

Second Language and Literacy Learning in School and at Home: An Ethnographic Study of Chinese Canadian First Graders' Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Based on the theoretical perspectives of socio-constructivism and language socialization, this study reports two Chinese Canadian first grader's experiences of language and literacy learning in and out of school in a unique sociocultural setting where they were "the mainstream." The article examines the students' reading and writing practices in school and at home, as well as their parents' and teachers' thoughts, beliefs, resources, and concerns regarding their literacy learning. The findings suggest that there exists great linguistic and cultural discontinuity between the Chinese children's school and home language and literacy experiences. The children view school and home literacies as separate entities rather than a continuum. Such perceptions further widened the gaps between their development of "school literacy" which is mediated through English language and culture and that of "home literacy" which is mediated through Chinese language and culture. These children's learning experiences were also influenced by the conflicts between the school's cultural values and those of their families, which include dissensions on biliteracy expectations, homework, parenting, and instructional approaches (e.g., the use of drawing and free play). Living between two separate worlds of school and home, the students are often burdened with the consequences of the cultural clashes and become "sites of struggle" between teachers and parents, and hence, are placed in a dangerous position for potential failure at school.

Editor's note: All names used in examples are pseudonyms.

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INTRODUCTION

Research on minority and/or English as a second language (ESL) students' home and school literacy practices has concluded that literacy is a part of students' lives in and out of school, and that their learning experiences in and out of school need to be explored to inform educators about their particular sociocultural backgrounds and educational needs (Li, 2001, 2002; McCarthey, 1997; Nieto, 2002). Students' experiences, perceptions, and insights can provide valid and thoughtful information about learning and may directly or indirectly influence teachers' instructional practices. Banks (2001) points out that historically public education has concentrated on school knowledge and paid little attention to students' personal and cultural knowledge—concepts, explanations, and interpretations that students derive from personal experiences in their homes, families, and community cultures. These experiences, perspectives, and insights are significant in informing educators of the knowledge and experiences that students encounter in schools and other educational settings. However, very few studies have addressed young minority and/or ESL children's experiences, especially those of young Asian Pacific children, in their particular sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts (Banks, 2001).

Research on students' school and home literacy connection has predominantly focused on minority groups such as Latinos and African Americans (e.g., McCarthey, 1997; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Valdés, 1996, 2001). Although Asian Pacific children have become one of the fastest growing populations in North American schools, they have received relatively little attention in educational research due to their particular minority status (e.g., as honorary whites who are willing to assimilate to the mainstream) (Lo & Reyes, 2004) and/or the widespread *model minority* stereotypes (e.g., Asian children as high achievers who can succeed on their own) (Li, 2003, 2005). Within the limited research on Asian student population, in the past few decades since the term model minority was coined in the 1960s, scholars as well as the media have devoted much research to the search for explanations of Asian high achievement (e.g., Peng & Wright, 1994; Kim & Chun, 1994; Sue & Okazaki, 1991). Few studies have explored the everyday learning experiences of Asian children in their particular sociocultural contexts inside and outside schools (Li, 2002; Xu, 1999). With the large influx of Asian Pacific children who face the challenges of linguistic, cultural, and academic adjustment in today's schools, such explorations are particularly needed to better understand their learning needs.

To contribute to such an understanding, this study reports two Chinese Canadian first graders' experiences of language and literacy learning in and out of school in a unique sociocultural and socioeconomic setting in a city called Riverview, a Vancouver suburb in British Columbia, Canada. I seek to examine the students' reading and writing practices in school and at home and to understand the thoughts, beliefs, resources, and concerns of these children when they

are socialized into different sociocultural discourses. This understanding might help identify reasons for differential success and help educators implement more effective instruction for such students. Specifically, I address the following research questions: 1) What are the children's learning experiences at home and at school? 2) What are the teachers' and parents' perspectives of their learning in these settings? 3) What are the factors that shaped the children's learning experiences at home and at school? 4) What are the implications of their experiences for educators and learners?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIOCONSTRUCTIVISM AND LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION

Literacy as Sociocultural Construction

In this paper, I situated my understanding of the two children's experiences and their intersecting social relationships in the world of home and community, and the world of school. I looked at forces that sustain their continuous engagement with literacy and factors that deter their investment in learning. From a socioconstructivist perspective, I look at second language learning as a dynamic social process in which a learner is an active meaning maker (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1986). A learner makes sense of self, home and school experiences, school practices, and her/his experiences in society at large (Wells). Therefore, this dynamic process involves complex social relationships that a learner forms with other co-constructors of knowledge in their everyday literacy activities and events. These co-constructors are members of the learners' particular socio-cultural contexts—teachers, peers, parents, and community members. Each of these co-constructors represents a voice of learning and knowing, and thus forms a multivoicedness in which multiple layers of values of knowing and learning are embodied (Bahktin, 1981, p. 272).

According to Gee (1989), a learner's social world can be categorized into two over-arching domains: the primary discourse of the home and community, and the secondary discourses of the public sphere—institutions such as the public school. Gee (1996, 1999) later defines the two sociocultural discourses and the different social languages within the discourses as different cultural models of literacy. That is, the different cultural beliefs in school and home discourses can be seen as different cultural models that represent their understandings of how the world works shared within their respective communities and groups (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Quinn & Holland, 1987). According to Gee (1996, 1999), a cultural model not only defines what is "normal" or typical and to be expected but also sets up what counts as "non-normal" or non-typical and threatening in certain contexts. Therefore, cultural models often involve certain viewpoints about what is right and wrong and what can or

cannot be done to solve problems in the world. Such functions of setting up what count as right and normal, as Gee (1996) points out, often result in rendering exclusionary actions and creating and upholding stereotypes.

Research has demonstrated that the dynamics and processes of different cultural models of literacy practices can have significant impact on minority achievement and school reform (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001). Since cultural models carry within them values and perspectives on people and on reality, cultural models from different cultures can “conflict in their content, in how they are used, and in values and perspectives they carry” (Gee, 1996, p. 90). For minority students who come from different cultural backgrounds, the cultural models of their own home culture can conflict seriously those of mainstream culture (Gee). Studies on immigrant and minority groups’ literacy practices suggest that immigrant parents differ significantly in their cultural models of learning and their educated values, beliefs, and actions from their mainstream counterparts (e.g., Gallimore & Goldenberg; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Heath, 1983; Li, 2002; Valdes, 1996).

Language Learning and Language Socialization

How do children acquire these different cultural models of literacy practices? Research on language socialization indicates that language and literacy learning is part of a process of socialization through which the learner acquires particular values and relationships in the social context where learning takes place (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Ochs (1986) posits that children acquire a worldview as they acquire a language. Since the process of acquiring language is deeply affected by the process of becoming a competent member of a community, language learning is intricately linked to the construction of social roles, cultural affiliations, beliefs, values and behavioral practices (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). For second language learners who walk in two cultural worlds, the process of acquiring a language(s) may involve the intersection of multiple/different cultural values and beliefs and multiple contexts of socialization. For such learners, as Lam (2004) observes, it is important to note that language practices do not exist in isolation from each other just as cultures and communities do not exist as discrete entities, but rather interact with each other in various degrees of complementarity or conflict.

The multitude of interactions between different belief systems and social languages define individual learners’ social identities and shape what their voices can say (Wertsch, 1991). For example, power struggles between the social languages in primary and secondary discourse may affect individual learners’ choices of appropriating or “speaking” a particular social language and becoming a member of that social community. In some cases, learners are capable of repositioning themselves in contesting the official social languages and re-creating their own social languages and identities (Gutierrez, Rymes, &

Larson, 1995). Therefore, literacy learning as a social practice emphasizes the relational interdependency of agent and world, persons-in-activity and situated action; and learners' participation in learning is inherently "situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 51). Thus, for second language learners who juggle between two languages and cultures, language socialization can be seen as

a site of struggle where language practices are governed by and used to produce configurations of power that determine the norms of conduct and where diverse affiliations or socialization experiences of the learner interact with each other to influence how the learner is socially positioned in any specific language learning contexts. (Lam, 2004, p. 47)

In this study, I explore how two Chinese Canadian first graders learn about literacies and their use, and the cultural values and beliefs in ways of learning within two social contexts (school and home). Viewing the children's literacy practices and learning experiences as social construction and as part of the process of becoming culturally competent members of a community, I link the analysis of the children's literacy practices to more general ethnographic accounts of cultural beliefs and practices of the families, schools, and the communities into which children are socialized (Scheffelin & Ochs, 1986).

RESEARCHING CHINESE CANADIAN CHILDREN'S SCHOOL-HOME LITERACY CONNECTION

Settings of the Study: The School and the Classroom

The school in this study, Taylor Elementary (K-7), is located in the middle of a quiet middle-class neighborhood. Before 1980, the city was a laidback, White farming and fishing community. The high influx of Asian immigrants since 1980, particularly Hong Kong and mainland Chinese immigrants since the 1990s, has transformed the city into an urban, middle-class, Chinese community (Makhoul, 2000). Although they are a racial minority in Canada, they are the majority in the multiethnic school with a total of 241 students. The school's 2001 demographics tally indicates that 158 students' home language is Chinese; 32 students' home language is English; and 51 students speak other languages at home. Altogether, the school has students who speak 20 different languages. The school has 12 regular classroom teachers and three ESL/resource teachers; all of them are nonChinese, English-speaking Caucasians. The school has one Chinese employee, Mrs. Wong, who is a classroom assistant.

The ESL programs in the school follow a resource model. That is, ESL/resource teachers are also special education teachers. Some ESL students are pulled out of the regular classroom together with cognitively delayed, special

needs children. The three ESL/resource teachers in the school are responsible for 158 ESL students as well as all the special needs students in the school. Although the mainstream teachers such as Mrs. Haines were not trained as ESL teachers, they are defined as ESL teachers in Taylor Elementary handbook.

In the target combined first- and second-grade class, there are 23 students; 17 are Chinese, four are of East Asian origin; one is Caucasian; and one is a student of African origin adopted by Caucasian parents. Mrs. Haines is a White, middle-class woman in her 50s. She has been teaching in the school district for 29 years. Although she has not had any training in ESL, she has had 1 year of experience teaching English in an elementary school in Japan about 10 years ago. Mrs. Haines volunteered to participate in the study because she was frustrated by the resistance of Chinese parents to cooperate with the school, and was eager to find out more about Chinese parents and their values on education. Mrs. Wong is her classroom assistant.

The two focal Chinese Canadian children discussed in this article are Sandy Chung and Alana Tang who are both six years old. Sandy was born in Canada, and has an elder brother who is in the fourth grade. Her family immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong in 1990. Both parents have high school educations in Hong Kong. Sandy's father operates his own landscaping business while her mother stays home to take care of her and her brother. Different from Sandy, Alana was born in mainland China. She came to Canada with her family in March 1999. She also has a brother who is in the seventh grade. Both of her parents have associate degrees from colleges in China. Her father, Mr. Tang, had his own real estate business and was a multimillionaire, and her mother was in business management in China. They came to Canada as investors. Now Mr. Tang stays home, buying and selling stocks online and researching new ideas for business in Canada and in China, while Mrs. Tang works part time as a technician for a biochemical company in the area (operated by Chinese-speaking people) to occupy herself.

Data collection with the children

During October 2000 and June 2001, I collected data in and out of the school Sandy and Alana attended. I used a variety of ethnographic methods to collect data including direct observation, participant observation, interviews, and document collection (Fetterman, 1998; Spradley, 1979, 1980). My fieldwork entailed weekly visits (1 school day per week) to their classroom. I also conducted participant-observation of some of the classroom activities. During the school visits, I observed the focal children's interactions with peers and teachers and took field notes of my observations in the school. I particularly paid attention to the literacy activities in which they participated, their language use and choices in different settings, their interactional patterns with teachers and peers, and the ways they used or talked about their home literacy experiences. I also collected, read, and/or photocopied samples of their written work.

In order to gain more information about the focal children, I conducted semistructured interviews with their teacher, Mrs. Haines, at the beginning and at the end of the research project. I also interviewed Mrs. Haines's assistant, Mrs. Wong. I asked them about their experiences teaching the Chinese children, their insight into their children's experiences in school, and particularly their assessment of their literacy performance.

I had informal conversations with the children's parents during the research process. Towards the end of the research project, I also conducted a semistructured interview in Chinese with the parents at their home. I asked the parents about their children's home literacy practices, their perceptions of schooling in Canada, and their beliefs and values of education. All the interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed and translated into English if the original transcripts were in Chinese.

Data analysis

Merriam (1988) suggests the process of qualitative data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic. Data analysis in this study was ongoing throughout the data collection period. The ongoing analysis helped to identify emerging patterns and themes (e.g., students' different home and school literacy practices, and uses of their first language in school settings). However, more systematic analysis was conducted after the data collection was completed and the interviews were transcribed.

Following Wolcott's (1994) approach to domain analysis, I developed major domains such as parent's, teacher's, and student's perspectives on literacy, student's home and school literacy experiences, student's interaction with peers, teacher's and parent's perceptions of the student, and cross-cultural differences. These domains were further broken into smaller categories. For example, in the domain of parent's perspectives on literacy, four smaller categories were developed — literacy education, L1 use and maintenance, home literacy, and L2 use and learning. These subcategories were used to code the transcripts and field notes. After this stage of data analysis, I narrowed down key themes and categories that were relevant to this report and embedded the analysis in the research findings that follow.

THE CHILDREN'S LITERACY LEARNING IN SCHOOL AND HOME

In this section, I provide a detailed description of the two children's language and literacy experiences in school and at home. In order to understand their learning process and to represent language socialization in each child's particular sociocultural context, I have also included the perspectives of their parents and teachers. These different perspectives represented different layers of meaning that are embedded in different cultural values and beliefs.

Sandy: A Serious First Grader's Literacy Learning in School and Home

When I first met Sandy in Mrs. Haines' combined first- and second-grade class, I noticed one thing that was very unusual for a six-year-old child—she appeared to be very serious and displeased with things around her as she always looked at the others with disapproving eyes. What made a six-year-old girl so intense? I wanted to find out more about her and try to understand her unique attitude in and out of the school.

Sandy's school literacy activities

At the beginning of the term in September 2000, Sandy was pulled out from her regular class for four 40-minute periods per week to work with an ESL/ resource teacher, Mrs. Vincent, in a small ESL language group. In the small group, she participated in activities related to Christmas, family, animals, and winter in order to develop her vocabulary and to practice speaking, reading, and writing skills. These small-group studies had helped her learn English. From the beginning of February 2001, she started to attend the small-group ESL study for one 40-minute period per week, and join the larger class group for chapter book literature studies on the *Elmer and the Dragon* series. By March 2001, Sandy was able to identify almost all of the letter sounds and was able to read an increasing number of words.

Sandy tells me that she does not like the chapter book she is read to at school, "It is not fun." I speculate that she does not fully understand the stories because of her limited vocabulary. I notice that during big group readings or literacy activities, Sandy seldom raises her hand, or speaks up, and she often sits quietly and appears timid. Although she is beginning to read picture books on her own, she is not fond of reading—especially reading stories. I seldom see her read in school. Even when she reads, she always claims that she does not like the books.

Sandy likes drawing, particularly coloring her drawings. In one of her journal entries she writes, "I like painting Wha I grow up I will be a ats. [I like painting. When I grow up, I will be an artist.]" Her favorite color is pink, so she always uses pink to paint herself. She gave me many of her paintings of hearts and friends as presents.

Although Sandy can complete her written work with support, she passively resists independently completing the writing tasks such as phonics or journal writing. For phonics, she has to write down the letters that are taught as well as words beginning with those letters. Sometimes, she has to draw pictures about the words and make sentences with them. For journal writing, she has to write about stories read in class. She is able to finish the drawing part; however, when it comes to printing and writing, Sandy often waits at her desk for help or refuses to do it even if the words are provided for her on the blackboard.

Sandy demonstrates the same resistance to learning math. She always waits for help before trying anything on her own. When asked, she would often say, “I don’t want to do it.”

Sandy also appears to be afraid in front of the class. Sometimes when she is called upon to answer questions in front of the class, she appears to be timid. During one of the math sessions, she was asked to do addition with her fingers. She put out her hands, but was afraid to do it, and she lowered her head, staring down, and was unable to speak up although she was able to count on her own. Mrs. Haines notes that “she was afraid to take any risks” because she is afraid to get it wrong, which is very common among Chinese children whose families emphasize “getting everything, every word right.”

The classroom rule maintainer

Sandy’s unwillingness to undertake any new tasks may have to do with her critical attitude towards things around her. She is too serious about classroom rules and others’ behaviors, and therefore, she does not want to take any risks. Sandy is known among the class as the classroom rule maintainer, and therefore has very few friends.

Sandy is very particular about Mrs. Haines’ English-only rule in the classroom. When I explain to Alana in Chinese some of the class activities, Sandy often frowns and reminds us that we should not speak Chinese in the classroom. Many times, I observe that she reminds the students who speak Chinese that they should follow the rule. She often tells them, “I don’t want you to speak Chinese because it’s English here.” Sandy maintains not only the English-only rule, but also several other rules. Several times she complains to me about students who do not follow the rules. For example, “Miss Li, Amy had secrets. Mrs. Haines said that we are not supposed to have secrets here.”

Sandy is also eager to correct other students’ errors in speaking English. For example, during one class, Kara was going to help Alana to spell a difficult word, but the other students in the class suggested Alana do it on her own. Due to the interference of their first language, Chinese, they mix up the use of “him” and “her” as the two words have the same pronunciation in Chinese:

Other students: Kara, don’t help him [Alana]. Don’t help him. He can do it.

Sandy: Not him, her. Don’t help her.

Sandy’s gradual change

Sandy’s consciousness of the English-only rule gradually diminishes as two new Chinese-speaking students, Kara and Alicia, join the class. These two students rely heavily on Alana and other Chinese students’ translation to understand the classroom activities. Their constant use of Chinese among themselves in the classroom has virtually shattered the English-only environment. Beginning in

January 2001, I noticed that Sandy started to use Chinese (both Mandarin and Cantonese) during free playtime when she played with her friend, Amy. Sandy's use of Chinese seems to have a positive effect on her attitude toward others in the class. She is able to concentrate on tasks and even play activities in which she is engaged, and she is able to express herself more in free play situations. She appears to be happier than before and starts to have a smile on her face. Mrs. Haines also notices that "she started to loosen up a little bit." I observe that Sandy also uses Chinese with Amy in many imaginative play situations during their play center time.

One time, Sandy and Amy pretended to be a family driving to Disneyland. Sandy played the mother and child, and Amy played "婆婆 [grandma]":

Sandy: You take the baby. 我们去 [We'll go to] Disneyland.

Amy: Disneyland! Oh, 我们得带吃的 [We've got to take some food.]
You know where it is?

Sandy: Oh, I'd better bring a map! Map, 我得画一个. [I have to draw a] map.

Amy: Ask Miss Li to draw us a map.

Sandy (after getting a piece of paper and a pencil):

"Miss Li, could you draw a map for me? 我们开车去
[We're driving to] Disneyland.

Sandy not only starts to use Chinese during unstructured class time, she also code-switches during this time. For example, in March 2001, when they finished reading two versions of the story Pinocchio and watched a play about it, they were asked to write a letter to the actors or actresses about how they felt about the play. Sandy decided to write to the actress who played Pinocchio, but she got stuck on the actress's name:

Sandy (frowning): 她的名字是? [What's her name]? Christine, Kristin,
or Christy?

Amy: 不是啦. [Not that].

Sandy: 哪个? [Which one]?

Amy: 不知道啦. [I don't know].

Sandy: Maybe Mrs. Haines will tell us.

Sandy's attitude change has had a positive impact on her in many ways. Mrs. Haines comments that she "is gradually gaining confidence at school." I notice that she starts to read more during in-class free time. One day when I saw her reading a book, *Jack and Jill*, by herself, I went over and joined her. I asked her to read with me, and she was able to read it with fluency although she had problem with a few words such as *that*, *time*, *those*, and *why*. When Amy came over to join us, and Sandy decided to play teacher, she held the book open and asked Amy to read with her, "OK, Amy, it's your turn." When Amy was reading alone, Sandy helped her with a few words. When it was time for

chapter book reading, Sandy asked me, “Miss Li, we didn’t finish the book. Can we put a bookmark in there?” And she turned to Amy, “We’ll finish it later.”

Sandy’s learning at home

Sandy’s negative attitude may come in part from her home literacy experiences. Many times Sandy tells me, Mrs. Haines, or the teachers’ assistant, that she does not like weekends at home. On Mondays when the class is asked about their weekends, Sandy always has similar stories about her home life, “My mom would not let me play unless I finish my homework” or “My mom did not want me to watch TV because she said it was a waste of time” or “I can’t play because I did not finish my homework.” After a lot of informal chatting with Sandy and a formal interview with her mother, Mei, I learned more about Sandy’s home life.

Every day after school, Sandy and her brother would take half an hour’s break to eat some snacks or watch TV. After the break, her brother, Billy, practices piano while Sandy works on her homework from her Chinese school or math homework assigned by her parents, or reading homework from school. Unlike her brother, Sandy refuses to take swimming and piano lessons as she does not want others to watch her. Mei explains that Sandy is very shy and is always conscious about how other people think of her, especially in public or outside of their home setting. Mei does not know why Sandy becomes so sensitive about how others view her and what shapes her personality. She speculates that maybe she was too lenient or indulgent with her when she was a baby or she has not educated her properly from early on.

Since Sandy does not take any piano or swimming lessons, Mei asks her to put the time into her studies. “She has a lot of more time to study than her brother,” Mei says. Mei enrolls Sandy in a math tutoring school for a while as she finds that many other kids in the school take extra classes and perform better in math. But later she withdraws Sandy from the math school because of Sandy’s protest.

At home, Sandy likes to play with Barbie dolls and her Hello Kitty toys, and watch cartoons. Like many young girls, she likes to act like the mommy of her dolls and change the dolls’ clothes. She does not like the fact that her mother asks her to study all the time. “Study is boring,” she says. Mei always insists that Sandy do her homework first before playing, which always makes Sandy very unhappy. Mei tells me of her frustration, “I always have to get mad at her if I want her to study!”

Consistent with her practices at school, Sandy dislikes reading at home. Mei seldom reads stories to Sandy; most of the time Mei asks her to read by herself. The best way to learn to read, according to Mei, is to learn to pronounce and spell words and then make sentences using the words. So when

Mei asks Sandy to read the storybooks sent home by Mrs. Haines, Mei always feels that Sandy does not master the books:

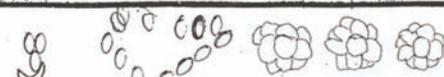
I asked her to read the books sent from school, and she picks them up and flips through them and tells me she can read them. And she does not like to read those storybooks...I have to fight with her about her study all the time. It is always such a headache.

In Sandy's reading record (see Figure 1) submitted to school, I notice that many of the books Sandy reads are recorded on several consecutive days or for quite a few times at different dates. This may indicate that Sandy is asked to read and recite these books over and over again by Mei, as it is the custom in Chinese education to learn through repetition and rote-memorization.

Figure 1. A sample of Sandy's home reading records

Sandy's Reading Record

DATE/ BOOK TITLE/ INITIALS		DATE/ BOOK TITLE/ INITIALS
Mar-9, 2001 Anthology	14	Mar-17, 2001 dragon 7
Mar-9, 2001 Winnie the - Pooh's Colors	15	Mar-23, 2001 The Tale Of Tom Kitten
Mar-11, 2001 Winnie the - Pooh's Colors	16	Mar-25, 2001 Grove's Day at the Beach
Mar-12, 2001 Winnie the - Pooh's Colors	17	Mar-25, 2001 Sasqua&C h.
Mar-15, 2001 The Tale of Tom Kitten	18	Mar-25, 2001 skinnamarinky
Mar-16, The Tale of Tom Kitten	19	Mar-25, 2001 what can we do
Mar-16 Toron-to-to ☆☆☆☆☆	20	Mar-25, 2001 Down Down
Mar-17, 2001 Elmer dragon 1	21	Mar-25, 2001 Toron to to
Mar-17, 2001 Elmer dragon 2	22	Mar-27, 2001 anthology
Mar-17, 2001 Elmer dragon 3	23	Mar-28, 2001 colours  m
Mar-17, 2001 Elmer dragon 4	24	Mar-28, 2001 colours m 
Mar-17, 2001 Elmer dragon 5	25	Mar-28, 2001 Anthology y
Mar-17, 2001 Elmer dragon 6		 CONGRATULATIONS !!!



Despite her dislike of reading at home, Sandy does express a more positive attitude towards writing at home. When Mrs. Haines asked her to draw about her writing, she drew a picture of her playing and writing at home. She writes, “I like to write.”

Like her elder brother, Billy, Sandy is becoming trilingual and she code-switches between three languages at home, especially when they visit their grandparents’ house. Every weekend she goes to study Chinese in a Chinese school for 3 hours, and she also visits her grandparents. She speaks Mandarin with her grandparents and Cantonese with her parents. She also watches Chinese TV and reads Chinese books. But she often converses with her brother in English when they talk about school events.

Sandy’s parents’ perspectives on her learning

Mei wants Sandy to study more because of her brother’s experiences in his first 3 years in school. She believes that Billy’s difficulty in school is a result of the teaching methods in the primary grades that focus more on play. On one of the field trips for which she volunteered as a parent, she told me why she was worried and had to put pressure on her daughter:

From Grade 1 to 3, there is no homework, just play. Some kids do not know whether it’s play or study. Some end up not learning much. All of a sudden, when they get to Grade 4, they have a lot of homework and they get an exam, and the kids can’t handle it.

Because she thinks that homework is very important to strengthen the children’s learning and make it easier for children to make the transition from Grade 1–3 to Grade 4, she went to his son’s teachers when he was in Grade 1–3 to demand more homework. The teachers did not make any changes, so Mei does not think it is worthwhile to ask again. “They told me they would consider my suggestions, but they didn’t.” Therefore, she has to force Sandy to study more at home.

Mei already notices Sandy’s resistance to learning. From her experience with her son who has also resisted learning since he was in first grade, Mei thinks it might be better not to be as rigid with Sandy as with her brother.

Another factor that Mei thinks is not advantageous to Sandy’s learning is the combined class; she prefers single-grade classes like the ones in Hong Kong. She believes that combined classes are too distracting for students. “It is hard to learn when you have two grades together.” Also, the school gives them too much freedom and is not strict with the students, which makes it hard for her as a parent to discipline her at home, especially when it comes to changing her attitude toward learning.

Mrs. Haines' perspectives on Sandy's learning

Mrs. Haines describes Sandy as “a sour little girl,” who “seemed to resist everything.” She speculates that Sandy’s negative attitude toward her surroundings may be the result of pampering and indulgence by her family:

I think that might be a part of results of this sort of pampering. They just sit and wait for the world to come to them. They don’t go out and meet the world. There seems to be a percentage of children that are like that.

Mrs. Haines observes from Sandy’s talk in the classroom that like many other Chinese children, Sandy’s after school life is quite sheltered and protected and there is not enough socialization and play with other children. “They tend to shop a lot, and go to the restaurant, but there is not enough meaningful play,” Mrs. Haines says, explaining that this isolation after school is detrimental to children’s psychological and emotional well-being:

These children just don’t have opportunity to run and play, and it’s becoming more and more a suicidal thing, not just for immigrant children but for all children. [They are] so pressured and I just think that it’s dangerous that they are trapped.

Mrs. Haines believes that the pressure from parents often results in students’ fear of making mistakes and consequently their reluctance to try:

They have fear of making mistakes and not getting it right. I’m always pushing them and trying to inform them that you can [make mistakes]. When they are trying to write a big word like, Menorah, and [they] only miss a couple of letters, I say, “This is an excellent mistake.” So the whole idea that making a mistake can help learning, and sometimes that’s a stronger learning experience than if you just stay within that comfort zone and get everything right. The cultural importance of education—“I want to do well” is a strength, but I think that strength can be a weakness too because some of the children are so over-programmed.

Mrs. Haines believes that the quality and depth of learning, and children’s ability to think, make connections, and problem solve, will be far more effective when they are taught in an integrated and activity-based setting than if they are given a set of rote memory activities in each subject area with no interrelationship between those areas. She suggests that children’s learning needs to be embedded in their everyday meaning making, and how this kind of embedded learning can make a difference to Sandy:

We had the story last week called *Gilbert in the Frogs Pond*. It was about the frog that tricks some cook by giving them a recipe offered for bugs, a recipe to prevent them from eating him. From that we have the kids make their own menu, restaurant menu that bugs would like. So they would come up with all sorts of things that would be of interest to a frog. Sandy came to school today, and she had been to the restaurant on the weekend, and came back and she said, “Oh, you have to put dots before you put how much.” She obviously had been motivated by that activity, and then carried this learning out there into the environmental print of the restaurant and noticed on the menu that there’s a menu item that has dots and she knows the price. And she came, budding with smiles on her face and was excited about that. So it was really nice to see her excited because she was very, very sour in the beginning of the year.

Sandy’s experience suggests that there is a disconnection between school and home in terms of how language and literacy is learned and should be learned. In the next section, I turn to the experience of Alana Tang who, unlike Sandy, was born in China, and now lives in Canada.

ALANA: ADJUSTING TO THE NEW ENVIRONMENT

Unlike Sandy, six-year-old Alana is more outgoing. She has been in the school for over 1 year, but has not achieved the expected level of proficiency in English. She is a beginning Level 1 ESL student, and is pulled out of class every day to work with two ESL teachers in small language groups for 40-minute periods. Mrs. Haines observes that Alana can complete her journal writing with support and is beginning to spell some words on her own. She is able to name all the letters and almost all of the letter sounds, and read some simple words.

Though Mr. and Mrs. Tang want Alana to become literate in both English and Chinese so that she will be prepared for living in both countries, their uncertainty about whether to stay in Canada has had an impact on Alana’s learning. During the first school year she was frequently absent from class because she went back to China several times, and this discontinuity was believed to have resulted in her slow progress in English. She also failed to submit complete home reading records, despite the fact that Mrs. Haines sent notes home to request the parents’ help to fill in and sign the record forms. Mrs. Haines wondered whether her parents were at all involved in Alana’s learning at home.

Alana formed an instant bond with me when I started the research study because she found out that I could speak Mandarin. She told me that she missed her kindergarten in China, “我喜欢中国啦。我老师最喜欢我。她总是叫我做事情。可是这里不是这样一来的。 [I like China a lot. My teacher liked me the best. She always asked me to do things. But it is not like that here.]”

Alana at school

Alana loves reading at school. I note during the 15 minutes’ morning reading time she often appears glued to her book—she gazes so intently and closely at the book as if the world around her does not exist. She looks mostly at the pictures, as she cannot yet sound out most of the words. Mrs. Haines tells me the story about the day when she first started to read the letters:

Alana was reading on *Ten Apples Up On Top*. And all of a sudden one day she made that connection between the print on the page and the words we were saying out loud. It was a formal reading process that started for her, and she was so excited about that. She came to read the book to me, and then to Mrs. Gambell [the principal]. It was a real transition for her. I photocopied the page and put it in her file.

Although Alana begins to make sense of the words on the page, she is struggling with listening and speaking. Her lack of ability in these two skills prevents her from fully participating in classroom activities. Mrs. Haines tells me that most of the assessment on Alana has been focused on her understanding English, and it is hard to assess her other curriculum areas. During the whole-class reading time, she often appears quiet and confused and often looks at other students to try to understand what is going on. Sometimes, she looks around her and appears to have lost interest in the activities. For example, when they were listening to a story on tape, or listening to songs like “Junk Food Blues” and “Canada in My Pocket,” Alana appeared lost and was unable to follow the activities. And often during these activities, she is unable to ask Mrs. Haines’ classroom assistant or me for help, so she just sits there and watches the students around her.

Alana also appears to have trouble understanding some of the writing activities. During their Christmas unit, one of the tasks was to write a letter to Santa about one’s wishes for presents for Christmas. Alana took a piece of paper and sat down at her desk, but she did not know what to do. Mrs. Wong went over to help her, “Alana, do you know what to do?” Alana answered pointing to the blackboard, “No.” Mrs. Wong explained in English what the task was. But Alana turned to tell me in Chinese, “我不知道要干什么。 [I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.]” I explained to her in Chinese and she understood.

I speculate that her confusion about the task may be related to the concept of Santa rather than simply language. She does not appear to understand who Santa is and why she has to write a letter to him to ask for things. In a subsequent conversation with Mrs. Haines, she speaks about her wishes for her mom, which differs from other children who express wishes for themselves.

Alana appears to dislike drawing in school. She often complains that her drawings are ugly and does not want to show them to classmates or adults. Sometimes she draws the picture, erases it, then draws it again. She tells me in Chinese, “我觉得我画得很难看。 [I feel that my drawing is really ugly.]” Sometimes she tells me that she does not know what to draw.

Although Alana is critical about her drawings, she can complete them with some help. Mrs. Haines or Mrs. Wong will normally sit down with her to talk about her drawing, and to write down her stories for her. Her writing is not just about school readings, but also about her home life. She even uses Chinese characters in her writing. For example, in her writing about her Chinese New Year dinner, she added traditional Chinese antithetical couplets (often posted on Chinese doors during the Chinese New Year) “对联 [safe journey wherever you go]” to her drawing.

Alana brings in her home experiences not only in her writing, but also through different events. She is always very excited when she can recognize Chinese characters. In January 2001, she brought her math book from home to show me. The math book was for Grade 1 students in China and was brought over by her parents to teach her math at home. Another day she brought in her personal phonebook and wrote down our telephone numbers. Other times, she likes to teach me different things she learns from home. One day she played the role of a teacher with me:

Alana: 你会画兔子吗? [Do you know how to draw a rabbit?]

Guofang: 不会。 [I don't know.]

Alana: 我教你吧。 [I will teach you how.] *She took a pencil and drew a rabbit step by step, and at the same time explaining to me, “这样, 再这样。 [This way, and then this way.]”*

Although Alana is a cheerful child, I find that she is not socially content in the classroom. In September 2000, Alana first befriended Shivani, an East Indian girl with autism. Since it is hard for Alana to understand Shivani's speech, Alana does not play with her that much. As Mrs. Wong has observed, Alana does not make many friends in school. Many times Alana tells me that she has no friends and nobody to play with and that she misses her friends in China.

In December 2000, when Mrs. Haines was doing the Christmas unit, Alana asked me to read *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* to her in Chinese because it had too many words in it. I started to translate the story from

English into Chinese for her. When I got to the part when no other reindeers would play with Rudolph because he had a red nose and he was small, he felt lonely and sad, Alana started to relate the story to her own feelings:

没有人跟我玩了。我不会说英语。我以前有个朋友跟我玩了,但是她不再跟我玩了。我还有其他的朋友在柳州。[I have nobody to play with because I can't speak English. I used to have a friend to play with me, but she doesn't play with me anymore. My other friends are also in Liu Zhou.]

To have a change, I continued reading the book in English, and she appeared to have lost interest in the book, “啊呀, 太多字了。[Oh, too many words.]” She took the book, closed it, and put it back on the shelf.

When I informed Mrs. Haines of Alana's expression of loneliness in school, Mrs. Haines speculated that it was a combination of her family who did not like their children to be out of their supervision, and Alana's lack of socializing with other kids:

The kids in this neighborhood rarely had out of school play-time, so any friendships they form are just the school friendships... I don't think she has a lot of friends out of school, like playing time away from the family, and there is very little after-school socialization amongst the children that I'm aware of. The families do a lot going out in the evenings to restaurants and that sort of thing, but it is with the family, not with other children, so that might make friendship difficult.

In early January 2001, Alana befriended a Cantonese-speaking girl, Melinda, who was much better at English, and this friendship greatly helped Alana. During one of the sessions about the *Gingerbread Man*, for example, they were required to write their understanding of the story in their notebook, and they copied some of the big words such as *gingerbread* from the blackboard. She was not sure she was copying correctly. Melinda explained to her in Cantonese that “这个应该大写了。看黑板了。[This letter should be capitalized. Look, it shows it on the blackboard.]”

Alana's constant use of Chinese is, however, against the unofficial English-only rule. Regardless of Sandy's protest, Alana continues to code-switch between Chinese and English with Melinda. Her status in the classroom has changed dramatically when in mid January 2001, a new student, Kara, joined the class from China. Kara could speak Mandarin and Cantonese, but could not speak any English, and Alana immediately took on the role of assisting Kara and translating for Kara. When I walked into the classroom on Kara's first day, I saw Alana and Kara sitting on the floor with a book open in front of them, and Alana was translating some words for Kara. Other students who also

saw the change in Alana came to report to me, “Alana is helping Kara.” And I went over and praised her, “What a good girl, Alana!”

Alana becomes more active in class activities and is always eager to make Kara understand what is going on around her. For example, if there was a drawing and writing activity, Alana would explain to Kara what to do in Cantonese: “你先画幅画, 然后再写句子. 如果你不知怎拼写. 再看黑板. [You draw a picture, and then you write a sentence. If you don’t know how to spell the words, they are on the blackboard. See there.]” During free play time, Alana and Melinda fully embrace Kara into their group, and they code-switch between Mandarin, Cantonese, and English. Alana also takes up a teacher’s role during their play station time. The following conversation took place in Mandarin:

Alana: 我来教你. 八减一等于多少? [Let me teach you. How much is eight minus one?]

Kara: 七. [Seven.]

Alana: 再来一个. 这个很难啰! 八加一加二等于多少? [Let’s do another one. This one is very hard! How much is eight plus one plus two?]

Kara: 十? [Ten?]

Alana: 不对! [Wrong!]

Kara: 十一! [Eleven!]

At the end of April 2001, another new student from China, Alicia, came to class. Alana also took her into their group. She enjoyed her new friends and wrote about learning different things at school with these friends. Mrs. Haines commented that it had been fruitful for Alana to have some new students come into the class:

She is really acting as a translator for them, which is good because she has to understand English... She is happy and relaxed in school and she is probably socializing a lot with the whole group now... She gravitates toward them, and she is the leader in that group now because she had more experiences than them.

Alana’s home literacy practices

Alana’s home is a distinctly different world from school, although their home is located across the street from the school. Every day, Alana’s father comes to pick her up from school at around 3:00 p.m. when he finishes his lunch and some work online. At home, Alana generally watches TV for a few hours until supper time. She usually watches English cartoons such as *Sailor Moon*, *Digimon*, *Pokemon*, and *Power Ranger*. These are the only hours that Alana has contact with English at home. Mr. Tang is not happy that Alana spends

so many hours in front of the TV (as it is bad for her eyes), so sometimes he takes her to play in nearby parks, or he asks her to play outside the house for a change. Occasionally, Alana plays video games on the computer and watches Chinese TV. On weekends, Mr. Tang takes her along to go shopping and to get together with some Chinese friends they have made in Canada. He also drives Alana to her weekly piano lessons.

Since Mr. and Mrs. Tang cannot speak English and are not sure they want to stay in Canada long term, they are very serious about Alana's Chinese development. They teach her Chinese reading and writing at home and require her to speak Chinese at all times. Although they understand that there are cultural differences between school and home, Mr. Tang expects their children to "act in Canadian ways at school and follow Chinese ways at home." He feels strongly about the importance of keeping the Chinese language and culture:

As a Chinese girl, she has to learn her mother tongue to maintain Chinese culture and tradition. I ask them that if we come back to China ten years later and they cannot speak any Chinese and cannot communicate with their grandparents, what should they do then?

He also believes that it is important for his children to learn English as, "since we came to Canada, they have to learn both English and Chinese. Some aspects of Chinese culture and traditions are really good and we have to keep them. We also need to learn the good aspects of Canadian culture." Mr. Tang perceives his role as a parent is to "teach them Chinese at home." He does not think he can do much to teach his children English, "They have to learn English themselves for our English is poor. It depends on themselves to learn it [English]."

Every evening after supper, Mr. or Mrs. Tang would teach Alana Chinese characters using Chinese textbooks they brought over from China. Mr. Tang tells me that Alana is already studying at a second-grade level in Chinese and can read many words. They follow the textbook instructions and other Chinese literacy instruction methods they are familiar with, such as copying. Mr. Tang explains:

We are not as strict with her as we were in China. We used to ask her to copy a lot, but now we are here in Canada, and we still require her to finish all the assignments, and learn more new words, and that's OK. But we were not as demanding as we were in China, strictly monitoring her progress every day.

In March 2001, Alana told me that her mom changed her schedule so that she came home from work at around 4:00 p.m. to teach her Chinese characters. She said, "我做中文作业。还要练钢琴。中文很难呢。 [I have Chinese homework. I also have to practice the piano. Chinese is hard.]"

They also bring many Chinese children's storybooks from China. Alana has read many of them with Mrs. Tang at home (Figure 2). Mr. Tang believes that Alana's skills in Chinese will help her in learning English. However, Alana's extensive Chinese reading at home is not communicated to Mrs. Haines who thinks that Alana does not read at all at home. Mrs. Haines asked me to talk to Alana's brother twice and later once with Mr. Tang about the home reading records. After my conversations with Alana's brother and parents, I realized that they did not know they were supposed to record Alana's readings (in Chinese or English) on a reading record form, sign it, and return it to Mrs. Haines. Once they understood this requirement, Alana began to bring these records to the class regularly on time. These readings demonstrate that Alana is a sophis-

Figure 2. A sample of Alana's home reading records

Alana's Reading Record

DATE/ BOOK TITLE/ INITIALS		DATE/ BOOK TITLE/ INITIALS
长发姑娘	14	The EMERALD'S new SWIT
five little monkey	15	Why are TIGERS STRIPED
田中 仙	16	ABC BOOK
白菜姑娘	17	My Shoe
水仙	18	Oh, the places you'll go
嫦娥姑娘	19	ABC
牛郎织女	20	Little rabbit
孙悟空	21	白雪公主
小国游记	22	小心陌生人
羽毛波娃娃	23	三只蛋
The wheels	24	半身人
five fat turkeys	25	学偷小赖
Black White Rabbits ABC		CONGRATULATIONS !!!

ticated and avid reader in Chinese. Alana draws a picture of her reading in her bed and tells me that she enjoys reading stories at home.

Mr. and Mrs. Tang teach Alana not only Chinese, but also math at home. Like many new Chinese immigrants, they quickly learn from their son's seventh-grade experience that math in Canadian schools is 3 years behind that in China. Mr. Tang comments that "what is taught in eighth grade math is the fifth-grade level in China." And like many parents from China, they already use Chinese textbooks to teach Alana math, and she has already finished working on the first-grade math textbook.

Although Mr. and Mrs. Tang cannot understand much English, they try their best to watch Alana's progress by listening to her talk about school. They notice that Alana's English has improved and they are pleased that she is making progress. Since they are new to the country, they rely on their new Chinese friends to understand the differences between Canadian and Chinese schools. They have asked many of these friends about Alana's progress in English. Mr. Tang observes:

One year ago when I was worried about my daughter's progress in English, one of my friends told me that I needed not to worry about that and that my daughter would catch up in a couple of years. I have asked many friends, not just one, and they all had this experience. So with Alana, if her teacher did not say she was not doing well, I would just pay some attention her report card. If one area is really bad or not meeting the standards, I will be very worried. I feel that she is doing OK, and she is also slowly making progress as my friends have predicted.

Mr. Tang feels that as long as his children are performing well in school without failing any subjects, he does not need to communicate with the teachers. For example, although he does not like the fact that the school emphasizes drawing, he chooses to adjust it at home rather than talking to the teacher about it. "They do draw too much at school, so at home we emphasize more academic aspects. I think the teachers just want students to have more freedom to choose what they want to do." Mr. Tang reiterates that he is not worried about Alana's studies so far as she is still young.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHILDREN'S SCHOOL-HOME LITERACY EXPERIENCES: A DISCUSSION

Although Sandy and Alana differ in their personalities, home literacy experiences, knowledge of English and native language Chinese, and socialization experiences in school, they share some similar adjustment barriers in school.

The findings suggest that there exists great linguistic and cultural discontinuity between the Chinese children's school and home language and literacy experiences. For both children, they have two schools: an English school in which they learn the language through integrated reading and writing activities and free play; and a Chinese-style school at home where they learn Chinese, math (and English) through more direct instruction and supervision from their parents. Their distinct experiences in school and at home mirrored the influence of different cultural beliefs and practices that the parents and the teacher held (Li, 2002, 2003, 2004; Xu, 1999). From the perspectives of both parents and the teacher on the children's learning, tension also existed in their views on goals for biliteracy, homework, parenting, and instructional approaches (e.g., the use of drawing and free play).

In terms of goals for biliteracy, the discrepancy lies in the school's monolingual orientation and the parents' bilingual and biliteracy expectations of their children. While the school employed an English only policy in order to facilitate the children's faster mastery of English, the parents tried to support their children's learning of both Chinese and English at home and expected their children to become bicultural and biliterate. Understanding that their children would learn English reading and writing in school, the parents actively supported the development of Chinese literacy at home. Such discrepancy between school and home expectations no doubt had influenced the children's understanding of the two discourses (Li, 2002, 2005). As I will discuss later, the children's initial choices of language in school suggest that they view the school and home as separate social situations in which a certain language is used and valued.

The incongruencies are also reflected in the parents' and the school's understandings of beginning literacy approaches. While the teachers emphasized learning through play, story-reading, and drawing as an effective beginning writing activity, the parents wanted to begin with basics, with more focused explicit instruction on reading and writing and more independent homework from school. Different from the teachers' view, they viewed free play as "non-learning" and drawing as a "nonacademic" activity. Their different perceptions are influential in their respective practices that they socialized the children into the distinct discourses. At home, the parents emphasized more homework and academic activities (e.g., practice on oral reading and printing/writing), while in school the teacher emphasized more integrated activities with ample opportunities for free play and drawing. The different ways the parents and the teacher socialized the children are also related to their perceptions of each other's approach to educate the children. For example, the teacher saw Chinese parenting as too rigid and as applying too much pressure on the children, and therefore enforced more play and drawing at school. The parents, on the other hand, saw too much play and drawing in school and, therefore, enforced more homework and academic learning at home.

These discontinuities between school and home have had a profound impact on the children's language and literacy learning. From early on, the children viewed school and home literacies as separate entities rather than as a continuum. Such perceptions further widened the gaps between their development of school literacy, which is mediated through English language and culture and that of home literacy, which mediated through Chinese language and culture. Both Sandy and Alana were quite aware of the differences between school and home discourses. While Sandy became the English only rule maintainer in class, Alana tried to follow the rule even though she was not able to converse fluently in English. Both became very frustrated in different ways, as they could not fully express themselves. Sandy, for example, became very resistant to reading and writing in school in the beginning. And Alana became very lonely and isolated without being able to play or understand the classroom activities. Their understanding of the English only rule in school that is different from their Chinese homes suggest that when they acquire the English language in school, they are also acquiring the "code knowledge" or the hidden curriculum that is embedded in school discourses (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984).

However, the children did not become passive recipients of the code knowledge; instead, they recreated "counterscripts" to the hidden curriculum through their choices of first language use in the classroom (Gutierrez, Rymes & Larson, 1995). The changing dynamics of the classroom composition after the arrival of new coming nonEnglish speaking students afforded both Sandy and Alana the opportunities to realize the importance of their ability to speak both Chinese and English, particularly Chinese. In Sandy's case, her tentative use of Chinese in the classroom helped her bridge the school and home separation that she initially held. Such a bridge gradually transformed her attitude towards school work and learning in general, her relationships with other students, and her ability to be able to play freely in play centers. For Alana, her Chinese ability afforded her opportunities to help the new students, and her assistance to the students empowered her to become a legitimate participant of the classroom community rather than remain as an outsider at the periphery (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In both cases, the children's first language use have changed their social roles and identities in the classroom; and elucidated their different understandings of the "symbolic associations" of the two languages with their values in the classroom settings (Schechter & Bayley, 2004, p. 610). For them, their use of Chinese at school becomes the media of school and home continuum, and such a continuum allowed them to reconstruct and recreate their own social roles and spaces in which they can rely on their native language to learn a new tongue (Townsend & Fu, 1998).

In summary, classroom and community contexts are complex, and becoming a competent member requires navigating the competing agendas of its subcultures (Willett, 1995). Both Sandy and Alana lived between two separate

worlds of school and home and were often burdened with the consequences of the cultural clashes. They have become sites of struggle between teachers and parents, and hence, are placed in a dangerous position of school failure. However, they exercised their agency by reconstructing their identities through their language choices and renegotiated the meaning of becoming a competent member of both worlds.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This ethnographic report has focused on the school and home literacy practices of two Chinese Canadian first graders. The two children, one born in Canada and one in China, both came from families that do not speak English at home. Their literacy practices and experiences in school and home may be similar to many immigrant and/or minority children who have to make adjustments between the two discourses (Li, 2001, 2002, 2004; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Valdés, 1996; Townsend & Fu, 1998). Their experiences have significant implications for understanding Chinese and other Asian immigrant children who are learning to become bicultural and biliterate in cross-cultural contexts. First, the discontinuity between home and school suggests that developing a genuine school-home partnership is critical in addressing minority children's developmental needs. Both the teachers and parents invested a fair amount of time and effort to ensure the children's language and literacy learning, but their efforts were not coordinated. Rather, their actions were sometimes contradictory because of their assumptions about each other's practices (e.g., the issue of homework, free play, and drawing). This divide was counterproductive to the learners' development. A connection needs to be built between parents and teachers/school so that they can work together to ensure the success of English language learners.

There are many ways to build this school-home connection. One of the first steps is to involve parents in the classroom to learn firsthand about teachers' instructional practices. Teachers can bring parents into the classroom periodically to lend a hand, to demonstrate a talent or skill, or to present some cultural activities (Tabors, 1997). Tabors points out that involvement, such as lending a hand in the classroom, is a low-demand task that allows parents (who may or may not be proficient in English) to get a firsthand look at what goes on in the classroom so they can begin to feel more comfortable with the activities that occur there. For parents who have more confidence in their English ability and more comfort level with being in the classroom, demonstrating a talent or skill is a good parental involvement activity. Teachers can arrange with parents to work with a small group of children first and then move to activities for a whole group. Teachers can also invite parents to come to the classroom to present some cultural activities such as teaching songs in their native language, demonstrating national/ethnic dress, or developing an ethnic cooking project.

Once parents are comfortable coming to school, more formal activities that specifically address the issues of discontinuity between school and home in terms of literacy practices and beliefs can be organized. These activities can include thematic parent nights that address how mainstream schools work, how early literacy is taught in school, and key issues such as play, homework, and the processes of learning a second language. Parents can also be included in planning and presenting similar issues from their point of view. These kinds of activities emphasize sharing information and knowledge about each other's cultural practices and learning from each other and, therefore, will empower the parents to become real partners in educating their children and will help build reciprocal relationships between school and home (Li, 2006).

Li (2006) also suggests that teachers could reach out to the community, rather than always ask the parents to come to school. Teachers could do home visits to get to know the parents' concerns on a personal level. Though this may be time consuming and hard for the teachers to achieve, it is the most powerful and effective way for teachers to get to know the students' home literacy practices and to build trust with parents (McCarthy, 1997). Teachers could also visit the private tutoring institutions that the children attended in order to gain firsthand experiences about what the parents want for their children. Learning about the practices that the parents valued would significantly facilitate the teachers' understanding of the parents' concerns and beliefs and their repertoire to accommodate the parents' needs. If necessary, teachers (and the school) then could use community resources or parents as consultants to explore ways and strategies to make such accommodations (Li, 2006).

Another implication calls for school pedagogical practices that support English language learners' bicultural and biliteracy continuum (Cummins, 2000; Hornberger, 1989; Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2003). The two children's transformative use of first language in the classroom suggests that it is of paramount importance for mainstream teachers to value and build on their knowledge in their first language, especially for beginning learners. As Townsend & Fu (1998) point out, for children who are developing their competence in a second language, demanding standard language forms in their talk and writing creates barriers to exploration, risk taking, and motivation. To avoid creating such barriers for children's learning, teachers should not only allow students to make use of their knowledge in their first language as resources for learning a new language, they should also develop instructional practices that help students build such school-home biliteracy continuum. Teachers, who may not understand their students' home languages, can create situations in which students' first language can become uniquely meaningful and valuable, planning activities to expand the range of language use, and providing consistent opportunities for developing literacy in the two languages

(Cummins, 2000; McCarthey, 1999; Moll & Ganzález, 1994; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). For example, teachers can create opportunities for students to share literature in their first languages, create a multiliterate project (e.g., dialogue journals, weekly individual literacy meetings) to be conducted by a community member in the native language with students, or invite community members as active participants in the class (see Schwarzer, Haywood, & Lorenzen, 2003).

In addition to pedagogical practices that build children's biliteracy continuum, teachers can also make pedagogical accommodations to parents' beliefs in early literacy instruction through developing an integrated curriculum. Gibbons (2002) suggests that an integrated curriculum can help children learn about the language and through the language; therefore, there is a place for teaching the basics such as phonics, spelling, and grammar in the curriculum, and this can be done without compromising interactive and meaning-driven classroom practices. She maintains that explicit teaching of phonemic awareness and spelling (as well as reading and writing) are of particular significance for ESL students, especially those of younger grades. Gibbons recommends three principles for teachers to integrate the teaching of language as an "object"—moving from whole to part, from meaning to form, and familiar to unfamiliar, and back again.

Lastly, teachers can utilize different pedagogical strategies to help learners make school and home connections and to become legitimate members of the classroom community. One such strategy is to use communication and classroom organization to support second language learning (Tabors, 1997). To do so, teachers first need to gather information about the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of second language children (e.g., basic demographic information, linguistic practices in and outside of the home, and relevant cultural practices). Gaining this background information will help teachers better communicate with the children to facilitate their initial adaptation to the classroom community. Teachers can start with what the children know and combine different techniques, such as the use of body language and repetition, to help children feel comfortable about the learning community and reduce their frustration from the beginning. Teachers can also change the classroom setup to ensure their adaptation occurs more smoothly. Classroom organization includes the physical setup that provides spaces where second language children can feel comfortable, competent and occupied; classroom routines that give second language children cues as to what to do and when even before they can understand language around them; and small-group activities that mix second-language children with first-language children who can provide not only linguistic input but also social support for second language learners (Tabors). These strategies will lower second language learners' affective filter and allow them to be successfully integrated into the classroom community.

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