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ABSTRACT

An approach used to help bridge the distance between home and school for bilingual/bicultural immigrant families is described. First, the various roles of the classroom teacher as cultural storyteller, cultural healer, and cultural worker in the relationship between the schools and homes of bilingual students is explored, drawing on recent research and theory. A University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh program for English-as-a-Second-Language and bilingual education teachers, which attempts to train teachers to build bridges between cultures, is also described. It focuses on one course designed to engage teacher trainees in bilingual and language minority family research projects using narrative and ethnographic methods. Student projects culminate in written narratives of family lives, which bring with them increased appreciation of cultural autobiographies as a teaching technique and a deeper understanding of the teacher's varied roles. Issues arising during the project included development of trusting relationships among participants in ethnographic and narrative research, techniques for gathering and arranging stories, ways of representing and interpreting the stories, and determining who the beneficiaries of the research are. (Contains 60 references.) (MSE)

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Story Weaving: Teacher Research with Bilingual/Bicultural Family Narratives

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Story Weaving: Teacher Research with Bilingual/Bicultural Family Narratives

Through the hotel window the hubbub of Manhattan filters in with the late afternoon sun. In the hazy light the shadowy features of Chan Lor, Hmong refugee from Laos, are revealed. He is sitting in a stiff chair near the front of a small conference room, alongside the equally shadowy forms of his wife, Khou, and Faye Van Damme, a preschool teacher. Like the slow, whispering voice of fire his words flow, gaining strength and surpassing the haunting sounds of the *qeng* which emanate from a tape player in the back of the room. He becomes silent, and Faye Van Damme, teacher and researcher of family lives, begins to weave Chan's story with her own, focusing on an eventful day in their respective lives: January 15, 1983. On that day Faye celebrated her fifteenth birthday in Wisconsin, while a world away, Chan attempted the dangerous crossing of the Mekhong River:

There is much laughter and frivolity as friends and family enter the balloon- and streamer-filled house. Games are played, gifts are opened, and cake is eaten; all in the name of fun.

There is no laughter, only seriousness and dead quiet. It is a fifteen mile walk to the shores of safety. It is unknown who is going to die. Many lose their feet from walking on land mines. Shirrtails are held, boats are loaded, and strangers are trusted; all in the name of freedom (Van Damme, 1998).

Faye Van Damme, Chan and Khou Lor are first-time visitors to New York, newcomers and new voices in the world of academic conferences. They bring with them a story of many border crossings, a story that is a weaving of two lives, a story about bridging the gap between schools and the homes of bilingual students and families.

This paper describes a narrative research project carried out by pre- and in-service teachers working with bilingual families in Northeastern Wisconsin. The objectives of this project were to improve the understanding of pre- and in-service teachers of the lives of immigrant families and the issues they face, and to facilitate a dialogue between the home and the school. The first part of this

paper describes the cultural roles of teachers, a theoretical framework which guided the development of this project: Teachers have the potential to be cultural *storytellers*, cultural *healers*, and cultural *workers* in their relationships between schools and the homes of bilingual students. Next, I describe the context of this study within a semester-length course and with narrative inquiry as the chosen mode of research. Following this are excerpts from the family narratives, interpreted through the cultural roles framework. Finally, the implications of this project educators, family participants, and researchers are developed.

Teachers' Cultural Roles

In educating minority language children and youth, both in the past and at present, teachers have often served as *cultural border guards*, inculcating the ways of the dominant culture while closing the door on students' own language and culture. How does this process work? First, there is often little contact between teachers and bilingual families (Valdes, 1996; Walker-Moffat, 1995). Problems being experienced by bilingual children are often blamed on "the home" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1996), and bilingual families are usually left out of conversations about second language education policies in the schools (Soto, 1997). The ways in which bilingual families and their children are perceived by teachers and schools are still greatly influenced by theories of cultural deprivation as an explanation of school failure.

Theories of cultural deprivation and a "culture of poverty" which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s suggested that children from certain non-dominant cultural groups grow up deficient in needed cultural attributes, and are trapped in a cycle of failure (McCandless, 1952; Lewis, 1966; Bereiter & Englemann, 1966). The implicit assumption behind cultural deprivation theory is that the home culture (and language) is the problem, and that to succeed students from such homes must be taught to perform in traditional mainstream ways. Even federal legislation of the era, such as the Bilingual Education Act (1968), which ostensibly supported services to students in their home language, was compensatory in nature, focusing on the deficiencies of non-Native English speakers (Brisk, 1998).

Nevertheless, recent research suggests that bilingual families contribute in valuable ways to their children's learning. Moll, Velez-Ibañez and Greenberg (1989) identified *funds of knowledge*, sources of skills and information for daily living, in their work within a working-class Mexican-American community. In projects which include teachers as researchers of their communities, these funds of knowledge from students' homes become resources available for curricular innovation and pedagogical change. In a variation of this approach, Andrade (1998) engaged bilingual children as ethnographers of their communities and their classrooms. Ethnographic and narrative research has revealed rich portraits of the skills, strengths, and values present within bilingual and bicultural families (Carger, 1996; Valdes, 1996; Hones, 1999).

Since many teachers and schools lack a strong connection to the lives and learning of bilingual and bicultural families, there are important reasons to involve preservice and inservice teachers in family-based projects. In describing the success of a family studies program in New Mexico for preservice teachers, Grinberg and Goldfarb (1998) argue that teachers must be sensitized to realities of children's worlds and become skilled in the bridging of the worlds of the home and the school. McCaleb (1998) highlights the importance of preservice teacher involvement with diverse families to promote literacy, while Olmedo (1997) describes ways in which family oral histories gathered by teachers can be woven into the social studies and history curriculum. Research with linguistically and culturally diverse families, therefore, has implications for teacher education, academic achievement, school-community relations and the development of multicultural curriculum.

Clearly teachers have the potential to play a variety of cultural roles in the lives of linguistically diverse youth: the teacher can be a *storyteller*, a collector of stories, and an interpreter; the teacher can be a *healer* who can help students adjust to life in the dominant culture without stripping away their own cultural understandings; building upon these two previous roles the teacher can be a *cultural worker* who will address issues of power in the classroom and in society.

The Cultural Storyteller. Teachers as *biographers* develop and value their own cultural autobiography as a reflective tool and a source of professional knowledge (Goodson, 1992; Ayers, 1989). Moreover, they can encourage the telling and sharing of diverse student autobiographies as part of their practice and curriculum (Paley, 1995; Barone, 1995). This may help teachers to better understand the "circles of meanings" (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1987) reflected in the lives of students and communities. The study of life stories provides a format for improving teacher--student relationships through awareness of cultural difference, an important component in cultural therapy as practiced by the Spindlers or in "family-based multicultural education" as recommended by Walker-Moffat (1995).

The teacher is a *ethnographer* or *interpreter* when she seeks to understand the lives of students and their families, and interpret these lives to the dominant culture (Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba, 1991). Teachers address their own sense of cultural identity as well as participate in direct intercultural experiences in the wider community (Zeichner, 1993). The use of ethnographic techniques such as participant observation and field notes can help teachers document these experiences for later reflection with colleagues (Moll, 1992). They also provide a basis for teachers to interpret the dominant culture to all students, and especially those who come to school with different cultural understandings. Finally, the work of interpretation provides an ongoing format for the continual personal and professional growth of teachers who might otherwise be mired in curricula that is not of their own creation and removed from the life experiences of their students.

The Cultural Healer. The teacher as cultural *therapist* seeks first to come to an understanding of her own sense of culture as manifested in her lived experiences, and then to understand the cultural understandings of students Spindler and Spindler (1994). This is therapy, then, for both teachers, students and society. In his foreward to Pathways to Cultural Awareness (1994), Henry Trueba writes:

Could anyone really question the universal need for healing? The daily stories about hatred, cruelty, war, and conflict dividing nations, regions, states, cities, and neighborhoods reveal clearly the

open wounds and hurts of many. We all carry profound emotional injuries that affect another deeper sense of self and the ability to recognize who we are individually and collectively (viii).

The teacher as therapist can help students to manage the stress involved in multiple cultural conflicts between home, school, peer groups and society (Phelan and Davidson, 1994).

Beyond the need for healing, the teacher as *cultural trainer* recognizes the importance of minority students to maintain ties to their cultural and linguistic communities while learning the tools necessary to participate in the dominant discourse (Gee, 1990; Delpit, 1988; Gibson, 1988).

The Cultural Worker. When teachers see their role as defenders of an established "American" culture against perceived threats posed by minority cultural understandings, they may take on the role of the meta-story teller or *border guard* (e.g., Hirsch, 1988; Schlesinger, 1992; Bloom, 1987). Other public figures (e.g., talk show hosts, politicians, movie producers) can be border guards in the negative sense, in that their interpretations and representations of the world can negatively affect the way that diverse cultural groups see one another.

When teachers challenge the metanarratives by encouraging the development of student *counternarratives*, they take on the role of *border crossers* (Giroux, 1997). Giroux describes the work of border pedagogy:

...to engage the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences, and languages...not only to read these codes critically but also to learn the limits of such codes, including the ones they use to construct their own narratives and histories...(to) engage knowledge as a border crosser, as a person moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power (147).

The difference between the work of the *border guard* and the *border crosser* can be seen in the former's unreflective acceptance to the prescribed authority of *custom* and the latter's struggle for *remembrance*: Giroux (1997) writes:

Remembrance is directed more toward specificity and struggle, it resurrects the legacies of actions and happenings, it points to the multitude of voices that constitute the struggle over history and power (154).

Here, then, in the role of the *border crosser*, the cultural roles of teachers come together: The *border crosser* commits herself to remembering and to helping students to remember their own

histories of struggle; she values diverse cultural and linguistic understandings of the world; and she prepares students with the critical tools to address the unequal distribution of power in society.

Potential Cultural Roles for Teachers*

<u>Cultural Storyteller</u>	<u>Cultural Healer</u>	<u>Cultural Worker</u>
<p><i>Biographer.</i> Uses her own autobiography as a reflective tool for practice; encourages students to tell and learn from their own cultural life stories (Goodson, 1992; Ayers, 1989; Paley, 1995).</p>	<p><i>Therapist.</i> Seeks ways to address multiple cultural conflicts faced by minority students/families; to ease the transition into the dominant culture without sacrificing meaningful aspects of students' own culture (Spindler and Spindler, 1994).</p>	<p><i>Border Guard.</i> Transmits the metanarrative of the dominant culture (in the dominant language); seeks to prepare students with the <i>cultural literacy</i> they need to function in American society (Hirsch, 1988; Schlesinger, 1992; Bloom, 1987).</p>
<p><i>Ethnographer.</i> Collects, interprets, values and utilizes as part of the curriculum stories/ knowledge from variety of student cultures (Moll and Greenberg, 1992; Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba, 1991; Diaz Soto, 1997).</p>	<p><i>Trainer.</i> Prepares students with literacy tools to be fluent in the language/culture of power, to adapt <i>without</i> necessarily assimilating (Gee, 1990; Delpit, 1987; Gibson, 1988).</p>	<p><i>Border Crosser.</i> Critically engages with multiple cultural/linguistic communities; helps students develop their <i>counternarratives</i> to the dominant culture's <i>metanarrative</i>; actively works to create diverse democratic communities inside and outside the classroom (Giroux, 1997).</p>

* The boundaries between these role descriptions are hazy at best. For example, the *ethnographer* can also be seen as a cultural healer and/or a cultural worker, and the *border guard* is also a cultural storyteller.

The Bilingual Family Research Project

In our ESL/bilingual education licensure program at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh we attempt to address the dire need to build bridges between schools and various linguistic and cultural communities. We seek to prepare teachers

- who value linguistic and cultural diversity, and understand their multiple cultural roles as second language educators
- who can critically assess themselves, their schools and their society
- who have the ability to engage in real educational problem-solving with others
- who can use participatory action and narrative research to reach out to minority language communities and build authentic curriculum and instruction, and
- who are producers of knowledge and creative members of professional communities.

Students in our program represent the growing demographic diversity of Northeastern Wisconsin. Approximately 70% of the students are of European American heritage, 20% are Asian American (predominantly Hmong), and 10% are Hispanic. Most have grown up in one of the nearby communities, although some spent their early years in Thai refugee camps, The Philippines, Puerto Rico, and other diverse localities. Our students have many strengths, including a strong work ethic (most have jobs along with their academic work), interest in learning about other languages and cultures, and good academic preparation. What our students need, especially those coming from Euro-American backgrounds, is a stronger connection to the lives of bilingual students and families in their homes and communities.

One of the courses in our licensure sequence, Principles of Bilingual/Bicultural Education, was chosen as a place to engage students in bilingual family research. In this course students are introduced to broader sociology, politics and policies of language and culture; explore ethnographic and narrative tools available for doing research within minority language communities found in texts such as Valdes' (1996) Con Respeto and Walker-Moffat's (1995) The Other Side of the

Asian-American Success Story, and engage in dialogues with members of bilingual families through a semester-length research project. The culmination of the bilingual family research projects were written family narratives from which students presented excerpts as performance events. These narratives, co-authored and coedited wherever possible with family members themselves, documented the stories of the participants, framed by the historical, cultural and sociological contexts of their lives as immigrants and refugees.

This research is carried out as a participatory project of our students and bilingual families in Northeastern Wisconsin. The objectives of this project are to improve the understanding of preservice and inservice teachers for the lives of immigrant families and the issues they face, and to facilitate a dialogue between the home and the school. This project encourages participation of bilingual family members in the retelling of their own "stories" and voicing their ideas about issues of education inside and outside of schools (Lincoln, 1993). Teachers, as cultural border crossers, are expected to gain a deeper understanding of the lives and concerns of bilingual families, and to take a critical stance in support of these families and their *counternarratives*, or stories which provide a counterpoint to the dominant culture's depiction of minority groups (Giroux, 1997). There is also a felt need to inform the wider monolingual community about issues facing bilingual families and children.

Narrative research is the mode of inquiry used in this research project. Denzin's (1994) *interpretive interactionism*, involving the organization of life histories around "epiphanies" or life-shaping events, has been particularly influential for student researchers. This style "begins and ends with the biography and the self of the researcher," and encourages personal stories that are thickly contextualized, and "connected to larger institutional, group and cultural contexts" (510-511). Moreover, the stories presented in the text "should be given in the language, feelings, emotions, and actions of those studied" (511). As indicated in the work of Grumet (1991) and McBeth and Horne (1996), many ethical and methodological issues need to be addressed in the writing of bilingual/bicultural narratives, especially when not all student researchers share the same cultural background as their informants. The importance of addressing the informants stories in a

respectful manner is underscored, and family research participants are included in the process of analysis, interpretation, and, wherever possible, as *co-authors* of the final text.

Students begin by examining the role of language and culture in their own lives through autobiographical poetry. Poetry, as the work of Tedlock (1983), Richardson (1992) and others suggests, is one of the narrative forms which deepen understanding of lived experience. Students are engaged in the poetics of narrative through an activity during our first class meeting. They are asked to interview a partner using questions such as the following:

- Do you remember any of the stories about the past that your parents/grandparents or other older adults told you when you were a child?
- What is unique about the place where you grew up? What is your most special memory of it?
- Tell about an event in your life involving cultural conflict (conflict resulting from misunderstanding or mininterpretation of culturally-based signals). How did this event change you?

From their notes on their partner's story, as well as their observations, they write short, free verse poems about their partners.

Students conduct narrative, ethnographic research with minority language families who have volunteered to participate in this study. Over a ten-week period individual and small groups of students are paired with each family, learning about their lives and initiating dialogues about the education of minority language children. Thus, data sources for this research include, with permission from students and their informants, students' written accounts of their own lives, transcriptions of audiotaped interviews with research participants, field notes, videotapes and photographs of family life, and library research.

Narratives and the Renegotiation of Boundaries

The culmination of the bilingual family research project was the production of written narratives of family lives. These narratives highlight the multiple voices of participants involved in the research, including the voices and autobiographical experiences of the researchers themselves. Moreover, these narratives served to illustrate the cultural roles as storytellers, healers and workers which pre- and inservice teachers fulfilled as part of this project. Excerpts from these narratives illustrate the journey undertaken by these students of bilingual family lives, and what they have learned about how to bridge the two worlds of school and home.

Their development of cultural and linguistic autobiographies and poetry made students aware of the importance of their *biographer* role. One of our students, a third generation Polish American, writes of her search for information about her family cultural heritage:

When I decided to get to know my own roots, there weren't very many people left who knew the stories behind the immigration of my great-grandparents. It seemed as if Judga and Busia never shared stories about their homeland, their village, their reason for leaving all that was familiar to them behind. Instead, I had to find my stories in courthouses, archives, and family history centers (Kiedrowski, 1998).

With their appreciation of their own cultural past comes a new interest in creating opportunities for their second language students to retell, orally and in writing, their own cultural autobiographies. Several of our students develop curricular units which integrate language skills and content areas by using storytelling as a theme. For example, one of our inservice teachers, with the support of a Hmong community activist, prepared her elementary ESL students to dramatically present stories of the Hmong people. The children helped to choose stories to enact, developed and practiced their individual characters, their dialogues and scenes, and with the help of the teacher, parents and the community activist, organized their stage costumes, set and props.

The final dramatic presentation of these stories, in English and Hmong, was given to their entire elementary school and invited guests.

Our students often see a clear connection between their roles as storytellers and healers. While engaging in ethnographic interviewing with a Hmong parent, one of our students also played the role of the *therapist* by acknowledging both her informant's traumatic cultural struggle as well as her culture's strength:

Mee said, "The most difficult thing about my life was when my mom, my brothers and my own two children died and my husband leaving me. I was left alone not knowing how to do anything...I am waiting to die..."

My heart hurt for her as I watched her cry...I asked her if she wanted me to stop interviewing her and shut off the tape recorder. She shook her head...Mee has great inner strength to have gone this far...I truly believe that what has made Mee strong mentally has been the strong Hmong tradition of self-reliance and independence. Her children and other Hmong people living close to her have given her support and other opportunities to help her survival in the United States (Thompson, 1998).

Children of immigrants to the United States often grow apart from their parents as they adapt more quickly to the new language and culture, and as they lose the ability to really communicate. One of the goals of the family narrative project (described below) was to provide a forum in which the stories of parents and other elders could be explicitly valued by teacher-researchers, and to initiate a process of cultural therapy (Spindler and Spindler, 1994) between generations.

Many of the narratives reflect the emerging dialogue between the student-researchers and their informants. Through family interviews our students became aware the tremendous importance that minority parents place on education. Often these parents have limited English

skills and little formal education, yet they find ways to support their children's learning, as in the case of Xia, a Hmong mother:

The only formal education Xia had were the two years of adult school when she arrived in America. Because Xia lacks skills in English, her husband, who understands English better, attends the teacher-parent conferences. However, in supporting the children in other school related functions such as school awards night, movie nights, etc., it is Xia who attends with the children. Even though Xia is unable to carry on a full conversation in English, she is courageous and unintimidated by unknown situations (Vang, Robinson & Smith, 1998).

Students reflected on our earlier discussion of the ethnocentric attitudes and values often present in parent education programs (Valdes, 1996) and were able to use these family narrative studies to begin to identify culturally sensitive ways to encourage families to support the educational experiences of their children.

Personal stories shared by participating families about life and death on the U.S.-Mexican border stand in stark contrast to the political furor over illegal immigration which has garnered so much media and policy attention. One of the Mexican mothers interviewed had to cross the border at Nogales separated from one of her children. From a McDonald's restaurant window she watched her youngest child taken back across the border three times by *la migra*, the border patrol:

Four times she had to cross. She had the figure of a little saint in her hand. It gave me goose bumps. I felt very bad because she told me later, "Look, mommy! This helped me cross." I felt better with my older girls, but I also felt bad because I saw that they were so strong. They didn't cry. They didn't yell, nothing. I was happy that they didn't cry, but sometimes I feel bad because they were so young (Lupe, interviewed in Serrano, Dryer, Fink & Cortes, 1998).

Although they are supportive of the work entailed in the cultural worker roles, some students, especially those who work with Latinos, take issue with the *border guard* descriptor, and have suggested the term *gatekeeper* instead. Nevertheless, it becomes clear to our students that whichever term was chosen, there is the implication that one culture, one language, and one grand or meta- narrative are seen as important: Students either assimilate to these, or they are shut out. On the other hand, the *border crosser* seeks to prepare students with the tools necessary to be heard in the dominant language and culture, and moreover to use these tools to develop *counternarratives*--stories of their lives and communities which offer critical perspectives to those of the dominant culture. Students came to appreciate their own need to become cultural *border crossers* by listening to the real border crossing experiences of families.

Students, sometimes accompanied by their participant co-authors, have arranged to present this family narrative research at in-services in their school districts, at community service organizations, and at professional conferences. The dissemination of the written narratives is also being pursued through journals and edited volumes. This narrative research project provides a forum for bilingual family members to share their stories and ideas, and for preservice and inservice teachers to learn from the families they serve and to begin making contributions to the field of second language practice and research.

Story Weaving: Implications for Teachers, Families and Research

With each day in New York, with each new session attended at the international TESOL conference, Chan and Khou Lor, refugees from Laos, became more animated as they discussed ideas for the future: He wants to attend the conference next year, in Vancouver; he wants me to come back with him to Laos to help document some of the stories of the forested highlands; he wants to go to the university, and get a degree in educational counseling, while his wife, Khou, appears ready to pursue licensure as a bilingual teacher. Along with Faye Van Damme, they also see themselves as writers of lives whose work will be of interest to others. After meeting with editors one evening, we return to find that firemen have converged on our cheap, midtown

Manhattan hotel to answer a false alarm. Khou makes sure to get some photographs, “for the book.”

Pre- and inservice teacher-researchers and their family participants appeared to benefit greatly from the bilingual family research project. Nevertheless, several issues in this research were identified in follow-up meetings with student and family participants in the process.

How Do We Build Rapport and Trust? Time is an important factor in establishing a trusting relationship with all participants in ethnographic and narrative research. Paradoxically, we were attempting to carry out a narrative research project over the period of a university course, a period of a few months. This posed special problems for students who had no prior familiarity with the families they were researching. Inservice teachers who worked with the families of their students, on the other hand, found it much easier to begin their studies with some prior rapport already established. Nevertheless, students who made the effort to do utilize additional research on the cultural backgrounds of their participating families proved successful in establishing a relationship. One of the techniques which we suggested to all students was to bring home country maps and other relevant cultural artifacts to their initial meetings with participating families, and this served to raise the level of interest and involvement in the study on the part of participants. Also, it was clear that sensitivity when conversing and asking questions, as well as a relaxed, personable approach served students well. Participating family members were able to see them as people, different than, but also similar, to themselves, and sharing a common concern with the effective education of all young people.

How Do We Gather and Arrange Stories? Problems frequently mentioned by students gathering stories involved finding ways to overcome language barriers, and challenges with the interview environment and equipment. Although there were definitely issues of important details being lost in translation, for the most part our students found ways to communicate effectively with at least some of the the members of the bilingual families. Many of our students were able to use their Spanish-speaking skills when interviewing immigrant families from Mexico. Some of our native Hmong-speaking students worked collaboratively with other students to interview Hmong.

families in creative ways: the Hmong-speaking students would interview those in the family, such as the parents, who were less fluent in English, while the non-Hmong speaking students would interview older children who could communicate quite well in English. It was generally felt that the homes of the bilingual families offered the ideal interview sites, as the participants felt most comfortable there. However, as these natural settings included the sounds of children playing, radio music, and dinner being prepared, there was some interference on tape recordings of interviews. Nevertheless, students were able to use these additional sounds to recapture the spirit of such homes, where life, in all its vitality, goes on.

Once stories were gathered and transcribed, students and family participants were faced with decisions on how best to arrange these stories into a narrative. Interestingly, many chose to focus on life-changing events, what Denzin (1994) refers to as *epiphanies*. For many, it was a border crossing experience. For others, important events included births and deaths, interactions with employers or the schools, and even dreams.

How Do We Represent and Interpret the Stories Shared? Students also addressed the ethical implications of how to represent the stories of these bilingual families. Most chose to represent larger sections of participant voices in the text, and to show moods and feelings through their careful physical descriptions of the participants and their world. Many of our students, following the lead of Tedlock (1983) and others, chose poetry as a form well-suited to suggest the emotive power of participant voices. When drafts of initial texts were shared with family members, participants were able to clarify and extend their ideas, as well as approve or suggest changes to the forms in which their stories were represented. Wherever possible, students were able to produce, and share with participating families, bilingual texts. For family members who had low literacy levels, our students were asked to represent, and request participant comments, orally, in a language understood by those involved.

Who Benefits from this Research, and How? Our students gained a depth of understanding and sensitivity to students and their families, as well as knew knowledge of diverse cultures and ongoing cultural change. Inservice teachers involved in the project have said that it

has improved their ability to communicate effectively with all the families of their students. Some have taken the written record of immigrant and refugee stories and experiences and begun to weave it into their social studies and language arts curriculums. Many of our students have remained in contact with the families they interviewed, continuing to learn from them, and sharing their talents with family members as tutors in English and other academic subjects.

Family participants, especially parents, feel that this project has helped them to preserve their family history and history of their people for their children. Moreover, they have had the opportunity to inform the mainstream population about why they are here in the United States, what their lives are about, and the strengths of their cultures.

Educational research can benefit from such projects which connect teacher education to bilingual and bicultural families and homes. Such participative narrative research broadens our understanding of learning as it takes place within immigrant families, of ways in which teachers develop their various cultural roles, and how entire schools and communities can learn from sharing of these stories. Such sharing of personal and cultural stories is at the heart of work of building bridges between diverse groups of Americans who are divided all too often by ignorance and stereotypes.

At a time when support for bilingual education in the United States is uncertain, family-based research can provide opportunities for teachers-as-researchers to better understand the socio-cultural and historical contexts, the learning processes, and the needs of minority language families. Moreover, by establishing a research relationship based on trust and respect, by creating space for bilingual family members to develop and tell their *counternarratives* to dominant culture (Giroux, 1997), teachers-as-researchers can become better allies and advocates for a meaningful system of bilingual/bicultural education.

Family-based research experiences, as an integral part of a teacher education program, help engage students in problem-posing education, encourage students to think of themselves as writers and researchers, and initiates greater dialogue between families, communities, schools and the

academy. We all have important cultural roles to play in fostering a climate where diverse stories and interpretations of our lives together can be shared.

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