# Fast Capitalism, School Reform, and Second Language Literacy Practices

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This 2-year qualitative study explores the ironies of educational reform in the United States as experienced by three second language learners attending a school attempting to transform itself into a high-performance elementary school in California's Silicon Valley. Drawing on the concept of "fast capitalism" in a globalized economic work order (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996) and the tools of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989), the findings from this investigation reveal that the discourses of school reform in the United States visibly and invisibly placed second language learners in new highly vulnerable positions. In what follows I provide an analysis of this vulnerability by relating the experiences of three families and their attempts to enrol and stay enrolled in the school of their choice. Next, I provide a critical analysis of the discourses of reading and writing instruction and of a text produced by a focal student named Alma in this context. This analysis highlights the ways in which classroom literacy practices inadvertently constrained the efforts of second language learners to acquire academic literacies and ultimately legitimated the school's decision to declare Alma "not Web material." The implications of this study relate to better understanding classroom SLA from a historical, institutional perspective and to supporting teachers and policy makers in addressing the needs of second language learners in a time of rapid social and economic change.

*When we take a sociocultural approach to literacy, we exit the mind, and ultimately the school and enter the world, including the world of work.* (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996, p. 4)

Increasingly, economists, social theorists, educators, and language specialists are calling our attention to the linkages between changes in global economy, ensuing demands for school reform, and the ways in which language practices simultaneously reflect and create new forms of social practice (e.g., Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Cummins & Sayers, 1995; Gee, et al., 1996; Katz, 2001; Reich, 1992). Specifically, Gee, et al. (1996), as well as others, argue that "the new work order" is driven by saturated world markets and increased global competition. As a result, they maintain that work is becoming geared toward producing customized knowledge-based products and services as opposed to standardized material goods en masse. Leading analysts of changes in the forces and relations of production such as Senge (1991) and Drucker (1993) have named this new kind of manufacturing "new capitalism."[1] They argue that as world economies move from producing standardized, material commodities to producing customized services for niche markets, business organization must change because bulky, top-down bureaucracies associated with "old capitalism" are not capable of anticipating and quickly responding to targeted clients' needs in a "just in time" fashion. Senge and Drucker further advise that if companies are to remain competitive in a rapidly changing global market place, they must become flatter, leaner, decentralized organizations. Workers must be "cross-trained" team players who share expertise, not specialists who work autonomously. Finally, they argue that such fundamental changes in the nature of work demand new kinds of "knowledge workers" who know how to solve problems creatively and collaboratively, instead of mechanically following static job descriptions.

As in the past, the demand for new kinds of workers exerts pressure on schools to prepare people to take their place in a changing economic order (see Cohen & Mohl, 1979, for a discussion of how school reforms associated with the Progressive Era in the United States were a response to industrialization and urbanization). Echoing the language of new capitalism, contemporary school reformers argue that schools cannot operate like Fordist factories, but must become thinking organizations. Advocates of school reform, myself included, assert that learning therefore should not look like piecework but like

project-based collaborative teamwork; that teachers should not function as givers and evaluators of facts but as critical co-constructors of knowledge; and that students should not be passive receptacles of information but equally critical problem solvers.

To achieve these changes in the organization of teaching and learning, reformers in the United States have been pushing for a variety of initiatives that are widely taking hold in schools across the country (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995; Little & Dorph, 1998; Murphy, 1991; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). For example, driven by the belief that "smaller is better," large elementary and secondary schools are being restructured into smaller units such as "houses," "teams," or "academies." These smaller units are intended to support teachers in creating a sense of community, in sharing information, in making decisions, and in being more responsive to the needs of their students. Second, many school reformers maintain that if teachers are to be responsive to the unique needs of their students, authority should rest with them, not with administrators and policy makers who are less aware of the day-to-day demands of their work. Finally, similar to the discourse of workplace reform, many school reformers call for a movement away from traditional, Fordist approaches to teaching and learning characterized by students individually mastering isolated facts within artificially separate disciplines. Rather, they advocate a constructivist approach to teaching and learning characterized by teachers and students developing knowledge collaboratively through the exploration of interdisciplinary real-world problems.

In providing a critique of workplace reforms, and by extension school reforms, Gee, et al. (1996), make several important points. First, they highlight that one of the fundamental characteristics of new capitalism is that it centres on producing engineered communities of practice that purposefully attempt to socialize people into assuming new identities so that they can become new kinds of managers, new kinds of workers, and new kinds of consumers. Second, the authors highlight how language practices, as well as other discursive semiotic systems, are implicated in building these new communities and new identities. Specifically, they draw attention to the way literacy practices create social positions from which people are "invited" or "summoned" to speak, listen, act, read, write, think, feel, believe, and value in particular ways (Gee, et al., p. 10). In illustrating these points, Hull's work illustrates how the ability of workers, particularly second

language learners,[2] to negotiate smoothly and resist strategically new subject positions is crucial if they are to become indeed empowered as opposed to exploited by reforms in the organization of their work (Hull, Jury, Ziv, & Katz, 1996; Katz, 2001). This quick slippage between the promise of opportunity as described by business consultants and the likelihood of new forms of marginalization as experienced by workers captures the essence of fast capitalism.

Despite the similarities of the new work order and what some are calling the "new school order" (Malarkey, 1999), there have been no similar investigations of the discourses of school reform. This paper, therefore, is an investigation of the implications of new ways of organizing teaching and learning, particularly for second language learners who have historically been the impetus of many school reforms (Cohen & Mohl, 1979; Fass, 1989; see also Gebhard, 2000, for a review). Specifically, the central question guiding this investigation is: How do second language learners assume, negotiate, and resist the roles assigned to them by the discourses of school reform?

THE STUDY

The purpose of the broader study from which this paper is extrapolated was to explore the ways in which the phenomenon of classroom second language acquisition is shaped by the institutional context in which it is embedded (Gebhard, 1999, 2000). This larger investigation sought to describe how sociolinguistic interactions within English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual classrooms are shaped by the institutional contexts of U.S. public schools engaged in the process of structural school reform. In this paper I draw on data from one school, Web Magnet Science and Technology Elementary School. I focus on Web Magnet because of its location in the heart of California's "Silicon Valley." This region is held up as exemplifying many characteristics of the new work order and is a place where pressure to produce an Information Age–savvy work force through schooling is part of the local ongoing dialogue between the business community and educational policy makers (Hull, et al., 1996).

*Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework guiding this research is informed by a sociocultural perspective of second language acquisition (SLA). A sociocultural perspective takes as a starting point an understanding that the origin and structure of cognition

are rooted in the daily social and cultural activities in which people participate (Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1998). As a point of departure, however, I foreground questions related to the role played by power dynamics in schools as institutions and the ways in which issues of English-language proficiency are implicated in the production and reproduction of social relations and material conditions (Gebhard, 1999, 2000; Olsen, 1997). For this project, therefore, a wider theoretical lens is needed—one which underscores the relationships that exist between texts, both oral and written, and the sociopolitical, economic, and historical context in which they are acquired (Fairclough, 1989, p. 24; see also Bourdieu, 1991).

Applied to a discussion of second language learning in reforming schools, as Figure 1 illustrates, the theoretical assumptions undergirding this study are that classroom textual practices shape and are shaped by the institutional context in which they are embedded (e.g., turns-at-talk and literacy events). Institutional practices, or "organizational discourses" (e.g., approaches to curriculum and instruction) as enacted in the nomenclature of organizational structures, policy statements, staff development meetings, and the like, in turn shape and are shaped by societal discourses and ideologies regarding the education of second language learners (e.g., assumptions regarding societal multilingualism and diversity). Theoretically, then, one of the aims of this broader investigation was to illustrate how "micro" discursive practices within a climate of reform circulate through multiple "macro" levels within school organizations and in doing so galvanize and/or erode naturalized assumptions and power dynamics inherent in the practice of second language education in modern public institutions (for studies of literacy adopting a similar approach see Gee, 1996; for studies of doctor-patient discourse see Wodak, 1996; for studies of advertising see Fairclough, 1989).

*Methods*

The methods of the larger investigation of which this study is a part were qualitative in nature and involved the construction of three case studies of schools undergoing "restructuring" in California.[3] The data were collected by a team of researchers with a variety of interests over the course of three, week-long site visits to each school between September 1995 and June 1997. My specific role as a member of the research team was in analyzing the meaning of school restructuring for second language learners at a time

FIGURE 1
Second Language Acquisition as an Institutional Phenomenon
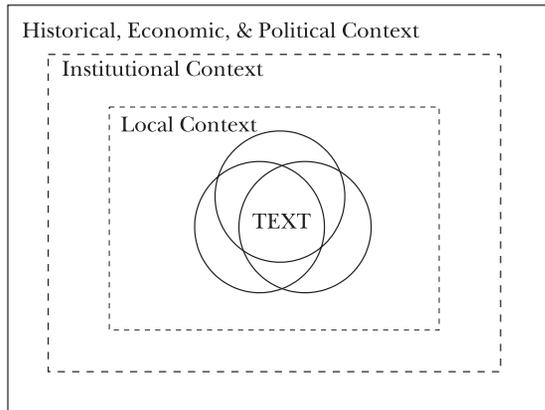


*Note.* Reprinted from Gebhard (2000).

when conservative politics were gaining momentum in California as evidenced by the passage of anti-immigration, anti-affirmative-action, and anti-bilingual-education legislation (Gutiérrez, Asato, & Baquedano-Lopez, 2001).

The structure of the case studies was shaped by two units of analysis: the school and the focus student institutionally designated as *limited English proficient* (LEP). The purpose of designing a study with two units of analysis was to create a bifocal approach for seeing mutually constituting dynamics between individual actors and the multiple contexts they inhabit within schools. For the unit of the school, the team of researchers selected three elementary schools representing a rural, suburban, and urban distribution from a pool of 144 schools which were awarded 5-year restructuring grants as part of a state-wide school reform bill known as California Senate Bill 1274.

For the unit of the individual focus students, I selected four students for participation based on both their identification by the school as LEP and their grade level. Of these four, by the end of data collection, due to a variety of reasons (e.g., students transferring to other schools and students being retained a grade), the number of students on which my analysis was based was reduced to three—only one of whom was a part of the original cohort. In selecting students, I focused on third- and fourth-graders because these grades are transitional years in which the linguistic and academic demands placed on students increase. As such, the third and fourth grades can be seen as important turning points in students' ability to cope with increasing academic demands that may have lasting

implications for their academic trajectories. Additionally, focal students were selected to represent a range of academic and language proficiency levels categorized as "low," "mid," and "high." These categories were defined by an initial observation, a consultation with their classroom teachers, and a review of their school records.

DATA SOURCES AND ANALYSIS

The data sources, as Table 1 shows, are of multiple types: field notes from observations of school life as experienced by focus students; transcriptions from audiotaped semi-structured interviews with students, parents, teachers, teachers' aides, and administrators; and relevant documents (e.g., students' work, students' academic records, curricular materials, and school reports). The analysis process moved through a series of overlapping phases. Phase 1 involved reviewing field notes, transcripts, and records at the organizational level in order to get an understanding of what schools attempted and how second language learners were organizationally positioned. This review involved conducting a broad content analysis to profile and code the schools' activities in regard to a number of institutional aspects of schooling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). These features included the following:

*Aspects of School Restructuring and Second Language Learning*

- *The physical plant* (e.g., an analysis of where second language learners were physically lo-

TABLE 1
Data Sources and Analysis

| Unit of Analysis | Observations | Transcripts from Audiotapes and/or Videotapes | Document Collection | Method of Analysis |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School $n = 1$ | • General staff meetings<br>• Committee meetings<br>• In-service workshops<br>• Special events (e.g., open house) | • Interviews with district personnel<br>• Interviews with administrators<br>• Interviews with restructuring coordinators and committee chairs<br>• Interviews with teachers<br>• Interviews with ESL and bilingual teachers<br>• Interviews with bilingual aides | • Student records<br>• State records<br>• School reports<br>• Media pieces<br>• Correspond-ence with parents<br>• School maps | • 'Thick' descriptive fieldnotes (Geertz, 1973)<br>• Content analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992)<br>• Critical discourse analysis of transcriptions (Fairclough, 1989) |
| Focal student $n = 3$ | • Shadowing focal students throughout their school day, including additional support services, lunch, recess, and after-school programs | • Recordings of classroom social and linguistic interactions<br>• Interviews with students<br>• Interviews with parents | • Student work<br>• Teacher-created materials<br>• Textbooks<br>• Correspond-ence with parents | • 'Thick' descriptive fieldnotes (Geertz, 1973)<br>• Content analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992)<br>• Critical discourse analysis of transcriptions (Fairclough, 1989) |

cated on school campuses and the nature of the material resources in their classrooms, such as computers, overhead projectors, and the like).

- *The organization of teaching and learning* (e.g., second language learner and "mainstream" student grouping practices; "push-in" or "pull-out" ESL and bilingual instruction; level of support for native language instruction; and programs for native English speakers to learn a language other than English).
- *Curriculum and instruction* (e.g., the connections between ESL and bilingual instruction and the "mainstream" classroom; evidence of instructional practices that strengthen language learning and support academic achievement; and supports for first and second language development).
- *Assessment practices* (e.g., the use of alternative, culturally, and linguistically sensitive assessment tools; the ability to set and monitor linguistic and academic goals for second language learners; and entry and exit re-

quirements for ESL and bilingual programs).
- *Professional support for teachers* (e.g., the character of workshops or in-services designed to provide teachers with an understanding of the needs of second language learners; and the ways in which ESL and bilingual staff members have opportunities to examine and develop their teaching practices and work with other teachers).
- *Family and community interactions* (e.g., organizational structures or norms of behaviour that foster understanding and respect for linguistic and ethnic diversity and the availability of bilingual counsellors and social workers).
- *Governance* (e.g., the character of specific committees that act on behalf of second language learners).

In addition to a broad-based content analysis of the schools' restructuring plans in regard to these categories, Phase 1 involved an analysis of the

ways in which ESL and bilingual programs were talked about in meetings and described on paper using the tools of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Specifically, this analysis included attention to the following:

*Aspects of School Restructuring and Critical Discourse Analysis*

- *The lexicon*. What classification schemes are drawn upon in discussing second language learners and second language education? What metaphors are used? What euphemisms are employed?
- *Syntax*. Is agency clear? How are passives used? How are nominalizations used? How are pronouns used? How are declaratives, interrogatives, and imperatives used?
- *Textual structure* (oral and written). What large-scale structures do texts have? How is participation structured and controlled? In what ways is textual cohesion achieved?
- *Images*. How are visual images and other non-linguistic semiotic systems used in conjunction with linguistic signs?

Phase 2 focused on analyzing the experiences of focal students. This process entailed reviewing field notes and transcribed audiotape and videotape to code the different types of activities in which second language learners participated. I paid close attention to how activities were accomplished in terms of how participation was structured (Philips, 1972; Mehan, 1979; Cazden, 1988) and in terms of how teachers and students appropriated various signs and tools available to them in accomplishing tasks, especially tasks associated with language arts instruction (Kern, 2000; Lantolf, 2000; Wertsch, 1998). In doing this analysis I also identified the ways in which speaking position constructed the identities of second language learners as members of classroom communities, and the ways in which such identities supported or constrained second language learning opportunities (Norton, 2000; Toohey, 1998, 2001; Willett, 1995).

Phase 3 involved analyzing the discourse of school restructuring at the institutional level and the discourse of school restructuring as experienced by individual focal students in local, specific classroom contexts. The purpose of this phase was to determine where patterns of institutional discourse and classroom discourse intersected and how these intersections reinforced historically rooted school identities for second

language learners or provided opportunities for resistance (for a history of immigrant education in the United States see Cohen & Mohl, 1979; San Miguel, 1987; Fass, 1989; Raftery, 1992; Olneck, 1995; and Olsen, 1997).

## WEB MAGNET SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY SCHOOL

As one exits Highway 101, a main artery connecting San Francisco and San Jose, and approaches the well-cared-for school grounds of Web Magnet Science and Technology School, the peaceful surroundings of this attractive elementary school offer a welcome relief from the stress of trying to manoeuvre through Silicon Valley traffic during rush hour. Web Magnet is a small, single-story school tucked between a row of single-family homes with manicured lawns and a large, open park complete with baseball diamond, volleyball court, and a scattering of mature oak trees.

Web Magnet is situated in the city of Barnette, an affluent, predominantly White community that has benefited enormously from the boom in Silicon Valley during the last decade. According to US Census data, the population of Barnette in 1990 was 30,000. Approximately 75% of this population was designated as White, 12% as African American, 10% as Hispanic, and the remainder as Other. Additionally, 63% of the population of Barnette in 1990 owned their own modest three-bedroom homes at an average cost of $435,000. Given skyrocketing real estate costs, which were fuelled by the boom in Silicon Valley, these same houses now, ten years later, cost upwards of $700,000.

The families of the students who attend Web Magnet, however, have participated in and benefited far less from the robust high-tech economy that visibly and invisibly whirls around them. In fact, they do not live in the predominantly White, affluent community that surrounds the school they attend. Rather, the students who attend Web Magnet reside in the Latino and African American communities located in the working-class section of the city referred to as East Barnette. They attend school in this whiter, more affluent part of town because of a controversial redrawing of district lines in the late 1980s.

The racial and socioeconomic differences between the neighbourhood community and the school community are reflected in a comparison between demographic data for the school and the census figures mentioned above. Specifically, nearly 60% of the students attending Web Mag-

net during the 1996–1997 school year were designated as African American, 32% as Hispanic, 3% as White, and the remainder as Other. In regard to the Hispanic population, the number of students who were officially categorized as LEP jumped threefold from 9% in 1992 to 27% in 1997. In addition, approximately 50% of the students attending Web Magnet were eligible for a free or reduced lunch based on financial need (see Appendix A for a more detailed 5-year demographic school profile).

Last, Web Magnet is a small school serving approximately 270 students from Grades K–8, with a single teacher assigned to each grade. There were few additional, non-teaching staff members other than a principal, a restructuring coordinator, a secretary, and a morning janitor. This was the staff configuration prior to California's class-size reduction mandate in 1996. Under state law, the staff grew to include another first-, second-, and third-grade teacher in 1997.

## SCHOOL REFORM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW IDENTITIES

When visiting Web Magnet classrooms, on just about any day of observation, I became familiar with the surprisingly similar images, activities, and patterns of interaction associated with reading and writing instruction. Students of colour, neatly clad in the school's uniform of grey, blue, and maroon, would sit quietly at desks arranged in groups of four. During the next hour and a half or so, they would work independently as classical music softly played from the class's CD player. The activities students engaged in included working on drafts of writing assignments, reading assigned texts or books of their own choosing, or logging on to one of the classroom computers to exchange e-mails with employees who worked for the school's corporate sponsor (e.g., e-mail exchanges related to school activities, weekend plans, area sporting events, new movie releases, and the like). Periodically their teacher would call a student over to have a one-on-one writing conference in a corner of the room that was appointed with overstuffed chairs, muted-colour throw pillows, soft lighting, and attractively framed pictures of students, teachers, and their families.

These predictable images, activities, and patterns of interaction reflect key aspects of the school's reform efforts (see Appendix B for a comprehensive profile of the school's restructuring efforts). First, in regard to technology, the school established a partnership with a leading high-profile software company. Through this partnership, the school purchased enough hardware and software to create a networked computer lab and to have at least two computers in each classroom.[4] Second, in regard to curriculum and instruction, the administration provided training to make sure all teachers were knowledgeable and used teaching methods reflective of "brain compatible instruction" (Jensen, 1998). Teachers described this approach to teaching as focusing on creating "predictable," "clutter-free," "organized," and "peaceful" learning environments. In practice, the hallmarks of this approach involved teachers posting a daily agenda, playing classical music when students worked independently, and decorating the classroom in what they called "quiet" ways. These "quiet ways" included appointing the room with soft colours, muted lighting, and other personal knick-knacks such as family pictures. Third, in regard to classroom management, the administration made sure all teachers, students, and parents were fully versed in a behaviour modification program called "Lifeskills." This program reflected an attempt to translate findings from studies of the behaviours of highly successful corporate managers into techniques designed to inculcate these behaviours in children at home and in schools. Specifically, based on a book by Dorothy Rich (1998), the administration mandated that every teacher post the 15 characteristics of successful students in "the Information Age." These characteristics included, for example, taking "initiative," being "organized," showing "effort," using "common sense," and being able to "cooperate" with others. Using these posted words as touchstones, teachers rewarded or punished students for using or not using "their lifeskills" through a merit and demerit system. Rewards included weekly award ceremonies and privileges such as going to McDonalds for lunch. Punishments, on the other hand, included notifying parents, giving detentions, issuing suspensions, and ultimately expelling students from school.

In sum, like many fast capitalist projects, the discursive semiotic practices associated with school reform at Web Magnet enacted an engineered community of practice and accompanying set of identities for students and teachers (Gee, et al., 1996; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, Katz, 2001). Namely, classrooms at Web Magnet felt in many ways more like upper-middle class, Pottery Barn living rooms than institutional spaces; students were constructed more as self-directed actors than as consumers of facts; and teachers were positioned more as consultants

than as information givers. To Web Magnet's credit, the school's reform efforts, resulting practices, and accompanying roles for students and teachers stand in refreshing contrast to the bleak images and oppositional stances of students and teachers which are all too often characteristic of urban schools serving high numbers of second language learners and students of colour (Darling Hammond, 1995; Kozol, 1991; Olsen, 1994, 1997). The central question guiding this investigation is, however: How did second language learners assume, negotiate, and resist the roles assigned to them by the discourses of school reform at Web Magnet? In answering this question, the data reveal that the collective practices at Web Magnet visibly and invisibly placed second language learners in new highly vulnerable positions. In what follows, I provide an analysis of this vulnerability by relating the stories of three families and their attempts to enrol and stay enrolled at Web Magnet. Further, I provide a microanalysis of the practices associated with reading and writing instruction and of a text produced by a focal student named Alma. This analysis highlights the ways in which classroom literacy practices constrained Alma in her efforts to acquire academic literacies and ultimately were implicated in the school's ability to declare her "not Web material."

## ENROLLING AND STAYING ENROLLED AT WEB MAGNET

Web Magnet's restructuring proposal and subsequent efforts over the five-year funding period were full of meaningful silences regarding the position of second language learners, despite a 300% jump in the number of students institutionally designated as "Limited English Proficient" (from 9% to 27%). The common response in interviews with administrators and teachers concerning how school reform efforts were affecting second language learners was best captured by the school's counsellor, who said, "We don't have any specific bilingual program . . . It's English only" (Web Magnet School counsellor, personal communication, May 14, 1997). The school's justification for the lack of an ESL/bilingual focus to their reform efforts and in their day-to-day practices centred on the school's "magnet" status as a high-performing science and technology school and on the school's admissions policy.[5] As stated in the parent/student handbook for the 1995–1996 school year,

> Initial acceptance at Web [Magnet Science and Technology School] for grades 2–8 is determined at least

in part by test scores. Students should obtain at or above the 40th percentile in reading and the 60th percentile in math. Most importantly, students should be willing to put forth effort to achieve academic success. (*Web Magnet*, 1995–96)

Such high percentiles as measured in English by the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) by default excluded many learners of English regardless of their ability to perform academic tasks in a language other than English. The reason for the increase in the number of students designated as LEP, despite the school's stringent admissions policy, related to two other factors. First, many LEP students, such as the focal student named Alma, started attending Web Magnet in kindergarten, when tests were not administered. Second, "strong-willed" parents, as one teacher referred to them, who wanted "English-only" instruction for their children and were willing to make an extraordinary investment in the school, were often able to persuade the administration to accept their children. This was the case for the two other focal students named Julio and Amy. The narratives these students, their parents, and their teachers told about how they were able to "get into" Web Magnet had remarkable parallels. Namely, Amy's and Julio's parents had been sending their children to elementary schools in their neighbourhood. Both families described how the academic abilities of their older children had caught the attention of teachers who advised them to get their children out of the "regular" school and into Web Magnet. Both families described how they aggressively lobbied the school and committed to volunteering in a host of ways to get the administration to agree.

In an interview conducted in Spanish and translated into English, Amy's father, Mr. Silva, described his family's experience. He explained that a teacher at his neighbourhood school had recommended that his eldest son, Alejandro, transfer to Web Magnet because he was "too intelligent" (interpreted as "too intelligent" to attend the "low performing" school in his neighbourhood which had limited resources compared to a more adequately funded, "high performance" school like Web Magnet). This teacher told Mr. Silva to try to get Alejandro into Web Magnet because he was "one out of hundreds," "the best" in the class, and that Mr. Silva should "not stop trying" until Alejandro got what he needed. Mr. Silva described how, at this teacher's urging, he succeeded in getting all three of his children on Web Magnet's waiting list, and how eventually Alejandro was able to attend Web Magnet before

graduating and moving on to middle school. When it came to Amy, however, he had an additional obstacle because she was able to read and write in Spanish but not in English. As evidenced by her school records and interviews with Amy and her father, Amy had been enrolled in a bilingual program in kindergarten and first grade in her neighbourhood school before coming to Web Magnet. At that time, Amy spoke Spanish and English and had an age-appropriate ability to read and write in Spanish but not in English. As a result, she failed the English entrance test administered by Web Magnet's second grade teacher. The second grade teacher, Ms. Humphrey, the only fluent Spanish speaker on staff, described how Mr. Silva "just begged and pleaded with us to let her in," and how the school agreed to admit Amy on the condition that Mrs. Silva work as a classroom aide two mornings a week for the entire year. Mr. Silva described how, when Amy "first got to Web [Magnet], they [teachers] didn't like her very much," but that with the hard work and the efforts of his wife, "it was worth it because at the end of the year she was at grade level with all the other kids."

In commenting on these events, Ms. Humphrey, who was Amy's, Julio's, and Alma's teacher, said that the extra effort Latino parents had to exert to get their children into Web Magnet made them distinctive kinds of parents in ways that did not "necessarily fit the profile of other parents in the district." In asking her to elaborate on specific features of this profile, she said that these Latino parents "take initiative," "have confidence regardless of the ability to speak English," and get "involved." Missing from her description of the Web Magnet "Latino parent profile," in the case of both Amy and Julio, is the fact that both families were willing, in effect, to "pay" for admission to Web Magnet by donating an enormous amount of time. This price is one that many families with full-time, less flexible job situations or with very small children at home cannot afford. Moreover, the degree to which parents like Mrs. Silva were essentially pressed into the role of an unpaid bilingual aide speaks to the degree to which the school unintentionally leveraged parents' commitment to their children's education to fill in gaps in the school's infrastructure.

Paying this price, however, did not necessarily secure the future of one's son or daughter at Web Magnet in the long run. Rather, the precarious nature of "staying" at Web Magnet became apparent in an analysis of how, in an unforeseen turn of events, the state's class-size reduction mandate increased competition between students and their families and put second language learners in particular in jeopardy. Specifically, because of class-size reduction, the school was forced to create two first-, second-, and third-grade classrooms. These two third-grades fed into a single fourth-grade, creating a problem of over-enrolment. The administration responded to this problem by revisiting the school's admissions and discipline policies to decide which students would be invited to continue and which students would be "advised" to transfer to other schools in the district. As a result, students who were performing below grade level as determined by CTBS scores and teacher comments, students who had acquired too many "Lifeskills," and students whose parents did not volunteer regularly at the school, were at risk of losing their coveted spots at Web Magnet. The parents of all three focal students described the panic this situation caused. In an interview, Julio's mother, Mrs. Reyes, expressed "what a load off her back" it was that Julio was going to be allowed to stay despite his poor grades, low-test scores, and his teachers' assessment that he was a "low"-performing student. She described how other students who had poor grades and test scores and whose parents had not made an active effort to "get to know teachers" received letters telling them that they could not come back.

Mrs. Reyes: *Resulta que están mandando cartas a las personas que no completaron las veinte horas o que nunca vinieron por la escuela y no conocen a los maestros de sus propios hijos y que realmente no les importa la educación de sus hijos. Yo sé que Julio es un poquito flojo con los deberes porque como ya va a terminar y él no quiere hacer los deberes pero ya recibí mi carta diciendo que me lo aceptaban el próximo año.*

Researcher: *¿Ah, sí?*

Mrs. Reyes: *Sí.*

Researcher: *Ah, que bueno.*

Mrs. Reyes: *Si, eso me quitó un peso de encima. Yo realmente me estaba preocupando sin saber en que escuela ponerlo.*

(Mrs. Reyes: Well, they're sending letters to the people that didn't complete their twenty hours or that never come by the school and don't even know their kid's teacher, that don't have much interest in their child's education. I know that Julio has been a little lazy with his work because he's about to get out of that grade [third] and he doesn't want to do his homework and all that but they already sent me my

letter that he'll be allowed to return next
  year.
Researcher: Oh, yeah?
Mrs. Reyes: Yeah.
Researcher: Oh, how good.
Mrs. Reyes: That was a load off my back. I kept
  worrying about what school to put him in!)

Interestingly, as evidenced by lines 20–21—
"[People who] don't have much interest in their
child's education"—Mrs. Reyes seems to have internalized a common sense assumption at work in
American schools. This assumption dictates that
parents who do not regularly attend open houses,
go to parent-teacher conferences, or volunteer at
school do not care about the education of their
children. The hegemony embedded in this belief
is that it serves middle-class parents who have the
time to volunteer and who have been socialized
into establishing particular kinds of relationships
with teachers (e.g., teacher and parents as "partners") that may be very different from the kinds
of relationships that are typically established between teachers and parents within other cultures
(e.g., the notion of the teacher as a respected,
high-status professional; see Valdés, 1996, for a
discussion). As will become clear in discussing
Alma's experiences, not all immigrant parents
shared the school's understanding of the role
they were expected to play. Second, even if they
did understand what was expected of them, they
did not always have the luxury of time that such
participation requires. Alma's parents, for example, worked during school hours. Her mother
made an effort to come to parent-teacher conferences and to stay in touch with teachers but was
not able to put the same kind of investment into
the school as did Amy's and Julio's mothers.
Moreover, neither of Alma's parents spoke English, making communicating with the school difficult, particularly because the school made no
consistent effort to have an interpreter available
at meetings or to translate written communication going home to parents.

In sum, becoming and remaining a student at
Web Magnet meant primarily displaying academic English language proficiency by achieving
high scores on standardized tests. Room for negotiating the legitimacy of a Web Magnet student
who was not proficient in English was possible if
parents, like their children, fit a rather narrow
definition of what it meant to be a "Web parent."
This definition necessitated that immigrant parents not only have some fluency in English, but
also adopt culturally specific roles such as "parents as partners" and "parents as volunteers." The

degree to which the parents of focal students
consciously or unconsciously understood the
roles they were expected to play, and/or the degree to which assuming these roles was a possibility, varied and had profound implications for
their children. Amy's mother worked essentially
as an unpaid, part-time bilingual aide for a full
year and was thus able to secure Amy's future at
Web Magnet. Julio's mother kept her son in good
standing because she played a key role in one of
the school's fundraisers (e.g., *Christmas in April*)
and regularly attended meetings. Alma's parents,
however, had less flexible work schedules and
were less proficient in English. Both of these factors contributed to the teachers' perceptions that
Alma's family was less capable of supporting her
academically and that Alma would be better
served by attending a less academic school in her
own neighbourhood, despite the fact that her
ability to complete assigned tasks was almost identical to Julio's.

## THE DISCOURSES OF READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION

The following is a description of the discursive
practices associated with independent study and
writing conferences, two related and high frequency interactional patterns observed in classrooms at Web Magnet during reading and writing instruction. In line with the new school
order driven by the new work order, these interactional patterns positioned students as independent problem-solvers and teachers as consultants, but also ironically constructed learning
as an individual phenomenon and language acquisition as skills-based piecework. Paradoxically,
these approaches to teaching, learning, and language development reflect the logic and goals
of the old capitalist work order, which are geared
toward the mass production of material goods,
not the tenets of new capitalism, which are
geared toward the production of knowledge-based products through teamwork, collaboration, and collective expertise. Even more ironic
for second language learners specifically, is that
these more traditional schooling practices—leftovers from manufacturing's influence on public
education (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Tyack,
1974)—invisibly cut second language learners
off from the much needed sociolinguistic knowhow that was distributed around them (e.g.,
Brown, 1994; Lantolf, 2000; Lave, 1988). As
such, the engineered community of practice in
which second language learners participated was
not one that readily prepared them to take their

place in the new Information Age as "symbolic knowledge workers." Rather, despite the semiotics of change (e.g., the absence of teacher-centred instruction, the living room surroundings, and the presence of high-tech tools), these literacy practices leaned toward preparing students to take their place as low-skill workers in a manufacturing work order that is rapidly disappearing (e.g., Reich, 1992).

The following analysis of a typical classroom interaction illustrates the above conclusion. In this example, students and their teacher sat pretzel-style in a circle on a cobalt-blue carpet as the teacher, Mrs. Chan,[6] listed the assignments they were to work on over the next hour and a half. This list included finishing their pen pal letters, completing two sections in their social studies text, and reading their assigned language arts text, *The Black Pearl,* by Scott O'Dell. Students completed these tasks with minimal support from Mrs. Chan. Likewise, students were to complete these assignments with minimal support from each other. These aspects of the discursive practices at work in Mrs. Chan's classroom were evident in Mrs. Chan's instructions to edit "yourself, by yourself and then I'll look at it" (see lines 32–33 below) and in the lack of teacher-approved interactions between students (e.g., lack of extended talk between students, and Mrs. Chan's warning to maintain a quiet, "settled" classroom).

Mrs. Chan: Okay, we've got lots to do. Raise your hand if you still have to finish your pen pal letter, to finish. (Alma, a focal student, raises her hand.) Okay, as yesterday, if I don't get it today, you're in today over lunch working on them. I am mailing them tomorrow. This is the last pen pal letter of the year. That we are sending. That they are going to get in time to write us back. I need to send them tomorrow. So I need for those to get done today. (Jaime, another focal student, raises his hand.) Raise your hand if that is going to be a problem for you. (Jaime pulls his hand down quickly. Alma is looking off to the right with her thumb on her lips in a semi-reclined position with her head under the table behind her. She shakes her head "no" in response to the question but does not make eye contact with Mrs. Chan.) All eyes up here. (Alma looks at Mrs. Chan and sits upright.) Is that going to be a problem? (Several students have their hands raised.) Julia, is that going to be a problem; why? (Alma claps her

hands once, looks at her lap, and bites her fingernail.)

Julia: xxxxxx (indecipherable)

Mrs. Chan: Shh, I couldn't hear.

Julia: xxxxxx (indecipherable)

Mrs. Chan: I won't look at it until you've edited yourself, and you've gone over that checklist. Yourself, by yourself and then I'll look at it. Joe, maybe you can tell us?

Joe: What?

Mrs. Chan: Did you finish your pen pal letter?

Joe: xxxxx (indecipherable)

Mrs. Chan: All right, after your pen pal letter, you need to work on social studies. It is lesson one and I'll put up two, too. Unfortunately, I erased it. Lesson one and two, chapter three. If you don't know the page numbers for that, where can you find it?

Carlos: In the index.

Mrs. Chan: In the index or in the front. If you finish that, and you've answered the questions at the end of each—(Mrs. Chan looks at two students sitting at a table in the corner of the room. These students did not go on the class field trip and have been assigned to sit in Mrs. Chan's class for the day. The two students have been reading a book together quietly with an occasional muffled laugh.) Marcos, could you get your book and go someplace else please? (Marcos picks up his book and moves to the floor by the bookshelf as Jaime and Alma look on.) No, that's not far enough. Over here by the poems. And is there anyone who doesn't understand about social studies? Richard?

Richard: Uhh, and if you finish it.

Mrs. Chan: I can't hear you.

Richard: What do we do if we finished our social studies?

Mrs. Chan: I'm going deaf, if you finish your social studies after you've showed me, then we see that you really understand it well, then you need to read *The Black Pearl* and you need to read through chapter—you have to read through chapter 10 by—by Thursday, because Sara is coming, and on Friday I'm going to give you a short quiz through chapter 11. Or just on chapter 11. (The student next to Jaime raises her hand. Mrs. Chan nods in her direction.)

Theresa: xxxxxx (Theresa asks something about how many social studies questions she has to answer. Students are beginning to move around.)

Mrs. Chan: Shh, all the questions of course.

Theresa: Oh. Can I go to the bathroom please?

Mrs. Chan: Yes. Okay, and after *The Black Pearl,* I would like to—I don't know if we're gonna have enough time—I would like to go over some more of math that we started yesterday, but we are going to—our problems took a lot longer today than they usually do (referring to a playground dispute that spilled over into the class and took 20 minutes of circle time). So are there any other questions? I will give you one minute to get settled and then I'll, we need to start doing something about it. (Mrs. Chan turns on classical music.)

During the next 40 minutes, the class as a whole worked silently. The only sounds I recorded were of papers rustling, chairs moving, and Mrs. Chan's voice murmuring as she conducted one-on-one editing sessions with students regarding their pen pal letters. After 40 minutes, Mrs. Chan began reprimanding students for too much "chitchat" and asked some students to move closer to her to ensure the room stayed quiet.

*Alma's Letter*

In regard to the ways in which focal second language learners participated in the activities described in the above transcript, Alma, like the majority of students, quickly returned to her desk, got the materials she needed, and got to work. During the first 4 minutes, she copied over a draft of her pen pal letter, stopping frequently to erase and rewrite words. Mrs. Chan had already responded to this draft in a previous conference (see recreation in Appendix C). Mrs. Chan's comments centred on spelling (e.g., *something, letter, four,* and *field trip*), capitalization, punctuation, and indenting (e.g., an arrow indicating where Alma needed to indent because the assignment called for "at least two paragraphs"). There were no other comments regarding the content of Alma's letter despite a lack of coherence between several of the lines she had written. For example, Alma's draft contained the following: "I know that the leters came in late it passed one mounth April and came in May." (Alma Garcia, third grade student).

My interpretation of what Alma was attempting to communicate was that she was apologizing for writing back so late, but that she did not receive her pen pal's letter until recently, despite the fact that it was written over a month ago. After copy-ing the letter, Alma waited in line for a second conference with Mrs. Chan. In this conference Mrs. Chan drew Alma's attention to four capitalization errors, which Alma had again copied over incorrectly. Mrs. Chan also crossed out the above lines regarding the lateness of Alma's reply but offered no explanation for why this made the letter better. After the conference, Alma returned to her desk and spent the remainder of the class silently copying over her draft with coloured pencils, alternating the colour of each word, and decorating the envelope with stickers, probably to the delight of its recipient. Her social studies text and reading text, however, went untouched.

For comparison, if a true constructivist approach to learning and language development were at work in this context, Mrs. Chan potentially could have entered into a more genuinely collaborative dialogue with Alma that might have led Alma to internalize or appropriate aspects of written English (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1998). Namely, Mrs. Chan could have "scaffolded" the process of writing a quality letter as opposed to solely focusing on the formal properties of her draft as a product (see Bruner, 1983; Johnson, 1995; Kelly-Hall, 2000; and McCormick & Donato, 2000, for a discussion of instructional scaffolding). For example, Mrs. Chan could have provided a "verbal scaffold" supportive of Alma's learning to write an apology if she had asked questions about what Alma wanted to communicate. In addition, Mrs. Chan could have helped Alma answer these questions in ways that might have given Alma the language forms required to produce a well-formed written apology (e.g., "I would have written sooner, but I just got your letter"). Such a dialogue not only would have improved the content of the letter in ways that Alma intended but also would have provided Alma with an opportunity to explore how conditional and implied conditionals are formed in English.[7] In addition, Mrs. Chan could have provided the class, not just Alma, with an example of several letters and then led a discussion rich in open-ended questions to help students construct an understanding of what features make some letters better than others.

Potentially, interactional practices such as the ones itemized above could have accomplished many things: first, in the Vygotskian sense, Alma could have looked to available classroom models when drafting her letter. These models could have acted as "cultural artefacts" or "tools" that could have enhanced Alma's performance when she was working independently (Lantolf, 2000; Wertsch, 1998). Second, over time members of

the class might have internalized Mrs. Chan's understanding of a quality letter and might have been in a better position to provide assistance to less proficient writers like Alma in a peer conference kind of situation. Third, Mrs. Chan's evaluation practices would have been made public and explicit and therefore could have provided both students and parents with a better understanding of how students were doing and where they stood in a highly competitive environment. Finally, in line with the main thrust of the new school order, a community of practice reflective of a constructivist approach to learning and language development would have done more to construct Alma as a symbolic knowledge worker capable of co-creating new thoughts with language as opposed to a skill-worker who mechanically copied edited words.

In contrast to the above hypothetical scenario, Alma's letter, and an abundance of classroom artefacts like it, reflected and created the kind of real-world school relationships she had with others, and in turn, reflected and created the social worlds to which she belonged and may likely belong in the future. Specifically, drawing on Fairclough's discussion of critical discourse analysis, Alma's letter and the other kinds of school-sponsored texts she produced bear "traces" to the context in which they were created (Fairclough, 1989, 1992). Namely, the revisions she made (e.g., the wholesale deletion of her "apology section" and the subsequent copying of a second draft) bear traces of the non-collaborative, form-focused approach to literacy instruction at work in this classroom.

Moreover, Alma's teachers, influenced by other discourses associated with English-only (Americanizing) instruction and individualizing conceptions of learning, interpreted Alma's schoolwork in very specific ways. Again, drawing on Fairclough's discussion of critical discourse analysis, teachers tended to interpret nonstandard features in Alma's writing, such as invented spellings and nonstandard uses of capital letters, as cues that Alma had a learning disability caused by her assumed bilingualism (Fairclough, 1989, 1992). Evidence to support this conclusion came from interviews with Alma's teachers. For example, in response to a question regarding how second language learners were doing in her class, Alma's third-grade teacher said LEP students often had "a lot of trouble getting their work done." She explained that the "problems" were ones that she located "within the kids" whose parents "are still just speaking Spanish at home." With reference to Alma, Ms. Testa[8] said,

There are a lot of kids who are bilingual. I find the difference within the kids is that most parents who speak English at home, and those parents who are still just speaking Spanish at home, and that's a sad statement, because I wish everybody at the whole school was bilingual, but I find that is where most of the problems are. . . . Like for instance, Alma's mom. It's hard for me, because I've tried to explain something to Alma and she doesn't understand, and I think part of it is because she doesn't have older people to help her understand a lot of those concepts. (Mimi Testa, third-grade teacher)

In sum, teachers' understandings of learning, literacy development, and multilingualism, coupled with intense competition for spots in Web Magnet's single fourth grade class, resulted in a set of practices that constructed Alma as a remedial student. For example, Ms. Testa recommended that a team of specialists test Alma to determine if the difficulties she was having were related to a learning disability or to her level of proficiency in English.[9] The testing team administered a battery of tests designed to measure Alma's academic development (e.g., the Woodcock Johnson Battery), her psychomotor development (e.g., the Bender Gestalt), her language development (the Idea Proficiency Test in Spanish and English), and her intellectual development (e.g., the Weschler Test of Intelligence). The team reviewed Alma's test scores and declared her a "Fluent Speaker of English" but recommended she repeat third grade. The following year, given remarkably similar teaching practices, Alma's literacy skills improved very little. As a result, her new teacher, Mrs. Chan, scheduled several conferences with Alma's mother to discuss the benefits of Alma transferring to her neighbourhood school, where she wouldn't "be the lowest."

Alma's mother, Mrs. Garcia, said in an interview that she realized Alma could "get distracted easily" but that she wasn't sure whether Alma's problem was a question of her ability to do the assigned work. Mrs. Garcia rejected the school counsellor's idea that the problem was "we speak Spanish at home and this confuses her." In fact, Mrs. Garcia and Alma both reported that Alma spoke English at home with her older siblings and had difficulty communicating with her parents in Spanish. In this sense, the degree to which Alma can be described as "bilingual" is open to interpretation. With anger, Mrs. Garcia blamed the school for only "wanting geniuses" and for not helping Alma since the beginning, when she entered Web Magnet in kindergarten. Mrs. Garcia's solution to the

problem was not to get rid of low-performing students but to get rid of low-performing teachers:

Mrs. Garcia: *Ellos quieren que sean como un sabio. . . . Entonces si quieren un sabio, o sea los quieren que vayan así de alto, yo pienso que aquél que va bajito también tienen que levantarlo no mandarlo a otra escuela, no decir "este que no sabe, vamos a mandarlo a otra escuela," que se va a empeorar. Ellos [los profesores] mismos tienen que sacarlo adelante. Si es verdaderamente una buena escuela lo tienen que sacar adelante, es lo que yo pienso.*

Researcher: *¿Ayudar a todos los estudiantes . . . ?*

Mrs. Garcia: *Si, no sacarlos . . .¿Entonces si esa, es la mejor escuela que tienen acá en el distrito, entonces por qué lo van referir a otra escuela? Tienen que sacarlo adelante ellos mismos. Le digo, mi niña empezó ahí, no tienen porqué me sugerir a mí otra escuela, ellos tienen que sacarla adelante, si ellos no la sacan adelante, quién la va a sacar? Yo no, porque yo no estudié, entonces tienen que sacar a los maestros.*

(Mrs. Garcia: They want them to be like a genius. . . . So if they want a genius, or someone who has a really high score. I think that for those who have a low score, they need help getting up instead of sending him off to another school, like saying, "This one that doesn't know, let's send him to another school," that would only make it worse. They [the teachers] have to help him out. If this is truly a good school, they should help him out, that's what I think.

Researcher: Help all the students . . .?

Mrs. Garcia: Yes, don't take them out. . . . So if that is the best school they have in the district, why are they going to refer him to another school? They have to help them out themselves. I tell you, my daughter started there, they have no reason in telling me to send her to another school, they must be able to help her out. I can't because I never went to school, so what they need to do is to take the teachers out.)

In formal interviews and more casual conversations with me, Alma resisted the remedial label of *learning disabled* that the school tried to affix to her and presented herself as a student who had no particular problems. In fluent, unaccented English she reported that she liked school and her teachers and that her assignments were "easy." Voluntarily, she read to me from the class's assigned text, *Charlotte's Web,* with enthusiasm and fluency. Similarly, the following year, Alma was eager to show me a somewhat autobiographical story she was writing, titled "Candy." Unbeknownst to Mrs. Chan, this was a nine-page piece Alma covertly worked on and shared with her friends during class instead of doing official assignments. Given the ways in which Alma seemed to go out of her way to present herself to me as a proficient reader and writer, a presentation of self that remained invisible to her teachers given their assumptions about language and learning, I was reluctant to bring up the subject of her retention directly. The topic came up, however, almost accidentally, when I asked in what ways she thought school was "fair" and "unfair," a question I asked all focal students. She responded by explaining that it was sometimes not fair when you're a "new kid" and other kids "won't let you play soccer," implying that making friends in her new class had been difficult at first. She went on to explain that it was her mother's decision that she was not allowed to go on to fourth grade with her old friends because "my mother didn't like my handwriting so *she* said you're going back into the third grade" (emphasis added). In an effort to clarify Alma's understanding of why she was held back, I repeated her response that it was her "mother's idea," to which she responded, "yep."

Researcher: Okay. Do you think school's fair?

Alma: Mm hmm.

Researcher: Do you ever feel like it's unfair?

Alma: Ummm, sometimes.

Researcher: What's unfair?

Alma: Because when we play soccer, they let the other kids play, but not the new kids that want to play, they don't let them play, like, when I was . . . they played soccer for two months, and then I wanted to come in and they said no, but then one time when one of the other kids took out a soccer ball they said I could play, and I was playing, then I played, and then they said I was good at soccer. Now I play.

Researcher: Why were you a new kid?

Alma: I was a new kid because I was supposed to go to fourth, but my mother didn't like my handwriting so she said you're going back into the third grade.

Researcher: How'd you feel about that?

Alma: Sad.

Researcher: Sad? Why was that sad?

Alma: Because I wanted to join the rest of the kids.

Researcher: Yeah. And it was your mom's idea because of your handwriting?

Alma: Yep.

This exchange indicates that Alma, while protecting a presentation of self as a good student to me, had to a certain extent internalized the ideology of the school regarding the cause of her academic difficulties.[10] That is, Alma did not attribute her difficulties in school to a lack of assistance from her teachers. Rather, like her teachers, albeit for different reasons, she located the cause of her failure in her family, specifically her mother.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The discourses of school reform in this context, shaped by social, economic, and historical forces, constructed Web Magnet as a "boutique," almost private school for high achievers. The specific character of the definition of a "high achiever" in this competitive context, however, made it very difficult for second language learners and their families to assume the identities required for membership in this school community and potentially for future membership in communities associated with high-paying jobs. For example, the literacy piecework skills to which Alma was apprenticed compromised her legitimacy as a Web Magnet student and most likely will not support her in the future as she tries to position herself as a winner in the redistribution of wealth and power taking place in the new work order.

This investigation reveals that a wide variety of complementary and competing discourses inadvertently produced the above situation. Namely, the reforms enacted at Web Magnet in effect wallpapered over the semiotics of industrial approaches to schooling with the language and images of fast capitalism while leaving historically rooted ideologies and practices regarding language, literacy, and culture untouched. For example, the reforms enacted at Web Magnet successfully changed how teachers and students used space, time, and learning tools. The faculty did this by rearranging the classroom furniture so the students no longer sat in rows but were grouped in fours. Teachers no longer lectured in front of the room in a "chalk-and-talk" fashion but consulted with students individually in the atmosphere of a modern living room equipped with state-of-the-art hardware, software, and Internet access. Teachers and students no longer studied compartmentalized subjects at specified times but went about their work guided by a time-flexible daily agenda. These fast capitalist initiatives and their accompanying images, however, were laminated over Industrial-Age practices that cast learning as an individual phenomenon and literacy as a skill developed through the rote assembly of formal bits of language. Moreover, Web's reforms left undisturbed powerful folk theories regarding social mobility in the United States (e.g., Kloss, 1971; Vollmer, 1997). That is, educators at Web Magnet, as did educators in the past, pressed immigrant families to give up ties to their first language and culture in exchange for the promise of social mobility. They made these demands on immigrant families despite the obvious benefits of multilingualism and multiculturalism in a borderless, global economy (see Cummins and Sayers, 1995).

In accounting for the failure of teachers and administrators to confront and productively disentangle the multiple systemic paradoxes that infused their reform efforts, the work of Andy Hargreaves regarding the nature of teachers' work is insightful (1994). Hargreaves maintains that teachers are precariously caught between two powerful epistemes, one modern and the other postmodern, in ways that make seeing, understanding, and changing how work is accomplished in schools difficult. He writes:

> The reason for the ironies of change are to be found in the wider social context in which schools operate and of which they are a part. The fundamental problem, I argue, is to be found in the confrontation between two powerful forces. On the one hand is an increasingly postindustrial, postmodern world, characterized by accelerating change, intense compression of time and space, cultural diversity, technological complexity, national insecurity, and scientific uncertainty. Against this stands a modernistic, monolithic school system that continues to pursue deeply anachronistic purposes within opaque and inflexible structures. . . . It is not simply that the modernistic school systems are the problem and postmodern organizations are the solution. Postmodern societies themselves are loaded with contradictory possibilities. . . . But it is the struggle between and within modernity and postmodernity that the challenge of change for teachers and their leaders is to be found. (pp. 3–4)

In drawing on Hargreaves' work to explain how teachers and their students are caught in what can best be described as an epistomological riptide, I do not wish to suggest that efforts aimed at changing racist and classist schooling practices are futile. Nor do I wish to reduce an analysis of school reform to a discussion of "bad teachers" by unfairly wagging an accusatory finger at Mrs. Chan and Ms. Testa. Rather, I hope this study adds meaningfully to debates shaping research and practice in the fields of school reform and classroom SLA in such a way that the discursive currents over which a social justice agenda is enacted can be navigated more smoothly.

First, in regard to studies of school reform, this

study illustrates that educators at Web Magnet, like educators in many reforming schools, were able to describe how their classrooms had changed as a result of school reform. However, when it came to explaining *how* student learning had changed, for the better or worse, teachers and administrators were often at a loss. As a rule, they either repeated a description of the reforms they were attempting or interpreted the question as one of accountability and provided examples of student work and reports of standardized test scores. This response should not come as a surprise given the public's faith, if not obsession, with test scores and given the slim resources dedicated to the professional development of teachers. For example, Mrs. Chan and Ms. Testa participated in workshops that trained them in how to implement "brain compatible" instruction and a "Lifeskills" approach to classroom management. They did not, however, participate in any sustained professional development opportunities that asked or supported them in thinking deeply and critically about how learning takes place, particularly how sociolinguistic interactions play a role in the construction of knowledge and language learning (see Gebhard, 1998, for a review of contextual factors that support L2 teachers' professional development). In this sense, through no fault of their own, the impact of the literacy practices at work in their classroom were invisible to them, and dominant ideologies regarding individualism, skills-based learning, and English monolingualism remained unquestioned.

In response to the above situation, which can only be described as a crisis, I agree with policy analysts who argue strongly that the professional development of in-service and pre-service teachers must become a high priority if reforms are to avoid the dystopia they so ironically engender (e.g., Little, 1984, 1989; Darling Hammond, 1993, 1994). As an applied linguist, however, I call for professional development opportunities that support teachers in seeing how turns-at-talk and literacy events in their classrooms shape student learning opportunities (e.g., taping, transcribing, and analyzing classroom interaction). This recommendation is warranted now more than ever given the call for teachers to implement Vygotskian approaches to teaching and learning in increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms (e.g., Tharp, 1997, and the work of the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence). Likewise, investigations of school reform, particularly evaluations, need to collect, transcribe, and analyze classroom sociolinguistic data if they are to capture and display the essence of interactions that support or constrain student learning opportunities.

Second, in regard to classroom SLA research, I argue for a broadening of the focus of studies adopting a sociocultural perspective of second language development.[11] For example, to date, there have been relatively few investigations of how a second language learner's access to users of the target language, to talented teachers, and to quality instructional materials is mediated by institutional practices associated with schooling.[12] A research agenda such as this entails asking questions regarding the connection between the classroom experiences of second language learners and a host of institutional practices such as how do second language learners get grouped for instruction? How are second language learners assessed? How are the teachers of second language learners professionally prepared and supported? How are school policies impacting second language learners made and enacted? How are ESL textbooks and other curricular material developed and used in classrooms? How do the families of second language learners play a role in the education of their children?

In conclusion, an interdisciplinary research agenda such as this admittedly (and unapologetically) asks educational researchers to become linguists and SLA researchers to become educational anthropologists. Moreover, this agenda necessitates that educational leaders and researchers interested in school reform develop a deeper understanding of sociocultural perspectives of language development and a greater ability to use the tools of discourse analysis. In turn, SLA researchers interested in exploring a sociocultural perspective of classroom SLA must not only "exit the mind" of the language learner, as suggested by Gee, Hull, and Lankshear at the start of this paper, but they must also move beyond the four walls of the ESL classroom by venturing into staff rooms, principal committee meetings, and the offices of district and state policy makers.

NOTES

[1] The terms *fast capitalism* and *new capitalism* describe the same phenomenon. Gee, et al. (1996), use the term *fast capitalism* to incorporate a critical perspective missing from the work of writers such as Drucker (1993) and Senge (1991). Gee, et al. (1996), define fast capitalist texts as a "mix genre" produced by business managers and consultants. These texts attempt to create on paper the new work order or what Gee, et al., call the "enchanted workplace." This workplace is a scripted one,

where "hierarchy is dead" and partners engage in "meaningful," "collaborative" work. It is also a place where the complexities of the real world are glossed over in ways that produce a kind of "soft-touch hegemony" (pp. 24–25).

[2] Many terms used to refer to students who primarily speak a language other than English are problematic. The term *limited English proficient*, for example, is pejorative in the sense that it accents limitations as well as privileges English over other languages as the medium of academic achievement in American schools. The term *linguistic minority student* fails to reflect that students who speak a language other than English are often in the majority given the make-up of the communities in which they live and go to school. Likewise, referents such as *English as a Second Language* (ESL) or *bilingual student* essentialize program types that vary considerably. For this report, therefore, I will refer to students who are learning English as an additional language as *second language learners*, despite the fact that many such students may in fact be learners of a third or fourth language or variety of languages.

[3] This investigation is part of a series of studies of school reform conducted under the direction of Judith Warren Little and funded by the Stuart Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation. California's Language Minorities Research Institute provided additional support.

[4] In the wake of California's state mandate to reduce class sizes for all first, second, and third grades, the computer lab was dismantled in 1997 to make room for an additional classroom.

[5] Magnet schools are public schools designed to attract students based on the school's ability to focus instruction on a specialty (e.g., the arts).

[6] Mrs. Chan is a White, monolingual English speaker of Irish descent. She was fully certified to teach third grade. She had 3 years of teaching experience at Web and was often called upon to train other teachers in Web's approach to teaching and learning. This pseudonym captures the fact that she married someone of Chinese descent and changed her last name from O'Hara to Chan.

[7] Conditional sentences typically consist of an "if clause" and a "result clause" formed using the model "would." In an implied conditional sentence, the "if" is omitted.

[8] Ms. Testa is a White, monolingual English speaker of Italian descent. She was fully certified to teach third grade. She had taught for several years in the New York Metropolitan area and was in her second year as a staff member at Web Magnet.

[9] See Cummins (1984) for a discussion of the disproportionate number of language learners who are inappropriately diagnosed with learning disabilities due to culturally biased educational practices and testing instruments as well as a lack of understanding of issues central to bilingualism and SLA. See McDermott (1996) for an insightful discussion of how learning disabilities are constructed by school practices.

[10] See Dorph (1999) for a discussion of the ways in which students internalize institutional narratives regarding the causes of their success and failure.

[11] Studies of SLA adopting a psycholinguistic perspective of language development have a very different, but equally valuable research agenda than the one I advocate here (see Firth & Wagner, 1997; Long, 1997).

[12] Some exceptions include Olsen (1994, 1997), Harklau (1994, 2000), Gebhard (2000), and Toohey (2001).

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APPENDIX A
Web Magnet Elementary School
Type: Elementary (K–8)
Size (6/95): 279

| | 1992–1993 | 1993–1994 | 1994–1995 | 1995–1996 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Students | | | | |
| Total Enrollment | 265 | 256 | 279 | 271 |
| White | 12 | 11 | 8 | 10 |
| African American | 180 | 165 | 174 | 162 |
| Hispanic | 58 | 67 | 83 | 87 |
| Asian | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Filipino/Pacific Is. | 14 | 12 | 11 | 9 |
| Am. Indian/Al. Nat | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % LEP | 9.1 | | | 28 |
| # Spanish | 21 | | | 70 |
| # Cantonese | 0 | | | 0 |
| # Vietnamese | 0 | | | 0 |
| # Hmong | 0 | | | 0 |
| # Other | 3 | | | 7 |
| % AFDC | 8.6 | | | |
| The Staff | | | | |
| # Administrators | 0 | 1 | 1 | |
| # Teachers | 12 | 11.6 | 11 | |
| % non-white | 23 | 23 | 25 | |
| Average years teaching | 8 | 8 | 7 | |
| % MA or > | 30 | 15 | 33 | |
| # Classified Staff | 13 | 8 | 12 | |

| The 1274 Budget | | % |
|---|---|---|
| Instuctional Materials | 13,351 | 3.71 |
| Technology | 152,617 | 42.38 |
| Org. Learning & Development | 150,896 | 41.91 |
| Staff Positions | 34,223 | 9.50 |
| Other | 8,994 | 2.50 |
| Total | 360,081 | 100.00 |

APPENDIX B
School Restructuring Matrix

| Aspect of Restructuring | Web Magnet Elementary School |
|---|---|
| Overall Restructuring Strategy | • The school used funding to purchase materials and to hire consultants for staff development in the areas of science and technology.<br>• Teachers cycle with the same students for two consecutive grades.<br>• High teacher and principal turnover (nearly 100% during the course of the study) compromised restructuring efforts. |
| Physical Plant and Material Resources | • Well-maintained facility (e.g., no graffiti or trash on school grounds, lights and clocks in working order, enough chairs and desks for students).<br>• Access to technology in lab and classroom was made possible in part through a partnership with a leading Silicon Valley company. Made vulnerable by high teacher turnover and a lack of space in which to house the lab in the wake of class-size reduction mandate. |
| The Organization of Teaching and Learning Related to SLA | • Second language learners assigned to English-only classes.<br>• No specific program for second language learners.<br>• District bilingual support person visits school irregularly.<br>• Second language learners were assigned tutors from a local university and participated in after-school programs. |
| Curriculum and Instruction | • Hired consultants and purchased curricular packages.<br>• Key programs included integrated thematic instruction (ITI), "Brain compatible instruction" (use of classical music, soft lighting, and throw pillows in each classroom), math (Quest 2000), and a school-wide approach to classroom management ("Lifeskills").<br>• Purchased hardware and software.<br>• Efforts made vulnerable by high staff turnover. |
| Assessment | • CTBS<br>• IPT (Oral K-6)<br>• No L1 assessments unless ordered by special education assessment team. |
| Professional Development for Teachers | • Minimum day once a week.<br>• The district required all teachers be in the process of getting their CLAD credential. Teachers report no change in practices.<br>• In-services in various approaches to curriculum and instruction but efforts made vulnerable to high teacher turnover. New hires report being frustrated because they are expected to implement programs about which they have little understanding. |
| Governance Structures | • Strong principal structure. Made vulnerable by high turnover.<br>• Latino parents within the district not associated with the school filed a lawsuit against the district for being out of compliance with state's mandated bilingual education plan. |
| Family and Community | • Parents required to work 20 "effort" hours a year as part of magnet contract.<br>• Bilingual secretary viewed as a key resource by Spanish-speaking parents and students.<br>• Parents complain about lack of Spanish communication with the school. |

APPENDIX C
Alma's Letter

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Dear  Sandy

Do you know Somethig is hap ning  my teacher. She is haveing a baby !

I know that the leters came in late. it Passed one mounth April and came in May.

I still have the first leter you sent Me. I will Keep this last leter for � ever. have

you gone to fill trips I have gone to 4 fill trips

on four field trips

At least 2 paragraphs

Sincerely,

Alma

Dear sandy                                                                                      5-12

My teacher is fine and dandy. Yes, Something is happening to my teacher. She is

having a baby!

~~I know that the letters came in late. it  Passed April and came in May.~~ I still have

the first letter that you sent me. I will keep this Last letter forever. Have you gone

to fieldtrips? We have gone on four fieldtrips.

Sincerely,

Alma