



Toward Expansive Learning Examining Chicana/o and Latina/o Students' Political-historical Knowledge

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Abstract

This article examines how Chicana/o and Latina/o youth employed their political-historical knowledge to “talk back” to the xenophobia and political contradictions that underlie the (im)migration “debate.” A literacy unit that honored bilingual students’ everyday translating created opportunities for students to utilize this political-historical knowledge to “translate” their critiques to formal and informal audiences in their writing (e.g., the mayor vs. friends). Pacheco briefly overviews the unit and emphasizes the practices related to voice most relevant to her analysis of sixth-grade students’ essays about (im)migration and the plight of (im)migrants. This article demonstrates how students framed (im)migration, positioned themselves within the debate, positioned major political figures, drew on their historical knowledge, and appropriated community discourses of resistance. In many ways, these students already embodied the kinds of critical literacies and position-taking advocated by literacy researchers and educators. This article concludes with a discussion of how educators can draw strategically on students’ sociocultural knowledge, as well as their political-historical knowledge, in the service of expanding their critical literacies.

Toward Expansive Learning: Examining Chicana/o and Latina/o Students' Political-historical Knowledge

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Literacy educators and practitioners who work with ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse students have increasingly turned to sociocultural perspectives to inform teaching that emphasize the role of culture in human learning and development (Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). These approaches help literacy educators understand how they could develop thematic curricula that employs the *funds of knowledge* available in students' lived contexts and practices (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Other literacy researchers promote curriculum changes that build on the language practices of particular cultural communities, including their hybrid language (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999; Zentella, 2005), translating (Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003; Orellana & Reynolds, 2008), and signifying practices (Lee, 2001). Rather than “fix” non-dominant students to “fit” into classroom literacy practices, these approaches challenge educators to explore how they can best use students' cultural, linguistic, and intellectual resources to enhance their academic potential.

As a member of a design research team, I worked with researchers to develop academic writing tasks around the particular skills Chicana/o and Latina/o bilingual sixth graders used as part of the everyday translating work they employed in a wide range of social settings outside of school (Martinez, Orellana, Pacheco, & Carbone, 2008; Orellana & Reynolds, 2008). As design research, the goal was to build on earlier studies of translation practices and to work with teachers to develop curriculum they could implement based on this work, making appropriate adjustments to this curriculum in the process (Collins, Joseph, Bielczyc, 2004). These translating skills included their flexible but effective use of English and Spanish, their

understandings of the meanings and statements appropriate in specific settings, their deliberate focus on meaning making across speakers, and their insights into how power functions through social interaction. The design study, which I describe in the following sections, coincided with the massive pro-(im)migrant rights marches in the U.S. in the spring of 2006, so the team incorporated literacy tasks around this topic in their examination of translating practices with students and their teacher. Numerous students from this sixth grade classroom had participated in pro-(im)migrant social actions, so we capitalized on this opportunity to relate out-of-school circumstances with in-school literacy tasks. For example, we asked students to question the Spanish versus English translations associated with a sign showing the silhouette of a woman and child running. The freeway sign is widely perceived as an anti-(im)migrant symbol and serves to emphasize the local versus official meanings associated with translating across languages (see Figure 1). In the course of facilitating academic writing tasks through a focus on the issue of (im)migration¹, I became interested in the broader political-historical knowledge the students had developed in and outside of school because it represented yet another repertoire of the socio-cultural resources youth bring to their school settings.

¹ I use *(im)migrant* rather than *immigrant* because I come at this issue from a historically concrete position. To perpetuate the notion of “immigrant” with respect to Chicana/o and Latin@ groups reifies, in my view, the legal and geo-political processes that produce notions about who belongs in the U.S. southwestern territories and who does not. As eleven-year-old Margarita voiced in her essay, *estamos en nuestra tierra natal* [we are in our native lands].

Figure 1: California Freeway Sign



The sixth grade students were U.S.-born as well as first-, second-, and third-generation (im)migrants from Mexico and Central and South American countries; many of them identified as Chicana/o and Mexican. When given the opportunity to discuss (im)migration in particular, the political-historical knowledge they demonstrated sophisticated readings of the socio-political circumstances of their life and schooling experiences. Specifically, they understood the intersectionality of being Mexican and Chicana/o, growing up in a working low-income community, descending from Latina/o (im)migrants, and the legal and political processes that reproduced their non-dominant status. For example, the students who attended Bellfort Middle School had already developed critiques about how and why schools diminish their politicized, historicized perspectives on their material experiences as low-income working Chicanas/os and Latinas/os in East Los Angeles (East LA), California. During a focus group interview, several students affirmed a peer's analysis that: "Just because we live in East LA they don't think we're smart" and "They think we can't do nothing about [(im)migration]" (June 13, 2006). Their political-historical knowledge was reflected in their recognition of the low expectations imposed

on them in part because they reside in a historically low-income, working-poor community and are perceived as members of a powerless, disenfranchised community of color. Their political-historical knowledge was also articulated in their essays about (im)migration and the rights of (im)migrants.

Examining Political-historical Knowledge that ‘Counts’

As I read through the students’ essays I began a systematic analysis of the origins of their political-historical knowledge: how, where, and with whom did they acquire their knowledge and persuasive ideas. Specifically, content analyses of the students’ final essays highlighted their political-historical knowledge in the following ways: (1) their framing of the issue, (2) positioning themselves within the debate, (3) positioning major political figures (e.g., Governor Schwarzenegger) within the debate, (4) effectively applying historical fact, and (5) appropriating community discourses of resistance. Along with their essays, I noted in interviews with their teacher Miss Herrera, and in student focus groups, that the students developed this political-historical knowledge across specific local contexts—in their homes through their families, through the community discourses and social actions of East LA, and in their language arts projects with Miss Herrera. Thus, to better understand how the students had acquired and appropriated this knowledge, I needed to expand my analysis of the local community context with some historical specificity. The students’ community context was not merely a backdrop. East LA has a particular history of resistance and social action imbued with the discourses, knowledge, socio-political critiques, and worldviews these bilingual youth appropriated in classroom literacy activity. A more specific description of the community’s history with political, grassroots mobilization illuminates the significant resources it made available to youth through continuous engagement with political change over time.

I attempt to capture the form political-historical knowledge took in bilingual students' writing and how a historical analysis specific to East LA deepens understandings about the contingent relationship between communities and student literacy learning and development (Cole, 1996; Moll, 1992; Rogoff, 2003). I also hope to demonstrate how literacy educators can create opportunities for students to recall, appropriate, adapt, or transform their political-historical knowledge in the service of re-imagining new social worlds, or *expansive learning* (Engeström, 1987). It is necessary to recognize Chicana/o and Latina/o students' political-historical knowledge, but the notion of expansive learning challenges literacy educators to pursue joint activity with students and their communities that can generate new ways to reconcile students' dissatisfaction with dehumanizing social categories, perceptions, and laws. In the following sections, I highlight tasks and discussions around (im)migration that in this design study revealed students' political-historical depth and breadth, and their capacity to name, analyze, and shape critiques about the exploitation, racism, and classism that affected their communities (hooks, 1989). I conclude with a discussion of the ways literacy educators can draw on students' political-historical knowledge in the service of expansive learning in their classrooms. I now describe East LA with some historical specificity that locates the knowledge these students brought to bear on classroom literacy activity.

Communities as Sites of Political-Historical Knowledge

Miss Herrera and the research team recognized that (im)migration and the plight of (im)migrants was a relevant issue for Bellfort School sixth graders in the mostly working low-income Chicana/o and Latina/o community of East LA. Between us, we had worked in urban schools, participated in mobilized social actions, lived in Chicana/o and Latina/o communities in Southern California, and understood the unique history of East LA. While popular cultural forms

have demeaned life in East LA through movies like “Born in East LA,” the community is revered for its history of radical political activism (Acuña, 1988; Samora & Simón, 1977/1993; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). The community’s historical trajectory of resistance and empowerment is beyond the purview of this article, but some highlight will illustrate the degree to which East LA continues to be a site of political-historical knowledge for contemporary youth and future generations.

Numerous examples are available in historical texts, so I highlight a few here for the sake of specificity. For example, in June 1943, East LA was the site of resistance against White servicemen who violently retaliated against growing numbers of young Chicanas/os and Mexican-Americans, who became recognizable for the zoot-suits Whites perceived as flamboyant. The struggle became known as the “Zoot Suit Riots.” The community was also the birthplace of the 1968 ‘walkouts’ or ‘blowouts’ organized by Chicana/o high school students demanding equitable educational opportunities through quality curriculum, respectful teachers, and anti-discriminatory practices, which typified the broader Chicano Movement of the 1960s. In 1986, the Mothers of East LA initially mobilized locally and at the state capitol to defeat a state proposal to build a prison in the community and in later years took up the issue of environmental racism in their challenge to a proposed incinerator project. At the time of data collection in the spring of 2006, East LA and other Chicana/o and Latina/o communities throughout the U.S. once again demonstrated their political determination after the House of Representatives passed HR 4437 (The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005).

Massive pro-(im)migrant mobilization demonstrations occurred in East LA during the three-month period we conducted our research and the Bellfort students, including some in Miss Herrera’s Language Arts class, mobilized walkouts at their school. During our weekly visits to

Miss Herrera's classroom, we learned that Bellfort administrators had instituted school-wide *lockdowns*—a disturbing appropriation of a prison tactic—requiring teachers to lock classroom doors to quell student grass-roots political action. On some days, administrators denied my entry into the campus and standing outside, I observed students jumping over fences to join their families in the pro-(im)migrant marches in the vicinity:

I noticed a student from behind the school gate climbed over it with the help of his peers but Mr. Tompkins [principal] sent him to the other man with a walkie-talkie. A minute later, Mr. Tompkins waved the boy over to him and briskly walked him by the arm toward the front entrance. He told the boy, "I looked *right* at you and you looked *right* at me and you went ahead and jumped the fence anyway. You're in *trouble*!" (Field note, March 27, 2006)

Despite the varying degrees of social consciousness embodied by these students and advocated by critical literacy researchers (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Luke & Freebody, 1997), these students' social consciousness and move toward praxis were unfortunately suppressed. Essentially, the school became an overt site of political struggle. Rather than ignore the emerging socio-political context around (im)migration and (im)migrant rights, the research team chose to organize tasks and discussions squarely around this issue. The focus of these practices was to facilitate students' thinking about the final essay, which required them to articulate their stance on a social issue of importance to them.

The Design Study

The current analysis emerged from a design study with first-year practicing teachers that made connections between bilingual students' translating skills and academic writing tasks. The research team was comprised of one faculty member, a post-doctoral fellow, and three doctoral

students: most of us were fluent English-Spanish bilinguals and had taught in bilingual and mainstream California public schools. In fall of 2005, we recruited a small group of teachers interested in language issues and facilitated discussions about language-based topics, including learning and development, policy, and cultural practices among students such as translating. In particular, Miss Herrera expressed interest in critical pedagogy and a general interest in language issues. When she granted the team permission to implement a design study based on her students' translation capabilities, we held several working meetings to design a unit.

The connections we facilitated between bilingual students' translation capabilities and their academic writing have been analyzed elsewhere (Martinez et al., 2008), and demonstrated the importance of capitalizing on the repertoire of students' linguistic skills and strategies to develop academic writing tasks. In this paper, I highlight the range of political-historical knowledge students demonstrated when the literacy curriculum invoked the social, political, and material dimensions of their life circumstances. Campano (2007), for example, deliberately used "reading, writing, and remembering" to explore (im)migrant and refugee students and their families' personal histories, knowledge, values, and traditions in the service of relational knowledge production. In our work with Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Hmong migrant students, we facilitated sociocritical literacies through analyses of their sociohistorical lives, both local and distant in time and place (Gutiérrez, 2008), and historicized writing that required particular analyses of how race, ethnicity, class, gender, and language intersected in their life circumstances (Pacheco & Nao, 2009). The current analysis further emphasizes that local communities are implicated in sociocultural literacy processes that particular kinds of knowledge, critiques, stances, and worldviews. In other words, communities vary in the ways they mobilize around particular issues (or not), the ways they represent themselves, and the ways they organize social life for their children. The particular kind of political-historical knowledge—including the

critiques and stances—some Bellfort sixth graders revealed about (im)migration could be “located” in the historical concreteness of East LA and in the community’s characteristic social and political actions.

Over two months, during the 2005-06 school year, we conducted participant observations in Miss Herrera’s sixth grade language arts instructional block (2 class periods), which was comprised of twenty Chicana/o and Latina/o students with varying degrees of English-Spanish bilingualism and divergent experiences in English-only and bilingual programs. Different research team members implemented various literacy tasks and activities, using mostly English, Spanish, and code switching during discussions. We video and audio recorded our implementation of a short language arts unit that connected translating skills to writing skills. As mentioned earlier, we incorporated tasks about (im)migration because the study coincided with various social actions in and outside of school, such as student-initiated ‘walkouts’ and community-wide pro-(im)migrant demonstrations.

After observing the political-historical knowledge students demonstrated in their talk and actions, I examined participants’ personal reflections about other experiences that might have fostered this knowledge. To this end, I conducted two focus group student interviews and one two-hour, in-depth interview with Miss Herrera to explore her overall approach to language arts curriculum throughout the school year. I especially sought her descriptions of literacy goals, her views on literacy teaching and learning, and the kind of practices that reflected her goals. For example, during a writing unit, she facilitated students’ understanding of connections between the high rates of incarceration in U.S. prisons and the heavy police presence and brutality experienced in working low-income non-dominant communities (Teacher interview, July 10, 2006).

Miss Herrera: “It’s about Social Consciousness”

Miss Corina Herrera was a 26-year-old first-year teacher who identified as Chicana with a substantive history of community activism around issues related to working low-income Chicanas/os and Latinas/os. She utilized both the district’s adopted English Language Arts and scripted reading programs, and supplemented these because they lacked writing components. In weekly discussions about her teaching, Miss Herrera highlighted her focus on writing and her inclusion of current events that highlighted social in/justice issues based on her orientation toward critical pedagogy (Darder, 1990; Freire, 1970/1993). For example, she facilitated literacy tasks around the execution of anti-gang activist and Nobel Prize nominee Stanley Tookie Williams to engage students in deeper thinking about capital punishment and the prison-industrial complex.

She articulated her aim to facilitate social consciousness so that students might feel empowered across contexts and institutions, as reflected here:

[Curriculum] was more about developing [students’] social consciousness so wherever they end up, they’d be socially conscious of their standing and still feel empowered enough to speak up and defend themselves. For me, it was *really* important for my kids to be politically aware. (Interview, July 10, 2006)

Miss Herrera deliberately connected curriculum to broader social justice outcomes and recognized that skills mattered insofar as they could potentially help her students to engage in transformative social actions across their life pathways. From her point of view, social consciousness reflected the ability to recognize community injustice(s) and to develop the political praxis to affect community transformation in the service of social justice. Through deeper analyses of social issues relevant to the material realities in their community (e.g., police

brutality and class reproduction), she created serious opportunities for her students to apply their political-historical knowledge to “analyze their surroundings and do something about it”

(Interview, July 10, 2006).

Exploring Social Issues with Students

The design study required pre- and post-assessment essays in which students articulated their stances on a social issue of importance to them to two different audiences. For this article, I focused particularly on the post-assessment, which incorporated oral and written modes and required students to articulate their stances on important issues and to translate this stance to two different audiences. For example, students addressed mandated school uniforms, (im)migration, under-funded schools, and the lack of “caring” teachers at Bellfort School and translated and transposed their stances for formal and informal audiences.

Since stances about (im)migration and the plight of (im)migrants had become central to community life, the team explored how particular signs, like a highly visible freeway sign (see Figure 1), reify anti-(im)migrant sentiment in contemporary U.S. politics. As part of an analysis of signs that mediate the social perception of (im)migrant communities, the team incorporated a popular comedy show segment that mocked the freeway sign: in it, the comedian surveys the public and one Department of Transportation (DoT) representative about whom, specifically, the sign depicts. Most individuals “on the street” refuse to state the sign depicts (im)migrants and one Euro-American woman says outright, “I’m not gonna say.” The students were particularly affected when the DoT representative says it depicts “wetbacks,” a derogatory word used in reference to Mexican undocumented (im)migrants, as in the 1954 massive deportation effort, “Operation Wetback” (Acuña, 1988; Samora & Simón, 1977/1993). “Wetback” created the discursive space for students’ sophisticated political-historical knowledge of racial and identity

politics, stating it was “racist” and unjust to use pejoratives toward individuals who provide invaluable labor and services (Classroom video, April 24, 2006). In anticipation of the stances they had to elaborate in their final essays (the post-assessment), these discussions provided students with resources they could later use.

Content Analysis of Students’ Essays

To understand the social-political knowledge represented in students’ essays, I followed methods of content analyses (Gray, 2004; Patton, 2001). I closely read and recorded patterns of knowledge sources in 18 essays written by nine of the 20 students that addressed stances on (im)migrant rights, HR 4437, and the treatment of (im)migrants in the U.S. I read through students’ essays and categorized the broad themes around which their essays coalesced: equality and justice, re-claiming the Southwest, contributions of (im)migrants, humanist perspectives, and resistance to criminalization of (im)migrants (see Appendix A). Broadly speaking, students drew on political-historical knowledge of (im)migrants’ contributions to local, state, national, and global economies but criticized how these contributions were wholly devalued in U.S. society. From their perspectives, (im)migrants made these contributions through demanding labor that is physically debilitating, disgusting (or “nasty”), and inadequately compensated. Moreover, students perceived that (im)migrants habitually undertook jobs that U.S. citizens either “do not want” or “will not take,” given the routinely poor working conditions of their low-income, low-status work (i.e., janitorial duties).

Evident across students’ essays was their knowledge of local and national power brokers and political stakeholders implicated in shaping opinions and legislation around the issue of (im)migration. They not only named the sponsor of HR 4437, Congressman Sensenbrenner [R-

WI], for example, but also connected the issue to the mainstream media, the mayor of Los Angeles, the East LA community, and President Bush. In their view, the plight (im)migrants experienced was distributed across a collective of individuals with diverse backgrounds and roles, rather than exclusively on (im)migrant communities themselves.

Moreover, students defied the assumptions embedded in popular rhetoric about who does and does not belong in the U.S. Rather than reify the issue by accepting it as valid, they employed political-historical knowledge to question the premises on which the public debate rests. For example, they drew on historical fact to challenge the geo-political boundaries that separates (im)migrants from “natives”. Thus, I conducted subsequent content analyses of the ways students located power relations in their complex understanding of (im)migration. While they justified pro-(im)migrant stances from humanist perspectives [i.e., that (im)migrants deserve to be treated like humans], they centered power in the ways they framed the issue, positioned themselves as key players, positioned politicians as complicit, acknowledged historical inaccuracies, and expressed discourses of resistance. Student focus group interviews and an interview with Miss Herrera provided further insights into the range of contexts in and out of school that facilitated this political-historical specificity.

Students’ Use of Political-Historical Knowledge

An analysis of the ways students framed the (im)migration debate demonstrates that even within this group of Bellfort sixth graders, they represented a diverse range of stances on this issue. In addition, while broader discourses around (im)migrants and their children sought simple solutions, these students generally employed socio-politically nuanced critiques that drew on local sensibilities. For example, HR 4437 sought to criminalize the 12 million undocumented (im)migrants currently in the country to dissuade the influx of new (im)migrants. Likewise,

vigilante Minute Men projects in Arizona and New Mexico support anti-(im)migrant legislation and a hyper-militarized border. In contrast, these Chicana/o and Latina/o students deployed sound political-historical knowledge that acknowledged the political economy of exploitable labor, various push-and-pull socioeconomic factors, the legacy of racism, the dehumanizing effects of (im)migration legislation, and the deleterious effects of American-style hypocrisy. Recall that the plight of (im)migrants and their children had compelled some students to engage in radical social actions rooted in the histories and discourses of East LA. Moreover, they generated novel visions of a more socially just, humane society.

1. Framing (Im)migration

Students framed (im)migration in ways that ranged across and within humanist, civil rights, reciprocity-based, and race-based perspectives. Those who adopted a humanist perspective believed that (im)migrants reflected the human pursuit for a better quality of life, so they sought opportunities in the U.S. that might lead to an improved quality of life for them and their families. Carolina's essay, addressed to local news reporters, illustrates the humanist perspectives some students expounded regarding the treatment of (im)migrants:

“Immigrants should be treated the same way as other people...they are human beings like other people. There's nothing different...They think by coming to the U.S. they could start a new life. That's all they want to do...The immigrants should not be treated like criminals.” (May 6, 2006)

While Carolina articulated her belief that (im)migrants are human beings, she also believed they deserved compassion both for their desire to “start a new life” and because broader political discourses criminalize these individuals. From Carolina's humanist perspective, (im)migrants deserve to be treated like the human beings they are, especially since their desire to

start a new life does not constitute a crime.

Other students believed (im)migrants continue to contribute to this country's infrastructure and in California, to its agricultural dominance as one of the world's most powerful economies. For these students, the debate centered on a notion of reciprocity between the individual and the nation-state: because (im)migrants 'pay' with their labor, the U.S. owes these individuals some compassion and gratitude. Other students rejected all or parts of the humanist, civil rights, and/or reciprocity-based perspectives because they firmly believed the discourses around (im)migrants were rooted in racism. In elaborating their stances, students boldly affirmed that the criminalization and de-humanization of (im)migrants from poor and low-income communities fueled current antagonisms aimed at an already vulnerable population.

2. Positioning Themselves within the Debate

Students explicitly positioned themselves within the debate in their alignments with (im)migrant communities primarily through their discursive use of the terms "us," "we," "you," and "they" and through a recognition of their own agency and potential for collective power. For example, students regularly used the words "they" and "them" in their discussions of (im)migrants but also indexed their identification within this community through their use of "us" and "we," as in "they are doing things for our community" or "us immigrants are people too." Several students positioned themselves through an emphasis on their individual agency and rights as residents or citizens to this disenfranchised community. While undocumented (im)migrants have limited avenues for resistance and mobilization, some students believed they justifiably "deserved" their assistance. Furthermore, they believed the school administration's lockdown policy thwarted their ability to realize their convictions, even if they sought to participate in pro-(im)migrant, community-wide walkouts. Maritza, for example, explained to

school district leaders that she had a right to walkout, since disenfranchised (im)migrants deserved her advocacy:

“We should have the rights to walkout because we are doing it for a reason and we are doing this because the immigrants deserve it because they do some work that the residents don’t want to do and they have to suffer because nobody else wants to do it.” (May 10, 2006)

Because Martiza believed (im)migrants were at a disadvantage in terms of job opportunities and rights to challenge governmental policies and practices, she believed she had a right—if not an obligation—to exercise her rights to support (im)migrants. Moreover, she expressly challenged the district’s institutionalization of lockdowns because she sought to exercise her rights to engage in transformative actions on behalf of individuals who made sacrifices for this country. Thus, students positioned themselves within the debate, but articulated how they were personally implicated across particular aspects of the debate as they distanced or aligned themselves with (im)migrants to varying degrees.

3. Positioning Political Figures

Throughout classroom discussions, President G. W. Bush, HR 4437 sponsor Congressman Sensenbrenner (R-WI), and California Governor Schwarzenegger were the public figures students most commonly referenced to make three particular arguments. First, President Bush, Congressman Sensenbrenner, and Governor Schwarzenegger symbolized the U.S. power structure as students recognized that these figures had the political capital to make substantial changes to how (im)migrants are perceived and treated. Second, students referenced them to substantiate the argument that many U.S. citizens are the direct descendants of (im)migrants who came to the U.S. across historical periods to seek better economic opportunities. Third, students

commented on the political practices and views of Governor Schwarzenegger since his own personal history as an Austrian (im)migrant, mostly indexed by his accented English, reflected a degree of hypocrisy. For example, Sofia boldly emphasized the governor's hypocrisy in her essay to him:

“You’re also an immigrant. So now you’re making new laws against immigrants. You should not be talking because you are also an immigrant. And if I was you, I should keep my mouth shut.” (May 10, 2006)

Sofia appeared to ask, how could these and other Euro-American political figures who are either (im)migrants or their descendants justifiably represent the antagonistic sentiment that constructed (im)migrants as criminals and threats? Some of the perceptions these students expressed during classroom discussions later emerged in their substantiations of their pro-(im)migrant, pro-social justice stances in their essays.

4. Drawing on Historical Knowledge

These sixth graders not only demonstrated their knowledge of key historical events that characterize U.S.-Mexico relations, but also strategically incorporated this historical knowledge to problematize perceptions of Mexican (im)migrants and (im)migration. They particularly referenced the 1948 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo through which the United States “stole” the Southwest from Mexico, as well as the Westward Expansion during which the United States committed genocide against Native American tribes to acquire sizeable amounts of rich, fertile land. Margarita expressed this interpretation to (im)migrants the following way:

“After all, they [Euro-Americans] were immigrants also because the Indians came here and kicked them out, and we are in our land because they stole parts of the U.S. in 1840 [sic]. The land they stole was California, Texas, New Mexico,

and other states so we are in our property, so if someone should go it's them

because *estamos en nuestra tierra natal* [we are in our native land]." (May 2006)

In her essay, Margarita demonstrated her historical knowledge and used it strategically to suggest that when land is stolen from indigenous populations, the thieves, so to speak, do not have rightful claims to these lands. Moreover, Margarita's use of Spanish added personal and political power to her forceful statement. In stating "*estamos en nuestra tierra natal*," she not only demonstrated her effective bilingualism (i.e., code-switching) but also positioned herself as a full member of a "we" that is indigenous to California and consequently Spanish-speaking.

Margarita and other students who shared her perspective engaged in re-naming the "real immigrants" in their essays: earlier Europeans settlers who sought economic opportunities in America were the real immigrants. In their re-naming, students challenged Euro-American claims that Chicana/o and Latina/o (im)migrants should "go back to Mexico" since these Euro-Americans are the descendants of the original settlers to the U.S. In essence, these Chicana/o and Latina/o students opposed the very notion of (im)migrant and (im)migration in popular discourses through their strategic incorporation of historical knowledge about U.S.-Mexico relations.

5. Appropriating Discourses of Resistance

As discussed earlier, East LA has a long history of resistance, mobilization, and civil rights actions. The community discourses that characterized the mobilization of disenfranchised 1960s youth disillusioned with the broken promises of social, economic, and political mobility through education were echoed over four decades later in the final essays of Miss Herrera's sixth graders. They incorporated words like "walk-outs", "boycotts", and "protests" in their essays and plead with adults to stand in solidarity to demand collectively the just and humane treatment of

(im)migrants. They appropriated first, a discourse of solidarity that centered on the kind of collective, large-scale mobilization efforts other East LA youth had used in previous generations. Moreover, these students' collectivist orientations contrasted the individualist orientations that schools promote through the persistent focus on individual meritocracy.

In an essay to her mother, Carla articulated the power of “supporting one another” for a pro-(im)migrant cause, particularly since she believed that only a collective group could affect (im)migration policy:

“I also strongly believe if we all support each other like we’ve been doing so far, we’ll be able to convince the government or president on accepting our thoughts and feelings because we’re just as important as anybody else in this country.”

(May 10, 2006)

Carla also elaborated how the collectivism she envisioned might challenge anti-(im)migrant policies and practices at the governmental level. However, her stance suggests that the governmental structure reflects the views articulated in HR 4437, since she claims that “we” are equally important as those individuals and groups whose views this structure represents. In other words, this “we” exists outside of this government.

Second, some students appropriated discourses about how (im)migrants sustain the economic vitality of California and the U.S. in general since they acknowledged that without them, these economies might collapse. Similar to arguments put forth in relatively provocative movies such as *A Day Without a Mexican* (2004) that explore California's dependence on Mexican and Latin@ (im)migrants, students acknowledged the economic losses HR 4437 would likely provoke, as Alfonso explained in his essay to President Bush:

“...If we immigrants leave, the businesses are going to lose a lot of money if they send us immigrants [back] and if they do, they will probably [be] closing down

more businesses and more things because we are going to do walk-outs and boycotts and more things.” (May 9, 2006)

Alfonso made another important point in his essay: (im)migrants as well as their families, friends, and supporters have the collective power to provoke more sustained economic threats through boycotting particular businesses. Again, Alfonso emphasized collective rather than individual power in his stance, which characterized both historical and contemporary approaches to mobilized resistance, particularly in low-income non-dominant communities.

Analyses of students’ essays highlight the political-historical knowledge Chicana/o and Latina/o students utilized in formal essays about (im)migration, as well as the ways that communities can facilitate youth’s politicized and historicized understandings of social issues. The politically charged circumstances of life in East LA in spring of 2006 became a central curriculum concern in the broader design study, and though the team was limited in time and scope, the essays were typed and mailed to appropriate audiences on behalf of the students. Still, these powerful essays revealed the sophisticated knowledge that students appropriated across contexts in and out of school in their community. These students reflected, of course, diverse experiences and ideologies—their bilingualism and biliteracy, translation experiences, political-historical knowledge, socioeconomic backgrounds, writing capabilities, and experiences as (im)migrants and with (im)migration in their families. Still, they represented powerful voices whose collective potential to affect social change has perhaps yet to be realized but whose potential for such action was reflected in their social envisioning of a world wherein being human matters more than legal status.

Suggestions for Practitioners

This section provides three suggestions for how literacy practitioners can learn more

about their students' communities and their histories, deepen their knowledge of students' local knowledge, and develop literacy activities that both build on this history and knowledge in the service of expansive learning (Engeström, 1987).

First, practitioners can deepen their knowledge of students' communities by exploring historical literature and sites that provide insights into the particular circumstances that have affected contemporary circumstances. Local museums and libraries might provide specific information about the events that capture a community's historical concreteness. Practitioners might also enhance their search for historical depth through efforts to understand the inter-generational knowledge of community members (including parents and caregivers), as well as community activists and organizers seeking to affect social change. Moreover, practitioners can take clear notice of the struggles and tensions communities face, as well as the social actions they take to reconcile their dissatisfactions, through ongoing contact with a range of community members. Community walks might also reveal some important historical and political artifacts that reflect a range of critiques, stances, and worldviews, such as this anti-HR 4437 billboard that urged passers-by, "HR 4437: You've already heard enough, now let your voice be heard" (see below).

Figure 2: HR 4437 Billboard in East Los Angeles



In the classroom, teachers can create opportunities for students to identify, articulate, and transform their political-historical knowledge—or the ways they apply politicized and historicized depth and breadth to their life circumstances. For non-dominant students, this approach requires particular consideration for how their racial/ethnic, class, and language backgrounds intersect as well with issues of gender, legal or refugee status, and sexual orientation (Cruz, 2001). Practitioners can organize multiple mediational means for the articulation of political-historical knowledge, similar to the incorporation of (im)migration in the design study in Miss Herrera’s classroom. For example, the thoughtful use of *teatro* for young literacy learners to “live alternative ways of knowing and being” (Medina & Campano, 2006), which might include a focus on social issues relevant to community life, provides students an opportunity to express or transform their knowledge and subjectivities through creative means. Practitioners could also choose to invoke community struggles and social actions to explore the type and range of political-historical knowledge students bring to the language arts classroom.

Finally, teachers could use the critiques, stances, and worldviews communities promote among their children and youth and understand this as political-historical knowledge that can be the center of students' literacy activity in the classroom. Practitioners could use historical literature and artifacts obtained from community sites, signs, and artifacts to mediate expansive literacy learning that generates newly envisioned social futures (Engeström, 1987), similar to these sixth graders' social justice appeals. While the research team was limited in time and scope, educators who promote transformative literacies can employ this knowledge in subsequent expansive learning that pushes students to articulate new social futures (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Luke & Freebody, 1997). Writing, particularly narratives about life experience, can facilitate a historical analysis that squarely examines how distinct socio-historical lineages affect present-day life (Pacheco & Nao, 2009). For example, a socio-historical analysis of my life experiences would require a specific examination of *The Bracero Program*, a guest worker program for Mexican agricultural laborers like my father, that lasted between 1942 and 1964 (Acuña, 1988) and is an important aspect of how my family came to call the U.S. its home. My hope is that these suggestions will expand literacy educators' learning *about* and *from* students to re-imagine ways of building on their political-historical knowledge to affect transformative educational praxis.

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Figure 1: California Freeway Sign



Figure 2: HR 4437 Billboard in East Los Angeles



Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:HR4437.jpg>

Appendix A: Student Responses to HR 4437

Equality & Justice	Re-claiming of Southwest	Contributions of IMs	Humanist Perspectives	Resistance
IMs deserve equal rights as citizens regardless of color, race, or religion **	History shows that (Euro)Americans stole Southwestern property from Mexico in 1840s *	IMs do the U.S. a favor because they suffer & get diseases when they take the hardest, dangerous, low-paying, nasty jobs citizens don't want ***** -manual labor -field work ***** -restaurant dishwasher -construction *** -work in garment industry -clean bathrooms -janitors * -maids -farm hands	IMs are human and deserve respect **** -not wild animals -not aliens -not trash -not criminals ** -not from another planet	Treatment of IMs warrants resistance & subversion -mobilized resistance -walk-outs -boycotts -protests
Immigration reform is step toward justice & abolishing racism *	If someone needs to go, it's (Euro)Americans, not IMs	IMs contribute to local and U.S. economy **** - not to "fool around"	Have sympathy for IMs who get sent back * -want a new start * -want a better life for themselves, children, & families *** -die occasionally on way here -are victims of hostile repatriation efforts -are doing what, historically, IMs did before them -might leave children without parents	IM supporters need to stick together to convince others, especially in a country of dreams & freedom *
Treatment of IMs & Mexicans is racist *****	IMs are on their property and can take back Southwest	IMs take jobs lazy (Euro)Americans don't want *	Emotional loss	Miss H. should cover for students in walk-outs
IMs & Latin@ are majority in LA *	IMs in "nuestra tierra natal" but (Euro)Americans are the immigrants *	IMs contribute to & help community		Acknowledged May 1 st protests & marches in LA and around world
IMs deserve thanks		Economic loss * - President will take notice		

* = additional student who shared similar views

IMs = immigrants