examples to substantiate particular social relations represented in the story:

- Seagulls fighting for food and people fighting (with a king) for food
- Jorge failing his teacher’s test because he had too much fun and Jamet failing the king’s test because he had too much fun

Although it was possible for students to develop some parallel examples to reveal their emerging understandings, this discussion illustrates Mr. Webber’s inclination toward structuring the interactional resources and analytic modes available for students. Thus, beyond his emphasis on short recall-response questions, there were few discernible opportunities in this brief discussion for students to construct new and expanded elaborations about the king’s dilemma. In sum, his recall-response questions, focus on test-like strategies (e.g., fill-in-the-blank), privileging the “correct” answer, and the recitative discourses constrained the nature of students’ participation as knowledge producers.

**Classroom Discussions: Some Closing Comments**

Analyses of reading practices in bilingual classrooms and how they constituted local notions of what counts as reading reveal that these third-grade teachers overwhelmingly organized interpretation-based discussions during their language arts instructional blocks. These discussions centered on a range of themes that provided ELs with divergent opportunities to participate in, and hence potentially acquire and appropriate, various interpretive modes to enhance their thinking and comprehension capabilities. Moreover, an analysis of the normative scripts that characterized each individual teacher’s organization of reading discussions illustrates the degree to which recitative, responsive, and responsive/collaborative scripts promoted meaning-making opportunities. A closer analysis of two telling classroom events across these two focal classrooms, however, reveals some tendencies. For ELs whose plight is exacerbated in a highly standardized English-only approach to (reading) achievement (Apple, 2001; del Carmen Salazar, 2008; Gutiérrez et al., 2002, Gutiérrez et al., 2009; Pacheco, 2010; Smith, 2004; Wright, 2005), these differences become particularly critical.

These tendencies can be broadly conceived as expanding or constraining ELs’ meaning-making opportunities, such that the normative discourses that characterized these discussions as cultural artifacts (Cole, 1996) enabled particular modes of thought or constrained them. That is, they opened or diminished discursive spaces for students to draw on their cultural knowledge and resources, challenge their teachers’ or peers’ contributions, develop the background knowledge to engage in texts, and contribute to joint semiotic processes based on their intellectual musings and positions. Specifically, Mrs. Nyland tended to build on students’ emerging deliberations and cultural knowledge, using a more responsive approach in her organization of topics and discourse during reading activities. One particular example illustrates the implications of her remediation (Cole & Griffin, 1983) of this discussion. That is, her reorganization of this social context facilitated a productive interrogation of cultural positions regarding evil people and enhanced the potential for expanded knowledge construction through opportunities for ELs to exploit and challenge each other’s worldviews.

Mr. Webber tended toward discussions that minimally varied thematically but emphasized vocabulary development, reducing the opportunities for broad interpretive modes (e.g., making predictions). Further, the discussions he organized illustrated that he honed discrete skills and test-like strategies, such as short recall-response questions. These questions have value in terms of the comprehension skills identified in the third-grade California reading standards. For example, ELA (English language arts) Standard 2.6 states that students should “extract appropriate and significant information from the text, including problems and solutions” (California Department of Education, 2007, p. 5).

**Discussion**

These telling classroom examples provide a window into how the current accountability framework and its interpretation across institutional contexts influenced reading activity for ELs. Namely, findings demonstrate that while school, district, state, and federal policy mandates perhaps influenced teachers’ working perceptions about the role of curriculum practices on their students’ reading activity (in English), analyses of reading practices demonstrate the powerful implications of this policy context on discourses that might affect expansive learning (Engeström, 1987).
Based on teacher and administrator interviews, this study shows that in broader school and district contexts, the current accountability framework and its underlying ideology of remediation (Gutiérrez et al., 2009) had significant implications on the shifting landscape about what counts as reading. Across state and federal policy and district, school, and classroom contexts, the role of English became increasingly essential, and practitioners felt more pressure to align policies and practices with curriculum standards and English standardized assessments. At the same time, ELLs' social, linguistic, and academic needs and literate trajectories became redefined in relation to mounting concerns around their English standardized test performance, and teachers progressively relied on these tests to inform their work. Recall that Pacific was considering replacing English-language development with text-taking strategies and that, according to its manager of staff development, Alvarez District recently implemented a reading assessment program to complement the accountability framework.

In the focal third-grade bilingual classrooms, this alignment privileged outcomes rather than meaning making, since even the prevalence of comprehension-based discussions could be characterized as recitative and at times responsive, but rarely collaborative and expansive (Engeström, 1987). Relatively speaking, Mr. Webber's recitative patterns tended to emphasize the honing of vocabulary knowledge and particular reading skills, whereas Mrs. Nylund's responsive interactions tended to provide opportunities that opened discursive spaces for joint thinking and collaboration. Further, the consistent use of the district reading program across both classrooms tended to narrow the range of ELLs' meaning-making opportunities, consequently reducing the serious uptake of alternative tasks and activities, alternative texts, diverse worldviews, students' bilingual/biliterate capabilities, and critical thinking (Freire, 1970/1993; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gutiérrez, 2008; Luke & Carrington, 2002).

This influence of the district reading program was reflected in these bilingual teachers' espoused literacy goals as they sought to help their ELLs achieve "grade-level" reading. In this way, teachers aimed their practices at a narrow conceptualization of reading achievement as defined by a host of institutionalized testing apparatuses (e.g., program reading tests, standardized tests), rather than learning aimed at students' still-undetermined potential. Thus, the realization of what counts as reading, who counts as a reader, and what counts as reading achievement was ostensibly shaped by policy mandates, commercial reading programs, institutional policies and practices, and standardized testing outcomes.

Of significance, analyses of ELLs' participation in, contribution to, and take-up of meaning-making opportunities illustrate the important ways that students employed their agency as knowledge producers despite the narrowing conceptualizations of reading achievement occurring around them across institutional contexts. That is, students' creative proclivities were evidenced in their sometimes unexpected but opportune participation as makers of meaning. Their teachers, however, managed this participation in divergent ways, sometimes privileging their status as coparticipants in the teaching, learning, and meaning-making process. Thus, rather than passively consume reading practices, students occasionally transformed, or attempted to transform, the curriculum artifacts that their bilingual teachers coordinated to promote the teaching and learning of reading across languages.

For educational practitioners, administrators, researchers, teacher educators, and policymakers who seek to re-mediate the academic trajectories of Latino students, many of whom are ELLs (Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003; Fry, 2009; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Huber, Hudor, Malagón, Sánchez, & Solórzano, 2006), this study has implications. While it illustrates that the dialectical relationships between policy and practices affect ELLs' meaning-making opportunities, it also shows that social actors (e.g., students, teachers, administrators, managers) play a role in these sociocultural processes. That is, what counts as reading may be reified through particular practices. Relatively speaking, Mr. Webber tended to hone skills through recitative scripts, whereas Mrs. Nylund at times re-mediated in the service of joint meaning making. The analyses of reading practices presented earlier illustrate that the social work of reading is a complex process, especially with regard to discursive contexts that can facilitate diverse, deep, and challenging meaning-making opportunities for ELLs.

Both teachers' literacy practices promoted policy-aligned notions of reading, one consequence of which appears to be that there were few opportunities to promote expanded forms of critical thinking (Luke & Freebody, 1997). If all students, but perhaps especially students who are ELLs, are to acquire the sophisticated, deep, and critical reading practices that are associated with higher academic learning and achievement, then policy and its instantiation in practice need to be aimed deliberately at enhancing what counts as reading to include expanded and critical meaning making, including the mediational means used to accomplish this work (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Díaz & Flores, 2001; Green & Heras, in press; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999; Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Rogoff, 1994). My hope is that this research might contribute to serious thinking around these issues.
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Mariana Pacheco is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, USA; e-mail mapacheco@wisc.edu.

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