

RE-ENVISIONING THE GIANTS:
A LONGITUDINAL CASE STUDY
OF ONE ESL LEARNER

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A Thesis

Submitted to

the Graduate Faculty

of Auburn University

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Arts

Auburn, Alabama
May 9, 2009

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Rachel Elizabeth Reed, daughter of Fran W. Reed and Harry Reed, was born October 17, 1983 in Nashville, Tennessee. She graduated from United Christian Academy in Dickson, Tennessee as Valedictorian in 2002. She graduated Summa Cum Laude from Lipscomb University in the fall of 2006 and received a degree of Bachelor of the Arts in English with a double minor in history and Spanish. As an undergraduate, she was highly involved in the Honors Program and worked with several student publications. As a graduate student, Rachel studied composition theory and literacy, focusing on second language writing. She graduated from Auburn University in May 2009 and received a degree of Master of the Arts in English.

THESIS ABSTRACT
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Master of Arts, May 9, 2009
(B.A., Lipscomb University, 2006)

54 Typed Pages

Directed by Kevin Roozen

With the continued focus on building L2 writers' abilities within the context of school, scholarship dealing with what kinds of abilities these writers bring to the classroom has been slower to emerge, leaving us with incomplete portrayals of students' lives. This thesis argues that such work has overlooked second-language learners' ability to employ a host of literate skills. Drawing on a the 'funds of knowledge' framework (Moll and Gonzales) that foregrounds students' out-of-school literate practices, this study employs Moll and Gonzales' work to explore what literate practices ESL students already have and how those skills might be harnessed to make them more active members of the academy. The study suggests that making second language learners active participants in school settings means both acknowledging what

abilities they have but also deliberately shaping activities to involve them in ways that see those skills as being an asset.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must thank Dr. Kevin Roozen for his continued engagement with this project and his encouragement, which kept me going throughout this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Michelle Sidler and Dr. Robin Sabino for teaching me how to be a better writer and researcher. This project would not be possible without Jane who let me see the world through her eyes. I have learned so much from all four of them and appreciate their commitment.

I am also grateful for my family's continued love and support. *A mi madre, siempre te amo.* I would also like to thank Anja Werth for her words of encouragement and Mary Diamond who gave me a start.

Style manual used: MLA

Computer software used: MS Word

Chapter 1: Re-Envisioning the Giants

A Longitudinal Case Study

of One ESL Learner

Because I, a *mestiza*,
Continually walk out of one culture
And into another,
Because I am in all cultures at the same time,
Alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
Me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan
*simultaneamente.*¹

--Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 1597

After completing a three-year study on a second language learner, Ruth Spack calls educators to become more aware of the pressures being placed on ESL students and explains that these learners possess multiple literacies that simply go unacknowledged (“The Acquisition of Academic Literacy”). In response to this treatment, Spack ultimately argues that ESL students should be viewed as active “creators of culture,” (34) advocating that these students be involved in the classroom and society in meaningful ways. Spack’s work then seeks to recognize second language learners as whole persons who possess a broad range of abilities both inside and outside the academy; her study likewise extends the classroom’s walls to configure the world as a space that welcomes all members of society. Such work references a rapidly growing body of scholarship dedicated to exploring second language learners’ academic and non-academic lives. Two

¹ This part can be translated as “Soul between two worlds, three, four. My head hums with that which is contradictory. I am lost within all the voices that speak to me simultaneously” (translation my own).

recent studies, for instance, offer several accounts of how ELL learners mobilize the full array of their literate abilities within the academy to prepare for life beyond graduation. In “Promoting Academic Literacy with Urban Youth through Engaging Hip-Hop Culture,” Ernest Morrell and Jefferey Duncan-Andrade explain how their students’ knowledge of hip-hop unlocks seventeenth century British poetry, by “[providing] students with the awareness and confidence they need to transfer these skills into/onto the literary texts” (90). Furthermore, in “From the ‘Good Kids’ to the ‘Worst’: Representations of English Language Learners across Educational Settings,” Linda Harklau, over a three year period, explores how three international high school students employ a range of skills in their classes and receive positive institutional feedback for such work; however, once these learners matriculate into their chosen colleges or universities, these skills are no longer acknowledged, making these learners appear deficient. Such work underscores the need to look more holistically at second language learners’ abilities and how they employ these skills.

However, scholarship invested in tracing how other ESL undergraduates’ academic and non-academic abilities interanimate each other has been slower to emerge. While second language writing scholarship has continually sought to recognize L2 learners as whole persons, the scholarship that has followed Spack’s call has focused on either student skills or how these students are treated. Such work continually bifurcates these students’ literate lives, not fully realizing Spack’s original vision. In “Cross-Cultural Composition,” Paul Kei Matsuda and Tony Silva designed a composition course

at Purdue that sought to integrate a range of ESL and Native English Speakers² students. Even though the cohort study which emerged from this course found that this environment fostered more cross-cultural interaction and created a more positive environment for both ESL and NES students, this study only examines students in an academic context and consequently continues to fragment their identities. Offering several case studies that deal with how both ESL and NES undergraduate, masters, and doctoral students negotiate the demands of academic writing, Chris Casanave explains one “should look for clues as to how pieces and layers interact and shift over time, influenced by particular settings and demands as well as by genre conventions and an individual’s sense of what it means to be a professional” (130); Casanave then reads students’ actions as worth of observation and analysis. Because such work concentrates on activity within the academy, it offers a limited glimpse into the range of abilities these learners possess.

When this body of scholarship has recognized students’ out-of-school literacies, it has portrayed these skills in a manner that either reinforces negative assumptions about second language learners or does not look holistically at their lives. For instance, in “Connecting the Texts of Their Lives,” Wendy Maloney proposes a course that tries to harness students’ lived experiences, but labels these students as being “at risk.” While Maloney deals with a highly political context (CUNY), such work suggests that these learners are in some way deficient. Ruth Collins work comes closer to more fully utilizing student abilities by seeking to make them active in their communities, yet her course focuses on a limited population of learners (Generation 1.5) to the point that her

² For the rest of the thesis, I will refer to Native English Speakers as “NES”

findings may not be transferable to a broader range of ESL learners (“Building Academic Literacy from Student Strength”). To date, in “Engaging Literacy: A Biliterate Student’s Composing Practices Beyond School,” Youngjoo Yi has conducted the only study to examine non-academic abilities by focusing on an ESL student’s out-of-school composing practices; however, the study catalogs these practices without showing how they relate/interact with other skills. While these studies attempt to draw on students’ richly literate lives, they tend to provide incomplete or even negative portrayals of these students, leaving Ruth Spack’s call largely unanswered.

The second body of scholarship to respond to Spack continually calls for more ethical treatment of these learners, but has not been followed by work that seeks to achieve such ends. In “On the Ethical Treatment of ESL Writers,” Tony Silva, issuing one of the earliest attempts to draw awareness to such treatment, explains teachers should “recognize students as intelligent human beings and unique individuals with their own views and agendas” (156). Ann Johns, continuing Silva’s argument, explains students should be allowed to use their knowledge since “it is only through drawing from what they know or can investigate with confidence that students can thoroughly understand the language, concepts and discipline” (“Linguistic Diversity” 139). While such work begins to fulfill part of Spack’s call, the resulting studies do not attend to the full magnitude of it—to this point, the scholarship continues to offer a limited glimpse of the abilities these students possess and how those skills are used.

This scholarship underscores the need for deeper and more complete accounts of what practices students possess. In order to enrich our understanding of ESL students so

that we as educators can help these students in a manner that recognizes who they are as unique individuals, this thesis builds on a longitudinal case study of Jane,³ a Taiwanese student who has lived in the United States for a year, during which time she has been primarily focused on taking classes in a large southeastern university's Intensive English Program (IEP). This program focuses on grammar, conversation, and developing the necessary skills for reaching a high score on the TOEFL test. Jane moved to the United States in order "to live abroad" and to become a professional, "since this might be [her] last chance" to do so.⁴ As the third of four children born to a working-class Taiwanese family living in a city on the outskirts of Taichung, Taiwan, Jane audited graduate education courses and, at one point, wanted to earn a masters degree in adult education or ELL studies.

To "enrich her life," Jane traveled and immersed herself in different cultures. Starting in high school, Jane began to travel to a number of different countries—eventually visiting the Czech Republic, parts of South America, Spain, Singapore, South Korea, Mauritius, and finally the United States. Commenting on her experience, Jane says,

I liked to watch the Travel Channel [and see places like] Spain, Czech Republic, Mauritius. I think I would like to go to Europe, to Italy and to other countries. It is different [to] look from [the] outside in. When I went to South Korea, it is similar to my country because people look the same. In Europe, people are more relaxed, and they do not worry. The signs are different. The trees are different. The landscape is different. Every time when I go somewhere, I find something different. Like when we went to Las Vegas. I want to find out what is exactly different. When I studied, my parents paid for me to travel. After [I got a] job, I

³ In keeping with the terms of the IRB protocol, a pseudonym has been used in place of the co-researcher's name.

⁴ Her responses to interview questions have been edited: pauses and mis-starts have been removed and various punctuation marks and capital letters have been added in order to help convey Jane's responses.

traveled once a year. If I can [earn] enough money, I would like to see [more places]. If I have a degree, I can enrich my life.

During her time in the U.S., she traveled to a number of different places ranging from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Las Vegas, Nevada. This long history of travel indicates someone who can navigate a number of different diverse circumstances and is globally savvy. Not surprisingly, her global focus would shape what Jane writes about and directed many of our conversations together.

While traveling to these diverse locations, Jane began to see how the ability to speak English could enrich her life by allowing her the independence to explore these places. Jane notes,

I learned English was more important. [On the trips], I joined the travel group-- usually, they were very hurried. They take you to a lot of different places, and you take a picture. And they tell you a bit of history. You don't really get something from that. You just go there and take a picture. I hope one day I can travel by myself and show I am independent and can do something. If I can speak English, I can choose what I want and stay all day.

Her educational background also reflects her desire to broaden and enhance her linguistic repertoire. While completing her B.A. in Spanish, Jane took several travel English courses and often recruited her classmates to the same ends. In addition to possessing these language skills, Jane also speaks several different Chinese dialects and Taiwanese. To date, Jane is the only member of her family to earn a college degree and to work outside the town where her family lives. Her interest in travel coupled with her broad range of linguistic abilities highlight the number of literacies Jane employs. Such a portraiture illuminates the abilities she possesses rather than the skills she may lack.

In order to continue building her abilities and her cultural understanding, Jane has continually immersed herself in a range of communities both at home and abroad. For example, she attended church regularly during her time in Taiwan and the U.S. While she primarily participated in primary social church activities in Taiwan, Jane joined a number of different Bible study groups in the United States in order to understand how texts such as the Bible have shaped certain U.S. ideas and practices. Such participation reflects Jane's ability to immerse herself in a group of people in an attempt to understand how that group functions.

While church served as space in which she could increase her cultural knowledge, Jane also participated in her University's Conversation Partner's Program⁵ in an attempt to enhance her English skills.⁶ Over the course of her year-long stay, Jane had two conversation partners, of which I was one. She met with us for an hour or more one time a week and sometimes twice a week. During the summer months (May, June, and July), we met at least twice a week for an hour. Such participation suggests that Jane has a number of abilities and support systems at her disposal and that she employs these abilities in complex ways in order to realize her own definition of what it means to be literate—being able to understand a range of different communities as well as being able to speak English more fluently.

⁵ This program seeks to pair international students with native speakers in the area in order to help international students become more fluent in their use of spoken English.

⁶ Jane scheduled every meeting we had and often contacted me via email to arrange meeting times and places. She also informally planned what we would do at these meetings. At times, she wanted to focus on her writing and devised prompts that directed her ideas. If she had IEP coursework due, Jane would schedule additional meetings to have her work reviewed. Such participations suggests that Jane was an active member of the Conversation Partners Program.

The data collected over the course of one year consisted of attending regular weekly Conversation Partner Program sessions and tutoring sessions with Jane. During these informal sessions, I took extensive notes of what she said and how she characterized her experiences here and abroad. Data include personal observations, a number of Jane's academic and non-academic writing samples, and documentation of what strategies she employed in her writing. We spent a total of 35 hours in weekly meetings and tutoring sessions and logged a total of 9 hours in formal tape recorded interviews. The data also encompasses the notes Jane made about the writing exercises/responses discussed in tutoring. To augment this data, I occasionally asked more direct questions in an interview-like style and took note of what questions Jane asked in return. During the collection process, I asked questions that would construct a more complete image of Jane by employing the same manner that Casanave does in *Writing Games*. Casanave uses Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot's idea of "portraiture" in order to "pay acute attention to detail" and to "[bring] readers into setting and into people's lives in richly detailed and humanistic ways" (33-4). Using this method, I am able to represent Jane as a person who navigates new and often difficult channels such as the academy or living in a new culture rather than letting the data serve as a static representation of who she is. Furthermore, Casanave wishes to bring her own experience to light and "[includes herself] rather openly as a character [. . .] because the stories [. . .] are as much [hers] as they are [her] informants'" (32). In like fashion, I do not want to appear as the invisible, "all-powerful" author who hovers above the text in an attempt to gain some useful bit of information; rather, Jane and I formed a type of dialogic

community which depended upon both of our voices: both of us were learners as we were also teachers.

In response to this data, I argue that Jane uses skills in complex, strategic methods in order to broaden her understanding of U.S. culture as well as enhance her own skills as a writer and thinker. Jane believes being literate involves but is not limited to “being able to communicate, being able to be a good time manager, and being able to work with people.” Moreover, part of Jane’s tactics involve reappropriating different communities in order to reach her literacy definition, meeting both her short and long-term goals. Thus it is her developing English abilities which compliment what her background has already enabled her to do, and what emerges is a student who asserts power over her situation.

My thinking grounds itself in Moll and Gonzales’ funds of knowledge framework. Moll and Gonzales approach literacy learning by assuming that “[the teacher’s role] is to enable and guide activities that involve students as thoughtful (and literate) learners in socially and academically meaningful tasks” (“Lessons from Research” 157). They argue that students come to the classroom with a host of skills which simply go unacknowledged and believe that a theory, which they have termed the “funds of knowledge,” should be employed to see what skills the students have. They specifically define the funds of knowledge “as those historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (“Lessons from Research” 160). This theory allows us to explore not only who these students are as people but also what kinds of activities and

practices have shaped them into being the people they are today. In essence, this framework allows us to dispel the notion that ESL learners are “at-risk”⁷ or “basic writers.” Rather than viewing learners as empty vessels to be filled and emphasizing the abilities they lack, the funds-of-knowledge approach assumes that learners possess an array of linguistic and literate resources and invites teachers to explore how they might be used in the classroom.

Further illuminating what knowledge is, Moll and Gonzales explain, “The funds of knowledge of a community are not a laundry list of immutable cultural traits, but rather are historically contingent, emergent within relations of power, and not necessarily equally distributed” (*Funds of Knowledge* 25). In essence, this definition attends to the wealth of resources students possess outside the classroom, allowing for a fuller realization of Spack’s call.

The “funds of knowledge” depend upon layers of Vygotskian theory which advocate a more holistic look at literate abilities and configure learning as a social, cultural activity. In *Vygotsky and Education: Instructional Implications and Applications of Socio-Historical Psychology*, Moll explains

Vygotsky introduced a more expansive notion of the zone of proximal development. [. . .] [H]e highlighted the importance of everyday activities and concepts in providing meaning, the ‘conceptual fabric’ for the development of schooled concepts. To make schooling significant one must go beyond the classroom walls, beyond empty verbalisms; school knowledge grows into the analysis of the everyday. (10)

⁷ Wendy Maloney uses this term in her essay, “Connecting the Texts of Their Lives to Academic Literacy: Creating Success for At-Risk First-Year College Students,” which shows ELL students as being minority students who suffer from a lack of educational investment. While recognizing that Maloney deals with an intensely political situation (CUNY), the term also attaches a negative stigma to ELL students. The term is used with some frequency in the literature that focuses on issues concerning academic literacy among language-minority students.

Concomitant with this view of Vygotskian theory, Moll and Gonzales go beyond academic spaces to explore what practices exist and how these practices inform what learners gain and skills they employ. In the same way that “Vygotsky rejected artificial divisions and abstractions and instead on what we would call a holistic approach” (6), Moll and Gonzales’ funds of knowledge approach seeks to examine “common” household and cultural practices to understand how these abilities can be used as a basis for developing school ones. Such a perspective values a fluid look at the range of abilities one possesses. As Moll and Gonzales would explain, “[T]hese cultural tools and practices—some which are stable, and some which change across generations—are always implicated in how one thinks and develops” (*Funds of Knowledge* 18).

Moll and Gonzales’ perspective allows us to return the focus to the student in an attempt to see what skills students have. Moll and Gonzales report two direct implications of their work. First, their theory “[debunks] [. . .] ideas of working-class, language-minority households as lacking worthwhile knowledge and experiences” (“Lessons from Research” 161). Such notions allow researchers to explore a broader range of abilities since it characterizes all of these experiences as being worthy of analysis. Second, Moll and Gonzales further explain that their theory allows us to “[understand] the concept of culture from a more dynamic, ‘processual’ view, not as a group of personality traits, folk celebrations, foods, or artifacts, but as the lived practices and knowledge of students and their families” (“Lessons from Research” 162). It invites researchers to collect a broader range of data that seeks to represent a person’s entire literate life, how literacies emerge within different contexts, and foregrounds these

abilities rather than the skills they lack. This kind of framework affords a more holistic approach to examining students' lives in a manner that views their entire range of abilities as important. Methodologically, this framework offers the kind of "ecological" approach that Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, and Papper call for in their recent *CCC* article.⁸

The second chapter traces Jane's activity in the Conversation Partner's Program and suggests that she reappropriates the program to meet her own objectives. It also traces the life of an essay she wrote to suggest that its content is informed by Jane's rich life experience both in the U.S. and in Taiwan. The third chapter follows her continued activity in church to understand how she navigates this community. The data suggests that she reappropriates this community to enhance her understanding of U.S culture as well as prepare for the TOEFL test. The final chapter discusses what this study suggests for future research as well as teaching practices.

⁸ Fleckenstein et al. suggest that researchers need to devise new ways of collecting and interpreting data that take into account a subject's complexity and suggest that viewing the research process through their metaphor "metaphoric harmony" (390) will allow researchers to do so. They explain, "At stake in a discipline's metaphors of research process is not just academic knowledge making that accrues cultural capital for individual, institution, and discipline. At stake is a way of living, a way of being, that fosters and supports the emergence of humane worlds and citizenry" (413).

Chapter 2: Coffee House Chats A Focus on the Conversation Partner's Program

While taking classes in the Intensive English Program and preparing to take the TOEFL exam, Jane wrote to the Director of the Conversation Partner's Program and asked for two conversation partners, of which I was one. In this program, the English and ESL speakers set their own schedule, usually meeting in informal settings to chat or do activities such as watch a movie. While she participated in a number of different tutoring organizations to enhance her literate abilities, Jane characterizes her experience in these programs as follows:

I know several students when they go back [to China] they still go to the Academy School. For English, [they only study for] tests [like the] TOEFL, GMAT, GRE. They have all kinds of listening—all kinds of Chinese writing and music classes. But, anything you learn in music or school is to get a higher grade. It is private, and you need to pay. That is why I think America is so good, you can go to study partners, and it is free. I can have a Conversation partner. There is the Writing Center and it is all free.

Her response indicates that she views these programs as a means to foreground her abilities, contrasting the various out-of-school resources to what she experienced in the Academy School. The distinction she draws reveals that: whereas the academy school focused on grades, the U.S. based groups tend to emphasize improving one's skills. Secondly, while students must pay to attend the academy school, they can use the same U.S. resources Jane did for "free."

Jane specifically attended the Conversation Partner's Program to "improve her English and to connect with and English speaker and know their way of life." In a later interview, she remarks,

I think it is a way to contact with the local people or contact with the local student. Anyway, I think it is good to participate in as many activities as you can in America—because it is a chance. . . You can connect with local people and try to see differences or learn something different or to know their custom or their culture.

As with her travel interests, Jane's desire to learn about different cultures and what makes them unique comes to the forefront.

During our first meeting, Jane came armed with a set of TOEFL books and a list of questions she was eager to ask me, her new conversation partner. During the first five minutes of our conversation, Jane not only established a weekly schedule for us but also asked me the following questions: "Where did you graduate?" "What was your major?" "What do you want to do in the future?" As we sat outside a hall festively decorated for the Chinese New Year, Jane, who was helping to organize the event, kept switching from English to her native Taiwanese language to give direction as needed. As the party began, she greeted the hosts and the servers and, in Chinese, introduced me to them. I was initially told Jane was attending a "level three"⁹ Listening and Speaking class; however, the first meeting revealed a more richly literate life than what the label suggested.

⁹ Meaning she was an intermediate speaker. The Intensive English Program curriculum defines a Level 3 speaker as one who can "conduct five-minute conversations or interviews with a native speaker on general topics, summarize the information obtained, and organize it according to main ideas and supporting details."

During the year Jane and I were conversation partners, a richer, more complex portraiture would emerge. As Margaret Syverson suggests in *The Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition*, writing—and other communicative practices—should be more broadly situated to recognize what other factors shape a given activity. Syverson’s work illuminates how abilities imbricate each other. Likewise, Jane not only brought a wealth of resources to bear on her participation in the Conversation Partner’s Program, but also reappropriated the “official” resources of this program to meet her own needs. In other words, Jane’s lived experiences—ranging from her work experience to her travels to her church participation—shaped how she navigated the Conversation Partner’s Program as she would use it to foreground her writing as well as explore different cultures.

Remarking on her decision to focus on writing, Jane remarks,

At the beginning we just talk[ed], then I said, “Why don’t we practice writing”. At the beginning, I came to America to talk, I needed to know what people were saying: can I understand or not? So we tried to talk. After that, I [thought], “Why don’t we try other things?”—because I am a person who likes to try different things. Also I think that even you can talk or communicate it doesn’t mean that it is good enough: Can I write something different—not just a diary and not just what I say? For writing, I need to read something or think about something and then just write it down.

The strategy of using the program to learn about cultures as well as to focus on her writing can be traced back to her life experiences in Taiwan. Both of these uses suggest that she not only possess a richly literate life that extends beyond the academy but also that she took active steps to achieve her own definition of what it means to be literate; in Jane’s words, “knowledge must be useful and serve a purpose.” The texts Jane voluntarily created provide an opportunity to explore her literate life, allowing her spoken and written words to characterize her own experience.

The Conversation Partner's Program posits English language learning as being non-academic, fun, and focused on building practical skills. It neither has a set curriculum nor advertises itself as a tutoring program; however, Jane reappropriated the program to focus on her academic and non-academic writing. She more specifically decided what she wanted to write about and what tools should be employed while composing. Jane designed these tasks as well as carried them out—I then served as a resource who could provide feedback on her writing and offer insights to U.S. culture. In terms of the non-academic texts produced during the time we were conversation partners, Jane wrote a CV, a business resume, four statements of purposes, two short-stories, two informal essays, ten TOEFL essays, a personal journal, and a host of emails she wrote to prospective graduate schools—most of which she revised several times. She also carried a 3x5 white spiraled notebook which contained a list of words, some written in English and some in Chinese, that she heard on either the radio or the television. In terms of her school work, Jane brought in a short story and two speeches to have “checked.” The short story she wrote was awarded the highest mark in her class for her creativity and execution. Jane revised a majority of these texts, asked me to review them again, and retyped these texts, making the Conversation Partner's Program highly textual.

While there exists a noticeable difference between how many academic and non-academic texts Jane wrote and although the list of genres she engaged are not exhaustive, they begin to illustrate Jane's richly literate, highly textual life. To explore this life further, I will trace the ecology of one essay she wrote, “Fried Oysters,” using other texts she wrote to inform my reading of it. Thus, a broader body of her writing guides my

analysis and allows me to draw connections from her work. As with the other documents she wrote, Jane designed a prompt that would focus on an area she wanted to learn more about; for this essay, she decided to focus on cooking since she wanted to learn more words that described how to prepare food. Her essay, “Fried Oysters” sprang from that prompt.

On the surface, her essay appears to be a piece of writing that gives an account of how to make a fried oyster. While her prose could be studied for things such as error, the essay does have a certain level of rhetorical sophistication: it places the fried oyster in a larger cultural context, draws from her rich experience in the Taiwan Night Markets, and is meant to educate her readers as well as herself. Reflecting on why she chose to write this particular essay, Jane explains, “At that time, I thought that I can write about something to build up by vocabulary. But, I didn’t know what field to write about. I liked to cook. So I thought I would introduce you to a favorite dish in Taiwan.” In light of this and other experiences, the text then becomes a complex, multi-layered, multi-purposed entity which reveals a richly literate life.

Below is the prompt and her essay.

Begin by explaining what your favorite dish is from Taiwan. Then explain what you want your readers to know about this dish. You could tell us how it is prepared, what is unique about it, why you like it, or what we should know about it. Don't feel as if you have to answer all of these questions. They are supposed to help give your writing a focus.

As we know, Taiwan is a country that is famous for night markets. These collections of street stalls, sidewalk vendors and small canteens are a major part of the Taiwanese social scene. However, what is the most popular traditional snacks? The answer is oyster omelet and it's also my favorite dish. One of the reason is I love oyster, another one is it is made up of crunchy and soft. You definitely have to try it, and you will have the experience special and memorable.

Now, let's me tell you the recipe of how to cook the oyster omelet. The main ingredients you need are oysters, eggs, potato flours which is scrabbled with water, and shredded cabbages. First of all, clean oysters in salted water and dry oysters with a paper towel. Second, put some oil in the pan. Then, put the dry oysters to fry until medium well and put the potato flour which is scrabbled with water. Continue cooking it until it becomes coagulate and crystalloid. Later you can place the eggs and shredded cabbages and cook it until it is well done. Finally, Sprinkle the sweet and a little salt sauces when you eat it.

Can you find it in other countries? Maybe you can find some dishes that are similar, but you can't find this unique oyster omelet in other places. Next time when you go to Taiwan, don't forget to try it. I guarantee you will love it as I do.

Figure 1: "Fried Oysters" (Jane)

From the opening line, Jane sets the essay around the night markets in Taiwan, a place “where [she] went often during college.” While the Night Market section could be overlooked as a merely rhetorical move on Jane’s part, the section dedicated to the Night Markets reveals a lifelong involvement¹⁰ in an important Taiwanese custom. When asked why she began the essay in this manner, Jane responded,

I started to write about it because in America you never find a place like that. Americans close a store early or on time. I have been to Europe and the same thing happened—It was close to time for the place to close, and they asked us to leave. It is quite weird—Chinese people always want to make money. If you knock on the door [at a restaurant in China], they will always open [it]. We have stores [that are open] at night—even the bookstore or pharmacy—any kind of store. I went to Night Market a lot to look around. I will go to the book store to see what book is popular. I am very curious. Sometimes that isn’t very good. I work in two places one is [Ti Min]. It is a city. There are a lot of night markets there.

If you live in a capital city, they have a night market every day. If you live in a small town, they will have it once or twice a week. When I was a college student, I liked to go every week. I liked to walk around to see people, what is new, what people are doing, and what people are selling.

For Jane, the Night Market is a place not only to discover what is new but also to observe what people are doing. Such activity speaks to the breadth of experiences Jane possesses and characterizes her as being a culturally savvy person. Using such experience as a means to discuss fried oysters gives her more authorial ethos because she has accumulated a lifetime of experiences in this context; consequently, it makes her an expert on the subject. Jane places value on being able to locate characteristics that define a culture and explain why those characteristics are important. Jane situates her primary topic in its cultural context in order to highlight the dish’s importance. Her interview

¹⁰ In a later interview, Jane explained that “When [she] was young, [her] mother would take [them] to the night market.”

response foregrounds Jane's out-of-school experiences and reveal a person who is naturally curious and is a cultural anthropologist.

Moreover, bringing together such information in a manner that educates her reading audience as well as herself (the essay improved her vocabulary) requires a good deal of commitment and engagement. Such demands require her to synthesize information and implicate a range of resources to complete the piece. She draws on her experiences in the Night Markets, her experiences in Europe and the U.S., a Chinese-English dictionary, knowledge of her reading audience, and a computer. Each one of these requires different skills and adds layers of complexity to what might be thought of as a homogenous text.

Jane's prolonged history in the Taiwanese cultural milieu and that such experience becomes foregrounded in her writing underscores Moll and Gonzales' notion that learners have vast life experiences which they can use at their disposal. As seen from the opening lines of her essay, Jane uses her life-long experience in the Night Markets to structure her writing as well as to situate "fried oysters" in a larger, cultural context. Using this experience gives her a position of authority within the essay: her knowledge of this scene not only affords her subject material but also allows her to speak insightfully on the issue. Jane's ability to mobilize her life experience demonstrates that the funds of knowledge are more than "a laundry list" of skills (*Funds of Knowledge* 25), but are important events which tacitly shape what one thinks and consequently does.

This enaction¹¹ further illuminates the portraiture rendered of Jane's writing: rather being

¹¹ I am using Margaret Syverson's definition of enaction in *Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition*. She specifically defines it as "the principle that knowledge is the result of an ongoing interpretation that

a homogenous product, her prose embodies not only the life experiences she possesses but also the knowledge afforded by those events. Her prose can then be seen as a complex, heterogeneous entity which asks for appreciation and contemplation.

While her ability to place fried oysters in a larger context allows her to discuss the dish from different vantage points, Jane also structures her writing to be clear and concise. Through the next five lines, Jane narrows the focus to discuss oysters and ultimately how they are prepared. Jane writes,

These collections of street stalls, sidewalk vendors and small canteens are a major part of the Taiwanese social scene. However, what is the most popular traditional snacks? The answer is oyster omelet and it's also my favorite dish. One of the reason is I love oyster, another one is it is made up of crunchy and soft. You definitely have to try it, and you will have the experience special and memorable.

By using a question and signal words such as “however,” Jane demonstrates a level of finesse in her writing: she can not only discuss a subject but can skillfully place that subject within its broader context without losing focus. She also employs several new vocabulary words, such as “vendors,” “canteens,” and “crunchy.” Thus, the essay’s content acts as a support system that allows her to learn new words and her to place those words in proper context.

Granted, the wording in some of Jane’s sentences interferes with the text’s readability, still Jane’s writing clearly details how to make a fried oyster. Her directions tell readers what kinds of ingredients are needed, how to cook the oysters, and how to add garnish. Moreover, Jane consistently uses articles correctly, which is an accomplishment, and also uses signal such as “first,” “second,” “later,” and so on to

emerges through *activities* and *experiences* situated in specific environments” (13). She cites vision as an example: “Vision is *enacted*—what we see is brought forth (emerges) through the coordination of our physical structure and our cognitive and physical activity” (15).

signal the process she articulates. While these words may be considered commonplace in academic prose, Jane understands that the information needs to be structured and can effectively organize it in a more Euro-Western style of writing. This point illustrates Jane's ability to write a linear essay in English with a certain level of rhetorical sophistication.

The layers that Jane attempts to give her essay complicate each other as she balances educating her audience with employing new vocabulary. While Jane's writing depends upon vivid vocabulary words to help make meaning, words such as "coagulate" and "crystalloid" do not fit either the content she describes or the character of her writing: her writing engages the reader through entertaining, academic prose whereas the later of these two words sound more scientific in nature. In the second paragraph, the content alone did not provide sufficient scaffolding to help Jane use new vocabulary words as well as she did in the first one. These complications reveal the vocabulary selection process Jane undergoes while writing but also demonstrates what occurs while trying to negotiate competing demands.

While she already designed the text to educate her audience and allow her to practice writing, Jane assigned the "Fried Oyster" essay a tertiary purpose, using it as a springboard for a discussion about what people in the U.S. eat. In one of our Conversation Partner meetings, Jane asked me, "What do you think about canned foods?" "Did your mother allow you to eat them as a child?" "Do you think they are healthy?" After hearing that most U.S. citizens believe any sort of vegetable to be healthy, she said, "You mean you don't believe you will turn into a mummy?" Jane's interest in writing

the “Fried Oyster” essay extended beyond merely meeting the requirements of the assignment: it became a means to educate others and herself using a number of different avenues. After reading her essay her responses to interview questions, I find that not only does Jane have something to say, but she puts forth a great deal of effort to do even small tasks well and provides herself with opportunities to communicate in better, clearer ways.

While Jane’s life experience can be explicitly seen in her decision to foreground night markets and her favorite food, her knowledge of writing form and her ability to repurpose activities further shape how she navigates this writing task. What Jane learned about writing in school in Taiwan shapes how she structures her essay and organizes her information. This acts as an invisible guide that molds her form as she conveys her ideas. Secondly, her move to use the Conversation Partner’s Program to foreground her writing as well as to make her texts multipurpose¹² mirrors the tactics she employed as an office assistant. As Moll and Gonzales’ work suggest, her life experiences tacitly inform her actions as well as give her certain kinds of knowledge. This rich presence continually illuminates how richly literate her life is.

The Academy School: The Usefulness of Form

I discovered during an interview with Jane, the whole form of the “Fried Oyster” essay derives its structure from a tactic Jane used in the Taiwanese Academy School. In one of our meetings, Jane wrote an essay that explores the Academy School and how this experience differs from U.S. school experiences. When describing what kind of writing strategies she employs in both settings, Jane explains,

¹² I did not help Jane make her texts multipurposed, but tried to carefully answer her questions.

When I was a college student—I was not an English Department student, we needed to take English classes. The writing in Chinese and English is different. Before I told you. Usually in Chinese writing we just write three paragraphs—you put the most important thing you want to tell people in the conclusion. The first paragraph is how you make a connection—one that touches your topic. You put main idea in second paragraph. Third has the most important idea.

The structure of “Fried Oysters” follows the form Jane describes: it has three paragraphs, with most of the content falling into the middle paragraph. The middle paragraph has three points. The essay then not only depends upon her personal knowledge of the Taiwan Night Markets and fried oysters but also utilizes the writing she did in college.

When I asked about how she went about writing the “Fried Oyster” essay, Jane more specifically describes her process in the following ways:

First, I tell you [what] Taiwan is famous for—it is famous for the night markets. (You can buy some snack or something like that.) Then I started to tell you about the omelet—it is my favorite dish. And [I] tell you about the reason the second paragraph. I started to tell you how to make it and what kind of ingredients you need. Because we need a conclusion in this [the third] paragraph, I wanted to show [how it is] different from other [dishes].

Her “Fried Oyster” essay matches the form she used in college/her previous schooling, Jane also confirms this correlation by explaining that she intentionally used this form. Jane also explains that the third paragraph contains the most important information. This underscores that Jane’s primary concern with locating and articulating differences between cultures. Moreover, her usage of this form suggests a link between her previous schooling and the work she does outside of school, suggesting a correlation between a number of different skills in a number of different settings over the course of time.

In “Contrastive Rhetoric in Context: A Dynamic Model of L2 Writing,” Paul Kei Matsuda addresses the static model of L2 writing which attributes errors in ESL writing

to the writer's background. Suggesting a more dynamic model of writing that takes background into account, Matsuda writes, "What is important is not to arrive at a clear definition of the background of the writer and the reader, but to understand that their backgrounds are complex and flexible—varying from person to person and from time to time—and that the context of writing is also dynamic" (248). Matsuda highlights the need to view ESL writing as being heterogeneous and to understand that different events in second language learners' backgrounds emerge in the work they produce and in whatever setting they compose. Jane's background then forms a layer that continues to influence her writing and shows to what extent this experience informs her actions.

Her life experiences further illuminate Moll and Gonzales' notion that skills accumulate over time and inform later practices. Her prose also illuminates what abilities ESL learners have outside academic contexts and that these skills can be mobilized in different settings and be repurposed for different objectives. In a Vygotskian sense, her schooling practices work with her non-school activities to inform who she is and what she does: that is, her participation in different communities interanimate each other and help her navigate a range of tasks. Rather than parceling out these abilities—thereby segmenting her literate life—these skills should be holistically studied in order to better understand how Jane employs her range of literate practices in her writing or otherwise.

The Workforce: An Economic Perspective

While tracing the ecology of the "Fried Oyster" essay, one might overlook Jane's work experience in that it seems removed from her academic writing and other literate practices. However, her work experience informs how she navigated the programs: she

saw English as a way to improve her chances of employment and often assigned multiple purposes to her writing and activities to achieve such ends. For example, when responding to why she participated in different tutoring organizations, Jane kept mentioning that these programs were “free,” viewing them from a business/economics lens. Her own definition of literacy begins to also emerge from this context: Jane describes knowledge as something that “must be useful and serve a purpose.” In this manner, Jane’s out-of-school experiences continually inform her actions and how she approaches her actions.

Reflecting on her work experience and why she emphasizes enhancing her English skills, Jane explains,

Before I was an administrative assistant, and they would tell me what to do. But at that time, I spend a lot of time to read English to help myself to learn English. I think I never looked down at my job, but still some people do. I worried that I didn’t have a strength because anyone could have [my job]. I think about having something that [I] can compete with. [With that], nobody can take my place. Until now, I am not quite sure what field I am going into. On my way there, I need a little bit of time and training. In five years, I can be a person who has a strength point and can be proud to tell other people about it. I don’t worry about what they thought about me.

The various practices of Jane’s life, both past and present, continually inform what she does and what ends she achieves. Furthermore, Jane places a good deal of importance on being able to acquire certain kinds of skills—a perspective formed by her experience in an administrative position: her role as an administrative assistant becomes a key factor in why she diligently studies English and why she engages in the kinds of communities that she does. Under a different theoretical framework, such activity would go either unnoticed or be discounted.

In other Conversation Partner meetings, Jane wanted to create a CV ¹³ and a later business resume. Her CV ¹⁴ further illuminates her literate life by showing what positions she has held and what tasks these jobs have asked of her. Her “extended CV” indicates Jane completed a B.A. in Spanish at Princeton University in Goforth, Taiwan and later worked for two internationally renowned software companies (CV). At Sintia Intelligence Systems, Jane was a General Affairs Administrator, and at Corporation and Norway Microelectronics, she was a secretary to the Vice President. In these companies, Jane occupied a number of positions that required her to have a wide variety of skills. In one of her positions, she was responsible for recruiting company members to invest money, investing those funds, and being able to communicate with a wide range of people all over the city.

During this time, she also completed various courses to become certified. Her training at the “Professional Secretaries and Administrators Association” and training at the “Joaquin Training Center” illustrate Jane’s continual need to improve how she functioned in her various positions (CV). Since Jane’s roles demand the ability to complete jobs efficiently and effectively, her previous work experience may contribute to her belief that knowledge must be “useful” and “must serve a purpose.” From this perspective, individual tasks can be seen as the tiny movements which turn the cogs of larger wheels, causing that machine to work smoothly and productively. This view then does not disparage small actions or little deeds since these spark initial action. This

¹³ This CV was also constructed during one of our Conversation Partner sessions.

¹⁴ See Figure 2 below

perspective then transforms how we see work: be it academic or otherwise, work is the combined force of many individual movements which may go unnoticed.

This understanding continued to frame Jane's thinking: when she moved to the United States, her definition expanded to include acquiring those communication skills necessary to make her competitive in the United States job market. A question which Jane continually asks herself is, "Why would someone hire me over a native speaker?" However while this view may seem quite narrow and ESL scholars might argue that learning English requires adept knowledge of not only the language but the various situations in which that language applies,¹⁵ this question becomes a medium through which Jane can achieve her ultimate goal of having a good job and having a "happy life" as she often refers to it.

In this manner, her question is quite practical since she has to build the necessary skills in order to gain employment; however, it can also be viewed as representing on of the small tasks which help her achieve her larger goal since she cannot stay in the United States and earn her teaching certificate if she does not have the physical resources necessary to meet such ends. It is this framework which helps make sense of how Jane negotiates her voices and the academy, which can be notoriously difficult to navigate due

¹⁵ For instance, in her 2008 CCCC presentation, Min-Zhan Lu argued that L2 learners need to have a deeper, richer understanding of English language and know how to employ it in a range of settings. She also suggested that institutions place too much importance on the benefits of having language skills. This perspective places primary importance on learning English for its own sake rather than viewing its importance through association. While it is important to have a more comprehensive knowledge and appreciation for English languages (or whatever language is being studied), Jane's experiences highlight the pressing need to communicate in English well or otherwise. Moreover, for Jane, knowing English means being able to live in the United States where she believes she has the best chance to get a job. Through this lens, being able to understand English as quickly as she means being able to survive (in some sense of the word).

to its policies and procedures. Yet, it also demonstrates how her background continually influences and informs what she does.

While the ‘funds of knowledge’ approach does afford us new perspective on ESL student’s literate lives, Jane’s reappropriation of the content of her English classes and our conversation sessions in an attempt to realize her definition of literacy begins to eclipse what portraiture Moll and Gonzalez’s framework can render: while they continually look for ways to use students’ skills as a bridge for developing other literacies, Jane’s literacies were already actively engaging the academic and non-academic communities in which she participates.

At first glance, Jane’s “Fried Oyster” essay appears to be a homogenous text that may be riddled with error. Yet upon closer inspection, her essay speaks to her rich life experience as well as her ability to foregrounds such events to make her a stronger writer. While the style speaks to her previous education’s influence, Jane repurposes this form for her own ends: it becomes a means for her to educate her audience and herself. Moreover, Jane’s ability to repurpose the Conversation Partner’s Program for her own ends demonstrates a great deal of ability and determination.

Throughout her essay, Jane not only attempts to employ new vocabulary words, but her writing has a literary quality that unites knowledge of her culture and with nuances of style. Jane adopts an authoritative tone: this point becomes increasingly more significant when we realize that she has only been engaged in consistent English writing for the past five months. We should read her writing to see what kinds of choices she makes and what ideas might have shaped those decisions.

Moreover, Jane's determination and persistence can be viewed as a type of literacy as well: neither the IEP teachers nor I pushed Jane to participate to the level she did. Jane initiated her participation in the Conversation Partner's Program as well the numerous texts she created or engaged. Such motivation speaks to her ability to navigate and to continue navigating a range of different tasks: for Jane, this ability (her motivation) suggests that learning English is an internal process and intimates that her participation assumes an added layer of depth (that is, she is not a person who merely goes to class—she actively seeks communities to engage and participates in them as much as she can). This portraiture foregrounds the skills Jane possesses rather than the abilities she may lack.

Jane's CV

Volunteer Experience:

YMCA Summer Camp
Directive Volunteer, summer ****

Certificate and Conference Presentations:

Times Professional Secretaries and Administrators Association
Professional Secretary and Administrative Management, ****

Joaquin Training Center
Professional Administrator of generally affairs management, ****

Atlantic University's Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning
Sharing Best Practices, *****

Organizations:

Secretary Association of industries in science parks
Member, *****

Caring Association of Norway Company
Executive Secretary, *****

Flute Club of Norway Company
Class Leader, *****

Phi Alta Te
Conversation Pater, *****-Present

Education:

Studying abroad at the IEP, Atlantic University, *****-Present

Princeton University, BA, *****
Goforth, Taiwan
Major: Spanish
G.P.A.: 3.14

Employment:

Min How pharmacy
Sales Assistant, *****

Sintia Intelligence Systems Corp.
Generally Affair Administrator, *****

Norway Microelectronics Corp.
Vice-President Secretary, *****

Figure 2: Jane's CV (the names of the Companies as well as the years Jane was employed have been scrubbed in keeping with the IRB protocol)

Chapter 3: Reappropriating the Amen Corner

A Focus on Literate Activity in the Church

During her year-long stay in the U.S., Jane participated in a number of programs and communities—as she would say—to “improve [her] English” and give her “practice, practice, practice.” These mantras resurfaced every time Jane and I met, and they motivated her to participate in everything from First Harvest Food Bank Drives to church. The coffee shop where Jane and I met on a weekly basis bordered an office complex which housed the Church of the Seven Hills.¹⁶ Jane, usually sporting a faded blue t-shirt bearing the church’s name and carrying an Abercrombie and Fitch bag which served as her purse often greeted or was greeted by someone from the church—they were usually recent college graduates who worked at one of the church’s offices.

As I quickly learned over the numerous interviews and meetings we had throughout the year, church was an important center for Jane. It was a place where she could not only improve her listening and speaking skills but where she could also begin to discover part of U.S. life and culture. More importantly, I argue that Jane used church as a vehicle for gaining knowledge and exploring different aspects of culture, but that her participation in such institutions represents a dense, complex web of intersections where literate abilities continually merge and re-emerge—her participation in these communities not only influences what she understands but also what she writes and how

¹⁶ In keeping with the IRB protocol, the church’s name will remain anonymous.

she goes about writing. Jane's literate abilities do not act as random, unconnected layers that may or may not surface. Rather these literacies are constantly in motion— influencing the tiniest, most seemingly insignificant idea or decision she made.

The Church of the Seven Hills, which Jane consistently attended throughout her time in the U.S., is one of the largest churches in the city where Jane lived. The church has two services every Sunday (a 9:15 and an 11:15 service) and had numerous programs and classes where people either study or get involved in a church activity. While the town as a whole contains many churches where Jane could have attended, this church stands out as markedly different; although the other churches are affiliated with a particular denomination or sometimes specific subgroup within a denomination, Church of the Seven Hills does not claim any affiliation and whose greeting could read as “a place for everybody.” The Church of the Seven Hills, a mega-church, has four other locations throughout the state in which Jane lives. All of these different churches share one primary pastor, one church name, and one style of worship. The branch where Jane attended is located within a strip mall that houses various restaurants and retailers; the members, as Jane reports, tend to be college students or recent college graduates.

The Church of the Seven Hills is a highly textual, highly literate place which offers its members and visitors numerous spaces to participate in the church's life. The pastor circulates throughout the three area locations, tapes his sermon, and then that sermon is broadcast via satellite to the other locations. According to Jane, the service begins as an image of a digital clock is projected on the screen; this clock counts down to as the praise band will take the stage to lead such contemporary songs such as “Awesome

is the Lord, Most High,” “Come and Worship,” and “Amazing Love.” Since there are no hymnals, the words are broadcast over the screen to help the worshipers follow the music; the words that are to be sung become highlighted so that they can participate without distraction. The minister starts to speak as the music fades and the countdown flashes “0.” Audience members are given outlines so that they can follow along throughout the message. These outlines, printed on 5x7 manila paper with holes punched on the left side, give specific information about that service (date, location, and speaker) and list the speaker’s main and sub points. Blank spaces replace some of those words so that participants can follow along and complete the outline.¹⁷ During communion, the grape juice is contained in a small, circular plastic container with the wafer resting on top--itself encased in a thin layer of plastic with the words “This is my body, which has been broken for you: Take, eat: do this in remembrance of me” surrounding in a dark red ink to represent the blood of Christ.

For someone wanting to improve his or her listening and speaking skills, this type of environment provides several opportunities for continued growth. When asked why she chose this particular church, Jane explains,

I go to the [Church of the Seven Hills]. They have a pastor but he is in another place. So we go there and just see the screen. They take the film on that day. And they tape the topic at 8 at one place and take it to another place—I go to the 11 o’ clock service. At the beginning, I think to practice English, have an opportunity to talk with people. I went there just for practicing English.

For Jane, church represents a space in which she can not only practice her English but also talk with other English speakers. Her participation in church mirrors how she used the Conversation Partner’s Program in that both are focused on a central self-determined,

¹⁷ These outlines are also available via the church’s website.

self-assigned goal. In consequence, church becomes a reappropriated space since for Jane its primary purpose is educational and cultural. The way that the music is displayed would allow everyone to follow what is being said such whereas using a hymnal where one has to not only recognize the words but also know the value of different notes to know how long those notes are to be sung. In this manner, the song service would give Jane guidance both on how to sing the songs but also how long to hold the words being sung.

The sermon outlines provide a means of reference as Jane listens to the service, focusing her attention to the specific words and phrases the minister says and allowing her to record the message. In this manner, Jane centers her attention on capturing the spoken messages, transforming the sermon into ideas that can be written down, processed, and analyzed later. Here writing serves as a means for Jane to know what takes place in the church; however, this kind of writing is not necessarily interactive: Jane, in a sense, almost acts like a transcriber or recorder of what happens. In this context she becomes a recipient of information, but does not necessarily reproduce what she has heard.

The immediate portraiture gained from this part of Jane's life reveals someone who repeatedly and purposefully engages in highly literate, highly textual environments. To participate in the Church of the Seven Hill's service, one has to know how to navigate a range of different tasks (reading, listening and speaking, and writing), reinforcing Moll and Gonzales' notion that the environments in which learners participate outside of the context of school are highly skilled, demanding places. This transforms the image we see

of Jane: she is someone who joins different communities to not only learn about those communities but also to use those spaces to help improve her knowledge of English and her ability to reproduce spoken and written language. In this manner, the institutions serve her purposes, and she becomes a person who negotiates numerous complex avenues for her own ends.

However, the church does not merely represent a space where Jane learns more English. Jane also attended church to learn something about U.S. culture; this goal continually re-emerged throughout the interviews. Jane explains,

Before I sat in the adult education class, they talk about the church and the Bible. They said almost in the old days, every family have the Bible and that is where they learn how to read. That is how their education started. I think, "Oh! So the Bible is important. Almost every one knows about it." At least I should know about it. I started to go to Bible class. The class also said that the people go there to have social activity. I want to go to church every week.

For Jane, the Bible has importance in that it reveals something about U.S. life. This view transforms what role religious texts such as the Bible play: rather than being a tool that instructs people how to live, it shows what people value. The Bible becomes a living artifact to how people educate themselves and operate within society. Coming to know why people act as they do motivated Jane to understand more of what the Bible says. Moreover, Jane attended church because of the social activities it afforded: it was a place where she could interact with numerous native English speakers in a one-on-one setting.

Jane effectively and creatively re-envisioned participation in this kind of community: she made the Bible and church about discovering parts of U.S. life from a source she saw highly influential on mainstream society. Jane not only reshapes these communities to serve her purposes but also chooses how she will participate in them.

This reinforces Moll and Gonzales' claim that students possess a multitude of literate abilities; however, her activity goes beyond what Moll and Gonzales describe: her activities form a complex web of actions that involve reappropriating different communities or resources for her own ends.

Such activity does confirm a broader Vygotskian idea that people can internalize language or other literate practices and deploy them for their own uses. In *Vygotsky and Education*, Moll provides an illustration in which an elementary school teacher tries to teach her students how to analyze a text. These students were able to not only grasp the teacher's objective but also deploy such skills and repurpose these abilities by using them for different tasks. Moll writes, "They had made this knowledge their own and were able to 'reapply' this knowledge in various activities: to shape their own writing and their peers' writing, to make sense of text, or simply to derive more enjoyment from literacy" (*Vygotsky and Education* 14). In a similar fashion, Jane understands a range of different communities, participate in them, and also refashions them to realize her own purposes. Recognizing such ability changes how we view Jane: she possesses a great deal of literate abilities and can internalize different practices rather than merely being an "at-risk" student.

Within the church body, Jane participates in a number of programs to improve her English. Her participation within these groups can be described as nothing less than deliberate, determined, and focused. In terms of the services attended, Jane describes her participation as:

I focus on what he [the minister] says and some of the new vocabulary. Usually, I just try get the main idea. The reason I go there is I like people—I think it is

popular or something. You go to museum to see art. It is one activity I can join here. If I can go, I will go. Sometimes I cannot go.

To understand the main idea, Jane uses the outlines provided by the church, which requires attention, a keen listening ear and a ready pencil. The outlines reproduce the precise order of words from the sermon so that the worship participants know what words to place in the outline and where they should go. While it could be argued that she merely performs a mechanical task in that she writes what she hears and does not have to interpret the recorded information, the way Jane navigates the task, upon closer inspection, demands fuller, richer participation. The sermon and the outlines based on it, in effect, unite listening and writing, two needed literate abilities. This combination of skills further requires Jane to negotiate a whole host of activities: she must pay attention to the screen (the visual), listen carefully to what is heard (the auditory), synthesize and process this information (cognitive), and record (kinesthetic) the necessary parts into the outline. Additionally, she writes down new words so that she can look them up, keeping all of these outlines in a binder at home for later perusal. In essence, these outlines form a continually growing textual body of knowledge that Jane can both explore and use to document a community's life over a period of time.

As Jane became aware of the activities afforded by the church, she began to participate on a deeper level and often went to small group worship services. While she attended the Church of the Seven Hills consistently and exclusively throughout her time in the U.S., Jane changed small groups several times and finally joined a small group composed of friends she knew from the university courses she also attended. As Jane changed groups, the demographics changed drastically: the first group(s) tended to be

primarily Caucasians and were people Jane had never met; the last group had a range of international people were most of them were from Asian countries (Southeast Asian at that) and were people Jane knew.

However Jane participated to learn more about the Bible from a cultural studies perspective; Jane's objective profoundly clashed with the church's/small group's aims.

Jane's words illuminate this conflict:

One of my friends took me to a small group to worship God. Later, I went but the experience was not good. I think it was too strong. I think they think they worship strongly to keep the evil away. I don't want to go there anymore. So I think I just want to go to Church and Bible study. But, don't push me to be a Christian. I don't mind connecting with that religion, but if you keep telling something—I begin to think about your purpose. I think it is too much for me.

In contrast to the other communities which lent themselves towards improving one's English skills, the last small group she attended viewed her participation in terms of their own ideology. In consequence, the church and Jane interpreted her participation in fundamentally different ways and assigned different purposes and goals for that participation, creating a conflict between the two.

Jane's participation in this community illuminates more of her literate life: she is a student, as she a worker and a church participant, as she is a novice cultural anthropologist. Such activity highlights Moll and Gonzales' Vygotskian roots in that it demonstrates a broader range of activity that informs what Jane does. One of her ultimate goals is to improve her listening and speaking skills, and to achieve such ends, Jane seeks input from native speakers in a variety of settings. These resources form a dense web of places and tasks that Jane continually navigates. Such activity underscores Vygotsky's idea that social places act to shape what a person learns, and that while

school does contribute to such learning, it is not privileged in this forefront. In terms of looking at finite spaces like school, Vygotsky writes,

When one approaches the problem of thinking and speech by decomposing it into its elements, one adopts the strategy of the man who resorts to the decomposition of water into hydrogen and oxygen in his search for a scientific explanation of the characteristics of water in its capacity to extinguish fire . . . This man will discover, to his chagrin, that hydrogen burns and oxygen sustains combustion. He will never succeed in explaining the characteristics of the whole by analyzing the characteristics of its elements. (qtd. in *Vygotsky and Education* 6)

Thus, activities should be understood in relation to the host of the broader range of experiences and abilities so that a fuller, more literate portraiture can be more readily achieved.

Jane's church experience emerged in her writing as she prepared for the TOEFL test and wrote for fun. Core Christian¹⁸ ideas (such as salvation and an anthropomorphic view of the Divine) began to surface in her later writings; while this rhetoric would give her tools to express her ideas, it would often complicate what she tried to communicate. More specifically, she would try to represent concepts specific to her cultural experience in Taiwan with Christian-based rhetoric. When commenting on this idea, Jane explains,

When I went to church, I had the opportunity to talk with others—to know how to contact with Americans. So I just go there to know some new people or you know to practice my English. Church helped me with my writing a little. I think church helped me to learn how to act or what is the good manner or custom of the local people. Writing is different –because I think if you want to write a good article or thesis or anything you need to know a lot of words or [have] a good sentence or something. [. . .] Sometime I can speak or pronounce a word, but I cannot spell it. I need to check it on the internet again.

Her use of church to aid her writing not only demonstrates an overlap of literate abilities but also makes what is visible on the page more complex. Upon first glance, Jane's

¹⁸ Granted not every Christian community holds to these ideas

writing communicates a given idea, but is complicated by parts that do not seem to fit. While those parts could be interpreted as feeble attempt to articulate her thoughts, they represent her participation from the communities in which she participates. This perspective then changes how her writing is perceived: rather than seeing an ESL writer who struggles to communicate her thoughts, we see one who pulls from a range of different literate activities to improve her English skills as well as her understanding of part of U.S. culture.

“Lucky God”: A Focus on Church and Culture

In preparation to take the TOEFL exam, Jane responded to a series of Longman¹⁹ prompts as well as prompts she found in the internet. One of those prompts reads “‘When people succeed, it is because of hard work. Luck has nothing to do with success.’ Do you agree or disagree with the quotation above? Use reasons and specific examples to support your answer.” In terms of this specific prompt, Jane notes,

I think those topics make me think about life, to make me think about something that [has] really happened. If I never look at this topic or not prepare for the TOEFL, I won't think about these kinds of things. I will try to write it down and find the reason. This one is a good topic.

Throughout her essay she focused on what it means to be successful and what factors contribute to that success. However, she would use more religious rhetoric to demonstrate what she gained from her experiences in Taiwan.

In a prompt that places ideas surrounding how to be successful in conversation with what it means to work hard, Jane continually references God in some manner, often depending on the phrase “Lucky God.” While this may seem out of place, particularly

¹⁹ A well-known, recognized publisher of TOEFL preparation materials.

for something meant to prepare her to take a standardized test (which favors a logical, argumentative style), her decision to write the essay in this manner makes more sense when placed in the context of Jane's church participation and her cultural background.

While observing Jane's church, the Benediction prayer read, "God, thank you for loving me and for sending your only son for me. Today I put you first; you are my Lord and Savior. Forgive me for doing things my way. We need the power of you so that we can walk in holiness." The sermon ended with the hope that "He [God] would guide you to all truth." From the church's standpoint, God is a being who has power and can transform people's lives. While this view is certainly not new to Christian organizations, the Church of the Seven Hills focuses on God's power or as they put it "the power of you" who is for the "empowerment of believers" so that they can be "set free from death." While the lines spoken at Jane's church may not seem significant, they do illuminate the tendency to envision the Divine through a certain perspective. Certainly, the God that figures in Jane's essay reflects the idea that God is a power entity that can influence people.

As the writing continues, Jane's rhetoric also mirrors a central Christian verse. In the third paragraph, Jane writes, "Remember, God close this door for you, and He will open another one for you too." Her line mirrors the New Testament passage which essentially conveys the same message: Luke 9: 9-10 reads, "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened" (Harper Collins Study Bible 1786). The

verse also envisions God as a powerful being who can provide opportunities as well as take them away, further highlighting the image of God as portrayed by the Church of the Seven Hills. In addition, her last line, “You need miracle to let everything you need to happen [at] the same time” also speaks to the same idea represented in the New Testament passage: it depends upon an external source bringing everything together at the right moment and is something that an individual cannot do. Even though these brief references could be the result of using a translator/dictionary/thesaurus, they highlight the Christian influences that her writing takes.

When describing people like Jane who have a host of skills that often do not get acknowledged, Moll and Gonzales assert that “[t]hese are people living, working, thinking, worrying, and caring. In the course of their lives, as individuals and as a group, they constitute households that have generated and accumulated a variety of funds of knowledge that are the intellectual residues of their activities” (*Funds of Knowledge*, x). For Moll and Gonzales, literate abilities do not form a discrete set of skills that can be employed in certain circumstances. Rather experiences in different literate communities tacitly shape what one thinks and believes as well as the various ways in which that person acts. Thus, the experiences of one’s life form a unique body of knowledge that reemerges as a person encounters different settings and demands. Jane’s church experience then becomes part of a larger body of knowledge she accumulates as she participates in different communities and assumes different roles. Her church participation influences what she thinks about and consequently what she also writes

about. In Vygotskian terms, looking at social settings such as these allow the “hidden processes visible” (*Vygotsky and Education* 5).

While key religious components figure in her writing, Jane uses them to communicate concepts rooted in her cultural experience. In a later interview, Jane explains what the “Lucky God” means. She describes how she wrote the essay as,

I don't know how to say it, because in your culture, you don't have this. In our culture, lucky god will help you to be successful also devil or bad god will cause you to fall down or everything you did is not good or will lead to bad results. Because I think I am a lucky girl, I appreciate everybody and everything around me. I become more positive. But I think luck is not always there if you don't treasure it. Maybe I am here. And it is over there. Even though you think you are lucky, it is not the food you can live on. Now I need to do something else not just depend on being lucky, and I will be fine. I need to study hard and have good English skills. Even when I am old and not lucky, I will have a skill.

Since there is no U.S. equivalent to what Jane is describing, the language of the church can aid her in describing what she tries to articulate. The concepts she presents both in her interview as well as in her essay itself all possess the same characteristics: something that is powerful beyond an individual's control. As with the “Fried Oysters” essay, cultural differences become a central focus in this essay.

Jane's response further illuminates the importance she places on having good English skills. For her, having the ability to speak English well not only allows her to have a secure future but it also empowers her to achieve what she wants. To be fortunate, Jane believes one has to be young, positive minded, and subservient to someone else's control. Interestingly enough, possessing the ability to speak English removes her from a lifestyle and larger forces that may keep her at a disadvantage. As seen throughout her

writing, her cultural experiences both here and abroad continually inform what she writes and how she writes it.

Jane participates in a number of different organizations such as the Conversation Partner's Program, church, and Bible study. Gloria Anzaldua characterizes these relationships as "no longer be[ing] made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. [. . .] I will overcome the tradition of silence" (1588). Jane's ability to employ a multiplicity of voices, although some of them maintain a privileged position in society, enables her to participate in different social settings, allowing her to overcome circumstances which may keep her silent. These voices illuminate the portraiture rendered of Jane: she is more than merely being an ESL student since she has a host of literate practices. Her knowledge of English and the ways she chooses to develop it make her a part of a broader range of communities, thereby giving her more voices with which to communicate.

Jane articulates this experience in the following response:

I think I am really lucky girl. I don't think I have a special skill until now. But after I graduated, I met a lot of good people. And they help me, and I learned something from them. I get into a good company. There a lot of things happened. I earned money, and I accepted the money; I came here and I received a lot of help from others. Until now, I think my life is not bad. The point is I think I am lucky. Before when I was a secretary, I joined the secretary association. From that time, I started to think I am lucky. [I will give you an example] about money, some people work very hard, but they don't have the chance. If you want to earn the money, God will help. Time is important—help from God help from others is important. The place, time, people, or place, Everything gets together and you have the chance to be better. Some people work very hard and they do not have the chance. If I don't have the chance to go to Norway [a company where she worked], I wouldn't have the chance to get money and I wouldn't have the chance to come here.

In the same vein as Anzaldua, Jane views her experiences as working together to bring her to a certain point. In her response, Jane sees her role as a secretary as being crucial to where she is today. In terms of her literate practices, all of her roles equip her with different skills that help her pursue the kind of life she desires.

Such activity underscore one of Moll and Gonzales' central principles. In *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*, Moll and Gonzales suggest that “[t]he concept of *funds of knowledge* is based on a simple principle: People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (Preface, ix-x). Jane’s view that she is “lucky” is rooted in her life experiences—and these experiences equip her with certain kinds of knowledge that inform her perception of both the world and herself. These different knowledges demonstrate that she is a literate person who engages in a range of literate activities, each one foregrounding different skill sets.

Appendix B:

“When people succeed, it is because of hard work. Luck has nothing to do with success?” Do you agree or disagree with the quotation above? Use specific reasons and examples to explain your position.

Why can make people succeed? Ability, positive attitude, opportunity, and help from other people. Those are the basic succeed components you need. First, you need to work hard to develop a special ability. Then, you wait for an opportunity to improve yourself. Of course, you definitely need be luckier than other people. So, you will get the chance to be succeed. Therefore, I disagree with luck has nothing to do with success.

Everybody wants lucky God always on his or her side. However, how to attract the lucky God to be your side? You need to show that you are the worth one to be succeed. Let’s observe those success people, you will find everyone is a hard worker. They fight for their lives. They develop their abilities and wait for their timmy. They won’t give up every chance they get. They know what they want and insist their desires. Those are the reasons you can be luckier than others and the first step to be succeed.

Is it possible that you are the lucky one all the time? I don’t think so. That’s why life is so interesting and exciting. Sometime you are on the top, but sometime you are down. Meanwhile, no matter in what kind of situations you will be, there is always something you can learn from it. For instance, you lost your job. How can you know there is a better job waiting for you? You should be positive. Smiling and waving your hand to the lucky God to show that you are the one beside him. It will be closer to be succeed person. Remember, God close this door for you, and He will open another one for you too.

How can a person success by himself? We need people to support us, to be our mentor to help us. Think about: where is your people? You need your friends and your family, especially when the day you succeed. Or You won’t be happy and the lucky one. Treasure everyone is around you!

Some people work hard all of their life and waiting for their opportunities to be succeed. Maybe it’ll come soon or take a long time, or even you will miss the chance when it comes. You need miracle to let every thing you need to happen on the same time. People succeed, it is because of their hard work, positive attitude, and their support. Moreover, luck is important too. It just likes salt making a meal more delicious.

Figure 3: Jane’s “Lucky God” essay

Chapter 4 Re-Envisioning the Giants

In his concluding remarks to *ESL Composition Tales, Reflections on Teaching* Paul Kei Matsuda explains that while building on the work of giants,²⁰ we as educators must also seek to become giants ourselves since the work of including students in meaningful ways is an ever present need. He writes,

Even when we trace the paths created by these giants—seeing the same scenery they saw and making some of the same wrong turns they made—we will have to discover for ourselves what we know and where we are going. We will eventually reach some of the same conclusions: that teaching is a complex business, that we need to be critical and reflective, that we will continue to face the same challenges that we faced when we began, and that we nevertheless have to continue to walk forward as these giants so clearly have done. And we will see that we have to create this knowledge for ourselves. It cannot simply be handed down to us. When we come to these realizations, we will have reinvented ourselves as giants. And we will see farther and know more because we are seeing through the eyes of giants, not from their shoulders. The nature of *becoming* is that, in part, we also must start from scratch, although we have the tales of the giants to guide us in the process. We must all become giants ourselves. Each of us. (169-70)

To begin becoming those giants, part of the task involves continuing to envision ESL learners as whole persons. Throughout the interviews and Conversation Partner sessions, it became evident to me that Jane is a highly literate person who engages in a number of complex tasks in order to achieve her definition of what it means to be literate. Her actions illustrate the need for educators and researchers to look more broadly at the communities and the literate practices L2 learners engage. This understanding reinforces

²⁰ Those who contributed first to building ESL studies as a field

Moll and Gonzales notion that non-academic spaces are rich and can be formative in one's literate development.

Furthermore, we as educators should realize that NNES come to our classrooms with their own objectives, many of which have been shaped by their previous experiences. Jane's participation in the Conversation Partner's Program can be seen as either a recreation or implementation of the Academy School. Her move to recreate this community suggests that she negotiates the academy in manner that continually serves her needs and helps her realize what she thinks it means to be literate. This implementation blends her skills gleaned and revealed in our conversation sessions with what she learns in her Intensive English Program courses: she uses the Conversation Partner's Program as a means for discovering cultural nuances from the perspective of a United States citizen and seeks to bolster her knowledge of the English language in the IEP courses. Thus, her lived experiences, such as those in the Academy school, continue to shape how she acts and what kinds of skills Jane values. Moreover, from these actions, literacy learning/the classroom becomes a geopolitical space in which, while English skills are improved, Jane became more aware of the nuance of English language and United States culture.

Building on the work of giants also involves designing activities and assignments that allow L2 learners to use the full breadth of their literate abilities. The "Fried Oyster" prompt does reflect Moll and Gonzales' idea that using students' skills can help them perform better at academic tasks. For Jane, the prompt had three specific purposes: learning vocabulary, education her readers, and improving her writing skills. The essay

meets her needs of being useful since it accomplishes numerous tasks simultaneously: it is a small task which helps to accomplish larger more significant tasks. Such work highlights the need to see second language learners as literate persons who possess a range of skills and to facilitate opportunities to further enhance their skills.

While Jane has had to continually manage specific literate tasks such as the TOEFL test, this paper has not intended to focus on such interactions, though it should be noted that relying on limited assessments of students' abilities may, and in Jane's case does, render an incomplete portraiture of their lives and the skills that they possess. Further articulating this idea, Spack notes that the TOEFL scores did not forecast how well Yuko negotiated her classes en route to getting her bachelor's degree and did not reveal what kinds of strategies she employed. While this finding could inspire numerous responses, the larger issue encompasses how to help international students make the most of their educational experience. If this idea is the case, then we should also take into account what abilities students have and provide them with adequate resources for develop those skills.

To continue providing second language learners with projects that foreground their skills as well as viewing at them as whole persons, we need to continue looking longitudinally at them and the various communities in which they participate. Jane's participation in the Conversation Partners' Program and her church illustrate that she was able to reappropriate these communities in a manner that met her needs. Such activity reveals a more complex portraiture of her literate life as well as how her abilities interanimate each other. Longitudinally following learners like her may reveal even

more activity and how this activity changes or emerges in different contexts and for different purposes. This kind of scholarship would enrich our understanding of ESL learners as literate persons.

As reflected by my experience with Jane, students have a host of abilities which they employ in complex ways in order to achieve the ends they desire. Thus it becomes important to see what students want to do and equip them with the skills necessary for maintaining and participating in such a life. Second language learners should be seen as people who can be empowered to shape culture and become active and important members of society. Likewise, literacy learning should be defined as an activity that recognizes ESL students as persons already possessing a range of valuable abilities. Once a broader, more holistic view of literacy was established not only did it become apparent that Jane had a number of skills at her disposal but also that she used them to achieve her own definition of literacy. In light of students like Jane who continually strive to become a part of conversation and who use a multiplicity of voices that can enrich our understanding of cultures and ideas, we must also continually recognize our student's ability to become giants as well.

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