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Rewriting Identities: Using Historicized Writing to Promote Migrant Students' Writing

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This article outlines and advocates a *historicized writing* approach that leads (im)migrant Latina/o and Hmong students to reflect upon, reread, and rewrite their socially and culturally situated experiences. Students explored their own identities through readings, writing, and discussion based on larger umbrella social themes such as *historicality and sociality, language and culture, race and class, and gender*. This exploration took place in an environment which valued hybrid language practices that valued and legitimized students' lives while fostering critical thinking around issues related to farmworker experiences. Further case study analysis of the writing and reflection of two migrant students detail the ways that students were encouraged to grapple with challenging texts that extended to an examination of the ways such texts led them to question their lived experiences and work toward individual and social transformation.

This article examines the affordances of *historicized writing*, a form of writing that encourages students to reinterpret their personal experiences within a socio-historical trajectory. The emergence of historicized writing occurred during the Migrant Student Leadership Institute (MSLI), a programme designed to work with Latina/o and Hmong high school students from farmworker families

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throughout California (see Gutiérrez et al., this issue). This approach deviates from an overemphasis on the teaching and learning of the mechanics of writing, at the expense of thinking critically, as the centerpiece of writing curriculum for (im)migrant high school youth from nondominant communities, particularly those who primarily speak non-English languages (Kamler, 1997; Zamel, 1982, 1983). Instead, an emphasis on historicized writing facilitates students' sociocritical literacies (Gutiérrez, 2007a, 2008) in which students engage in deeper analysis of the historically and politically contingent dimensions of their individual and collective realities. This approach was facilitated by a social organization of writing that distributed knowledge, assistance, and collaboration across instructors and peers who provided ongoing opportunities for students to use rigorous texts as the basis for interrogating their sociohistorical positionalities in the world.

Historicized writing, however, also fosters students' identities as "makers of history" and engages students in "imaginative praxis" (Wartofsky as cited in Engeström, 1986). As members of disenfranchized nondominant communities, these imaginings rupture some migrant students' perceptions of a rigid and perhaps limiting social world and instead empower them to contemplate their own agency and potential for self-determination (Gildersleeve, this issue). Such an approach to the teaching and learning of writing for historically underserved students requires the provision of theoretically and ideologically salient tools and artefacts that can facilitate these "new" imaginings:

Just as in dreams our imagery is derived from our ordinary perception, but transcends or violates the usual constraints, so too in imaginative praxis, the perceptual modes are derived from and related to a given historical mode of perception, but are no longer bound to it. (Wartofsky as cited in Engeström, 1986, p. 30)

A historicized writing approach, then, deliberately seeks to facilitate migrant students' appropriation of social theoretical tools to think historically in the service of reimagining socially just worlds and rewriting identities as makers of history. To be clear, the implementation of historicized writing in MSLI was not without its dilemmas and challenges: it required a substantial amount of collaboration among the instructional team to plan curriculum beforehand and on an ongoing basis, as well as time to locate relevant resources during the course of the programme. While this approach was not expected to dramatically affect new ways of reading and writing for all MSLI migrant students, it provided a range of opportunities for them to participate in joint sociohistorical analysis where everyday life was interrogated in ways that differed from reductive approaches to literacy in mainstream schooling. This article examines how a historicized writing approach fostered students' sociocritical literacies (Gutiérrez, 2007a, 2008) and facilitated the kinds of writing skills and practices often neglected in critical approaches to literacy development for historically marginalized public school students.

METHODS: EXAMINING THE AFFORDANCES OF HISTORICIZED WRITING

For over a month before the programme began, the instructional team held numerous meetings to discuss curriculum themes, identify relevant course texts, and determine how to build on specific ideas, concepts, and constructs over 4 weeks of instruction. The present analysis of the social and cognitive affordances of a historicized writing approach emerged from the corpus of data collected during the Humanities/Writing course, which was taught in conjunction with the Social Science course during the summer of 2002. Each course was co-taught by an instructional team that consisted of two instructors and two teaching assistants and each class consisted of 25 MSLI students. All members of the instructional team were either doctoral or master's degree students then, or had recently obtained their doctorate from University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). It is important to recognize the supportive role of migrant parents and other programme staff (like residential assistants) who did not participate in the programme in an official instructor capacity. These parents and undergraduate residential assistants regularly engaged with MSLI migrant students outside of the classroom and facilitated meaning-making opportunities and deep social thought that students inevitably brought to their classroom participation.

The Humanities/Writing course was video recorded for the duration of the 4-week programme to document the teaching and learning practices that constituted a historicized writing approach and how students took up sociohistorical analysis in the discursive spaces of the classroom (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Maxwell, 1996). Photocopies of written work were collected to analyse how students appropriated new theoretical lenses in their reinterpretation of their lived experiences and material realities, as well as those of their families. It is important to note that classroom teaching and learning were organized around the use of students' full linguistic "toolkit" (Gutiérrez, 1992, 2000). That is, students were encouraged to participate in discussions and produce written assignments in whatever languages, registers, and varieties they chose—their full linguistic toolkit—because meaningful learning was the goal rather than school-based literacy and language learning.

Course work and assignments were analysed to examine how these tasks mediated students' understanding of texts, discussions, and their sociocritical thinking. The course work included iterations of an "I Am" poem, extended definitions about ways to define a "migrant student", responses to guiding questions that pertained to specific course readings, three formal essays, the revisions that led to their final essays, and a culminating piece—the autobiography. These work samples included feedback, suggestions, critiques, questions, and corrections the instructors made on written assignments regarding content, style, tone, form, and grammar conventions. Finally, memos of weekday tutoring sessions were utilized

to examine students' sense-making outside of the classroom as they strived to comprehend rigorous course texts in collaboration with their peers, teaching assistants, and instructors. For this article, these data were coded and analysed to examine specifically *what* was transformed for these students. Analysis focused on how students positioned themselves in the world, how they perceived their individual and collective potential, and how thinking historically facilitated newly imagined futures for these migrant high school youth academically and personally. The work highlighted in our analysis focused on students who demonstrated a discernable shift in the ways that sociohistorical literacy practices transformed the way they redefined and reinterpreted their identities and life trajectories. These focal students and their work serve as representative cases that reflect the kinds of transformations facilitated by a historicized writing approach that sought to foster sociocritical literacies.

FOSTERING SOCIOCITICAL LITERACIES THROUGH HISTORICIZED WRITING

The historicized writing approach in the MSLI Humanities/Writing course utilized a range of sense-making tools and provided multiple, ongoing opportunities for students to think through social theoretical constructs encountered in the texts they read. These ideas, such as how language creates a particular social reality, were applied to engage students in re-“reading” their life histories. In a later section, we examine how joint meaning-making opportunities, guiding questions, and dialogue journals mediated the discourses migrant students acquired, as they attempted to think through social theory in transformative ways. We provide two student vignettes that capture how the transformative orientation of a historicized writing approach manifested itself in literacy learning opportunities, providing some insight into what was transformed among migrant students in the MSLI.

Given their individual circumstances, students' uptake of texts and classroom discourse varied. For some students, rewriting identities meant coming to new and more historically nuanced understandings of their parents. That is, students began to reconcile their previously held deficit views of their parents as individuals who occupy the lower rungs of the economic ladder with the newly acquired knowledge of the exploitation of Latin America by Western European countries (Galeano, 1973/1997) and the consequences this exploitation has had on Latin American peoples. For other students, historicized writing provoked questions about *praxis* (Freire, 1968/2000) evidenced in students' emerging degrees of consciousness about ways to affect social transformation. Through social science texts and a historicized writing approach, students began to use sociohistorical analysis as a tool for rethinking their individual and collective roles as change agents. In the following sections, we elaborate the thematic foci around which a

historicized writing approach was organized and how these themes facilitated students' rethinking of their social history.

TEACHING AND LEARNING HISTORICALLY

The Humanities/Writing curriculum was organized around four themes students examined on a weekly basis: (1) historicity and sociality; (2) language and culture; (3) race and class; and (4) gender. These themes were chosen to contextualize the migrant experience within overlapping and intersecting lenses through which students could analyse and rewrite their own identities as makers of history. Students read texts related to these themes in the Social Science section of the programme and in the Humanities section, these foci provided students and instructors with opportunities to interrogate and re-examine the relationship between individuals and the world through social theory, but based in the lived experiences and material realities of migrant students, their families, and their communities. The curriculum emphasized academic expression, informal writing in dialogue journals, formal writing through various genres, and in-class discussions using hybrid language practices. Students wrote essays across three specific genres—comparative analysis, persuasive, and text analysis—and were expected to conform to writing conventions, use organizational strategies, and marshal details and evidence to support their claims. An individual dialogue journal provided further sense-making opportunities in which students practiced daily writing through some instructor-assigned prompts and during their “free time” to reflect about past and/or current life experiences invoked by a historical focus.

Week 1: Historicity and Sociality

The focus on historicity and sociality in the MSLI emphasized a deep analysis of capitalism, colonialism, and oppression; each of these was further developed in small group discussions and writing tasks throughout the week. This focus also emphasized the racial/ethnic labels that pervade our social and institutional worlds (e.g., government census surveys) and perpetuate narrow views of what it means to be “American”. Collective group histories of oppression engendered by “American-style” capitalism and colonialism were integrated into the discussion. Deliberations among students ensued about when and how new, transcendent labels (e.g., *Indio*, Mexican, Chicano, Latino, etc.) may or may not be productive, who determines the labels we use, and how we use them across contexts and particular distributions of power. For example, the comparative analysis essay required students to contrast various perspectives on identity. Students elaborated the various stance(s) respective authors took, the commonalities and differences

across these stances, the stance(s) that most aligned with their own view, and the reasons for this alignment.

Many of these discussions were initially driven by migrant students' perceptions that their collective histories as low-income and poor children from farm-worker families did little to impede their individual potential. While they recognized how a history of racism and discrimination have afflicted Mexican and Latino communities in the recent past, students generally perceived that overcoming oppressive social circumstances was a matter of individual determination. Consider Sofia's insightful comments during the first class meeting when the concepts of historicity and sociality and labels used to connote collective group histories of oppression and resistance were introduced. From her perspective, today's Mexican (im)migrants do not experience the kind of discrimination and disenfranchisement experienced by Mexican (im)migrants in the past.

Transcript 1: It depends on the person

We're lucky 'cus in a way, like right now, Mexicans or immigrants are more accepted than before but I know a lot of people, like in other years, Mexicans weren't accepted. They were criticized. Right now, you know, we have, like, we're okay if we don't feel like, *no nos sentimos como que nos rechazan. Me entiende? Nos sentimos bien porque ahora nos apoyan más pero si antes, si vivíamos en los tiempos de antes cuando había más gente que no nos quería, cuando no teníamos educación, cuando teníamos que trabajar más, nos hubiéramos sentido mucho más rechazados. Simplemente que ahora tenemos gente que nos apoya y nos hace sentir que podemos*, know what I mean? So, *depende de como te sientas tú, es como tú vas a reaccionar hacia la gente. Si a mi la gente viene y me dice que como yo soy mexicana no voy a ser nadie, a mi no me importa porque yo se lo que soy. Yo se lo que tengo. Yo se mi capacidad de hacer cosas, pero hay otra gente que no se siente bien y que no les gusta que le digan nada. So, eso depende de la persona.* (Classroom video, June 24, 2002; see Appendix A for English translation)

At the beginning of the programme, many students challenged the very need for group affiliation and Sofia, in particular, reconciled the legacy of systematic discrimination with new opportunities, such as MSLI, that demonstrate social progress in the name of inclusion and equity. Her perspective reflected the kind of powerful resilience these migrant students had developed: “*yo se lo que soy . . . yo se lo que tengo . . . yo se mi capacidad de hacer cosas* (I know what I am . . . I know what I have . . . I know my capacity to do things).” Sofia's elaboration is deeply hopeful even though her views are predicated on the myth of individual determination and meritocracy. At this juncture of interrogating their historicity and sociality, Sofia and her peers positioned themselves as “lucky”, “okay”, “accepted”, and “capable” and believed that individual effort—rather than structural inequities, institutionalized racism, anti-immigrant social policies, and systematic exploitation—determined individual success. They had not yet

questioned, for example, why a greater percentage of “unlucky” migrant students are systematically denied access to higher education (Huber, Huidor, Malagón, Sánchez, & Solórzano, 2006).

Thinking historically and socially, then, required a joint re-examination of the social, historical, and political circumstances that unequally distribute opportunity and access—and “luck”—among vulnerable youth from nondominant communities. Students explored a sociohistorical analysis of their own lives through a reflection on how Anglo-American supremacy, systematic deculturalization, the workings of capitalist society, and historical and contemporary United States–Mexico relations, for example, affect the ongoing exploitation of poor and low-income, migrant and (im)migrant, and documented and undocumented communities of manual labour—and their children. In unpacking their positionality in the social world, migrant students began to use this historical knowledge to analyse their subjectivity and to re-examine their experiences and identities within broader social trajectories. Analysis of data in later sections demonstrates that some students came to understand how sociopolitical circumstances, like anti-(im)migrant policies (e.g., California Proposition 187), have historically affected nondominant communities whereas other students came to question their complicity in these unjust circumstances through what they considered social *inaction*. In many ways, a sociocritical literacies project promoted counterstorytelling and counternarratives that privileged the voices and experiences of nondominant communities (Delgado, 1989), which students undertook in their culminating autobiography.

Week 2: Language and Culture

In week 2, during the focus on language and culture, the use of texts that employed hybrid language transcended the English–Spanish boundaries schools and their texts tend to promote. These hybrid texts exemplified how language differences are used to construct asymmetrical power relations between groups of people, such as the high status English occupies in the United States and globally. Texts such as bell hooks’ (1989) *Talking back* and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* subverted notions of dominant linguistic patterns through privileging, in form and content, hybrid language practices. Migrant students explored various theoretical perspectives on the relationship between language, culture, and the social world. Students explored how language orders social relations (Spender, 1980), how struggles over language reflect the politics of culture (Anzaldúa, 1990; hooks, 1989), and how the struggle for and against the languages of nondominant communities (e.g., Ebonics, Spanish) affects the academic achievement of nondominant students (Rickford, 1998). Students examined how language reconstructs specific subject locations and how struggles over language in local contexts reproduce racial, ethnic, and class distinctions and positionalities about who and what is valued.

The Humanities/Writing curriculum and pedagogical practices facilitated a coming to *voice* for students. Students constructed essays to persuade readers to agree with their position on the relationship between language and culture and used their own experiences and readings from the Humanities/Writing curriculum to support this position. Many migrant students acknowledged the degree to which they have internalized both explicit and implicit messages about their languages and cultures. They openly discussed the overwhelming sense of shame they have felt throughout their lives—and that they have perhaps resisted with the same tenacity—as evidenced in the following essay excerpt. Reading, discussing, and engaging with ideas from authors that embraced Latina/o hybrid languages, cultures, and identities provoked students to embrace the power and possibilities of a bilingual and bicultural life experience. One student, Anéydis, demonstrated a move from shame to hope and possibility in her written response to the work of Anzaldúa (1990) by articulating how hybridity opens doors to broader worlds and views.

Essay excerpt 1: Languages and cultures develop broader worldviews

The migrant students start to think that their culture is one that they should be ashamed of and try to hide [it] even though that's not true at all. When one is a migrant student, one is able to start learning a new language and culture. One is able to develop even more views of the world, which in turn results in a benefit . . . but it's important to realize that it's only a benefit if both cultures are kept . . . It's important not to lose [sic] one in exchange for the other. This student is now able to not only comprehend the meaning of one culture, but of two. This student is now able to have a broader view of the world. The world has a new meaning, a different meaning to migrant students. It's no longer a world with closed doors and nowhere to go, but has open doors for them to explore . . . By opening these [doors] they are now able to see the needs of not only their own people, but those of everyone in the community as well. Migrant students . . . are able to help a greater number of people as opposed to only their race, their world. It's these students, the migrant students, that will be able to make a difference. (Student essay, July 5, 2002)

In her analysis of Anzaldúa's (1990) challenge to "the dominant culture's interpretation of 'our' experience, of the way they 'read' us" (p. xxv), Anéydis emphasized that migrant students occupy a liminal space in U.S. society. They hide whom they are—their language and culture, however defined—and simultaneously engage in a process of learning the very language and culture of the dominant community (e.g., "academic" English) that provokes in migrant students this sense of shame. Moreover, Anéydis articulated how the acquisition of a new language and culture "benefits" migrant students, since these experiences expand their worldviews and their power to "make a difference". Anéydis and her migrant peers consistently associated the advantages of their own learning and life opportunities with the possibility of using

this learning and opportunity to serve “their own people” and “everyone in the community”.

In rewriting their identities through sociohistorical analyses, migrant students wrote about the significance of their empowerment and its material implications for the migrant community writ large. In essence, a historicized writing approach engaged migrant students in dialectical reasoning about their life circumstances by asking, “What does this mean for my community?” For migrant students who embodied linguistic and cultural “difference”, the opportunity to take stances about how these differences are legitimized and de-legitimized in U.S. society inspired a rethinking of previously held notions of power, equity, rights, and social justice.

Week 3: Race and Class

The readings on race and class emphasized the connections between these two social categories with regard to educational attainment, social and economic mobility, and life chances. Students interrogated race as a sociopolitical construct (Spickard, 1992) rather than a biological category, and considered how the historical circumstances that produced the “one-drop rule” have maintained White power and privilege (Davis, 1991), despite scientific evidence to the contrary. While most migrant students had had few opportunities to interrogate race and class, they were unmistakably conscious about how their lived experiences were affected by being low-income and poor, Latina/o and Hmong, and migrants and (im)migrants in the United States. After reading a piece by Harrison (2004) entitled “Invisible People, Invisible Places: Connecting Air Pollution and Pesticide Drift in California”, for example, students made lucid connections between the media’s neglect of pesticide use that specifically affects migrant communities and how race and class influence affect the neglect of this persistent social issue. In her response to the reading, Olivia wrote,

As I was reading through the article, I realized that I was part of those agricultural regions that get sprayed with pesticides. So, I think it’s very clear that pesticide drift can very well affect me as well as everyone else around me. (Student essay, July 11, 2002)

Olivia and some of her peers realised that they were indeed “invisible people from invisible places”.

However, a historicized writing approach required students to reclaim these experiences in ways that explicitly recentered the world as it is for them within a sociohistorical context. For example, students wrote “I Am” poems that required them to elaborate their subjectivities within the following literary structure: *I believe . . . , I wish . . . , I feel . . . , I want . . . , I ask . . . , I*

wonder . . . , I expect . . . , I wonder . . . , I dream . . . , I hope . . . , I am . . . , and so on. For some students, examining the race and class dimensions of themselves and their families' material existence as migrant labourers within social-political structures that sustain their socioeconomic vulnerabilities transformed their perceptions of their parents. In other words, the sociocritical literacies orientation necessitated new and transformative ways for students to "read" their social world (Freire & Macedo, 1987)—a transformation that critically analysed how and why their lives have taken a particular trajectory and how and why some dreams come to fruition or not.

Week 4: Gender

The Humanities/Writing curriculum embedded the gender lens throughout discussions in the 4-week programme, for example, how language constructs patriarchal relations that have consequences for women (Spender, 1980), but the final week was dedicated to the writings of feminists of colour in particular. These readings explored issues around spirituality, the exploitation of the migrant and (im)migrant woman's body, *machismo*, the commodification of women, the views of Xicana *feministas*, and sexuality. These texts emphasized the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of gender politics (Anzaldúa, 1990; Castillo, 1995; De La Rocha, 1999, track 8). The historicity of women's experiences, particularly those of Mexicanas, Xicanas, Latinas, and *Indias*, incited much discussion among students because they had rarely interrogated the gendered differences that shaped their experiences and they, in some ways, reproduced.

Pesticide use throughout the farming industry and its specific consequences on the health of migrant and (im)migrant women incited an especially contentious discussion regarding the ways that human bodies are adversely affected along racial/ethnic, class, and gender dimensions (Inda, 2002). For migrant students who had previously worked alongside their families in the fields and hence possibly been exposed to pesticides, this issue raised concerns about the potential future effects of these chemicals on their bodies and future health. Additionally, situating the material realities of poor women of colour more broadly along a sociohistorical trajectory that precedes Preconquest Mexico, for example, illuminated how racial/ethnic, class, and gender "differences" in actuality reflect the politics of domination and, in turn, the politics of resistance (Castillo, 1995). In other words, students came to understand that social injustice is not accidental or unintended, much less evenly distributed across individuals and/or groups. A historicized writing approach provided opportunities for students to appropriate social theoretical tools to re-examine, rethink, and rewrite individual histories, agency, and identities.

TRANSFORMING WAYS OF “READING” PARENTS: JAIME’S EXPERIENCE

As mentioned earlier, the views of many MSLI students initially validated individualism, meritocracy, and the availability of access and opportunity for Mexicans in “new” times. Thinking historically meant drawing on the experiences and struggles of students’ families and infusing sociohistorical insights to examine how race and class were systematically implicated in the realities of low-income and poor (im)migrants. Jaime was one student who wrote about the intimate link between his own racialized and classed experiences and those of his (im)migrant parents. Jaime opted to analyse a poem about *la línea* (Arancibia, 2000), which extends a familiar phrase among many Latina/o communities, referring to the United States–Mexico border but, in a broader sense, also connotes bi-national movements and traversals.

The following vignette exemplifies how historicized writing opened up opportunities for students to engage deeply with social theoretical concepts that describe this border consciousness, as well as the pivotal role that collaborative in-class dialogues played in developing new “readings” of their past and present worlds (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Vignette 1: Re-“reading” parents

Jaime Torres participates in class with the kind of peaceful composure that minimized the bite of his inquiries and lucid comments in the Humanities/Writing course. I sit with him during the peer-editing portion of class and review a first draft of his text analysis essay in which he needed to analyze a particular text that emphasized the racial/ethnic and class dimensions of social experience. He chose to analyze a poem, “*La Línea*” (Arancibia, 2000), through the lens of his own personal experiences and the historical trajectory of his family, since he believes his family somehow embodies these lines in different ways. We revisit parts of the poem:

the haves and have nots
have something to say
about lines
about financial aid lines
nafta lines
something has to be resolved
whose time line are we following anyway?

. . .

will we ever ever really ever cross the line
or will we just sit
encumbered
by the borders of our own minds

In his draft, Jaime connected his life history to his parents’ and we reflect together on the relationship between being (im)migrants and being low-income and poor—particularly how that history has affected his future aspirations to attend college.

He begins to re-tell his family history: migrations from and within Mexico lines to migrations from and within California lines. There was always a sense of hope the family would eventually settle in a community they could afford with enough opportunities to provide for a family. He wonders what his parents might say about the *líneas* they cross and that cross them, and the *líneas* they desperately seek to mitigate for their Mexican-born and U.S.-born children. He tells me he never really stopped to think about how his life has been about both fortune and misfortune, triumph and defeat, survival and exhilaration, resilience and fatigue, and *líneas*—contours, boundaries, divisions, margins—too many *líneas* to count. As we sit with his essay before us, he recognizes the deep sense of urgency that affects his parents' life and family decisions and is more than ever moved to transcend *líneas* to somehow help his parents and take advantage of opportunities, like the MSLI, to achieve that dream. (Memo, July 17, 2002)

The *línea* metaphor gained a unique significance in the context of Jaime's life experiences, particularly since the poem draws on the collective experiences of have-nots who stand in financial aid lines, are affected by NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) lines, and grapple with border/line-crossings (Anzaldúa, 1987). Jaime had never quite viewed his parents as have-nots within a sociopolitical structure that largely determined material realities along racial/ethnic and class *líneas*, as well as geopolitical ones. The point here is not that Jaime gained a new appreciation of his parents (albeit meaningful) or that his family's history was used successfully to analyse a course text. Instead, the opportunity to write and think historically facilitated Jaime's application of a sociohistorical lens (e.g., the lines that affect experience and opportunity) to the Latina/o (im)migrant condition in general, and his family's socioeconomic conditions in particular. He considered how these conditions were neither determined individually nor overcome individually.

Too often, traditional approaches to reading and writing fail to make connections between the experiences of migrant students, their families, and their communities; they make even fewer connections to the social, cultural, political, and historical particulars of their everyday life. As a telling case, historicized writing provided Jaime with the opportunity to transform his "reading" of his parents' narrative (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In light of this new reading, his educational aspirations (and MSLI participation) gained significance as transformative social acts because he believed these acts could rupture the *líneas* that signify his and his parents' reality. Jaime no longer perceived his college aspirations as a by-product of individual meritocracy but as a means to a reimagined end where life chances are expanded for his family through educational access. Still, this approach required Jaime and his peers to hone their writing skills through the appropriation of writing conventions valued in mainstream schooling and assessments as they conveyed these new readings.

Writing historically facilitated the development of a sociocritical literacy that for Jaime, and some of his peers, led to reinterpretations of the social lines that

demarcate racial/ethnic groups, socioeconomic classes, nation-states, power hierarchies, and degrees of consciousness (e.g., “the borders of our minds”). For some students, then, what was transformed was their ability to “read” their parents as social actors working within, but at the same time rising above, the constraints of being poor (im)migrants from nondominant communities in the United States subject to the mutability of the farming seasons. Through “reading” his parents in new and empowering ways, Jaime also repositioned his individual actions as essential to a collective effort that rested partly on his academic success and that simultaneously diminished the oppressive lines between his life trajectory and that of his parents.

HISTORICIZING THROUGH NARRATIVES, JOINT MEANING MAKING, AND DIALOGUE JOURNALS

The social organization of curriculum mediated and *re*-mediated (Cole & Griffin, 1983) how migrant students came to engage social theory and provided a range of social opportunities to jointly construct new understandings. The following sections elaborate how hybrid narratives, joint meaning-making, guiding questions, and dialogue journals were utilized as sense-making tools to facilitate historicized writing. These literacy practices constituted the sense-making opportunities that facilitated the goals of a historicized writing approach. That is, students utilized social theoretical tools to examine their realities from a historical perspective through opportunities to write, and engage in imaginative praxis whereby they articulate an identity as makers of history.

Privileging Hybridity in Meaning-Making

To foster historicized writing, the curriculum privileged personal narratives from a range of epistemological positions. Students were required to demonstrate both traditional and critical forms of literacy through analysing texts and applying these analyses to narratives of their own lives. Just as in a traditional English or social studies classroom, students were expected to include textual evidence to support their points, but unlike many such classrooms, personal experience was not “off topic” or irrelevant, but was instead central to an understanding and application of social theory. The distinct epistemologies reflected in course texts challenged “normal” ways of reinterpreting individual and collective social histories and expanded migrant students’ discursive toolkits. Course texts emphasized experiences particular to being a migrant Latina/o and Hmong student from a farmworker family within the social-political terrain of the United States. These texts also made available new discourses and ways of thinking and talking about situated identities (Gee, 1999).

Rather than “fix” students’ language histories through an overemphasis on English-only practices, migrant students’ learning was facilitated through hybrid language practices, as they read and made sense of texts in classroom and informal discussions, joint group activities, formal lectures, in-class assignments, and their own writing practices. Furthermore, expertise and “knowing” were not located in any one individual or group of individuals, including the instructors and instructional team, but, rather, distributed forms of expertise were privileged. Sense-making and critical-thinking opportunities were facilitated across courses, evening study hours, and joint group tasks. This orientation to teaching and learning is particularly productive for poor and low-income students with a history of participation in exclusionary schooling practices that neglect and ignore their knowledge, backgrounds, experiences, histories, and positionalities (Antrop-González & De Jesus, 2006; Bartolomé, 1994; Conchas, 2001; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Alvarez, 2001; Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 2004). In neglecting migrant students’ situated histories, educators and practitioners suppress the development of counternarratives in which students can imagine social change in the world (Trainor, 2002; Trifonas, 2003).

Historicized writing reinforced the social-cultural nature of student learning and development through the strategic reorganization of ongoing sense-making whereby students contributed to and jointly constructed knowledge. The smaller instructor-to-student ratios in the MSLI programme design (4 instructors to 25 students) afforded increased opportunities for instructors and teaching assistants to facilitate these critical interrogations across social configurations—whole group, teacher-selected small group, dyad, and student-selected peer groups. This range of social configurations provided multiple and ongoing social contexts for students to engage in work across a range of discourses, questions about course texts, peers’ inquiries and commentaries, and joint problem-solving.

Sense-Making Through the Dialogue Journal

While the Humanities/Writing course organized genre-base writing and multiple opportunities for face-to-face dialogue, the incorporation of a dialogue journal created the discursive space for students to “play” with ideas, particularly those perspectives they encountered across texts or from instructors, and peers. The dialogue journal provided alternative spaces for students to explore deeper questions about the relationship between individual and collective agency and the disruption of social reproduction. For migrant students who participated in school-based writing practices that view writing as the outcome of learning activity, the dialogue journal created opportunities to use writing to think through particular notions, musings they could later take up during classroom dialogues, activities, and writing tasks.

For some students, the dialogue journal created the space to articulate their role as “history makers” in a world that reproduces and sustains an unjust and stratified society. The instructional team collected students’ journals at least twice per week and maintained an ongoing “dialogue” with students about their emerging sense-making. The dialogue journal was, in turn, an invaluable resource for the instructors as it provided another means to learn about students and the kinds of strategic assistance, scaffolding, and support they needed to provide in their organization of the students’ learning. For example, one of the instructors learned from a dialogue journal that our migrant Hmong students called for a broader discussion within the Humanities/Writing course about the still shrouded social, political, and historical circumstances that led many Hmong to seek “refuge” in the United States (Hamilton-Merritt, 1999). There was uptake of these issues.

Two weeks into the programme, several students began poignantly asking about the transformative potential of the social theoretical constructs they discussed, examined, and questioned in the Humanities/Writing course. That is, how far could they take this idea of justice? Such discussions became normative. The transformative power of historicized writing lay in its affect on migrant students’ progressive analyses of social practices, systems, and relations in their writing and dialogues. Their analysis illuminated the implicit (and explicit) ideological assumptions that underpin the distribution of power, representation of history, construction of knowledge, and roles we ascribe to individuals along racial/ethnic, class, linguistic, and gender lines in U.S. society.

As a telling case, Dalila represents those migrant students who extended the relationship between social theories and transformative individual (and collective) action, or praxis (Freire, 1968/2000). For Dalila, the journal entries allowed her to participate in imaginative praxis in which historical thinking became significant insofar as it could affect the kind of change she believed needed to happen.

Vignette 2: “We can’t just *talk* about social issues”

Dalila Ponce asks the kinds of questions that dig deep into the heart of our dialogues in the Humanities/Writing course, as well as those in the Social Science course. *How does this discussion affect me? Why does this issue matter? What’s the point? What if I don’t agree?* She is an outspoken participant, but especially exploits her dialogue journal. She expresses her artistic inclinations through drawings and elaborate decorations, sometimes even writing sideways or upside down on the pages of her journal. She especially plays with noteworthy ideas and concepts in colorful representations that transcend the limitations of the two-dimensional canvas. For example, she emphasizes the words **FUTURE**, **HOPE**, **PEACE**, *REVOLUTION*, and **SOCIETY** throughout her journal. On one particular page, Dalila wrote:

“We’re not making anything better by just talking about social issues. What do we need to do to take action? What could I do? What could the MSLI students—the

faculty—what could we do to make our thoughts known? To stand up for what we believe in? I know some MSLI students haven't discussed these problems before. I know for them, talking about social problems means we're already doing something about it. But some of us have thought about things like RACISM and DISCRIMINATION, and we have opinions about it." (Dialogue journal, July 12, 2002)

Dalila began to engage in these discussions with her migrant peers who were asking similar questions about how to utilize these new ways of interrogating the world, and to potentially engage in individual and collective actions. Dalila recognized that her migrant peers were diverse with respect to their backgrounds and previous experiences, and acknowledged that ongoing consciousness-raising opportunities were a critical aspect of the process of social change. Historicized writing required her to engage in deeper social analyses through the use of new tools; Dalila took up these tools in her dialogue journal to explore her specific role in processes of social reproduction and her potential role in major social change. We saw in Dalila's questions, for example, a form of "talking back" central to a sociocritical literacies project oriented toward social change (hooks, 1989, 1994; Tejada, Espinoza, & Gutiérrez, 2003).

Dalila's recursive engagement with social theory across course readings, small group discussions, and historicized writing practices required her to articulate her understandings, to critique, and to question with evidence. These processes facilitated shifts in her expectations about the role of education in radical social change. The important point, however, is that through opportunities to think historically the purposes of writing were essentially redefined; writing provided opportunities for Dalila and her migrant peers to imagine and reimagine new futures for themselves and the migrant community.

THE AFFORDANCES OF HISTORICIZED WRITING

The historical academic underachievement of nondominant students from low-income and poor communities has led to aggressive educational policies that increasingly institutionalize narrow approaches to the teaching and learning of literacy (Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos, & Gotanda, 2002; Luke & Carrington, 2002). In contrast to these narrow approaches, the Humanities/Writing curriculum fostered migrant students' sociocritical literacies through the use of social theory as a tool for rethinking, re-examining, and reinterpreting how personal experiences and identities are implicated in broader global-historical landscapes. Specifically, historicized writing systematically engaged students in using their social histories and material realities as the impetus for rigorous critical analyses. Through the lenses of historicity and sociality, language and culture, race and class, and gender, migrant students re-"read" and rewrote their life narratives in ways that

transformed their perceptions of themselves, their families, and their proximal and distal communities. In MSLI, migrant students were engaged in consciousness-raising dialogues and writing practices whereby they reimagined and redefined their subjectivity from recipients of the social world in its current manifestation to social actors and change agents—makers of history—within still undetermined and mutable futures.

A historicized writing approach provided repeated opportunities for students to develop voice and express their thoughts about what they were reading, writing, and more importantly, discovering about themselves. This approach appropriated Freirian perspectives on literacy learning and development (Freire, 1968/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987), as well as cultural-historical perspectives on teaching and learning (Cole, 1996; Gutiérrez, 2007b; Moll, 1990; Rogoff, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978) to create a critical sociocultural pedagogy and framework (Gutiérrez, this issue). To this end, opportunities to write were designed to extend the powerful but fleeting moments of dialogue and sense-making that occurred during instructor-led lectures, text-based discussions during class and tutoring sessions, peer editing opportunities, the sharing of and response to written work, and the informal contexts of MSLI life. This approach was informed by the reality of migrant students' participation in contemporary schooling. It honed the literacy and writing skills these students needed to navigate their required high school classes as well as the high-stakes apparatuses used to deny access to institutions of higher education. In the Humanities/Writing course, students wrote on a daily basis and received feedback from teaching assistants, their instructors, and their peers. They responded to guiding questions, wrote in their dialogue journals, constructed essays that required a range of sociohistorical analysis (e.g., comparisons, contrasts, and persuasion), wrote poetry, and revised previous versions of their written work.

A historicized writing approach transformed academic writing into evolving opportunities to apply social theoretical frameworks to migrant students' narrative historical analyses and to engage in imaginative praxis (Wartofsky as cited in Engeström, 1986). Whereas many students began MSLI firmly based in the myth of individual meritocracy (e.g., the luck experienced by Mexican [im]migrants in recent times), historicized writing engaged them in re-examining their collective histories and how their lives were implicated in and through these histories. For some students, these analyses resulted in "reading" their families in new and profound ways (e.g., Jaime) to reimagine themselves individually and collectively within transformable social trajectories with the potential to affect a more socially just world (e.g., Dalila).

Through hybrid texts that recentered the subjugated narratives of poor and low-income nondominant communities, students engaged in critical discussions about the significant social, cultural, political, historical, and ideological dimensions of their lived experiences. Importantly, historicized writing privileged

migrant students' lives and vulnerabilities as the heart of sense-making discussions, rather than treating these realities as add-ons or afterthoughts in a curriculum where migrant students and other nondominant groups often become invisible. In a restrictive reform policy context that does little to affect the academic trajectories of poor, low-income nondominant students (Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2005; Huber, et. al., 2006), historicized writing fosters hope and possibility for traditionally underserved students especially as it promotes reimagined identities as makers of history through situated understandings of a social world they have the power to change.

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APPENDIX A

English Translation of Transcript 1

We're lucky 'cus in a way, like right now, Mexicans or immigrants are more accepted than before but I know a lot of people, like in other years, Mexicans weren't accepted. They were criticized. Right now, you know, we have, like, we're okay if we don't feel like, we don't feel like they reject us. You know what I mean? We feel good because now they support us more but if before, if we lived in the old times when there were more people that didn't like us, when we didn't have education, when we had to work more, we would've felt a lot more rejected. It's just that now we have more people that support us and make us feel that we *can*, know what I mean? So, it depends on how you feel, that is how you will react toward people. If people come to me and tell me that since I'm Mexican I'm not going to be anybody, I don't care because I know what I am. I know what I have. I know my capacity to do things, but there are other people that don't feel good about themselves and that don't like being told those things. So, it depends on the person.