

LITERACY PRACTICES OF MEXICAN AND GHANAIAAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN WITH
LIMITED ESL LITERACY

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Scarce ESL literacy research exists on low-literate, immigrant learners over the age of sixty. Research on this underrepresented population is critical for increasing their participation and success in ESL programs. This study describes the literacy practices, perceived needs, expectations, literacy statements, and classroom dynamics of low-literate, immigrant learners over the age of sixty. Data was collected over a seven-week period using interviews, classroom observations, and drawing tasks at a U.S. ESL tutoring center supported by volunteer tutors. Two ESL students from Ghana and México participated. Data was analyzed using Norton's (2013) investment model. Findings showed that participants desired autonomy; classroom dynamics influenced participants' perceived needs and negative literacy statements; and English-speaking family members positively influenced participants' engagement in English literacy practices. From a pedagogical perspective, increasing low-literate, immigrant learners' active participation in ESL programs requires improved resources for tutor training, relevant content for learners' needs, and learners to have strong social connections with English speakers outside of the classroom.

To my grandparents whom I will always love:

*Henry Oscar and Patty Butler
&
James and Velia Palmer*

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 RELEVANCE OF THIS STUDY

English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy instruction is prevalent in the United States. Each state receives annual funding for ESL instruction from the federal government. It has been reported that the population of English language learners (ELLs) is rising in the United States, from approximately 3.8 million to 4.9 million enrolled (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Calculating the current population of adult ELLs is more difficult because the U.S. Census Bureau relies on self-reports and because other reports' numbers come from a diverse group of government agencies and non-profits.

Annually, the U.S. Embassy allots a limited number of Diversity Immigrant Visas (DVs) that encourage immigration from countries with “low rates of immigration” to the U.S. (U.S. Embassy in Ghana, 2020). At the present time, DVs “requires the principal DV applicant to have a high school education, or its equivalent, or two years of qualifying work experience as defined under provisions of U.S. law” (U.S. Department of State, 2020). As commonly referenced in U.S. media, other means of immigration exist. Altogether, immigration is commonplace in the U.S., which means that many ELLs enter the country annually.

To keep up with the needs of the ESL population in the U.S., educators, community volunteers, and government officials desire to learn more about ELLs. Specifically, research is currently focused on the challenges that adult immigrant ELLs face, how to increase their participation in ESL programs, and how to support ELLs as they successfully acquire English language and literacy. Without knowledge of ELLs' needs, it is difficult to design curriculum and appropriately support ELLs during class time.

This study looks at the reasons behind ELLs participation in ESL tutoring and how ELLs practice literacy in their own languages and in English. Educators, community volunteers, and government officials will benefit from this study because it outlines the needs of adult immigrant ELLs who did not attain high levels of literacy education at home and are now enrolled in an ESL literacy program.

1.2 PERSONAL PATH TO THIS RESEARCH

“What more could I do with wild words?” Mary Oliver, 1992

I am an inveterate storyteller. The habit of telling stories has been long-established for me since the very beginning, from my gibberish as a two-year-old playing in the bathtub to my present scholarly writing. Often the common, daily practices of life interest me most, particularly people’s everyday language. The seemingly stale, characterless events of life, like shopping at the grocery store or completing grammar exercises, become noteworthy with a slight shift of perspective. For example, the ins-and-outs of grocery shopping are no longer axiomatic if I am a store owner who hopes to sell ten times more bananas to customers. Likewise, the way in which grammar exercises function is not mundane if I am the teacher invested in the success of students. In other words, I enjoy representing the everyday because everyday stories embody the fantastic details of human relationships, to each other and to the world.

In this section, I will detail the path that guided me to this particular story, one in which two immigrants from Ghana and México invested in practicing literacy. Starting with the basics, I will give you a brief glimpse into my personal history. Then, to connect with the present research idea, I will describe my early thoughts and deliberations with faculty and fellow teachers when designing this study, which I lovingly refer to as the “early warning signs” of an extensive writing project.

My grandmother immigrated from México to the U.S. after marrying my U.S.-born grandfather and became a licensed realtor. My grandparents raised my mother in Texas, where I was later born. When I was a toddler, my grandmother passed away from cancer. After a short time, my father received a job promotion, causing our family to move from Texas to Michigan, where, at that time, none of our relatives resided. Because of this sequence of events, I grew up with very little contact to Spanish-speaking relatives and did not learn Spanish at home, yet I had a tenacious desire to connect back to my family through learning the language, Spanish history and culture in the way that I could: at school.

At this point in my life, I speak Spanish. To earn my minor in Spanish, I was required to study the history of Spain and of Latin America, the history of U.S.-México immigration, and read Spanish literature. I have a very academic background in Spanish. Learning Spanish at school was not enough to satisfy my desire to connect with those roots, which is why, during my undergrad career, I chose to volunteer at an ESL center in the Spanish neighborhood of my city.

Volunteering at the ESL center was life-changing. Before, teaching domestic ESL was not on my radar; I had been thinking of working on a different continent altogether. As a volunteer, I helped tutor and teach the most dedicated students that I had every worked with. Most of the students were Spanish migrant workers who came to the daytime classes before going to work or while their children were at school. All of them routinely took notes, carried their workbooks to and from class, and asked insightful questions. I enjoyed being in that environment because the instructors, who volunteered their personal time, were so committed and happy to be there. I told myself: I want to be like these people; they are great! I wanted to have that dedication to learning like they all did.

Flash forward to designing this project, and my goal was still the same. My early thoughts were that I wanted to unite my passion for storytelling with ESL pedagogy. Early deliberations with faculty at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and fellow teachers gave me the confidence to pursue research focused on curriculum design for ESL learners in the community. My personal goals for this study were 1) to improve my future curriculum design and teaching so that I could adapt to the needs of low-literate, adult learners who immigrated to the U.S and 2) to share this knowledge with others. I was beyond excited to work with ESL volunteers and staff again during this study, and I purposefully designed the study to include and reached out to community literacy centers with volunteer staff.

This section of writing has been the “loosening of the tie,” or the “breath of fresh air,” before the formulaic writing takes over, lest you are left with a less personable impression of me. Although the remaining text in this thesis follows the typical genre requirements for thesis writing, I have chosen to present the results as stories, to stay authentic to the real-life people behind them. I have naturally been drawn to qualitative research because of the creativity and curiosity it makes room for, so I have designed a study that uses qualitative methods.

1.3 FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

This study examines the literacy journeys of two low-literate learners over the age of sixty who immigrated to the United States from Ghana and México, respectively, in order to understand their current and past literacy practices and their investments in ESL literacy tutoring. In the next chapter, I will review the research up to this point on the theoretical foundation for literacy as a social practice and highlight the gap in our understanding of low-literate, immigrants over the age of sixty. I will then present two case studies, setting aside one chapter for each participant, that detail the literacy journeys of the participants. The presentation of the

results will be followed by a focused discussion of the main findings of this study in relation to previous research. To conclude, I will provide research and pedagogical implications based on the study's findings.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following chapter, I will review the literature on second language learners and literacy practices. Starting with a description of the theoretical framework behind literacy as a social practice, the review moves into a discussion of current research on the second language literacy acquisition of immigrant learners. The next section of the chapter discusses the gap in the literacy research for low-literate, mature adult learners. Finally, this chapter concludes with the primary objective of this study and its guiding research questions.

2.1 SOCIOCULTURAL FRAMEWORK FOR LITERACY RESEARCH

2.1.1 The Influence of Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory

Vygotsky's (1986) work is a foundational principle of the sociocultural framework for literacy research. Since its first English translation in 1962, the concept of learning through interaction presented in *Thought and Language* has extended from the discipline of psychology to the field of sociolinguistics, and from the inter-related field of sociolinguistics to that of applied linguistics. Essentially, Vygotsky (1986) believed that "the primary function of speech is communication, social intercourse" (p. 6). He wrote with early childhood language development in mind, and he emphasized the importance of socialization on the development of thought (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 169). The social learning theory, which is based on Vygotsky's writings, states that language is learned and practiced in a community with defined historical, social and cultural contexts. This emphasis on a language learner's context, or the "contextualization" of language learning, can be traced clearly in the division between the cognitive perspective of literacy acquisition and the social perspectives, including the New Literacy Studies movement (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, 1994; Darvin & Norton, 2015; Gee, 2008; Heath, 1983; Norton, 1994; Papen, 2005; Pérez et al., 2004; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Reder & Davila, 2005;

Rivera & Macías, 2007; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Smith, 1988; Street, 2012). Furthermore, the influence of the sociocultural framework for language learning now reaches out beyond academia so that large, professional organizations like the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have edited their definition of “literacy” to incorporate the social aspect of learning. On the official website for UNESCO, the organization defines literacy as follows: “Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing and counting skills, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2019).

2.1.2 The Social Perspective on Literacy

Starting in the early 1980s, researchers questioned the skill-based, autonomous model of literacy acquisition (Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981). Supported by Structuralist social theory, the concept of literacy in the 1980s was traditionally defined as the learner’s internal process of acquiring cognitive skills. Traditional literacy theory suggested that literacy was comprised of two cognitive skills, internal to the individual learner: the ability to read and the ability to write (Gee, 2008). In practice, the application of this perspective in a community-based literacy class would be to ask students to perform reading comprehension tasks and write down lists of vocabulary words until they would ultimately attain fluency in the target language (Gee, 2008).

However, scholars challenged the limitations of the skill-based perspective because it blatantly ignored power dynamics that could affect a learner’s investment in the classroom. For example, the cognitive perspective could not account for the racism, sexism, and elitism that the

goal of making “literate” persons had become historically entangled with, especially the larger societal structures at work. As Street (2012) explained, the autonomous model of literacy upheld the belief that those gaining literacy would be “enhancing their cognitive skills, improving their economic prospects, making them[selves] better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their ‘illiteracy’ in the first place” (p. 28). For this reason, literacy theorists in the 1980s urged for a more holistic understanding of literacy that connected the traditionally cognitive approach to literacy with modern research on the social and cultural dynamics of language learning (Gee, 2008, p. 2).

2.2 DEFINING LITERACY AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE

Within the sociocultural framework, there are three social perspectives on the relationship between context and literacy acquisition: literacy as a social practice, multiliteracies, and multiple literacies (Perry, 2012). These three perspectives emerged over time, as they typically do, through nuances to the major framework. However, rather than adding precision, some argue that these multiple perspectives have made applying the sociocultural framework less clear. For this reason, this study takes the literacy as a social practice perspective and seeks to clearly define and operationalize the concepts within this perspective.

In the definition of the literacy “practice,” the influence of Vygotsky’s social learning theory of interaction is evident. The basic premise of the literacy “practice” is as follows: literacy is comprised of interactions between a person and a text, which regularly occur within a community and are regulated by community members. This community and its members are called the “context” of the literacy practice. The concept of “literacy as a social practice” is more complicated than this basic outline, however. Although there are several ways of explaining literacy practices, I will explore two definitions, which are not necessarily exclusive of each

other, to highlight the theory behind the term: first, from discourse theory, and second, from the context of New Literacy Studies movement. This present study used the NLS framework for defining literacy as a social practice.

2.2.1 Discourse Theory

Without a doubt, Gee's (2008) capital-D Discourse theory has been influential in defining literacy as a social practice. Ultimately, Gee (2008) defines literacy as the "mastery of a secondary Discourse," which he defines as "fluent control" of the Discourse within a community other than oneself (p. 176). Secondary Discourses, Gee (2008) states, "involve uses of language, either written or oral, or both, as well as ways of thinking, valuing, and behaving, which go beyond the uses of language in our primary Discourse no matter what group we belong to" (Gee, 2008, p. 174). In discourse theory, then, literacy is a social practice because literacy always involves society's beliefs, behaviors, and values. Literacy is about mastery of and exposure to the literacy practices of a community in the Discourse model.

Applied, this concept becomes clearer. Because the act of reading requires the interpretation of meaning and not simply the ability to connect words on a page with vocalizations, reading is a social practice where interpretation is regulated by certain social groups and institutions. For instance, a learner in an ESL setting "does not learn to read texts of type X in way Y unless one has had experience in settings where texts of type X are read in way Y" (Gee, 2008, p. 44). Gee (2008) provides a specific example of African-American students who interpreted a two-sentence story differently from others. He discovered that the African-American students were considered to have "misread the sentences" by the other readers. This concept of "misreading" a text demonstrates the social dynamic of "reading a certain type of text in a certain way," or the regulation of interactions between a reader and a text (Gee, 2008, p. 44).

Likewise, Street (2012) observed that “the ways in which teachers or facilitators and their students interact is already a social practice that affects the nature of the literacy being learnt and the ideas about literacy held by participants” (p. 29). In other words, Street (2012) seconds Gee’s (2008) definition of literacy as a social practice and adds the implication that literacy practices also affect the perceptions of learners about literacy.

2.2.2 New Literacy Studies

According to Gee’s (2008) review of the social perspective on literacy acquisition, the field of New Literacy Studies “views literacy in its full range of cognitive, social, interactional, cultural, political, institutional, economic, moral, and historical contexts” (p. 2). Within this view, New Literacy Studies theorists define literacy practices as a combination of “literacy events” and participants’ perceptions and beliefs about the events. Theorists were specifically concerned with categorizing social interactions where text played an integral role as “literacy events” since spoken language had been framed as “speech events” by that time (Street, 2012).

Heath (1983) employed the term, “literacy event,” in her study about literacy activities in Trackton. The term, “literacy event,” represents the social context in which people, or participants, interact with each other and written texts via reading and writing activities (Street, 2012, p. 37). Heath (1983) defined literacy events as “rule-governed,” which paralleled the definition of “speech events” at that time (p. 386). Based on this definition, the literacy event is not confined to formal education settings but can occur anywhere (Street, 2012, p. 34).

Literacy practices are distinct from literacy events because practices span multiple literacy events and incorporate the participants’ perceptions of the literacy events and their own literacy (Street, 2012). Scribner and Cole (1981) proposed that literacy practices were socially developed, which aligns with Heath’s (1983) view that literacy events were regulated by the

community. They defined literacy practice as “a recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge,” and as such being comprised of “technology, knowledge, and skills” (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 236). Barton and Hamilton (1998) recorded the literacy practices of residents in Lancaster, England, and traced the roots of those practices historically (p. 3). For their research, Barton and Hamilton (1998) explained that literacy events are “regular, repeated activities” in which “literacy has a role” (p. 7). Throughout their findings, they referred to their participant’s biographies as the “literacy life,” which suggests that literacy practices and events cannot be separated from the life journey of the person, or participant being studied (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Additionally, Barton (1994) adds that the way “social institutions support particular literacies” cannot be ignored or separated from the discussion of literacy as a social practice since “people’s literacy practices are situated in broader social relations” (p. 41).

Building on the work of early New Literacy Studies theory, Reder and Davila (2005) argued that the present theoretical framework lacked a clear boundary for context. Thus, they clarified the relationship between social interactions and context by suggesting that there may be a *mediated context* between the local and the remote (Reder & Davila, 2005). Social interactions that take place in the learner’s immediate surroundings are within the local context while those outside of the local context are considered remote. An example of a remote context would be one where state-funded textbooks are created for a state-run ESL center. Reder and Davila (2005) state that “the use of writing in social practices is the mediation of distant or remote social interactions, resulting in the expansion of context for specific literacy practices” (p. 180). In other words, the actual action of reading and writing is what mediates literacy events in differing contexts. It is important to note here that written text is decontextualized by its very nature.

According to Pérez et al. (2004), “written text literacy requires the reader to use background knowledge to contextualize and give meaning to the text” (p. 31). For this reason, it is the *act* of writing and reading where context must be considered.

Unequivocally, there are significant consequences of the “literacy as social practice” perspective on literacy instruction. First, literacy instruction that does not incorporate learner’s background and literacy experiences is simply teaching learners to “ignore their own previous knowledge” by decontextualizing their literacy practices (Street, 2012, p. 35). In essence, the only way that literacy instruction can actually be applicable to a learner’s literacy acquisition is if it is exposing learners to “models in natural, meaningful, and functional settings,” or, in other words, how to analyze and master the Discourse around them (Gee, 2008, p. 177). Second, literacy programs participate “in the reproduction of structures of power and domination in society” because their literacy practices are part of the broader social context (Papen, 2005, p. 49).

Decontextualizing makes space for exclusivity in literacy instruction. Participants in literacy events are always in context and being unaware of this fact is essentially being in a position of privilege. If a reader does not possess the “correct” background knowledge to provide the “correct” interpretation of the text in order to the “right” reader, then they are in a vulnerable position and have historically been ostracized. For an example of decontextualized literacy instruction and its negative effects, one does not need to look far into the past. Take the literacy for “social uplift” movement of the 1920s in the United States. This movement sought to create virtuous and prosperous readers. In 1926, Cora Wilson Stewart from Rowan County, KY, was designated the director of President Coolidge’s National Illiteracy Crusade after establishing herself as a reputable literacy educator in her local community and during World War I (Quigley,

2013, p. 87). She was motivated by religious and socioeconomic discourse of her time, including protestant ethics on morality and the “deficit perspective” embedded in the “social uplift” movement of the early twentieth century (Quigley, 2013, p. 88). For example, assurances of economic prosperity and “heavenly-mindedness” were given to those who gained the ability to read sacred texts in adult education literacy programs (Quigley, 2013, p. 85). Quigley (2013) argues that Stewart, and other literacy educators from the twentieth century, founded the “classic formula, the basic model, and the policy assumptions we can still see in traditional literacy programs today,” especially when it comes to these programs’ sense of “mission” and religiosity (p. 88). This model was unable to consider the students’ assets (i.e. their “non-normalized” literacy practices) and therefore could claim that students were *deficient* in some way. Because literacy practices are regularly occurring and regulated interactions, it should not be surprising that literacy practices are standardized, dividing the mainstream from the non-mainstream, the empowered from the stigmatized.

2.3 THE INVESTMENT MODEL FOR STUDYING LITERACY PRACTICES

In applied linguistics, the investment model views an investment as a “socially constructed desire to learn and practice a language” (Norton, 2013). Norton (2013) describes the purpose of the investment model as one that works “within a sociological, qualitative framework.” The investment model looks at the “why” behind learner’s choices versus their quantitatively-measured, psychological motives. The model was developed in response to the theory of learner motivation¹ (Norton, 2013).

¹ For further explanation of the theory of learner motivation, see Dornyei & Ushioda (2011).

Explaining the comprehensive model of investment, Darvin and Norton (2015) write that “as embodied identities inscribed by race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, learners navigate through spaces where they are not only granted or refused the right to speak, but also the right of entry” (p. 43). Thus, the model of investment incorporates the learner’s social and cultural capital so that the “navigation” or mediation of learners in the classroom can be more comprehensively explored. Investments are based on learners’ perceived needs and expectations, learners’ identities, and the power dynamics in their learning contexts. Pairing the investment model with the perspective of literacy as a social practice, the influence of power dynamics in multiple social contexts of the learner can be explored. This extension is in response to Menard-Warwick’s (2005) critique of the concept of investment. Menard-Warwick (2005) observed two participants with the same investments in English literacy whose sociopolitical constraints, such as one participant’s “undocumented status,” were undermining their “return on those investments” (p. 178). Looking at how a learner engages literacy in the classroom model alone cannot predict the literacy success of the learner; instead, a comprehensive view of the learner’s sociocultural context and political status is necessary.

2.3.1 Learner Investment Explains Level of Participation

Ultimately, Norton’s research via the investment model suggests that understanding learners’ investments provides the reasons behind their participation in literacy practices (Norton, 2013). Other researchers have applied the investment model to better understand how learners’ identities and their learning strategies connect to investment in language learning (Gearing & Roger, 2018; Hajar, 2017; Pinder, 2011). Pinder (2011) writes that “using a learner literacy investment metaphor suggests a more cooperative model, one in which learners with some

resources commission brokers with other resources to work with them to produce returns that benefit both” (p. 237).

2.4 “LOW-LITERACY” AS LIMITED EXPOSURE TO LITERACY EVENTS

In the broader world of ESL literacy outside of academia, it has been proposed that learners who are educated in their first language for more than 3-5 years have an advantage in learning English. The reports where years of education are used as a predictor for second language literacy performance are usually grounded in the cognitive perspective and approach literacy as a cognitive process. At best, dividing performance levels in second language literacy based on years of education creates “rough or fuzzy indicators” that are “broadly predictive of a student’s literacy background” (Gunderson, 2009, p. 45). Overall, Gunderson (2009), summarizing the work of the National Literacy Panel, concludes that “those who are literate in their first languages are likely to be advantaged when faced with the task of learning to read English” (p. 45). The accuracy of this assumption remains questionable and a tentative answer at best.

Other scholars acknowledge the general relevance of education background on literacy instruction in English as a second language. Burt and Peyton (2003), who seek to provide practical advice to instructors, concluded that “learners’ experiences and access to literacy” along with other factors “contribute to the speed and ease with which learners will acquire L2 literacy” (p. 6). However, two important questions arise from this conclusion: How much will their literacy experience contribute to second language literacy acquisition and why? Similarly, Bigelow and Schwarz (2010) summarized the scant research findings available on adults with limited print literacy by concluding that “particular attention paid to cultural influences and their

experiences (or lack thereof) with formal education” will be essential for these learners’ success (p. 1). Yet these two questions still loom over these tentative conclusions: how much and why?

According to the NLS definition of literacy, years of formal education should have little to do with literacy acquisition since literacy can and is learned outside of the educational context. The literacy as a social practice perspective upsets the dichotomy of formally educated versus uneducated that underlies the popular distinction between literate and non-literate persons. The investment model and the tracing of learners’ literacy practices, both current and past, will be essential to exploring the answers to these two questions for those with limited formal education. Since literacy is not an isolated, cognitive skill, but rather a social practice, those with low-literacy acquisition usually have had limited resources to engage in literacy practices and/or currently have limited resources to engage in English literacy practices. Low-educated learners have not been engaged extensively in the particular literacy practice of attending formal literacy classes, nor have they participated in the literacy events that occur in that context in their first language, such as fill-in-the-blank activities in a structured writing classroom. As such, these learners may have a disadvantage when engaging in academic literacy practices for the first time because they may not have expectations that align with the program, they may not understand the rules which govern that context, or their need(s) may not be met.

2.5 RESEARCH GAP:

2.5.1 Case Studies for K-12 learners

It is evident from the existence of edited volumes and from a basic journal database search that the literacy practices of K-12 have been more thoroughly documented than adult learners over the age of sixty. The impact of the social context on literacy practices has also been investigated for K-12 learners (Merga & Moon, 2016; Murillo & Schall, 2016; Ortlieb & Majors,

2016). Present research similarly includes the literacy practices of young refugee and immigrant learners (Dávila, 2015; Pyo, 2016; Sarroub et al., 2007; Stewart, 2013). For example, Dávila (2015) has represented African immigrant high school students' beliefs about their reading practices. Although less studied, even low-literate learners in K-12 settings have been represented in literacy research to some extent (Decapua and Marshall, 2010; Jiménez, 1997). For this reason, literacy instructors do not lack the resources to help their K-12 and young adult learners engage successfully in literacy practices. For example, many annotated teacher resource bibliographies exist, including the *Annotated Teacher Resource Bibliography for Working Effectively with Limited English Proficient Students with Interrupted Formal Education* (Cloud, 1996).

2.5.2 Demonstrated Need for Research on Immigrant Adult Learners

The sociocultural framework geared at investigating learner investments is a recent frame of thought in literacy research. In 2008, Mathews-Aydinli (2008) synthesized forty-one studies on adult literacy and found a lack of representation in adult education research for adult ESL learners outside of traditional education contexts, such as K-12 or university programs (p. 210). Similarly, Young-Scholten (2013) raised serious concerns about research's neglect of non-academic learners, especially those with limited first-language education. In response, studies within the past fifteen years have begun to document the ESL literacy instruction of adult learners immigrating to the United States. These studies specifically focus on these learners' needs, participation, social contexts, and current literacy practices.

The wide-ranging span of goals for adult learners' investment are not unknown to ESL practitioners. Educational psychologist, Daphne Greenberg (2008) summarized common ESL learners' goals in her review of the field of adult literacy, stating that "examples include

functional goals (e.g., balancing a checkbook, reading bus schedules), spiritual goals (e.g., reading the Bible), pleasure-related goals (e.g., reading the newspaper, playing Sudoku), family-related goals (e.g., reading to children, helping children with math homework), and/or economic advancement goals (e.g., completing job applications)” (p. 39). Schaedler (2009) discovered that her participants shared a common reason for ESL: being afraid of “making mistakes and being laughed at” (p. 283). Many ESL programs ask learners to report their literacy goals before beginning instruction. Although the goals are better known, how these goals pertain to learners’ investment in ESL instruction are complex and not fully understood.

Some research has been conducted to connect the diverse contexts in which adult immigrant learners participate and their literacy acquisition (Menard-Warwick, 2005; Purcell-Gates, 2007). Menard-Warwick (2005) argued that “history is an important dimension of the social contexts of language learning” in her case study of two Central American immigrants in California (p. 179). Likewise, in her edited volume of literacy practice case studies, Purcell-Gates (2007) reviewed the societal influences on learners’ literacy practices for those in their late teens to late-30s, which included home and digital contexts.

Other studies have explored the literacy practices of immigrant populations although presently most of these have been conducted at the dissertation level (Cook, 2015; Finn, 2011; Koch, 2017; Piersma, 2013; Trommler, 2019). For example, Koch (2017) interviewed three Hmong women’s engagement in literacy practices who attended community college courses to further delve into the reasons behind their academic success. One of the reasons, Koch (2017) found for their academic success was their “familial capital,” which is both the knowledge transferred from one family member to another about practicing literacy in various contexts and the emotional support of family members (p. 120-121). Piersma (2013) found that the literacy

practices of five learners, who were enrolled in Canadian ESL classes, could fit within four categories: family literacy practices, print-literacy practices for enjoyment, required literacy practices, and literacy practices connected to the class (p. 72). Correspondingly, Cook (2015) observed that Latino learners engage in “religious texts and books” as an “integral part” of their home life (p. 30). Cook (2015) also found that “homework was the secondary literacy source in the homes” since all her participants’ households included one or more school-age children (p. 59).

Likewise, Finn (2011) conducted classroom-based research on four Chinese immigrant students enrolled in an ESL course. She found that students commonly engaged in reading English newspapers once attending the course. This finding aligns with Trommler’s (2019) conclusion that most of her participants in the monastery engaged reading in English by reading online or reading the Bible (p. 92). One of Finn’s (2011) participants, aged sixty-five with two years of college education, was influenced by the many teacher corrections she received on her word choice, and thus, desired to increase her vocabulary knowledge (p. 126). While another of Finn’s (2011) participants, only engaged in English writing during class time and had limited English literacy engagement outside of class since she was married without kids to a husband who worked full-time (p. 144).

A handful of studies have explored the literacy practices of adult learners with little to no literacy education in their first languages (Perry & Homan, 2015; Pothier, 2011; Thieves, 2011). Perry and Homan (2015) found that these learners’ literacy practices outside of class aligned with research on other adult learners. Through a synthesis of thirteen case studies that consisted of ninety-three participants in total, Perry and Homan (2015) discovered that reading the Bible was a literacy practice for these learners and that these learners made time to practice literacy for

their own personal enjoyment (p. 441-443). They also observed a pattern in how low-literate learners were able to practice literacy in multiple languages but maintained a negative perception of their abilities, with one participant explaining that she was “a poor reader and writer” (Perry & Homan, p. 442). In relation to their findings, Pothier (2011) reported that one of her low-literate participants frequently spent time in the public library (p. 44) and complete homework exercises in English outside of class while the other low-literate participant required a translator outside of class and did not confidently engage in English literacy practices outside of class (p. 74).

Like Perry and Homan (2015), Thieves (2011) investigated the literacy practices of low-literate adult learners. However, Thieves (2011) performed questionnaires between two school locations and focused on the perceived needs of these learners, especially related to digital literacy. Thieves (2011) reported that the majority of her participants wanted to learn digital literacy skills on a computer while simultaneously increasing their English literacy (p. 121).

Altogether, it appears that low-literate adult immigrants desire to learn how to use a computer and desire to practice reading and writing for fun and for religious reasons just like other learners. One potential difference between adult low-literate immigrants and other learner groups includes their negative self-beliefs about their literacy acquisition. However, low-literate adult learners above 60 years old remain scarcely represented in current research on immigrant literacy acquisition.

2.6 PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

This study provides a description of how two low-literate learners over the age of sixty engaged in literacy practices throughout their life journeys, in both their first language(s) and in English. The purpose of the study is to represent these learners in connection with themes in current literacy research. Therefore, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What are these learners' current and past literacy practices, and in what social contexts did these practices develop?
2. What are the learners' investments in current literacy practices?

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter draws on the research presented in the literature review to present the design of the study. To start, I will explain the approach taken in this study and my role as a researcher. Then, I will describe the context of the data collection site and the background of the participants. Finally, I will present how I analyzed the data collected.

3.2 CASE STUDY APPROACH

Previous research on immigrant literacy has employed the case study approach to explore the literacy practices, social contexts, and needs of individual language learners. Although a range of methods is characteristic of the case study approach, observational research is usually at its center (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 385). Because of the holistic nature of data collection in the case study approach, the field notes of a researcher are essential for keeping accurate documentation of events (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 388).

There are several benefits of the case study approach. The case study allows researchers to establish relationships with participants in a natural, authentic way. Most importantly, the case study approach prevents the creation of broad generalizations about a diverse and complex student population, which would hinder the ability for research to account for the nuances of language learner's unique literacy journeys at this early, exploratory stage of its existence.

Aligning with previous research on the literacy practices of second language learners, I chose to conduct my data collection using the case study approach. Specifically, the design of this study aligns with the comparative case study approach, which relates multiple samples of a group by their similarities and differences (Campbell, 1975). Using the comparative case study approach, I was able to get to know participants on their own time and analyze the similarities

and differences in two low-literate, immigrant adults' literacy journeys. At the same time, by using the case study approach, I was also able to share who I was in a more genuine way over the course of several weeks as both an interviewer and observer at their weekly tutoring sessions.

3.3 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

As expressed in the introduction, I am a highly educated, English language teacher. I am a third-generation immigrant, who chose to learn Spanish and about Mexican history in the university setting. I was intentionally upfront about who I was with the participants. I realized that the participants may have felt embarrassed or scrutinized when I observed them for multiple reasons, including low self-esteem regarding their educational background, so I tried to alleviate that possibility by being honest and open about myself and my language learning experiences.

During the seven-week study, I observed tutoring sessions as a non-participant observer. The site where I collected data was used to individuals walking in and out of the classroom and sitting at tables when they were training to become tutors. For this reason, I tried to imitate the behavior of tutor trainees. I did not intervene in the tutoring sessions although I did grab necessary materials and answer tutors' questions when appropriate. Mostly, I sat at the participants tables, laughed with them, and handwrote notes quickly on my notepad. As a teacher, it was difficult at times to not interrupt the participants or the tutors, especially when one tutor was assigned to two students at once or when a student spoke Spanish and the tutor could not easily translate an activity's instructions.

3.4 CONTEXT OF DATA COLLECTION SITE

The purpose of the study was to provide authentic representation of two low-literate learner's literacy journeys in their first languages and in English. To accomplish this purpose, data was collected in an Illinois county from July 2019 through August 2019. The growth of the

immigrant population in the state of Illinois compared to the U.S. national average, with over 1,700,000 foreign-born residents reported in 2016 (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). The U.S. Department of Education appropriated \$25,938 of federal funds for Illinois's English language acquisition programs in 2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The county represented in this study had an average population size for a U.S. county, with about 170,000 residents (US Census Bureau, 2018). This population accounted for about a tenth of the Illinois state population (US Census Bureau, 2019). The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) reported that English language learners in the county made up five percent of the school district in 2019 (Illinois State Board of Education, 2019). Roughly eighty-four percent of residents in the county identified as White while roughly eight percent identified as African-American and five percent identified as Hispanic or Latino (Illinois State Board of Education, 2019). About ninety-two percent of county residents reported that they owned a computer, and ninety-six percent reported graduating from high school or higher (US Census Bureau, 2019).

The study was conducted at Northlake.² Northlake provided adult literacy instruction for all learners, from basic education to ESL, so the organization had several programs, such as adult basic education and ESL, at various sites established in its counties of operation. Nearly 80% of the students that were served by Northlake were ESL students, and students' ages ranged from 16 to 72 years old. The ESL literacy program at Northlake's church site started in January 2016, and the program was grant-funded. Tutoring services were offered free to all students.

The program ran with the help of volunteer tutors who were assigned to students based on their literacy levels. Northlake divide the ESL literacy levels as follows. Level 1 was meant to

² The name of the program is a pseudonym.

serve pre-literate students or someone who cannot read or write at all. As students test higher than a Level 7 in the ESL literacy program, they would meet the ninth-grade standards for English literacy and would switch over to the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), which would assign students a grade point level. Northlake could provide tutoring for ESL students up to the Level 7, the equivalent of a ninth-grade education.

In the small group and one-on-one tutoring, the tutors typically progressed with the students through the literacy levels. When students attained a higher literacy level, the tutor would begin to tutor them at that level. The program had previously assigned tutors based on a literacy level, but students were resistant to the idea of leaving their groups and/or tutors, who they had become attached to, as they progressed through the program.

The intake process for students to enroll consisted of a self-report and an assessment test. Students were placed into literacy levels based on the information listed on the student enrollment forms and their scores on the English reading test. In Figure 3.1, the literacy center's enrollment form is presented. The top portion of the enrollment form was usually completed by the student and the volunteer in cases where the student could not easily read or write the necessary information in English. The form asked for basic information about marital status, name and address, and country of origin. The form also asked students to report their years of education completed, if they had a U.S. diploma or GED, where they worked, and their goals for attending literacy instruction. The lower portion of the form was completed by the program coordinator, who would then assign tutors and fill in their placement test scores.

students' complete this assessment, the program coordinator places them at an ESL literacy level from 1-7.

The ultimate goal of Northlake's ESL literacy program was for students to progress to attain the highest literacy level, Level 7, and to achieve their personal goals for attaining English literacy. The students set their goals for gaining English literacy when they first enroll and annually after their enrollment. Examples of students' individual goals include getting a driver's license, helping their children in school, and applying for a job. The program coordinator desired for the program to be "student-driven" and supportive of students' goals as well as meeting the program's annual goals.

Northlake tutoring sessions happened Monday and Wednesday evenings for two hours, and students' attendance and progress in the program were reported. The volunteers work on a rotating schedule, which usually means that one student would be taught by one tutor on Mondays and another tutor on Wednesdays. For this reason, the tutors developed a method for communicating the students' progress and reporting students' attendance between each session. The tutors used yellow-colored forms to record the lessons achieved during each session, the date, and the homework assigned to the student during a session. When a new tutor began teaching in the interim of a long-term tutor, the yellow-colored forms helped tutors quickly establish rapport and continue the student's instruction. These yellow forms were filed annually in the program's records. Because of the consistent rotation of volunteer tutors, the tutors were accustomed to being observed by tutor trainees on a regular basis.

Because the program was grant-funded by the Illinois State Library, the program had several layers of mandated assessment. Along with end-of-unit summative assessments built-in to the curriculum, tutors tested the students for every fifty hours of tutoring that they had

received. These tests were meant to check students' progress in the literacy program. The tutors' teaching goals were determined by the state of Illinois since the program at Northlake was funded by a state grant. Seventy percent of participants enrolled at Northlake were required to make a gain of eight grade points annually on the tests. Each quarter, all Northlake students' progress reports were sent to the state of Illinois. Every two years, the program received auditors from the Illinois state government who assessed the program.

Northlake's church site was set up in partnership with a local church to provide ESL literacy instruction for students in small groups and one-on-one. The site was one block away from a kindergarten to grade five elementary school, which served a majority of students who identified as being of white or Asian ethnicity, and a few blocks away from two city parks and the local grocery stores. Figure 3.2 shows the exterior of the Northlake church site.

Figure 3.2: Northlake Exterior



Over the summer, the Northlake program would overlap with the church's vacation bible school and other church meetings. The tutoring sessions took place in the basement level of the church, in a recreation room with four circle tables and a long square table arranged on the right side. On each table would be a box of writing tools and the tutors' colored folders that contained the

yellow-colored forms and the printed worksheets for that day's lesson. The tables were not separated by any dividers, so the busier the room, the louder it could become. Figure 3.3 shows the Northlake literacy classroom before the class session started.

Figure 3.3: Northlake Classroom

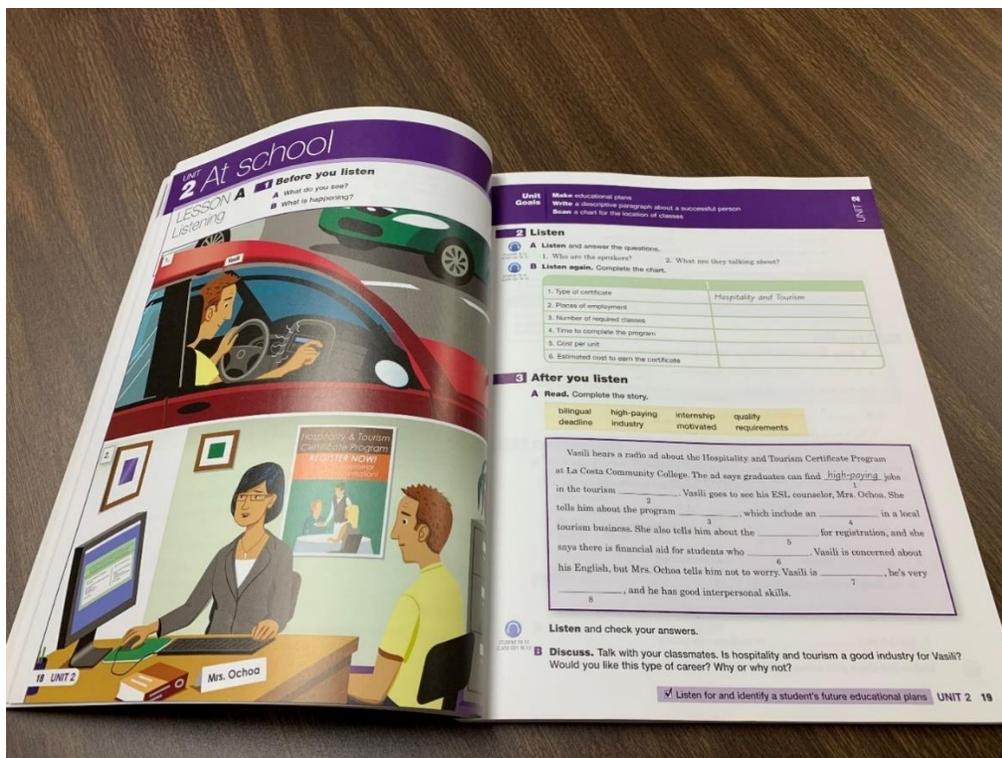


The left side of the room contained cabinets with literacy resources, such as literacy textbooks, personal whiteboards, and the portable CD player. The tutors all shared access to the same CD player and would coordinate the timing of their lessons accordingly.

The Northlake ESL program used the same curriculum, which builds thematically through five levels. For example, level five is job-focused, so the students in level five will learn about creating resumes and finding out more information about a job. A typical lesson from a

Ventures (Bitterlin et al., 2010) textbook, the curriculum Northlake used, would start with an audio recording of a conversation and then be followed by vocabulary and comprehension activities. Other lesson types included reading a brief article and then completing comprehension questions afterwards or reviewing a sample template, such as a cover letter template, and then creating a cover letter based on the students' work experiences. Figure 3.4 shows a sample lesson from the Ventures student textbook.

Figure 3.4: Typical Northlake Lesson (Bitterlin et al., 2010)



The technology in the classroom was limited to tutors' personal smart phones and laptops. All tutors kept their phones off the tables during tutoring. Students' phone were kept in their book bags. If a student desired to learn keyboarding or gain digital literacy, the tutor would occasionally offer to bring their personal laptop since Northlake could not provide that technology to students. No tutors brought their laptops in the sessions that I observed. The program coordinator at Northlake explained that one-on-one tutors were encouraged and did

access their laptops while tutoring. In fact, a page with linked online resources for tutors was included on Northlake's website.

Although Northlake did not prohibit the use of online translators when absolutely necessary, the tutors were encouraged to speak in English for the majority, if not all, of the tutoring sessions. The program coordinator found that students were more motivated to speak English during tutoring if they knew it was necessary. All the sessions I observed were conducted in English only.

3.5 PARTICIPANTS

Because the aim of the study was to contextualize the literacy practices and investment in ESL classes, my goal was to develop two to three case studies of ESL learners. Participants were selected through convenience sampling. I was encouraged to speak with particular ESL students by the program coordinator based on their prior program attendance. Although students were not required to have a steady attendance record prior to the start of the study, participants were required to attend at least one session per week for the duration of the study.

Before the start of the study, I created English consent forms with a formal study description and an informal script to explain the study requirements written in English. Both of these documents were professionally translated into Spanish and French. Two weeks before the start of the study, I visited the data collection site to recruit participants. All of the students enrolled in the Northlake ESL literacy program at that time were female.

During a preliminary interview, I asked ESL students at Northlake's church site to participate if they had five years or less of formal literacy education in their home language. This preliminary interview took place in the literacy classroom during a tutoring session. Initially, I had defined low-literacy by amount of years of literacy education the student had received,

aligning with the NRS Educational Functioning Levels (ICCB, 2014), which define low-intermediate basic education as the equivalent of fourth-fifth grade learning. Students with low literacy, according to this standard, will be able to recognize words, communicate information learned from reading, use context to determine word meaning, and comprehend the key ideas and details of a story.

Four of the total students identified as low-literate during recruitment and fit other participant criteria, such as having a first language other than English. I met with each of the students individually at the classroom tables. When participants first language was Spanish, I explained the study in Spanish using the script and my own ability to speak Spanish. No students enrolled in the program at that time spoke French as their first language. Two students requested more time to think over the commitment of participating in the study. By the start of the study, two students decided to participate. Participants chose their pseudonyms at the time of signing the consent forms. The two students who agreed to participate in this study were diligent in attending the program for the full length of the study.

3.5.1 Catriona

Catriona was in her early seventies when we met in 2019. She identified as Ghanaian, and she grew up in a working-class family with many siblings. She learned a sewing trade before getting married and working in Togo for several years as a seamstress. She moved with her husband to Illinois, and she began working as soon as she could. At the time of the study, Catriona was working full-time, and she drove herself to the tutoring sessions. She often came to tutoring sessions in bright-colored outfits that she had sewn herself.

At the start of the study, Catriona was known by all in the program because she had enrolled in Northlake's ESL literacy class from its start in 2016. In fact, Catriona had attended

literacy tutoring at Northlake's library site prior to the start of Northlake's partnership with the church. Her younger sister had also participated in the program and was fluent in French; however, Catriona did not speak French. From the years of working together, the program coordinator described Catriona as a "dedicated" student with no formal education. The program coordinator explained that the tradition in Ghana was to "send the boys to school first." The program coordinator observed that Catriona typically ran out of time during tests that required fast-paced reading skills but that she had improved in her writing and spelling since starting the program. In fact, Catriona had written an English essay about her life in Africa before the start of this study.

3.5.2 Camila

Camila enjoyed talking about her grandkids and her children during tutoring sessions. When we met, she was in her sixties and retired, but she maintained her daughter and son-in-law's home while they both worked and while her grandkids went to school. Camila's daughter always drove her to the tutoring sessions and picked her up afterwards. As a child, Camila was raised in rural México and worked as a migrant worker. During her enrollment in the Northlake program, Camila was reading in English in her free time.

Camila enrolled in the Northlake ESL literacy program in 2017. When she started the program, Camila placed at the intermediate level of English, or a level four in their program. The program coordinator described her as a "self-taught" student with no formal education before starting Northlake's program, and she was capable of understanding English when she arrived. The program coordinator reported that Camila had made "tremendous progress" within the program since she started so that she had reached a level six in their program by the time of this study.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

From June 2019 through August 2019, data was collected at Northlake's church site. Since the study employed the case study approach, the data was collected via a mix of qualitative methods, including interviews, observations, and photography.

3.6.1 Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Foreseeable risks to participants included emotional discomfort and social anxiety during the interview process as participants may have discussed potentially stressful and/or frustrating situations they encountered on their literacy journeys. I accounted for the fear of being misrepresented that participants may have felt during the study in several ways. First, without penalty, I emphasized that participants could withdraw their consent for participating in the study either in-person or via the contact information provided on the consent form. Additionally, I was open and honest about my own identity as a Spanish language learner and an English language instructor to minimize their fear of me as an outsider. Since I could not expect participants to always clearly understand my written English notes, I asked follow-up questions about what I had observed during interviews. I verbalized member checks will regularly occur throughout the interviews to allow the participants to validate my understanding of their responses (Koelsch, 2013).

To reduce any potential embarrassment, participants were also assured of their anonymity and that I would not discuss their responses with their tutors or their classmates. The participants retained their privacy on all data with the use of pseudonyms in all file names, transcripts of recordings, the analytic memos, the free-hand drawing task and all other image files. The only person with access to the identity key and consent forms with their real names was me, and the original recordings of interviews and observations were deleted as soon as accurate transcripts

were made. Each participant was shown and explained only the data collected on her for the purposes of authentic representation. No person outside the research team ever accessed any data with direct identifiers.

3.6.2 Observation

I observed for seven weeks during the program's summer session. I observed one night a week, either a Monday or Wednesday. I audio-recorded the participants' instruction for an average of thirty minutes at each of their respective tables, using a phone application that stored the data files to a password-protected online storage folder. The participants were tutored in the same room, so I was able to observe and note the participants' interactions with tutors when I was at their table and sitting on the opposite side of the room. I handwrote notes during observations, which included my immediate thoughts, description of the room, patterns of behavior I noticed, and descriptions and timestamps of important gestures or facial expressions to correlate with the interview data. I also diagrammed the room and the participants' place in the room during the observations.

After observations, I audio-recorded voice memos off-site about the sessions to reflect on possible interview questions and themes arising in the study. I transcribed observations as the study progressed. Through these observations and voice memos, I formed questions for the interview agendas.

3.6.3 Participant Interviews

Using the same mobile phone application that I did for observations, I audio-recorded each interview. I interviewed participants three times during the observation period: at the two-week mark, at the five-week mark, and the week following the last observation. Interviews typically were conducted at the beginning of the Monday or Wednesday session. The interviews

were one-to-one in an adjacent room, where participants were not overheard by anyone else but still remained close to the rest of their classmates.

The interviews were exploratory and built around themes. These themes included: participants’ backgrounds, goals, and literacy experiences. The interviews were unstructured to provide the space necessary for authentic and honest responses from the participants and follow-up questions from the interviewer (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 509). I built the interview guide during the seven-week observation period as I became familiar with the different aspects of the participants’ lives. Table 3.1 shows the interview number, the major themes of the interview guide, and sample questions that were included in the interviews.

Table 3.1: Interview Themes and Sample Questions for Unstructured Interview

Interview #	Themes	Sample Questions
Preliminary meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screening information • Explaining the consent form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your native language? • Did you go to school when you were a child? If so, how many years did you go to school?
First Interview with Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background • Motivation for coming to class • Goals for language learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do you speak English with? • How long have you lived in the U.S.? • Do you like the U.S.? • When do you wish you spoke better English? • Have you used vocabulary words when talking with American friends? • When are you finished learning English?

Table 3.1 (cont.)

Second Interview with Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current experience with text, literacy, instruction • Past experience with text, literacy, instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you do with the instructional papers from class? • Do you like the lesson workbook? • As a child, did you have a teacher? Did you learn to hold a pencil as a child?
Final Interview with Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of the patterns that I noticed from tutoring session observations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you write, I notice that you... Do you notice this too?

These themes remained the same throughout the study; however, a few questions were modified and follow-up questions were added to relate directly to the responses of the participants. After the study ended, I transcribed the interviews.

Out of the interviews, two were concluded with a drawing task. These drawing tasks directly related to the themes of the interview guide questions. Table 3.2 lists the drawing tasks prompts as read exactly to participants.

Table 3.2: Free-Hand Drawing Task Prompts

<p>Free-Hand Drawing Task</p> <p>Prompt #1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background • Motivation for coming to class • Goals for language learning 	<p>Instructions: Draw someone who uses the best English.</p> <p>Draw the people you speak English with and who speak English to you.</p>
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Table 3.2 (cont.)

<p>Free-Hand Drawing Task</p> <p>Prompt #2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current experience with text, literacy, instruction • Past experience with text, literacy, instruction 	<p>Instructions: Draw yourself learning English. Draw people learning to read and write.</p>
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While the drawing task has been a research method used with younger learners for memory and verbal recall (Barton, 2015; Tindle & Longstaff, 2016; Wammes et al., 2016), other qualitative researchers have found that drawing elicits different responses from adult participants than could be elicited in interviews alone (Mattison et al., 2015; Rainford, 2020; Soley & Smith, 2008; Varga-Atkins O’Brien, 2009).

I chose to include drawing tasks because drawing tasks help researchers build rapport with the participants, help participants remember information, and provide another means for participants to communicate their thoughts. In drawing tasks, both the participant and the researcher draw at the same time in response to a prompt. The drawing task gives participants time to think about their responses and recall aspects of their literacy journey as they visualize their past. Usually, the participants and I could laugh about the drawings we made and share our life stories more comfortably together. In addition to the benefits aligning with previous research, I also chose to implement the drawing task in order to give low-literate participants’ the ability to communicate their thoughts without words. Rather than find vocabulary to describe their previous and current literacy experiences or stress over the grammar accuracy of their oral

production, I wanted my participants to be able to focus on sharing their ideas and history in a fun way.

The coordinator of the literacy program and the on-staff member responsible for being present at the data collection site was interviewed. The interview took place four weeks into the study and before participants arrived at the site.

3.6.4 Images

During observations and interviews, I asked to take photos of the participants' work, the program's print materials, and the classroom space. Participants were more hesitant to allow me to take photos of their drawings after the interview drawing tasks. I included the images of their drawings sparingly in this study to respect the wishes of the participants. If a participant showed any embarrassment about their drawings, I did not include them in this study, but the conversation surrounding them was included to provide a description of the literacy contexts.

3.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As mentioned at the end of my literature review, the purpose of this study was to describe how low-literate learners engaged in literacy practices throughout their life journeys from their early childhoods and into their late-middle age. I sought to understand their literacy practices in their first languages and in English as well as convey how these learners invested in their ESL literacy classes. Satisfying this study's research purpose, the data collected pertained directly to my research questions. In Table 3.3, the research questions are directly tied to the data collected in this study.

Table 3.3: Relationship between Research Questions and Data Collected

	Research Questions (RQ)	Relevant Collected Data
RQ 1	What are these learners’ current and past literacy practices, and in what social contexts did these practices develop?	Interviews with Participants Interview with Program Director Class observations Participants’ Drawings Photos
RQ 2	What are the learners’ investments in current literacy practices?	Interviews with Participants Class observations

The two guiding questions for this study are written in the left column while the categorized data that answer the questions are listed in the right column.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

During observations at Northlake, I handwrote field notes to document the patterns that I was noticing in participants’ context, behavior, and practices. I also recorded voice memos immediately after the observations to quickly document my thoughts on that day’s observation. These field notes were the starting point of my data analysis, which I reviewed thoroughly and transcribed to a digital format before beginning data coding.

After collecting data over the seven-week period, I created a spreadsheet for each of the participants’ interviews, with each interview being a page within a book and each turn of the conversation taking up a spreadsheet line. I created columns beside the interview text as follows: 1) related to research question #1, 2) related to research question #2, and 3) background information. In the columns related to the research questions, I generated thematic labels to pick out patterns in the data over the course of the participants’ interviews. Examples of the themes

used to code the participants' interview data included: 'co-workers,' 'time,' and 'home.' In the column with background information, I created codes based on the interview text to highlight the words and phrases which the participants used to describe themselves. Examples of these codes included: 'didn't get a job quick' and 'we need to help.' I color-coded the information that was about the participants' present life distinctly from information that was about their pasts.

For the participant interviews, I organized the data chronologically and by theme. I measured the amount of time that participants talked during the observations and to whom they spoke. I verified the town names and dates with participants over text messenger or email when possible. I researched town names and dates included in the interview data and observations to verify that I had correctly transcribed the information.

I created a separate spreadsheet for the stakeholder interview. This interview was labeled by the following themes: 1) program-related, 2) Camila-related, 3) Catriona-related. The information from the stakeholder interview was used to provide the context for the data collection site.

3.9 CONCLUSION

In the following two chapters, I provide a chronological overview of Camila and Catriona's literacy journeys. I record how Camila and Catriona engage in literacy practices in both English and in their first languages, both inside and outside of the classroom. Following this presentation of this study's results, I conclude with a discussion of the participants' shared investments in ESL literacy classes and how the nuances of each of their literacy journeys may have affected their engagement in literacy practices.

CHAPTER 4: CAMILA'S LITERACY JOURNEY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The first time I conversed with Camila I wanted to start at the very beginning of her literacy journey, so I started our first interview with the basic question: when did you move here? I must admit that, as the researcher, I thought this question would have a simple answer—perhaps an exact date or maybe a rough estimate of the year that she had moved into her current home. However, the answer that followed was fragmented, spread over two interview sessions, and the details were wrapped up in the concept of “here.” I saw a clear division between “here” and “there” that I had not yet questioned for myself, but over the weeks of getting to know Camila and her literacy journey, I felt that distinct mental line blur, and I began to empathize with the emerging identity of bilingual learners.

Camila started by telling me she had been in the mid-western city where the study took place for fifteen years and how, even though she kept trying to return to México year after year, her daughter's growing family kept her in the United States. When I asked her if her children moved to the United States before she had, she explained that she first lived in the United States in 1982. The rest of her response that followed was a timeline wrapped up in family relationships and familial responsibility. As we spoke about her literacy journey, she openly shared her emotions about her life. We shared moments of laughter and somber moments too.

In this chapter, I will present Camila's literacy journey as described to me. I have sectioned her journey into three, chronological segments simply for the sake of organization. At the end of the chapter is a summary of the major themes appearing in the data.

4.2 CAMILA'S CHILDHOOD AND EARLY CAREER IN MÉXICO AND THE WEST COAST OF THE UNITED STATES

During an initial three-year span from 1982-1985, Camila clung to her Mexican identity in two isolated work environments in southern California. At first, she had decided to work as a nanny for a mother with two babies. Camila had heard while working with her family in Sonora, México, that employers in California paid well.

C: And when we, we are in here, Sonora, Baja California. There's a lot of people cross, and they say, 'Oh we need a lot of people for babysitting, for cooking' and they pay good. They say 'Okay.'

Since there were several job opportunities for babysitting and cooking, Camila was able to find a mother who had promised that she would pay all Camila's living expenses and allow for Camila to live in her home. Because of the language barrier, Camila told me that she hardly left the residence once she started working, especially not on her own:

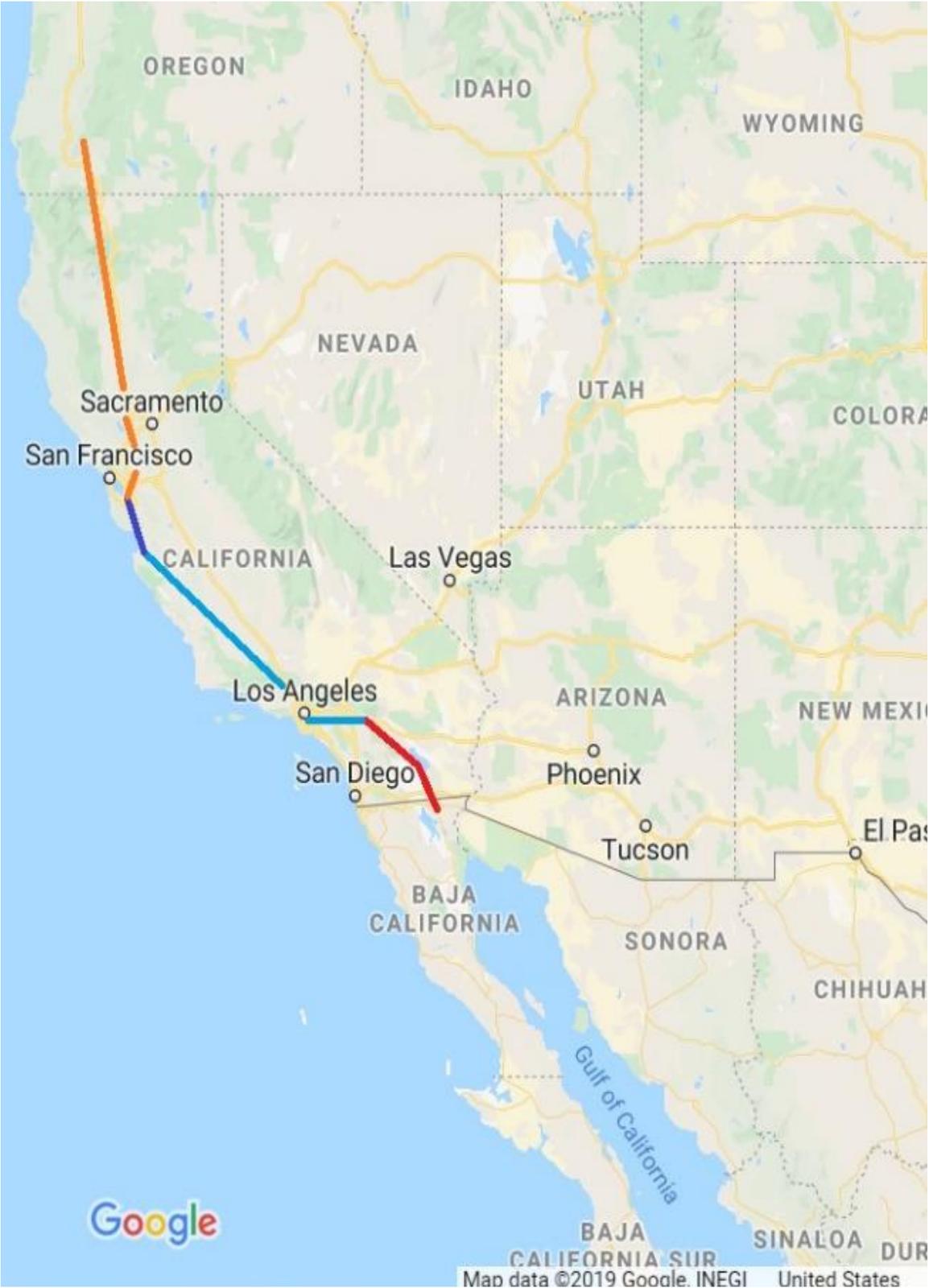
C: I take care for two babies, but I tell the lady, 'You don't send me to the store or anything because I can go, but I don't know that I can buy.'

Camila was not only worried about how she would communicate in everyday places like the store, she also told me that she had no friends and no entertainment since she could not understand them or the television. Eventually, the family Camila nannied for told her that she was not needed anymore since the children had grown.

Still needing to support her family, Camila decided to work in the field, helping with the lettuce and green bell pepper crops along California's border cities. Camila clearly remembers working in cities such as Pomona, Salinas, San Jose, and also in the state of Oregon. Figure 4.1 is a visualization of the distance between the places Camila worked from Sonora, México along

the west coast of the United States. The part of her trip starting in Sonora and ending in Pomona is marked in red. The part of her journey marked in blue starts in Pomona and finishes in Salinas. The journey from Salinas to San Jose is marked in purple. The journey to Oregon from San Jose is marked in orange. It is important to note that, while this map seems like a linear representation, it is not: Camila did not necessarily finish her work in Oregon before returning to México.

Figure 4.1: Visualization of Camila's First Time in the United States (1982-1985)



Once again, however, Camila told me she did not speak English while living and working in the fields:

C: Yes, but you don't need to speak English because you don't talk to anybody, and you don't know. And the store, they say one truck come every week and whatever you needed you pay in here and you bring your check.

Up to this point in Camila's story, she had not spoken a word in English, she could not write a check and depended on the local store to cash it, and she had been steadily working for three years. Because of her fear and inability to communicate in English, Camila spent those years without many resources and social support in order to send money to her family in México.

Camila then abruptly left the United States in 1985 to attend to her mother in México who was devastatingly sick:

C: Then my mom was very sick, and then I'm back because she take care of my kids. And I lose all my benefits because my mom die, and I don't have enough money for fix my papers.

Unfortunately, Camila's mother passed away. This family loss left Camila to raise her three children from her first marriage and remain in México until 1992.

Returning back to her family in México, she was asked many questions about her life in California. She remembers the questions she was asked by the people around her:

C: Um, when I'm back and the people started, 'Oh you live in United States?' 'Yeah.' 'And what do you know?' 'Nothing! It's the same as here.' 'No? But the other people they live and they change. All speak different, they driving.' And I say, 'No, no, because I'm coming only work.' But I never thinks, 'Oh I wanna live in here.'

Camila only thought of her experience working in California as temporary and her move as a way to support her family in México.

Despite telling her friends that she had not changed during her time in California, there were a few changes to her life from that time. Camila told me that she did not know how to take a bath when she first began nannying, which she later learned. She also learned how much a US dollar could buy during her stay. Growing up, Camila did not have a television, so her experience with technology broadened while in the Californian family's home.

It may seem odd to start in 1982 instead of 1957, the year when Camila was born; however, understanding the period from 1982-1985 gives you the same impression that I had of Camila when I first observed her tutoring sessions: hardworking, compassionate, and family-oriented. Now that you know her a little better, I want to share her most early literacy experiences with you. Camila was born in Michoacán de Ocampo, México, and she started school in the early 1960s in a rural village in México.

To fully understand the narrative that she shared with me, you need to understand some key facts regarding the political and cultural context of México in the 1960s. In the 1960s, México allocated most of their education budget to fund primary schools, and México was known for “primary education repeaters,” or students who did not meet the basic requirements of primary school to continue to secondary education (Kim & Hong, 2010, p. 28). In 1946, the Mexican government remained relatively stable, electing presidents from the same political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), with political corruption playing a major role (Clayton et al., 2017, p. 442). The political stability lead to a baby boom in México that ultimately strained the educational system and caused “migratory tides” of rural residents transitioning to big cities like Monterrey through the 1960s (Clayton et al., 2017, p. 448). There

were frequent rural and working-class protests throughout the 1950s into the 1960s (Clayton et al., 2017, p. 453). In 1968, university students were massacred by government-sanctioned officers during a peaceful protest in México City against government corruption (Clayton et al., 2017, p. 456). The strain on México's education system and the tense class divide and government corruption contributed to the political and cultural context of Camila's early literacy journey.

Camila had nine years of schooling in México. She started attending the local, rural schoolhouse when she was four or five years old, right after she could use the bathroom on her own. She remembers finishing school around the age of thirteen or fourteen, or around 1966-1967. For the first few years of school, she walked to the schoolhouse, but she started migrating and working the fields with her family when she turned ten years old and transferred schools frequently until she turned thirteen or fourteen.

Camila was very specific about telling me that her education was only about the "basics." In our first interview, I asked explicitly about how many years of education she had in Spanish, she responded that, even though she had nine years, she only had a basic education:

C: But I don't—no money and no—there's very far the schools for all the—and there's only the basic. Only the basic because before you have only the elemental school, six years.

And again, she told me that she only learned the basics after I asked about the subjects she learned in school:

C: But they focus more on the, uh, the basic.

I: Okay, yeah.

C: You can, you can reading good or writing good and understand everyday things.

Initially, I thought she was being modest about what she had learned while talking to me. I was a stranger who came from a big ten university and who had introduced herself by speaking academic Spanish, so I asked Camila for more details about her school and her childhood home to learn more.

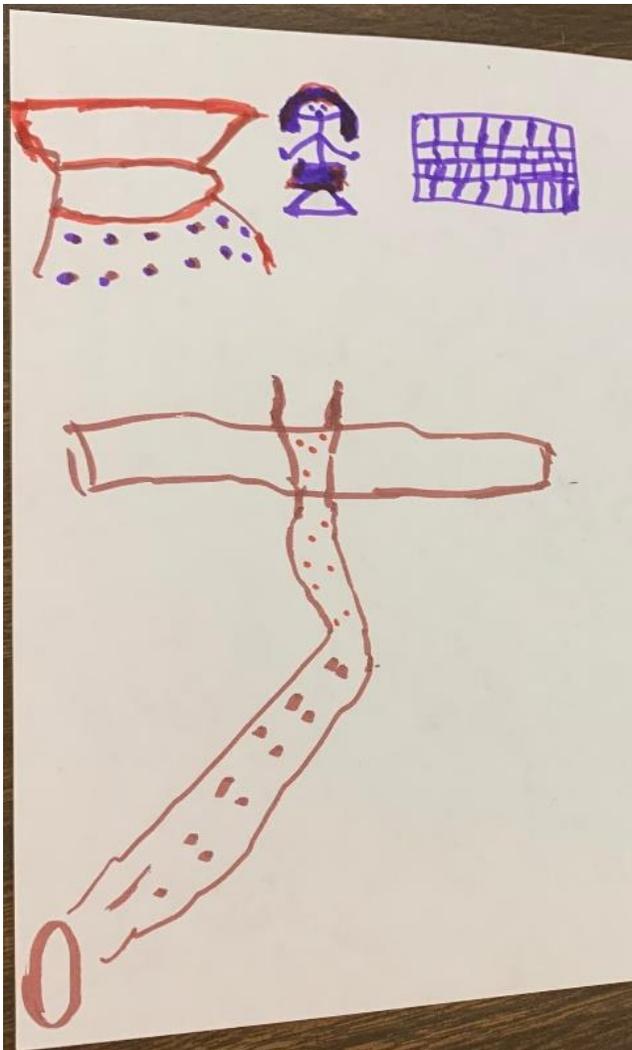
In the little town that Camila grew up in, everyone knew everyone. Camila walked to school with her cousins each day around six o'clock in the morning since the walk lasted about an hour and a half one-way. She told me that she always needed to pack and bring a meal to school. Then, all the children would arrive home around three o'clock and be very hungry. At times, she would find a ride with one of the families who had a car and could drive her to school:

C: Uh sometimes maybe hour and a half, morning and hour and half in the afternoon, or uh, sometimes the people that's in the car, they say 'Come on everybody' and they more-more fast but, uh, and the family say 'If you don't know the person, no, no, you walking.' ((laughing))

Even in her small town, however, Camila knew not to ride in cars with strangers and the students always walked to and from the school as a group for safety reasons.

Impressed with her dedication, I asked her about her teachers. I learned that Guerrero, México, was a hub for teacher education and a place where certified teachers were assigned to various schools throughout the region. There was only one teacher for all the grades in the district, and all the students were taught in the same room where rows of tables designated the students' grade levels. In Figure 4.2, Camila has drawn the highlights of what she remembers about school. This drawing contains an orange path with dots, which signify footprints, a river

Figure 4.2: Camila's Childhood Schoolhouse



with a bridge to cross, and the interior of the

schoolhouse. Camila included the students, purple dots, and the teacher's desk at the front of the room. She drew the teacher in purple and orange. She included a purple bookcase, which Camila told me was very large.

Consistently, Camila described her teachers as "nice" and people to respect. She like the school and her teachers. She told me that "all the teachers were nice" and that her teacher in the schoolhouse was patient. She drew a picture of her schoolhouse teacher during our second interview. She drew her with a long purple skirt and shoulder-length hair. As she drew, Camila recalled that her teacher had a large bookshelf which she

would ask students to take a book from every week and then talk to her about it after they had read their books.

Although the teachers were very nice, Camila made it clear to me that most teachers only stayed in her small town to gain experience before moving quickly to a better teaching assignment:

C: Some people—some teachers they's only three month because they say it's too hard for them. Or some people say 'oh, I can go over here. I'm needed more near.' But uh I think this is the same, same the-the doctors.

In general, it seemed that Camila witnessed the higher-educated residents, like teachers and doctors, come and go more often through her town than others, except for the Catholic priest.

She described a relationship between teachers, doctors, and the Catholic priest in her stories during our second interview. For example, Camila told me that her parents did not ever attend school since they were from a working-class family outside of the city. Because of their lack of education, they did not trust the traveling doctors who came to give vaccinations door-to-door:

C: Uh, my mom and my dad they never went to the school. They-they say it's not-not important because you don't need it. ((laughing)) because they coming when it's more the revolution. My mom I thinks she born in 1930 something almost 40. They, they, they don't know and because there no light, no electricity, no water, no nothing, only, only peace and quiet.

I: Yes, you didn't get that. You had to know your letters.

C: Yes, and when the people come and say 'oh' they never gotted a shot.

I: Okay, their shots.

C: Uh-huh, when they coming uh they just started—I'm born in 1957.

I: Okay

C: Maybe 1962 or three? Then they coming for all around México, every, every, every, tried to ((gestures for needle in the arm))

I: Vaccinate you?

C: Uh-huh

I: And your parents were like, oh my goodness, why are you giving her shots?

C: Uh-huh they say no because—they say no and they the people come. The only people not the family come in the home, they was the father—they coming but my mom made food for the father and they talking. No, no, they say no. The more important they was go to church not school. ((laughing))

In this story, Camila emphasized to me that the Catholic priest was the only person not in the family allowed to eat dinner at home with her parents. She told me that her parents believed that going to church was more important than going to school for them. Later on, Camila told me that her mother always requested that her children spend an hour each day on their homework when they returned from school. However, reading the Bible for short periods of time and reciting prayers were the only literacy practices Camila described her parents doing, and she told me that her mother did not know how to read or write in Spanish. She remembers memorizing prayers to say every day. Additionally, Camila attended Sunday school at the local parish at six o'clock in the morning.

Another important aspect of this story is the lack of electricity and running water she grew up with. You may have been wondering why everything seemed to start around six o'clock

for Camila growing up. She explained to me that everything was timed based on the sunrise and sunset since there was not electricity in the town:

C: Uh-huh, every everything, they was very early because they no electricity, you try to—the more, maybe when seven o'clock everybody ((whistle)) because no more.

In the afternoons, Camila would walk to the river. She described different places to find clean water for drinking, washing, and showering. Eventually, town residents did successfully advocate for irrigation and electricity in their town.

Camila also had textbooks sent home with her, starting in the first grade. She did not study a foreign language while in school. She had Spanish reading and writing, science, math, Spanish spelling, and another subject that sounded like a Mexican citizenship course:

C: Um, math, and the they were science, they was five, and they, other all the things for patriot. ((laughing))

I: Okay, right, because you were going to school, they had just had another revolution in México.

C: Mhm.

I: So they were very nationalistic?

C: Mhm, yeah.

These textbooks were sent home with her by the teacher. Her relatives around her age would have a study group on the patio so that they could study them together:

C: Uh-huh, for everybody. They say, but we living near for all my family, and everybody coming in the patio. 'oh I don't know this,' and maybe another knows and they don't know and maybe I know and then I share.

She explained that the older students could help the younger ones, like her, to understand the textbooks and the homework.

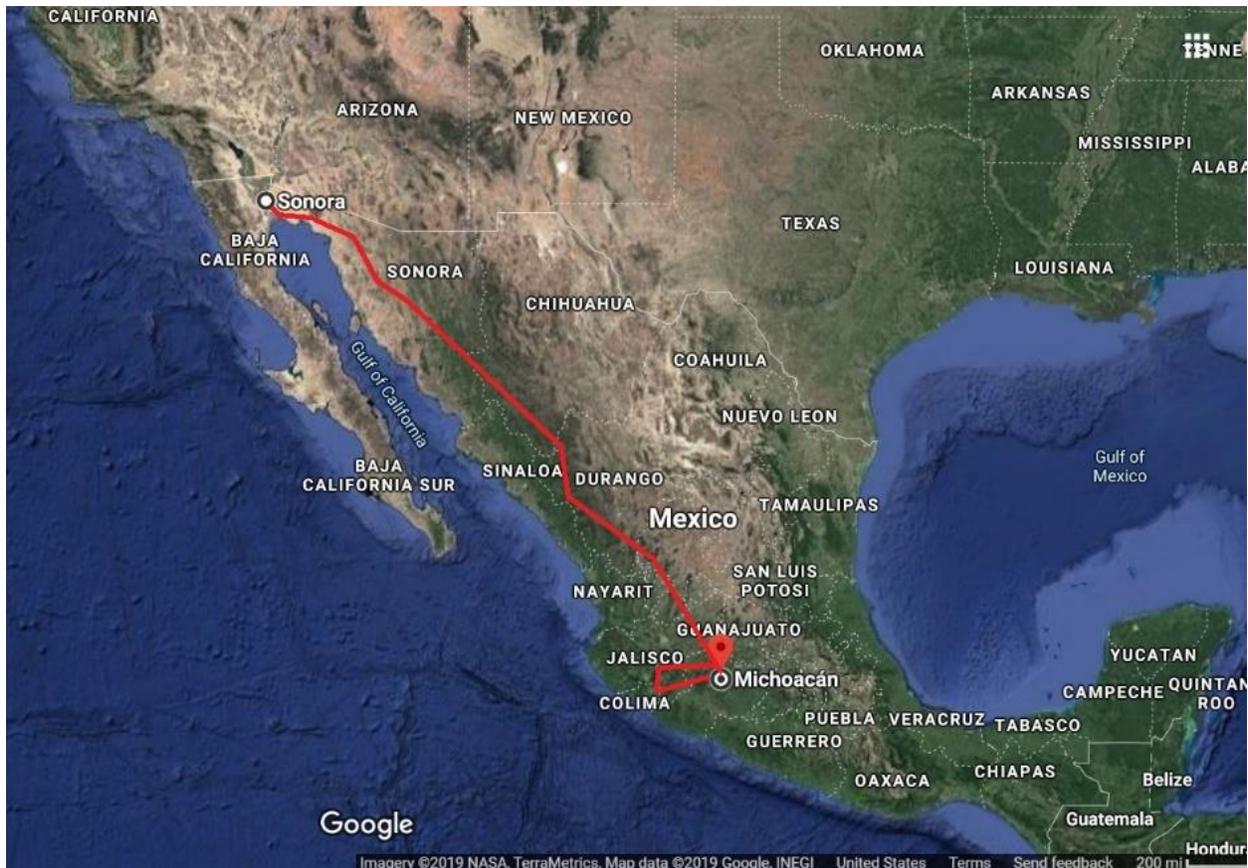
After about six years, Camila migrated with her family for work. She worked in the tomato and cotton fields and then in the wheat fields at six-month intervals, depending on the season. From Colima to Jalisco and Jalisco to Sonora, Camila and her family worked, migrating north after each job finished:

C: Mhm, yeah, ‘Oh there’s more job over here. And here is almost finished’ and we coming and when we’re more older ‘oh we need to help the family and this is why’ and little little little. ((Traces fingers up the north-western border of México on the map))

Because of this migration for work, Camila typically spent three months in school before transferring again, although she did spend a full year in one district. Her last year or so of education in México, she had a tutor come to her home one hour a week for in-home tutoring. She told me that she had one combined textbook that was about four inches thick and that she determined the pace of the material based on her work schedule.

A visualization of her childhood and early career in México is provided in Figure 4.3. In Figure 6, Michoacán is marked by the red pin and the red line represents Camila’s journey up the west coast of México. The white dot marks Sonora, México on the southern California border.

Figure 4.3: Visualization of Camila's Childhood and Early Career (1957-1982)



By the time her family reached the California border, Camila was in her twenties. She told me a story about the first time she saw a US dollar and heard an English word:

C: And the first time I see I uh, I see one dollar I say, 'Oh what is this one?'

I: The US dollar?

C: Yes, I remember the first dollar. They change, um they change for two pesos.

I: Wow!

C: It was a lot.

C: I never—I tell my daughter I never know there's another word, only my word because I don't know—I don't know nothing.

In these stories, Camila describes both the shock and her first impressions about a culture and language outside of her home country. She was surprised at how expensive a US dollar was and that there existed more words to describe her world than just the Spanish ones that she knew.

Before Camila was even exposed to the English language, she was already a working adult with her own children. Knowing her responsibility as a provider for her family, Camila chose to work in California away from her three kids, and she returned once she knew that her mother could no longer care for them. Once Camila returned to México, she made sure that her children could read and write in Spanish.

4.3 RETURNING TO THE UNITED STATES

By 1992, Camila was in her second marriage and had her fourth child. Her mother's passing had caused Camila to return to México, where she no longer had enough funds for a passport and procuring a travel visa was difficult. Her husband supported her desire to leave with her children for the United States, but he did not think she needed to learn English in order to stay with his family in northern Illinois. Camila disagreed, and she told me that she knew living in the northern United States would be different from living near the Mexican border. In her experience, the language barrier was inescapable:

C: No, when I come here the second time, my husband he said, 'oh you don't need it.' 'Yeah! I need it because I need the papers, they are different because this is very different from California.' When we coming here, everything in English. Only two people. For the school, only one, very, very older, and she's for the elementary, middle and high, and you don't know. She don't have time to, um,

coming with you or coming with others for fill all the papers. She was the only teacher who speaks Spanish.

Filling out important forms, understanding the everyday situations, and communicating daily was impossible to do in Spanish, and Camila had only two resources to translate for her, one of which was a busy bilingual teacher.

With her husband staying in México to work and trying to support her family now in Illinois, Camila told me that she put off taking formal English classes. Once again, Camila needed to support her family and work instead of taking time out of her day to study. She told me that she worked in restaurant kitchens and factories to help her family:

C: And before I work and I help my partner, my husband to raise my family, and I say, 'Oh later, later, later.' ((laughing)) Before I work always in the kitchen, restaurants or factories, and only a little bit.

She assumed an equal role in providing financially for her family. Camila believes in working hard, and she told me throughout our interviews that she works very hard and so do her family members.

Finding herself in an environment even less supportive of a Spanish monolingual, Camila became bolder about trying to learn English and going to places like the post office on her own.

Camila told me a story about sending money to México at the U.S. post office near her:

C: Sometimes when I send money to México I put everything on one paper and I got it to the post office and I say, 'Oh please can you send it to this one?' Because nobody, uh-huh. ((Laughing))

Camila knew how to ask for help in English at that point but still did not know how to correctly address mail or read and write in English, so she would go to the post office

with all the information written on one piece of paper and then ask the postal worker to help her mail the item.

Camila was proud to also inform me that while she lived in northern Illinois she earned her GED by taking a few courses in English and in Spanish. Her daughter proudly told her to display her certificate, and Camila was happy to tell me that she thinks having the GED is nice. However, she also expressed to me that she feels badly that others do not empathize with how time-consuming and full of effort earning the GED and learning English was for her:

C: Sometimes I'm feel bad because the people don't, they don't know how hard is when you try to learn and work and attend your family and it's hard. Mhm. But, um, sometimes you can have something that make 'okay this is my time.'

After these first few years back in the United States, one of her daughters married an American and moved to another city in the mid-west in the early 2000s. Camila decided to live with them because her daughter and son-in-law became pregnant. Camila had planned to leave the following year after her grandchild's birth and return to México with her youngest daughter; however, she remained in the United States for another twenty-seven years, watching her family grow and supporting her children and grandchildren as she could.

During our first interview, Camila mentioned her next door neighbor and how she would always see her in the morning and in the afternoon. Camila described her neighbor as patient and chatty even when Camila could not fully follow the conversation. She also told me that they would exchange food every so often. In this story, Camila remembers how they used to talk and her daughter's reaction to them:

C: And she was very patient with me. I always tell her, '(Neighbor), you're talking me, maybe I don't understand.' But she never say. Oh she always talking, talking, talking! I say,

‘Yeah yeah yeah.’ She talking a lot: his job, his travels, his family. I say, ‘Oh! Okay.’ And my daughter always laugh, ‘You understand some things and some things eh-eh’ ((tilts flat hand up left and right)). And when I’m cooking I send to her a little bit. And she make—she’s cooking very good and sometimes bring.

Camila enjoyed practicing her English with her neighbor and sharing her cooking. Before telling me this story, Camila distraughtly informed me that her neighbor died of a heart attack twelve days before her husband also passed away:

C: But I see her in the morning and the afternoon. When I’m coming class and the next day I see her. ‘Hi, hi.’ In the afternoon, I don’t see her, and I tell my daughter ‘what happened with her? Where is her? I don’t know.’ And then I’m coming for the trash and then her son tell me, ‘my mom died.’

Despite a rich legacy of working hard to support her family, Camila held the belief that she had not done enough. When talking about the recent death of her second husband and her neighbor, she reflected on what she would leave behind after her own passing:

C: We have uh, we work very hard in here. My older son is married and he's uh citizen. But that's very, the same very complicated papers, and he decided move to México. I say, ‘Okay uh I only help your daughter because she's married, two kids and my others.’ I feel bad for, I'm leaving them nothing.

Camila lays out her support system, who she supports and who supports her. She tells me that she helps her children, but she has a feeling of guilt about the future of her family. Even with the tremendous loss of her husband and neighbor, she told her daughter that she wanted to continue to attend her ESL classes so that she could get out of the house:

C: I tell my daughter anyway, ‘I don’t wanna only in here.’

4.4 CAMILA'S PRESENT EXPERIENCE

4.4.1 Finding ESL classes

At the time of this study, Camila attended twice a week literacy classes held in a church basement. Every class, Camila's daughter, who she lived with, would drop her off and pick her up.

Before taking ESL classes, Camila had often visited her local library with her daughter and grandchildren. Many of the local ESL programs host a week-long outreach event at the library once a year to recruit new students. Camila attended this outreach event and learned about a once a week course near her. She joined that class. However, enrollment was low, so the class was cancelled after only a few weeks. As previously mentioned, the city in which Camila lives has several ESL programs, and after the local class was cancelled, Camila decided to find an ESL course at the community college. However, she quickly realized that the course offerings were at inconvenient times and that the college was too far for her daughter to drive:

C: I started here—uh, after I go, went to the, going to the other program, but I tell my daughter, 'uh no because it's too far. Here and then in the winter.' And they say the have morning and night, but I say, 'in the morning, you need help for the kids. in the afternoon, you come in tired, you don't wanna drive.'

Camila was always aware of her and her daughter's family responsibilities when making the decision about where to attend ESL classes.

Keeping these responsibilities in mind, Camila searched for opportunities to learn English, especially when visiting her local library. At another outreach event a different year, Camila was able to speak to a literacy center staff member in Spanish about a new ESL opportunity: either she could participate in one-to-one tutoring at the library or in a church,

which was close to her neighborhood. She chose to attend the program held in the church, and she regularly attended for two years up to this point.

4.4.2 Camila's Current Support System

At the present moment, Camila no longer worked outside of her daughter's home. Her daughter had requested that she not work, so, instead, Camila took care of the home and household needs while her daughter and son-in-law worked:

C: I don't work I have uh almost 8 years I don't work because my daughter say, 'No more, you need rest.' I'm cooking, cleaning, laundry because my son-in-law work, my daughter work.

Her work inside the home kept her busy, and she enjoyed cooking for all her family members, especially since her American in-laws enjoyed the Mexican cuisine she made. She told me that she spoke with all her family when they would return home from work and school:

C: Uh-huh yes, with all the family when they get back, it's only, 'Hi!' I'm only 'ah, I'm busy!' Yeah because, um, I don't know. There's only the in-laws is American. But they all like the Mexican food. That's always I come and cooking something for. But I'm lucky all the family is very good.

Reflecting on the shift in responsibility she experienced after retiring, Camila told me that she could focus more on her English education than she could on her Spanish education. Once again, she told me that she had only needed the "basics" when she was learning before, but now she can give more attention to learning for herself:

C: Uh, maybe because, uh, before I have a lot of more uh more uh responsibility and I don't have a lot of, 'okay, I need only the basic.' Writing 'oh my name not the address something and that's okay.' And now I have more for me.

I: so you're saying in Spanish

C: Mhm

I: you had to just learn the basics

C: Yeah

To all her tutoring sessions, Camila would always bring her book bag that contained notebooks.

In each session, Camila would write down important words and phrases that she had learned. She told me that she would not have the time to study her notes during the summer before her grandchildren started school, but she explained that she had a different literacy experience now that school had started:

C: Yeah, because before you say 'Oh, okay you, you needed this.' 'Yeah look in the book and when I have time' and now this a different because, 'Oh,' I say this word. I say, 'I put.' I say, 'wait wait wait I put!' and then I check—

I: Where do you put it?

C: In my, my book.

Camila has ten grandchildren. She often told stories about her interactions with her grandchildren and children during our interviews and during her tutoring sessions.

When I asked her to draw someone she spoke English with every day, she immediately responded with "my son-in-law," and began drawing him.

She encourages her family to become bilingual. She told her son-in-law, who she lives with, that she believes it is better for her children to speak English outside the home and Spanish in the home. She also added that she is proud that her children speak, read, and write well in Spanish:

C: That's my son-in-law. And my there's only I tell him it's better you learning here Spanish and you can speak English outside. Because I'm always tell my kids 'in home Spanish, outside doing English' because you need it more outside than inside. They say, 'yeah, yeah.' All speak very good Spanish and reading and writing because I—they learn.

Later in our interview, Camila similarly extolled her grandchildren for becoming bilingual, and that three or four of her grandchildren are learning both Spanish and English at the same time:

C: Yes, but they, they, they speak, uh they don't speak too much Spanish but they know lots of Spanish and I tell that's good because you, you learn both at the same time.

Additionally, Camila included her daughter-in-law, who is married to her eldest son, in her list of people she speaks English with often. She highlighted her daughter-in-law's support and patience when listening to her English:

C: I think my daughter-in-law. She speak very clearly—clear. And she always support me and say, 'okay, okay, this is here, this is now. You understand good.' But it's not, uh, she's very patient.

Camila interacted with her tutors for the majority of the tutoring sessions I observed. At one point, she had state-regulated exams, so she spent the session taking the exam rather than having a lesson. Overall, Camila told me that she liked the teachers and the people at the program. She gradually became more confident in asking her tutors to repeat themselves if she did not understand them:

C: Oh? A first time I don't say nothing. I always say, 'Yeah! Yeah!'

I: You think--

C: But now I say, ‘Oh I’m sorry I don’t, I don’t understand. Can you repeat for me?’

I: Okay,

C: ‘Oh yes’ they say, ‘this is this’ and ‘oh okay.’

Camila knew to ask the tutors to repeat themselves in order to have a clearer explanation of the content or to hear a word again. She also included an apology and explanation when asking tutors to repeat themselves whereas before she would simply nod along or back-channel when she did not understand.

4.4.3 Camila’s Goal for Learning English

Camila was very clear about her reason for learning English: to become closer with her family. Multiple times throughout our interviews, she expressed a desire to communicate with all her family, especially her grandchildren who mostly speak English:

C: They and all my kids because my older son his wife is American. It's only English. My second son he married to American Mexican and there's a little bit of Spanish and more English. My daughters married to, my two daughters, they marry with Americans. It’s only I that’s speaking Spanish.

I: But then the grandkids you speak English to?

C: I’m coming more because they—I’m speaking Spanish and they all speak English. I say, ‘okay.’ And now I have more time and I try to understand and I don’t wanna push them, ‘Oh, you need to talk to me something.’ Because there’s six girls and four boys.

Camila told me that having American in-laws motivated her to start learning English. She also told me that she wants to make herself accessible to her grandchildren by not forcing them to speak in Spanish to her, which they may not feel confident speaking.

When I asked Camila in our first interview how she would decide when she had learned English, she told me she always wants to learn and that she liked reading in English. She specifically mentioned that she owned many books in Spanish but that she had started reading in English recently. I asked her a follow-up question in our final interview together to learn more about her goals for her literacy tutoring. I asked her when she felt that she could help others learn English. She replied that she could be a tutor “maybe someday” but that she needed more time to learn for herself because she believed that she did not know enough yet:

I: Would you ever—when do you feel you could become a tutor? Like when do you feel like you could help others learn English?

C: Ohhh ((laughing)) maybe someday.

I: Maybe someday. You think that maybe someday you will be able to?

C: Yeah.

I: Why not right now?

C: Um because there's uh, I have only a little time I think I needed more time .

I: More time learning or more time to?

C: Learning, no more time, more time learning.

I: Why do you say that?

C: Because I don't know a lot.

Adding to this conversation later, Camila told me she also would like more confidence in her ability to speak before considering becoming a tutor:

C: Speaking with other people when I don't know I feel why did I do—they don't understand me or maybe I'm trying to say one thing and I say another and I just say mm quiet.

I: So you like to build your confidence here.

C: Yeah.

Noting her progress on her goal, Camila told me a story about going to the movies with her daughter and watching a film in English. During the story, Camila remarked that her ESL classes helped her understand the content of the movie:

C: And uh the other day my daughter said we uh—she invited me to the movies. She say, 'Oh yeah,' she say, 'Mom you understand more. You don't ask a lot.' I thought, 'Oh my classes!' I'm happy!

Camila was proud and happy to report that her daughter noticed her progress and that she was able to participate in a normal family event like going to the movies. Similarly, Camila was also excited to share with me that she had started reading in English with her grandchildren, who had also commented on her progress:

C: And my grandkids say, 'Grandma, you do better than the last time.' 'Oh thank you!' ((laughing))

I: That's so great!

C: Yeah, I am feel more—eh, more in the family. Outside maybe not but.

I: Yeah!

C: I understand more and I think.

I: So you feel more a part of your family now?

C: Yeah yeah yeah!

In the last part of that story, Camila stated that she felt more included in her family even if she still was not confident in her connection to the outside world. Her grandson had started the first grade that month, so Camila read English books aloud to him and then she would listen to him read in English as well. She asked her grandson to be her English reading teacher, and she told me that he enjoys it:

C: Uhuh and I say because, I tell him, 'I, I can read in Spanish but I need—I wanna, read in English well, same you.' And it's supposed to be he's my teacher.

I: Awe

C: ((laughing))

I: That is so nice. Does he enjoy being your teacher?

C: Mhm, yeah. He say, 'Grandma no.' 'Okay.' 'Listen to me.' 'Okay, okay I listen to you.' ((laughing))

Camila did express to me that she felt more confident saying basic English phrases like *how are you*, *do you want a coffee*, and *my daughter's coming*, to people outside of her family.

Again during our final interview, Camila felt encouraged by the progress she was making in her ESL class and by the director's notice of it. Camila commented that her latest test score had mostly correct answers and that the director graduated her to the next learning level in the program:

C: I'm happy when um the director say, 'oh you're just moved up.'

I: Oh yeah!

She planned to keep attending her tutoring sessions because she enjoyed the one-on-one attention. She told me that she appreciated how her tutors would say a word "two or three times" so that she can practice it outside of the classroom:

C: The practice and then uh they say some words I hear in here I hear or learning here and then I put attention when I go grocery or my family they oh they say I know this word. I'm very happy.

When I asked Camila if she easily could remember most of the words she learned during her tutoring, she laughed and told me that although she does study once she gets home, she needs her notes to remember all the words. She tries to write only English notes to herself, and she occasionally will take her notes to her daughter or the program director to get feedback on her writing:

C: I'm try. Sometimes I make um in the book and I I I try I bring to the director and she say 'oh this is good this is not.' Or sometimes I ask my daughter, 'this is good or not?' and she say, 'uh yeah? It's good.' 'no, it's good or not good.' 'no, because you put this.' 'okay, that's it.'

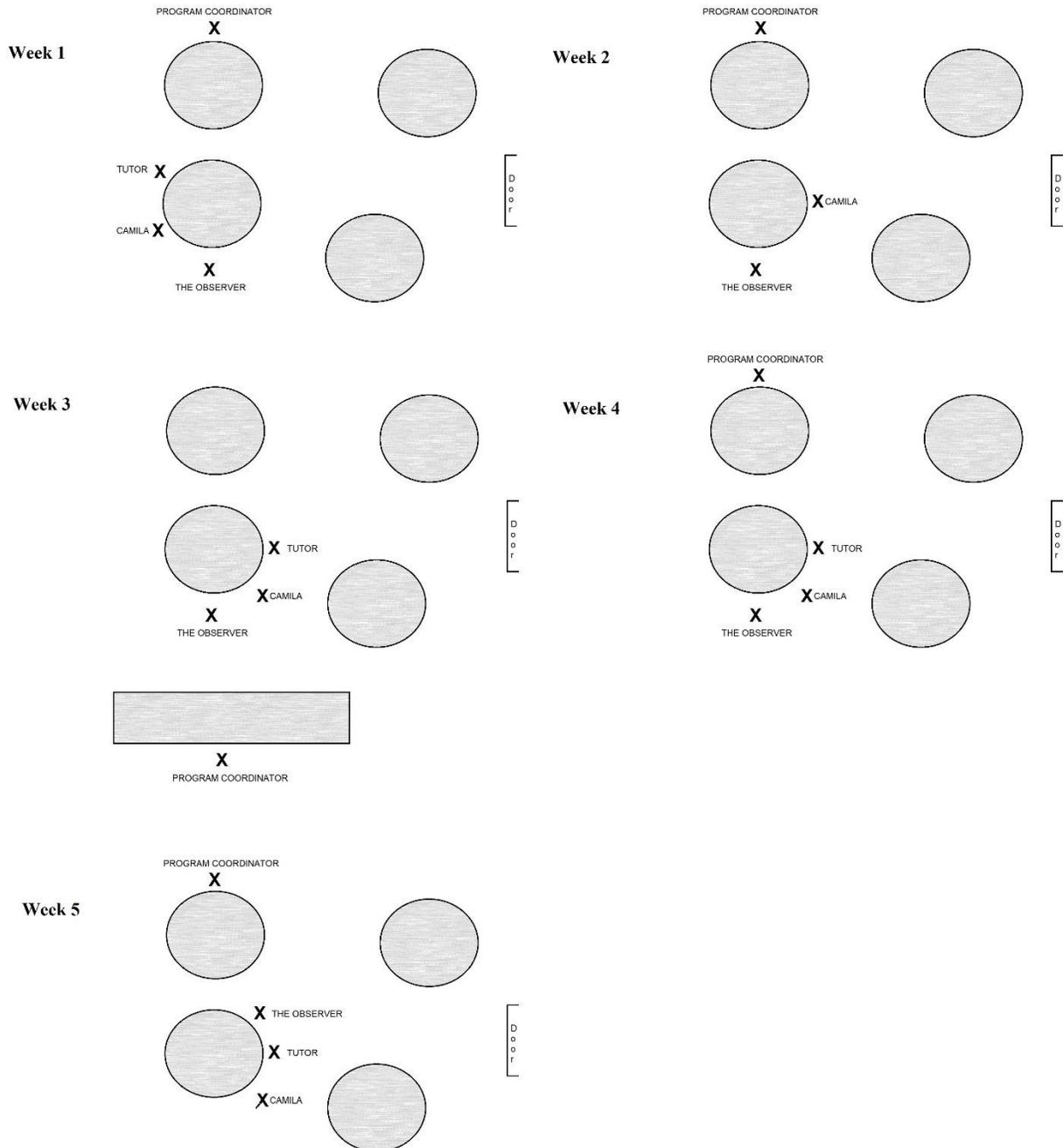
After three interviews with Camila, it became evident that her responsibility to provide for her family and her social relationships were the guiding forces behind her for literacy journey from her childhood home in México to her present-day home in the United States, and all the places in between.

4.4.4 Camila's Classroom Experience

Generally, Camila's classroom experience was full of learning new vocabulary and phrases. Some lessons focused on grammar, explaining infinitives, prepositions, and gender pronouns for example, while other lessons focused more on meaning and usage. I observed Camila with four different tutors over the course of the study. Although her tutors rotated often, Camila's seating arrangement did not. Diagram 4.1 shows where Camila sat during tutoring in

relation to the tutor, the program director, and me, the observer. During week two of observation, Camila was taking a end-of-unit test at her table while the tutor left the room.

Diagram 4.1: Camila’s Assigned Table in the Classroom



Camila had a habit of sitting closer to the left side of the room. She remained at the same table throughout the seven weeks of observation.

During tutoring, Camila would be asked by her tutors to form sentences with that lesson's content, like forming adverbs or using new vocabulary words. Commonly practiced during this type of activity, the tutor would always listen to Camila read her sentences and provide verbal feedback for Camila's responses either before Camila would write the answer down or once she had written all the required sentences for that activity. On the second day of observation, Camila was asked to form sentences using the listed adverbs on the worksheet. This list included only adverbs that ended with "-ly," like "quickly" and "skillfully." Below is an excerpt of that activity where Camila formed new sentences by first saying them aloud to the tutor and then writing down the sentence on her worksheet:

C: Skillfully. I think I cook good.

Tutor: Okay.

C: Cook!

Tutor: Or you can pick something else, something you're good at.

C: I'm quickly run!

Tutor: There you go, run it is!

C: Run, R-U-N.

Tutor: Yep.

C: I'm not well at speak English. I'm not. I am.

Tutor: So it would be?

C: I'm not well.

Tutor: I do not speak English well.

C: I do not speak English—no. I don't know.

Tutor: I do not.

C: I do not.

Tutor: Speak English well.

C: I do not speak well English.

Tutor: English well.

C: I. I is skillful—I cook. No. I am skillfully cooking?

Tutor: No. I cook skillfully because L-Y makes it an adverb and cook is a verb.

In this conversation above, Camila incorporated a phrase that she had heard before, “I do not speak English well.” She also formed a sentence in which she called herself a skillful cook and a fast runner. Halfway through forming the sentences, Camila became discouraged by not being able to place the adverb following the pattern, so she stopped herself from finishing the sentence and said, “No. I don’t know.” This conversation shows that Camila engaged her self-beliefs during literacy activities and also performed self-correction when creating sentences.

On the last day of observing Camila, she connected her response to a vocabulary question with the death of her husband and her family throwing her a surprise birthday party. The tutor was teaching Camila about the phrase, “I was touched/moved by (blank),” and how the phrase indicated an emotional response. In the conversation below, the tutor asked Camila about an example in her life where she may use the phrase, and Camila responded:

Tutor: So can you think of something that happened recently that moved you or touched you?

C: Yes, maybe when they—um, when I (inaudible)—when the family called me about somebody died. When they call me, they, “Oh!” But they don’t say, they say, “No oh! Something happen.” They only call me say, “Hey the father of your daughter die.” I thought no!

Tutor: Um, I would probably use a different, I would probably not use that in this situation, so maybe some examples, um, I was touched or I was moved by the musical performance. Maybe it was so overwhelming that it gave you a lot of emotions, like the emotions overwhelmed you.

C: Oh when it's like one song or something for my grandkids or my son-in-law because I—

Tutor: Maybe for your birthday one of your grandkids made you a card and you were touched or you were moved by the card that they gave you.

C: Ah, last year, I was very sad because it's almost twelve and nobody say nothing to me, and then for three o'clock everybody come, I say, "Oh boy it's too much people in here!" Tutor: Uh-huh they all came at one time.

C: I tell my daughter, "Maybe they forgot my birthday." They say, "I don't know. Oh, it's your birthday." They don't tell me, you know. And they say knock the door, and my grandson opened the door, and everybody say, "Oh!"

Tutor: So in that situation, you could say that I was moved or touched, either one, by everyone who came to wish me a happy birthday.

C: Okay.

Above, Camila associated the recent phone call with her family about the death of her husband with the phrase she had learned. The tutor corrects her and explains the typical usage for the phrase by using a more light-hearted example about an emotional response to music. Camila demonstrated in this conversation that she is able to understand context clues. She first guesses that this phrase can only be used to describe a reaction to music, but the tutor offered another example where a person was touched by a birthday card. This example caused Camila to

remember and share her own experience of being thrown a surprise birthday party. Throughout the literacy activities during Camila's one-to-one tutoring, she was encouraged to make connections between new vocabulary words and her life experiences.

Out of the half-hour on average that I observed of Camila's weekly tutoring sessions, Camila's speech production was either in response to her tutor's questions or part of her requirement to read her written work aloud. Most importantly, the longest stretches of continuous speech from Camila were when she was asked to relate her life with the content of that day's lesson. For example, Camila would usually give brief responses to a tutor's display and yes/no questions but would usually speak more in response to an open-ended question about her life experience or the reason behind her beliefs. In the following conversation, this typical response ratio is demonstrated:

T: So what is your favorite way to travel?

C: We're going to Chicago, to Wisconsin because we have kids and they're small.

T: So you gonna drive, you gonna take the train, you gonna fly?

C: We can take the train or my son-in-law drive.

T: Oh okay, so do you—Would you rather go in a car? Would you rather take the train?

C: I like the train.

T: Get up and move around. Would you rather take a train or a plane?

C: Um, train.

T: And why is that?

C: Uh, because there's more—that's fast and there's more easy.

T: There's more room to move around too. Which is more comfortable an airplane or a train?

C: Uh, I think the train you go another country maybe the plane is more far.

T: But this is about comfortable. Do you know what comfortable is?

C: Yeah.

In the above conversation, Camila responds with several sentences when asked questions about her opinion, where she will be traveling, and her reason for liking the train. She responds with one sentence or word when asked the either/or question, "would you rather," and the yes/no question, "do you know."

4.5 CONCLUSION

Summarizing the major themes appearing in the data is by no means to state that I have comprehensively represented Camila in this chapter. Rather, this chapter has been a glimpse into the literacy practices of Camila's life, both past and present.

CHAPTER 5: CATRIONA'S LITERACY JOURNEY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Talking with Catriona about her literacy journey was a cyclical process that started with a loose timeline but steadily focused more and more on a detailed path as the study progressed. After the first interview, I was certain that I had only a general idea of the main highlights of her journey: immigrating to the United States, starting school for the first time as a teenager, and learning to drive. However, other details about her birthplace and her social relationships were not clear until our final interview that took place after two months of spending time together.

One of the reasons for this process was my learning to ask questions as an interviewer. At first, my questions were general and exploratory while, later, my questions became more informed by the history of her country and I had a better intuition of when to follow-up versus move on in our conversation. Other potential reasons could have included the lack of familiarity between Catriona and me or Catriona's slow remembrance of decades of her life that was initiated by my questions throughout the study. However, the biggest factor for the cyclical process of our interviews may have been the constructs we shared during the interviews. For example, I had a black-and-white idea of what "home country" or "birthplace" meant. In contrast, throughout all of Catriona's childhood, her home country's government was being formed and separated from existing political entities (see 5.2 Early Literacy Journey in the Volta Region), which made pin-pointing a clear "birthplace" less clear-cut. This political and economic upheaval in Catriona's home country directly influenced her childhood and her education.

The results of the cyclical nature of our interviews was a complex narrative that I will share with you in this chapter. It is my hope that, after reading through this chapter on Catriona's

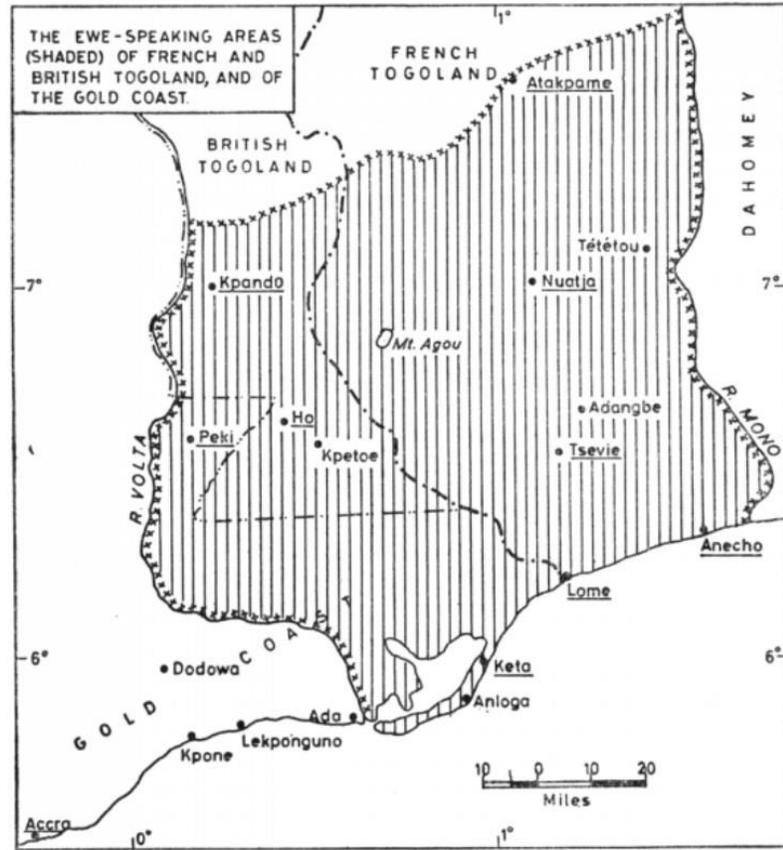
literacy journey, you will better understand her hardworking, dedicated nature. I hope you will experience her joy when speaking about her life, family, and her literacy goals.

5.2 EARLY LITERACY JOURNEY IN THE VOLTA REGION

Put simply, Catriona was born in Ghana, raised in the port of Lomé, Togo near the Gulf of Guinea, and attended school in the Volta Region of Ghana (see Figure 5.1: Map of Togoland). She identifies as Ewe, and the Ewe language is a common language between her and her family. However, the previous two sentences are oversimplifications of Catriona’s literacy journey. Specifically, the locations of her birth and her childhood home are not simple due to the shifting political climate of her home country.

The land now called Ghana and Togo was not always divided. In 1890, the Ewe nation was split into two by the British and German acquisition of their country (Amenumey, 1969, p.

Figure 5.1: Map of Togoland (Amenumey, 1969, p. 85)



67). France later mediated a conflict between the Ewe and its German colonizers by taking control its colony (Amenumey, 1969, p. 69). Figure 5.1 is a sketched map from Amenumey (1969) of the Ewe-speaking population in Togo and Ghana. It was not until 1960 that the government status and borders of the two countries, Ghana and

Togo were established.³ The history of this region is evident in its influence on Catriona's family: her sister speaks fluent French, Ewe, and English while Catriona herself speaks Ewe and English fluently but not French. To stabilize the newly divided Ghana, the government leaders, like Kwame Nkrumah, advocated a solution: increasing the education of its population. Figure 5.2 shows the current division of Togo and Ghana. The figure also shows the city of Lomé, where the red pin is located.

³ For those further interested in Ewe history, see Skinner, K. (2007). Reading, Writing and Rallies: The Politics of 'Freedom' in Southern British Togoland, 1953-1956. *The Journal of African History*, 48(1), 123-147.

Figure 5.2: Map of the Volta Region



Source: maps4news.com/@HOME

Because Ghana gained more funding for education, Catriona had the opportunity to attend school for the first time as a teenager in 1963. A recently opened school had offered to admit her, even though she was already in her teenage years. At this point in time, these schools were opening at a rate which was criticized for its pursuit of quantity over quality as the demand for qualified teachers was higher than the actual pool of candidates. How much of this information was known to Catriona at the time or even at present is unclear although it is likely that her illiterate, working-class family members would not have known every detail behind the political shifts they were affected by.

What one could have dismissed initially as a foggy memory on Catriona's part was revealed more and more during our interviews as an effort to explain, in her second language of English, her complicated and tumultuous literacy journey, of which many of the facts may not have been easily accessible to her growing up. With this understanding of Catriona's early literacy context, the fragments of information gathered in our interviews take on clearer meaning.

She lived with her father in Lomé, Togo after her family moved from Ghana. Her father was a fisherman who worked along the gulf, and her parents and other relatives had not attended school and could not read. Catriona explained this information to me in our second interview:

C: I live with my father in uh Togo.

I: Mhm

C: Because, hm, eh, they they they go along the sea.

I: Mhm

C: Eh, so we just moved to Togo,

I: Hm

C: Yeah (7.0) so I was raised there.

I: Yes, so did your family have a lot of books in the house growing up?

C: No, they don't have a lot of books.

I: But did they tell you bedtime stories before you went to sleep?

C: Ohh no.

I: No?

C: They are—they are fisherman, they just fish so they don't know anything about learning book. ((laughing))

Her father had a brother who was married and who made a living as a trader in Ghana.

When Catriona had the opportunity to start school in Ghana as a teenager, her parents sent her to live with her uncle's wife and to help her uncle's wife sell trade goods after school. The school that Catriona attended was about an hour walk from their home in Ghana. In our first interview, Catriona recalls her living situation when she started school:

I: So when did you start going to school? How old were you?

C: Oh! I am old! I'm not sure, but I don't start school early. I just, I just stay with my uncle's wife and then he is a trader, so I just help her selling the things. So I start school, I'm old before I start school. I start school in Ghana, 1963.

I: Okay, so you would've been 10 years old?

C: More than that! ((laughing))

Catriona told me in our last interview that she could not remember the exact age she was when she started English school in Ghana, but that she did already know how to speak and write Ewe

by that time and that she was roughly around the age of fourteen or fifteen. It seemed like her uncle's wife had an influence on her ability to go to an English school in Ghana:

C: Then, my—by that time I didn't go to English school, I'm, I'm just learning how to speak Ewe school, so one day then my aunt say, 'Do you like to go to school?' But that time I'm old.

I: Ohh

C: Yes, then I say 'Yes, I would like to go to school' but that—but that time eh our president is uh Kwame Nkrumah.

I: Yes.

C: Yeah, so she like—he like everybody to go to school.

I: Mhmm

C: So even if you're old you can go to school. Yes, so I say, 'Okay I can go' but I don't know how old I-I was by that time but just I'm old then I say 'Yes, I can go,' then they just uh send write me. Then I go to school in Ghana in Volta Region, yes.

Going to school was a formative experience for Catriona. The process to start school included registering and being placed at the appropriate grade level. Catriona was placed in elementary school at the grade level called class 3. In the 1960s, Catriona explained to me, the Ghana public school had classes 3-6 included in elementary school and four classes included in middle school, which they called forms 1-4. Each grade level worked in a separate room from the other grades.

The elementary and middle schools had different required dress codes: elementary required khakis while middle school required navy skirts and white tops. She told me that each

class took a full academic year to complete and that the school would only move students a grade level higher if they did “good.” Catriona enjoyed learning to read in English, and she told me that she liked reading and the books. She added that the experience had been difficult because she was also working:

C: Yes, I start from class 3, then they’re teaching, I went to—it is a bit difficult because from school I have to sell too, it’s very difficult for me.

Altogether, Catriona attended at least eight years of school while in Ghana. Catriona described these grade levels to me based on her experience of them. However, forms 1-4 were complicated for her to describe to me, so in the end I could not tell if she had attended forms 1-4 only in Ghana or if her apprenticeship in Lomé for sewing was part of a further high school education after middle school.

After finishing school in Ghana, her uncle found her a trade to study, sewing, and sent her back to Lomé, Togo for classes. When she moved back to Togo, all of her life returned to Ewe so that English was not used regularly by Catriona again until she moved to the United States. In our first interview together, Catriona explained her apprenticeship and early career as an employer in Togo:

C: I finish school; then my uncle say, ‘okay, as I’m already old, I can learn something’ so he put me in a sewing class. So I sew. I learn to sew. And then I open my shop. I have apprentice, yeah. When I’m coming here, every two years, I give diploma to my apprentice. Like I have like 18 or 25 people, do I give a diploma every two years. They learn for three years.

After her return to Lomé, Catriona attended a local church until she was married to her husband and moved to a different church, which she referred to as New Heart. At New Heart

church, Catriona joined the choir and began a life-long commitment to singing in a choir. When I asked her how she learned to read music, she explained to me that she could easily read Ewe by that time and that she had been able to read the Bible in Ewe since she was in school:

I: So how did you learn to read the music? Did you have your friends in the choir say ‘that’s the note. That’s how you say that.’

C: Oh by that time I know how to read Ewe, so everything is in Ewe.

I: In Ewe?

C: Yeah, so I read—I read the Bible in Ewe, I sing in Ewe. The music—The music you sing is in Ewe.

I: Okay, did you have your own Bible in Ewe?

C: Yes, I have—I like reading Bible, so I have it in the school since in the school.

I read the Bible at school.

At this point in Catriona’s life, she had attended school; learned to read, write and understand English as an adult learner; opened her own business, and she had chosen to marry and to sing in her church choir. For the next twenty-five years or so, Catriona lived and worked in West Africa, and she spoke in Ewe.

5.3 ARRIVING TO THE UNITED STATES

On October 12th, 2003, Catriona immigrated with her husband to the United States. They had played a lotto visa and won, which her husband had been praying would happen. Once they arrived in the United States, Catriona could not find work quickly, and she remembered how boring it was to stay in the house while she could not work. Having been a business owner and hard-working person her whole life, it is understandable that she would desire to work outside the home.

When she arrived she found that she could not immediately understand and communicate with the world around her. She could still read English, but it was difficult to remember all she had learned decades ago in school. She explained to me that she lost most of her English vocabulary from not using the language over the span of several years:

I: But did you feel that you couldn't read and write English when you got here?

Or do you feel like you could read English and write it well?

C: I can read it—I can read uh but if we—you are doing something stop eh it's a difficult.

I: Could you still read signs and read important documents in English when you first came here or?

C: Yeah I did but sometimes doesn't, a lot of vocabulary then which I don't understand so I have to go to uh dictionary.

I: Yeah.

C: Yeah, so that also make me lazy.

Additionally, she noted multiple times across different interviews how different the American dialect was from the British one she had learned in school:

C: Oh since I came here first 2003, uh, is it as uh, here English is difficult to understand the American English.

I: Compared to British English?

C: Yes.

C: And then I came here I say uh-oh I don't understand the American English then I start. See if they are talking if they don't get slowly it's hard for me to understand.

Because of this language barrier, Catriona remembered not speaking English very much when she first arrived in 2003. She said that she spoke more English after she had gained more confidence in her English ability.

Increasing her independence, Catriona learned to drive and acquired her state driver's license within the first two years of coming to the United States. She told me several times during our interviews that she really enjoyed driving. She would drive herself to work, to church, and to her English classes often.

Catriona and her husband found a church in their city after some time in the United States. Catriona joined the church's choir. She continued to sing in the choir during the time of the study. In fact, at the time of the study, Catriona had not moved after her initial arrival to the United States, so she had lived in her community in the United States for over fifteen years when I met her.

Eventually, I learned that Catriona had started English as a Second Language courses quickly after her arrival to the United States at the local community college. She recalled during our final interview that the hardest aspect of taking courses there was learning to use the computer with learning how to spell as a close second:

C: Oh here, it's a long time. When I just come here I just starting learning English learning English, so I go to the college too, but the problem for me is the computer.

I: Yeah

C: And then the spelling. Everything difficult. Computer I'm confused. I'm just stress me. So I just quit.

She expressed that learning the computer was a struggle in multiple ESL programs:

C: Uh-huh, I start school there then I go to after that uh I go to a new school there and the director is teaching there so I went there. I went to other school; it's hard for me because I don't know anything about computer.

I: Oh

C: Yes, so everything you had to do it in computer, but I uh struggle I do I go to school there but the things was hard for me so I say 'oh.'

--

C: Then, yeah, uh, then, I—in the school I start learning, learning, learning, learning, and the director also help me at home. But uh as I'm going to work and sewing too, I don't have time to continue.

I: Yes.

C: So it's hard for me to continue learning.

In these two conversations, Catriona discussed why the computer was so difficult to learn: not having the time to focus on it. Since she was a hard-working person, she only had time to work and learn English, but her lack of digital literacy was frustrating to her. She would try to learn keyboarding and how to use the computer when she had time, but often, she would become busy again and need to stop learning. She became frustrated that, when she would return to learn again, all that she had learned successfully would be forgotten. She shared this frustration with me in a conversation about keyboarding during our final interview as can be seen in Table 5.1 below:

Table 5.1: Conversation about Keyboarding

C: But uh as soon as I lev it then it gone
I: So you learn it, but it doesn't stay?
C: No! Yeah
I: And you forget.
C: Yes.
I: Hmm
C: To typing at first I can know that "r" is here ((typing in the air)). I can look this one and typing that.
I: Yeah you look at the screen but you're typing but then you forget.
C: Mhm eh
I: Yes.
C: But uh former oh I do good yeah but as I leave it then...
I: Yeah.
C: Just go.

Without the time to repeatedly practice until she could memorize the keyboard and other features of the computer, Catriona decided to not continue learning the computer even though she knew she could be successful if she had more time.

Once Catriona moved to the United States, she built a busy life for herself. She filled her life with church and singing in the choir, working, being with her husband, and studying English in various programs. Later, I would learn her daily routine and more about her social relationships while living in the United States.

5.4 CATRIONA’S PRESENT EXPERIENCE

5.4.1 Catriona’s Daily Routine

Catriona’s daily routine consisted of everyday tasks like cooking and going to work. However, she only average about five hours of sleep per day. In one interview, she gave me a detailed summary of her day, which is written out in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Catriona’s Typical Work Day

12:00 am	Midnight Prayer online
1:00 am – 3:00 am	Sleep
3:00 am	Get ready for work
4:00 am	Read scripture online
5:00 am – 4:00 pm	Work
After work	Call granddaughters and/or sisters
	Cook dinner
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm	Attend literacy classes or practice with choir
8:00 pm – 9:00 pm	Sew or read
9:00 pm – 12:00 am	Sleep

In her typical day, Catriona attended multiple online events, worked, prepared food for her family, called her relatives, sang in the English choir at her church or attended literacy classes, and sewed pieces or tried to read a book. During her day, Catriona spoke English with her co-workers, and she listened to her instructors at English literacy classes every Monday and Wednesday night. It’s no wonder that, in our last conversation together, Catriona commented on how sleepy she felt when coming to literacy classes:

C: Oh! When I come to work and then at first I work at—I wake up early at like 3, so when I wake like that, take a shower and then dress up. Then 4 I have to go to line and read our language for learning. It's a bible, so I read the Bible and talk about the things for the people in line. Then from I close at that at 5 something. Then from there I go to work, so when I go to work, I come back at 4. 4! Then I'm already tired, and I'm sleepy. When I take the book to read, then I just fall sleeping.

She told me that, because of her busy schedule, she had trouble staying awake after work when she is reading. Catriona had previously fallen asleep during the last class, and her instructor joked with her about it the next class time. Catriona told me that she would fall asleep during class, from time to time. Later in our conversation, Catriona felt conflicted about how she spent her time during the day:

C: I have a lot of study book right around my bed.

I: Mhm.

C: But if you're sleeping, it's ey! Because when I was child, I love reading. I love, but now every, eh, when I'm reading, I say, "Ey! I have to sew this one now!"

Catriona explained that while practicing her English reading, she would realize that she needed to finish sewing a piece for a client. She would need to stop reading and sew.

Catriona worked in housekeeping for an assisted living center. She explained that she worked alongside the certified nursing assistants (CNA) and other housekeepers. Usually, she would greet them and then work to herself for the rest of her shift:

I: How many people do you work with?

C: Uh co-workers? Mm, so many people! Because I work with my co-workers and uh CNA, yeah, CNA too. I work with them. And then when I get into co-workers who always say, 'how are you? How are you feeling today?' So I talk with them.

Aside from greeting her co-workers, Catriona spends her shift quietly working. She told me that work keeps her busy, so she doesn't have time to talk in English often:

C: At work, I'm just busy do the work, do the work, do the work. Then, then I come home, I'm tired. I just read, but to, I would like to talk, but uh because of time and busy.

5.4.2 Catriona's Current Support System

She and her husband worked opposite shifts; he works nights while she works days. She joked with me that her husband regularly slept more than she did. When they did have time to talk, Catriona and her husband spoke in Ewe.

She often called her sisters, one of whom lived in the United States. The sisters are fluent in Ewe, so Catriona calls and talks in Ewe. However, money was a key constraint for their phone conversations since long-distance calls for her were expensive.

Catriona calls her two granddaughters every day. They still live outside the United States. Catriona adopted her nephew's daughters as her own after her younger brother passed away. She expressed her strong hope that in the future her granddaughters will be able to move to the United States and go to school in her community:

C: Yeah, so he has two children. Then he pass away from sickness. He pass away, yeah. It's—so I'm trying to bring the children here, God willing.

She also hoped that, by having her granddaughters with her, she could learn and practice English more with them:

C: Yeah, so I just call them every day. They say, ‘Grandma we miss you, we miss you.’

I: Mhm.

C: Yes.

I: Wow. Well, I hope they’re able to make it. That would be wonderful, that you could have everyone here with you.

C: Yes, if they are here, then they go to school. I can learn from them more.

I: Right, right.

C: See me alone, I just can cook, then just go room, and I talk to and reading in my language too. Then, if I am too sleepy, then I just go to bed. Following day I will go, so I don’t have any children to be talking with that’s a problem for me.

Catriona believed that having a social relationship with her granddaughters in an English-speaking context would cause her to practice English more.

5.4.3 Catriona’s Current Literacy Practices

Catriona used What’s App, a messaging application on her phone, to speak with her granddaughters. She told me that texting was difficult for her but that she enjoyed the auto-correct feature. When she would contact me on the phone, she either called or sent an audio message rather than a text message.

C: Eh, it’s hard for me. But I can do it, but uh sometimes and the phone is good because if you write something uh you don’t write it well the phone just do it

I: Ah, it autocorrects.

C: Yeah! Yes, then it will write the good one. It's good but I'm not used to it.

Although Catriona still desired to learn how to use her computer efficiently and type faster, Catriona used her computer every morning from Monday to Friday as a member of an online community. She attended and read scripture for a Christian bible study for the Ewe Society.

One day during observation, the literacy director helped Catriona try to send a .pdf of Pilgrim's Progress to a friend. Catriona had read the book in Ewe and wanted to send the Ewe version to her friend who was learning the language. This process sparked a conversation between us about computers:

C: I want to learn computer, but I'm lazy when I'm learning. Then I just stop.

Then when I stop then, that thing gone. Then I'm so—when I say I start learning.

Then I say, "Oh let me sew!" Then I just leave it, but now I want to learn!

I: Mhm

C: Yes, I want to learn on computer. If there are no computer, I can do a lot, but uh my problem is that I don't know a computer well.

C: Last I brought my computer, I say, "Oh now I have to continue the computer again." But I have the capabilities, but I—the director teach me typ-the typing, com—then when I get home I just want to try, I don't get, then I just close it.

Then I didn't continue, but uh now I plan that I will take it day, someday and sit today. I just want to learn computer. That's what I'm planning now.

I: Okay.

C: Yeah, it's—Maybe God willing I can do it.

Catriona recalled how she stopped learning keyboarding, and she told me that she planned to bring her computer back to class so that she could finish learning. She also emphasized her faith that she would eventually learn how to type and how to use her computer.

When I asked Catriona about other literacy practices like reading English for fun or watching English movies, she always responded that she did not have the time in her day for them. She frequently would see a book that she found interesting, buy it, place it next to her bed, and then never have time to read it. I found this aspect of her day very relatable. Over and over, she repeated to me that, although she enjoyed English books and movies, that she could not find time in her day to read or watch them. Table 5.3 shows one of our conversations about books and movies.

Table 5.3: Conversation about Books and Movies

C: Oh I like book! When I see any story book, I buy.
I: Uh-huh
C: Story book I buy, but the time to read.
I: It's hard to find the time!
C: Yes, yes ((laughing)) It's hard to find the time, so
I: Do you watch movies?
C: I don't have to watch it.
I: You don't have time.
C: I don't have time to watch movie
I: Yes ((laughing))
C: I don't have time to watch movie, so you can watch for me. Yes, I like to watch but no time.

Table 5.3 (cont.)

I: Yeah, maybe someday.
C: Maybe someday.
I: You'll retire and have some time.
C: Yes, going to work and do all the things.
I: Yes, it takes a lot of time. I know!
C: Yes.

Catriona's humor is also evident in this conversation. She laughed often, and she joked that I would be the one to watch the English movies for her. She wished that some day she could have the time to read the books she purchased and watch movies.

5.4.4 Catriona's Goal for Learning English

During our first interview together, I wanted to know what Catriona thought about her progress in learning English since moving to the United States, so I asked her if she would be finished learning English one day. In her reply, she noted several concerns she still had about the current state of her English:

I: Do you ever think you'll be done learning English?

C: I don't know. ((laughing)) I'm not, because my dictation is so poor. Yeah! I can't spell it. I can speak English, but I can't. Dictation, I can't write well, and then, now I can't read quick quick quick quick. No! mm.

I: But then when you are better at spelling, writing, dictation, do you think you'll be done learning English?

C: Yeah, yes! Mhm.

Catriona saw a deficit in her ability to write well and to read quickly. Until she could improve her ability, she would not consider herself finished learning English.

In contrast, Catriona viewed the teacher as the best example of an English speaker. Catriona had only female instructors over the weeks that I observed her, and she had a partner assigned to her table who was an emerging Spanish-English bilingual:

I: Who do you think speaks the best English? That you know?

C: My teacher. ((laughing)) My teacher is.

C: They listen to different people so he can--she can understand us well.

Catriona told me that her instructors' experience working with various students helped them understand her well. Even in her praise of the instructor, Catriona caveated her ability to express herself in English during literacy classes.

Trying to better grasp Catriona's self-image, I asked her if she would consider becoming an English tutor. Her initial reaction was one of surprise. She said no. In her reply, she re-stated her concerns about her ability to speak and spell well and to explain grammar to others:

I: And you have been learning English for a long time it sounds like you read you write you can speak it really well why not become a tutor

C: Ah uhhh did I speak good?

I: What? You're asking me if you speak good!

((laughing))

I: So you don't think you speak good?

C: No ((laughing)) especially writing, I did-I did a lot of mistakes, spelling.

I: But you could teach? Or no you don't think you could teach English?

C: English?

I: Yeah!

C: How can I teach it? ((laughing)) Sorry.

I: Why not?

C: Grammar, I don't know grammar well.

Catriona clearly expressed a strong belief that she needed to improve her English literacy before helping others learn. Following up with Catriona, I suggested that teaching English literacy would not require perfection. I used myself as an example, stating that, even though I do not know English grammar or spelling perfectly, I taught. Catriona explained that I could teach literacy better than her since English was my language:

I: But I teach, and I don't know spelling or grammar perfect in my own language-

-

C: Your language is uh English.

I: Yeah!

C: Uh huh.

I: But I don't know spelling and grammar perfect.

((laughing))

I: I don't.

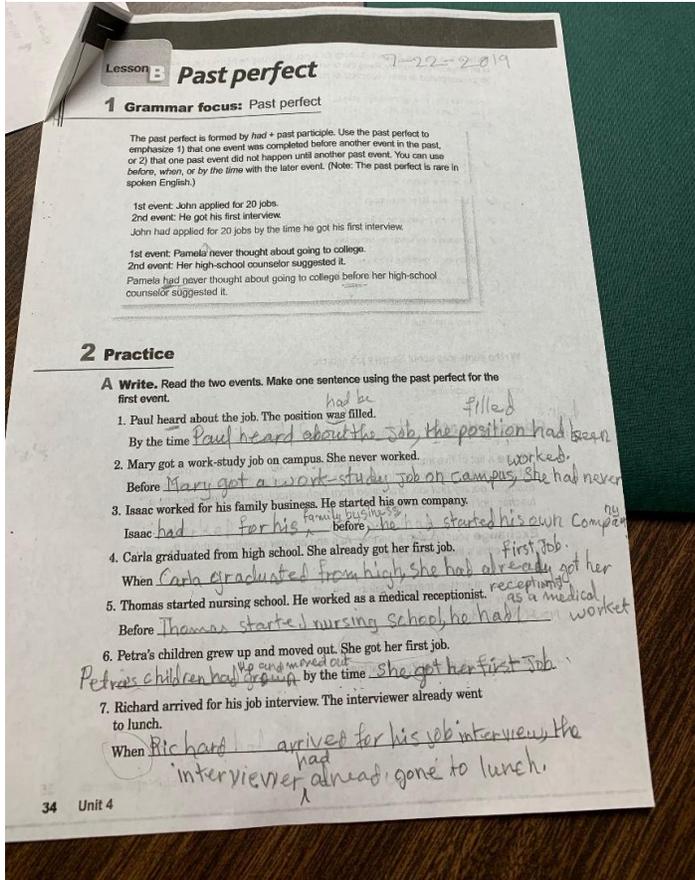
C: Definitely can do good than me.

Catriona's self-image included several weaknesses that may have been internalized feedback from her instructors. This self-image motivated her to continue English literacy classes and to remain a student rather than become a tutor herself. However, her busy schedule kept her from practicing and reviewing worksheets from class.

5.4.5 Catriona's Classroom Experience

Catriona told me that she would take the worksheets home but leave them in her

Figure 5.3: Catriona's Grammar Worksheet



bookbag. During one observation,

Catriona allowed me to take a photo of

her completed grammar worksheet

before she placed it in her bag as can be

seen in Figure 5.3.

I observed Catriona being

tutored by two tutors, one on Mondays

and one on Wednesdays. During

tutoring, Catriona rarely spoke about her

life unless directly asked a question by

the tutor. Her Wednesday tutor would

usually ask Catriona what we

discussed during interviews, and the

tutor was surprised by Catriona's responses and would ask follow-up questions during tutoring.

During both Mondays and Wednesdays, Catriona's tutors would ask her to write and read

her sentences aloud. The first observation lasted half an hour and during that time, Catriona was

corrected on her pronunciation of vocabulary while intensively reading a two-page article over

twenty separate times. This pattern of correction continued throughout the sessions I observed.

Relatedly, Catriona spoke very little during the sessions I observed. During the second

session I observed, Catriona spoke for only five minutes of the twenty-five minutes total. There

was another tutee at Catriona's table that day, and the student were alternating reading

paragraphs in a ghost story. As Catriona read a sentence, the tutor would summarize what it meant and define vocabulary words. At the end of my observation that night, the tutor defined the phrase, “dozed off.” Catriona jokingly said, “That’s me!” The full conversation went as follows:

C: That me.

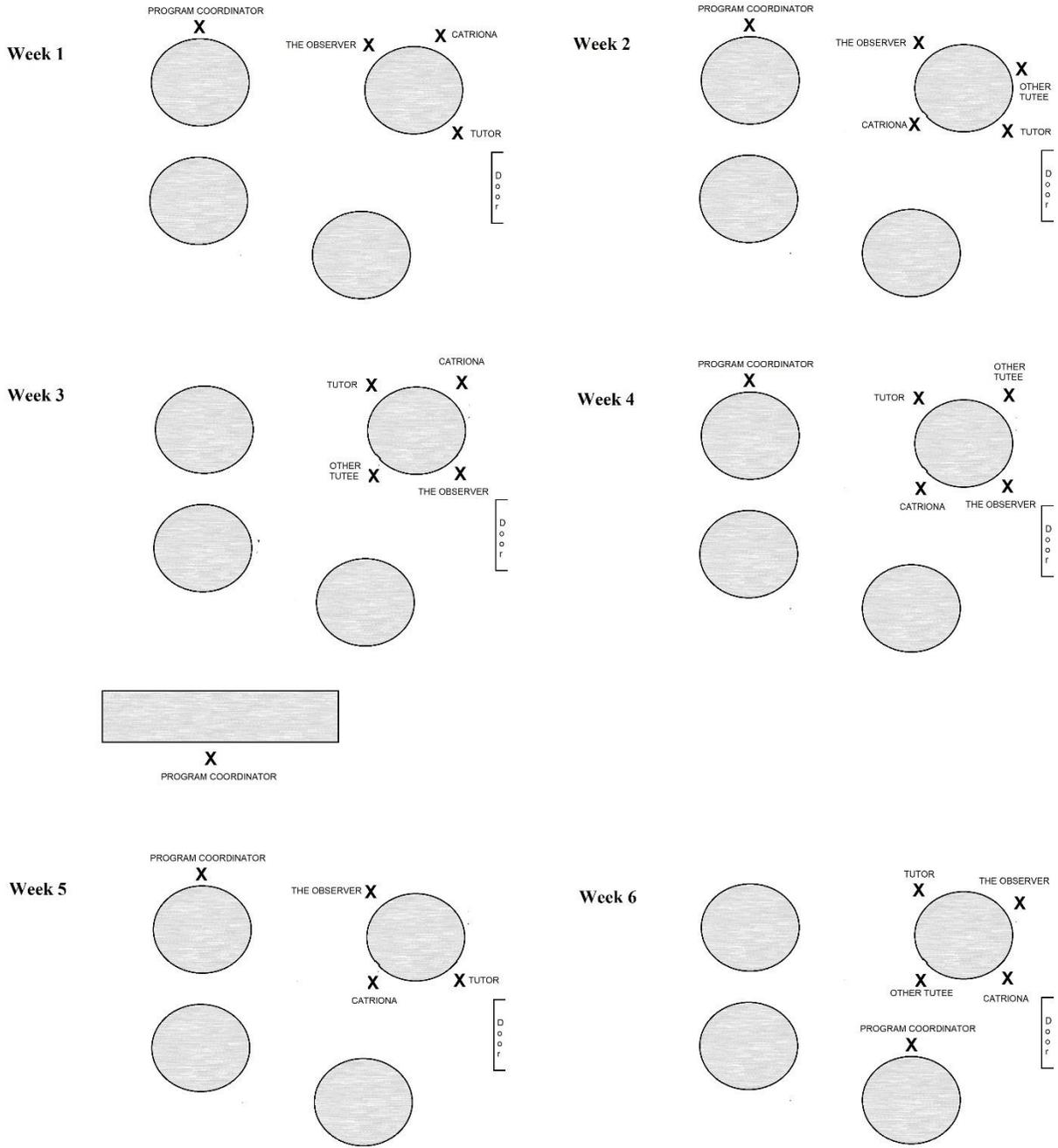
Tutor: Is that you tonight. Are you gonna doze off?

((laughing))

Tutor: I think last week she was gonna doze off on me. She was very tired last week, so she was gonna doze off. Alright, so let’s see.

Just like Camila, Catriona also sat at the same table each session, changing seats depending on if her groupmate was present or not. In Diagram 5.1, Catriona sits at the right side of the room, closest to the door; I, the observer, sat next to Catriona; the tutor usually sat between the two students or beside Catriona, except for the final observation; and the other tutee was present four out of the six total observations.

Diagram 5.1: Catriona’s Assigned Table in the Classroom



5.5 CONCLUSION

Ultimately, Catriona’s literacy journey was full of hard work and dedication. She persevered through political, economic, and cultural changes. Not only could she attend

literacy classes regularly, Catriona had clear literacy goals and could easily express them to others.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the research methods, this study takes the case study approach. By developing two case studies, I was able to more fully explore the literacy journey of my participants and the depth of their literacy experiences in English, Ewe and Spanish, respectively. I conducted participant and stakeholder interviews and participated in classroom observations. In the previous two chapters, I presented the rich details of the two participants' literacy journeys from their early childhood to their sixties and seventies. In this chapter, I will show the parallels and contrasts between findings on the two low-literate, immigrant participants over the age of sixty and between the two participants and those in their supergroups, adult immigrant learners and low-literate learners under the age of sixty, since more research findings have been compiled for those two groups.

This chapter will include cross-case study analysis of the two participants' literacy journeys and their literacy practices in English and in their first languages in response to this study's research questions. This study's framework operationalized the perspective of literacy as a social practice. With the assumption that literacy is a social practice, I further framed the study using the investment model, which accounted for the participants' identity, perceived needs, expectations, and the relationships of power in their social contexts. As stated in the literature review and research methods chapters, this study asked:

1. What are these learners' current and past literacy practices, and in what social contexts did these practices develop?
2. What are the learners' investments in current literacy practices?

Responding to these research questions, the following sections will be divided by each research question and will highlight key themes in the data, such as “Literacy Practices at Home” and “Perceived Needs and Expectations.” After this discussion, I will propose the study’s implications based on the main findings in this study.

6.2 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

As with all case studies, the findings of this study are not sufficient to support mass generalizations about low-literate learners who are over the age of sixty and immigrated to the United States. This research is not statistically representative of this learner population. However, the unique case studies presented in this study are able to provide insight into the types of literacy practices, social contexts, and investments of this learner population that literacy instructors and program directors should be aware of.

In this research, I have drawn on the words of the participants to guide my research findings. I have done my best to stay true to the original intent of the participants during the interviews, incorporating speakers’ pauses, expressions, and gestures to comprehend their meaning rather than on words alone. Naturally, a limitation of this research is my own interpretation of their meaning. However, I performed frequent member checks throughout the interviews and provided each participant with a paper copy of the study prior to final submission to be sure their thoughts were accurately represented, according to the participants themselves.

In this study, I relied on participants’ self-reporting of their literacy practices and journeys, and, as is the case with interview data, this self-reporting may have allowed room for bias or error, such as a lack of retrospective ability or social desirability bias. Although I attempted to make participants comfortable through the use of pseudonyms, familiarity, and professionalism when designing and asking questions, certain parts of participants’ literacy

journeys may have been emotionally uncomfortable or anxiety-provoking for participants to share with me. Additionally, the confinement of the setting of the study to the ESL literacy center could be a related limitation of this study since I could not personally observe participants outside of class and participants may not consider or remember certain literacy practices that they engaged in during the length of the study.

6.3 CURRENT AND PAST LITERACY PRACTICES

In this part of the chapter, I will address the themes in the data that respond to my first research question. The participants described their current and past literacy practices during interviews and were witnessed during classroom observations in some instances. I will discuss their literacy, past and current, in several contexts: home, work, school, and religious.

6.3.1 Literacy Practices at Home

Camila and Catriona shared the absence of two literacy events in their childhood home. Both Camila and Catriona's parents were uneducated. Camila's parents were working-class farmers while Catriona's parents were working-class and in the fishing industry. Camila remembered her parents falling asleep while trying to read the Bible and their belief that church was more worth attending than school. Both participants explained that they were not read bedtime stories because of their parents' literacy levels. This absence contributed to a lack of "familial capital" when Camila and Catriona started literacy education in the formal education setting (Koch, 2011).

A difference in Camila and Catriona's "familial capital" was evident in their childhood education. Camila started formal education at the age of four or five in her family home and would walk and study an hour a day on homework with her cousins, but Catriona started formal education as a teenager in her aunt's home and would work in her uncle's shop after school.

Camila was emotionally supported by the proximity of her family and was given the time to study with her cousins who were older than her outside of school, but Catriona did not have the same familial resources.

Camila and Catriona's current family-related literacy practices differed from those presented from adult immigrant literacy research on parents supporting their children's English homework tasks. Cook (2015) said that supporting homework tasks was the second most common literacy practice in adult Latino's homes. Likewise, Piersma (2013) observed that "literacy brokering" between parents and children happened often at home (p. 74). Because Camila was past the child-rearing stage of life and Catriona did not have children, this literacy practice was not present in their current lives. Catriona did not support anyone with English literacy in her household. Camila described her struggle to help her children in school when she returned to the United States, but at the time of the study, her children were no longer school-age. Neither thought that they could be a tutor helping others learn English despite their years of first language and English literacy education.

Camila's literacy practices at home aligned more with adult immigrant literacy research than Catriona's. Cook (2015) stated that the Latino families' she studied emphasized the importance of quality time and were proud of the bilingual identities. Piersma (2013) found that participants with children in the home engaged in reading books together (p. 72). Camila was proud to share her children's bilingual English-Spanish literacy ability with me during our first interview together. Because Camila lived with her daughter's family, Camila had the opportunity to engage in family literacy practices that Catriona could not. For example, Camila went with her daughter to an English movie to spend time together. Camila described pretending her grandson was her English teacher now that he was in first grade, so one of her current family-related

literacy practices was a way to spend quality time with her grandson. In fact, Camila's main goal was to learn English to better connect with her family, especially her ten grandchildren who were not as comfortable speaking Spanish.

Unsurprisingly, Catriona realized that her home life differed from the family environments of her peers in the class. Without prompting, she commented that she did not have anyone to practice English with at home, and she saw that as a problem. She told me that she was optimistic about her grandchildren living with her soon so that she could practice English with them. Although her home life was different, Catriona's home life did not resemble Finn (2011)'s participant without children who had limited literacy engagement outside of class. Catriona had English books on display in her home as well as books in Ewe, which aligns with Cook's (2015) findings that most adult immigrant learners have books on display proudly at home (p. 63). For Catriona, the books that she bought surround her bed, as she described, in piles. Catriona also daily participated in a online video call at home to read Ewe scripture, which will be discussed further later. Further investigation could be done to understand the alternative types of support that learners like Catriona have or could have when the familial support is not present in their current contexts, such as the support of online communities.

While it is clear that Catriona and Camila made attending ESL literacy instruction a priority, the interviews revealed how Catriona and Camila made their personal literacies a priority. Perry and Homan (2015) discussed the concept of "prioritizing personal literacy," or how much time and/or money learners dedicated to engaging in literacy during their personal time (p. 435). Perry and Homan (2015) observed that the low-literate adult immigrant learners reported "having little time for literacy" (p. 446). Catriona said she could not make time to practice English literacy outside of class, like reading English books or watching English

movies. Instead, Catriona showed a dedication to personal literacy in Ewe by waking up daily at four in the morning to read scripture and participate in her online community. Even though, Camila did report having time to engage in literacy during the length of the study, she explained to me that her retirement eight years prior helped her make time. During our interviews, Camila said that, when she was working, her response to studying English literacy was always “later.” Most importantly, Camila called the time she invested in her education, “my time,” which was her way of emphasizing the priority that she placed on her personal education during her retirement.

In alignment with Finn (2011) and Trommler’s (2019) findings on adult immigrant learners, Catriona used a computer at home and often spoke about her desire to learn keyboarding. Catriona frequently told me that learning keyboarding was “difficult” and that she did not make time to learn how to keyboard. However, she daily would join an online video call to participate in an online community, and she used the application called What’s App, with the auto-correct feature to text on her phone. On the other hand, Camila did not own her own computer or use a computer regularly.

6.3.2 Literacy Practices at Work

In the past, Camila often worked in environments that did not require literacy, especially in English contexts. Camila nannied in an English-speaking home and worked in the fields where speaking was rare and where reading was not required. It was difficult to deduce how much literacy was required in Catriona’s early career, but Catriona did state that she did not use English again in Africa after leaving school in Ghana. At the time of the study, Camila stayed at home alone, cleaning and cooking, or, sometimes during the summer, with her school-age grandkids. She would practice the vocabulary she learned in tutoring when at the grocery store,

which contrasted to her early days nannying in California where she would not leave the house. Similarly, at the time of the study, Catriona worked with CNA staff but did not have time to talk during her shift; however, some English reading is required at her job. Additionally, Catriona received her permit to drive in the United States and always drove to and from work and ESL tutoring.

6.3.3 Literacy Practices at School

Prior to moving to the United States, both Camila and Catriona had a few years of literacy education. Camila described extensive reading practices in her primary school, saying that she would take a Spanish book every week and then perform an oral report on the reading. In middle school, she had in-home tutoring when there was time between harvests. Catriona did not explain much about the types of literacy practices she engaged in while at school in Ghana, but she did state that she read the Bible and attended separate classrooms for the different educational levels.

Both Catriona and Camila engaged in formal literacy practices at Northlake, such as taking standardized literacy tests, writing sentences in response to comprehension questions, and performing intensive reading activities when I observed their tutoring sessions. Camila always connected to her literacy activities in ESL tutoring to personal experience whenever possible, which parallels Street's (2012) autonomous model of literacy. Camila also learned how participate in her education by asking for tutors for clarification and by writing English notes about vocabulary in her personal notebook. Comparatively, Catriona did not talk about her personal life during the tutoring sessions that I observed. The program coordinator had a general idea of Catriona's background, but the tutor did not know Catriona's home country or

educational background until the study interviews started. Catriona would take worksheets home and sometimes would review them, but often Catriona would not.

6.3.4 Religious Literacy Practices

In response to literacy research on religious literacy practices, I have separated out the religious literacy practices of the participants. Cook (2015) reported that adult Latino immigrants incorporate religious literacy practices into their family life. During her childhood, Camila recited oral prayers, but she did not refer to any present religious literacy practices during the study. Correspondingly, Trommler (2019) found that immigrant nuns studied the Bible to practice English literacy. Although Trommler's (2019) finding is unsurprising considering that her participants had a strong religious faith, Perry and Homan's (2015) findings corresponded. Catriona not only read the Bible regularly at home, but she also read the Bible at school. Additionally, Catriona read music to participate in her Ewe church choir back in Togo and in her English church in the United States, and she also read scripture every morning at four in the morning to an online video group.

6.4 KEY INVESTMENTS

In this part of the chapter, I will answer my second research question on learners' investments in current literacy practices. To do so, I will focus on the findings related to the four components of the investment model. First, I will explore participants' perceived needs and their expectations. Then, I will describe participants' literate identities through an analysis of their literacy statements. Before moving forward to the research implications, I will evaluate the power dynamics in participants' social contexts that may have influenced their learning investments.

6.4.1 Perceived needs and expectations

As stated in the literature review chapter, most ESL literacy programs are aware of students' goals for acquiring literacy. Northlake had a standard enrollment form where students listed their goals for attending tutoring. One scholar, Greenberg (2008), categorized typical student goals into categories, including students' family-related goals. Camila's goal for attending literacy tutoring at Northlake was to become closer to her family, specifically her ten grandkids who speak mostly English and her children-in-law. Camila's needs also related to her family: she chose the Northlake church site over the library site based on the drive time for her daughter and the evening time of the tutoring. Conversely, no family-related goals for Catriona were expressed during interviews or observations.

One difference between the two participants' needs and previous research is the participants' need for independence or autonomy. Catriona attained independence by learning how to take the written driver's exam and driving herself to and from tutoring every session. Similarly, Camila told her daughter that she wanted to come to class instead of staying at home since literacy tutoring was her time to socialize outside of her family. The desire for autonomy was evident in their hard-working nature throughout their lives: Camila was a working-mother and Catriona owned her own sewing business.

Sometimes, the curriculum at Northlake did not connect with students' autonomous lives. Camila was retired, so job-skill lessons, such as going back to school for a higher degree or writing a cover letter, were not relevant content even though Piersma (2013) found that job-related literacy activities would be beneficial for younger learners (p. 76). Catriona expressed the need to learn computer literacy, like keyboarding, but Northlake was not able to fund easy access to computers or resources for tutors to teach digital literacy at the time of this study.

6.4.2 Literacy Statements

Participants' literacy statements were documented throughout the study during interviews and observations. A literacy statement provides insight into participants' self-beliefs about their literacy. Perry and Homan (2015) coded speech where preferences or perceptions of literacy were stated as literacy statements (p. 435). For example, during interviews, Catriona stated that she liked reading and thought it was fun. Likewise, Camila stated that she was a curious person, who always tried to learn, and she also stated that she loved to read books.

Looking at low-literate learners' literacy statements, Perry and Homan (2015) concluded that low-literate learners practice literacy in multiple languages but maintain a negative perception of their abilities as readers and writers, writing that "formal schooling—or lack thereof—connected with many participants' negative literacy statements" (p. 447). The literacy statements of Catriona and Camila follow this observed pattern. Camila told me that she learned "only the basic" in primary education, where all levels were taught by one instructor and experience a heavy teacher rotation, despite being able to read and write in Spanish. Despite being able to read, write, and answer all my questions in English, Camila told me she needed "more time" learning at Northlake before she would complete her English literacy tutoring to her satisfaction and be more confident speaking English. In the same way, Catriona emphasized again and again that she was "old" when she started school even though she could already read and write in Ewe before attending British English school in Ghana. She called herself "lazy" when learning the computer despite her frequent use of the computer in her daily life. It is possible that there were more influences on these literacy statements than their prior literacy education.

6.4.3 Power Dynamics

One essential relationship in literacy tutoring was the tutor to student relationship. Tutors were native English speakers who frequently provided negative feedback to students and assigned literacy activities or proctored tests. It is expected that tutors have some influence on their students. Piersma (2013) found that her participants reported literacy needs directly correlated with what instructors corrected students on in the classroom (p. 71). Similarly, Finn (2011) found that tutor encouragement influenced participants' participation in literacy practices (p. 158). During one tutoring session, Camila told her tutor, "I'm not well at speak English." This literacy statement could have been influenced by the high amount of speaking in her tutoring where she was frequently corrected on her grammar usage and pronunciation by tutors. In our final interview, Catriona told me that she did not write well, read quickly, spell, or know grammar well. I saw a clear impact of testing and negative teacher feedback on Catriona's literacy statements listed above. During a twenty-two-minute sample of tutoring, Catriona's spelling and pronunciation was corrected twenty-three times during a read-aloud task with note-taking questions. Unfortunately, this pattern of correction occurred regularly when I observed Catriona practice reading aloud.

Outside of the classroom, political status can affect the investments of students in literacy practices. Despite both being immigrants, Camila and Catriona's journey to the United States widely differed. Catriona received Diversity Visa from the U.S. Embassy while Camila may or may not have been undocumented at different points of her literacy journey. I never asked if Camila had legal citizenship, but she mentioned the difficulty of getting papers and of losing her legal status before returning to the United States.

6.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have discussed the shared and differing literacy practices of two low-literate, adult immigrants throughout their literacy journeys. I started by acknowledging the limitations of the study. Then, I continued by answering each research question respectively. The following conclusion chapter will summarize the findings of this study and discuss the major implications of this study.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The intent of this study was to describe the literacy journeys of two low-literate, immigrant learners over the age of sixty and the current and past literacy practices they engaged in using their first languages and English. This study was grounded in the sociocultural framework, drawing from literacy as a social practice research and Norton's (2013) investment model. Although some literacy practices aligned with literacy research on other adult learners, the participants' descriptions of their literacy journeys foregrounded the different student needs of learners over the age of sixty, such as their need for more relevant content to suite their stage of life and need for social support networks outside of their familial relationships.

This study explored low-literate, immigrant learners' literacy statements. The participants both shared a self-reported love of reading. In contrast, the participants expressed multiple negative literacy statements about themselves during the study observations and interviews, which directly related to their literacy goals. Certain power dynamics, such as the curriculum design and the negative feedback from tutors during lessons, potentially contributed to the participants' negative literacy statements. For example, one participant stated that she could not read quickly and had received low scores on timed assessments for not finishing comprehension questions. She also stated that she could not speak English well and, during observations, had received twenty-three negative corrections from a tutor while reading aloud for twenty-two minutes.

7.2 RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study suggest that further research must continue to explore the literacy journeys of low-literate, immigrant learners over the age of sixty. As discussed in the

literature review chapter, these learners have rarely been included in literacy research up to this point. The exploratory nature of this study brought to light the unique socioeconomic backgrounds, literacy events, and life experiences that learners over the age of sixty bring into the ESL literacy classroom. Learners like those who participated in this study have fascinating stories to share during tutoring sessions. They also have clear perceptions of their needs that affect their investments in ESL literacy. Because of this, researchers must seek out this generation of learners and include their voices in future research.

7.3 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

To start this section, I would like to propose a few ways to improve the ability of tutors and students to experience a return on their investments in English literacy practices. Up to this point, I have not focused on the investments of the tutors; however, it is extremely important to remember that all tutors at Northlake are volunteers. Some have previous ESL teaching experience, but others received limited training at Northlake, due to budget constraints, and then began tutoring for the first time. The unavailability of resources to provide ample professional development throughout a volunteer's tutoring experience is unacceptable. Higher funding for tutor training in ESL literacy centers is vital to the success of the tutors and the students involved. Otherwise, tutors can unknowingly discourage their students by promoting negative literacy statements, as was the case with both Camila and Catriona.

Similarly, a one-size-fits-all curriculum does not account for the nuanced needs and expectations of low-literate, adult immigrants over the age of sixty. It is unreasonable to provide the resources for only one ESL textbook option to state-funded programs. These learners are at a different life stage with different practical needs. While some may require support for literacy practices like applying for government identification, jobs, etc., other students may be engaging

ESL literacy practices for fun, which is reasonable for retirees and those without kids. Curriculum considering low-literate, immigrant students over the age of sixty needs to be developed, and tutors need the knowledge and experience to adapt their current materials to fit the needs of these students.

The major implication of this study pertains to increasing students' participation in English literacy practices. As previously explained in the literature review chapter, previous studies employing the investment model have linked students' investments to their participation in ESL classes. Essentially, investments looks at the ways in which students and tutors both benefit from active participation.

Participants spoke more in English during tutoring sessions when tutors incorporated the participants' outside lives into the lesson. For example, Camila performed far more output when asked to connect the lesson's content to her own life than when asked to explain a concept or answer a display question, in which the tutor already knew the answer. Catriona barely spoke during observations, but she spoke more when describing her personal beliefs and sharing her school experience in Togo with her tutor.

Similarly, tutors may need to draw students' attention to the literacy practices they already engage in during tutoring sessions. For example, Catriona may not view reading English street signs while driving as a literacy practice that she performs quickly. A tutor could easily draw that to her attention and contradict Catriona's negative literacy statement that she cannot read quickly.

Finally, tutoring centers need a way to optimize tutoring sessions for learners like Catriona, who are limited in how they engage English literacy outside of the classroom. To start this process of optimization, more exploratory studies must be performed to find out more about

the literacy contexts and support networks that these learners engage in outside of the classroom. Since Camila had English-speaking family members to engage in English literacy practices with, her English literacy acquisition increased while Catriona's acquisition remained the same. For someone like Catriona, connecting her with an online English community may be a helpful strategy to facilitate her autonomous learning since she readily engages in Ewe literacy practices online.

In conclusion, there are several ways ESL programs, policy makers, and researchers can improve the ability of tutors and students to experience a return on their investments in English literacy practices. This study demonstrated a clear need for the representation of ESL learners with limited literacy over the age of sixty in research and began the process of sharing these learners' literacy journeys. The next step is to continue research on this particular community of ESL learners and to provide them with the resources for success.

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