

assignments, and opportunities exist for both parents and children to read, write, and respond together in their common language. When this occurs, parents know that they have made a contribution through their unique perspectives and experiences.” (p.152)

Meet Tania, Jessica and Luis-Case study of three students

Tania Castañeda comes from a very strong family with a sense of pride about its cultural identity. The researcher had worked with the mother before in a series of family literacy classes and was impressed with her exuberant personality and passion for life. Tania is a completely different personality from her mother – quiet, reserved, observant but with an unexpectedly wry sense of humor. In fact, this “picaresque” side of Tania made its appearance frequently in her writing and was especially delicious because of her cool outer image.

Tania started out with a positive attitude toward writing. She considered herself to be a good writer with good ideas. What changed for her during the course of the year was that she got a better handle on style and on writing as a craft as opposed to a spontaneous act. Another change was that she came to the realization that there were stories all around her and that many of the best stories she loved to read had started with some real-life experience for the author. She became a collector and connoisseur of family stories by the time we finished our year together. The last week of literacy she informed the author that she was keeping a notebook to jot down stories her mother told her in order to work on them later.

Tania in many ways exemplified the pinnacle of what the author had hoped to

accomplish with this project. She was way ahead of many of the other students in part because of the rich storytelling tradition in her home and her natural love for such stories. Many of the other students also were exposed to a rich oral tradition, but Tania was fascinated by these stories and truly appreciated them. Through the explicit instruction during writers' workshop she honed her skill as an author. The researcher observed her incorporate new ideas about good beginnings, use of rich vocabulary, and suspenseful pacing very consciously after writing conferences or class lessons on writing techniques. Her first narrative for the Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) project started out:

Many years ago my grandmother Cruz was walking on a hillside very, very peacefully as on any other day. When my grandma had nearly reached the village a spirit appeared to her. The first thing my grandma asked the spirit was "Are you from this world, or from the next?" "The other world" replied the spirit. "What is it that you want?" asked my grandma. And the spirit answered "Only a pair of candles." Afterward she asked the spirit "When did you die?" and it answered eight days ago. Then my grandma asked, "And what else?" and the spirit grabbed her by the neck and my grandmother couldn't talk for a long time after.

Later, she wrote about a time she told a lie to her cousin:

One very sunny day, around eight o'clock in the morning. I had breakfast. I put on my green Hello Kitty jacket. All was going well until I stepped out of the house. I was dangerous outside of my house. I headed over to get my cousin Joel. On the way over I was thinking about a trick I could play on him. Ding! The lightbulb went on!

While the first few lines are stilted, she is attempting to set the scene and build up some suspense leading into the story. This particular story had organizational problems but was incredibly original and marked by Tania's strong voice. These writing qualities only got better with each piece she produced. Tania wrote about

two important objects for the final writing project, a hand crocheted “dress” that was used to cover the kitchen blender, and a corn grinder (“el molino”). Both of these pieces showed marked improvement in organization, the area she had the most trouble with in her earlier pieces. So while the story of the lie she told had a lot of personal style, it was difficult to follow the sequence of events. In contrast, her essay about the hand-crocheted dress was a tribute to her late Aunt Chuy and the improvement in organization allowed her talent in voice and word choice to shine. The same occurred with the essay about the corn grinder. She had good use of transition words and a very clear beginning, middle and end marked by paragraphs. Her passion for what she was writing came through clearly. Finally, Tania exceeded on the Oregon State Writing Test. She chose to write to a prompt in the expository mode, writing about her favorite hobby: drawing. She scored 5 in every single trait from both raters.

Jessica is a delightful, bubbly and social young girl. She struggles to stay focused on her schoolwork yet expresses her desire to be a good student. Writing was one activity that Jessica enjoyed and took pride in. In her “Yo soy...” book, Jessica wrote about her family and friends and their importance to her. The text was repetitive and very general; not much was learned about each of these individuals beyond that they were special to Jessica. This project also underscored Jessica’s need for support in spelling and punctuation. She was very pleased with her book which she illustrated and shared with the class. For the assignment for Día de los muertos (Day of the Dead), Jessica wrote a type of fairy tale. This was a story that her mother told her which she recounted and altered. It was a kind of morality tale

in which a daughter disobeys her father and receives dire consequences. For this writing piece, Jessica received scores of mostly threes in the six traits indicating that she was developing but didn't yet demonstrate a strong control in her writing. The piece did have strong organization since it followed a traditional story line. Once again, her weakest area was in conventions but she also showed a need for more work in sentence fluency as many of the sentences were repetitive. Jessica continued to work on these areas of writing with her piece "La mentira." (The Lie). Her voice was stronger in that composition as she was writing about her personal experience and was quite motivated. In conferencing with Jessica the focus was on tightening up her writing and eliminating unnecessary and repetitive phrases in order to bring out the strong important writing. When Jessica wrote about her "objeto especial" (she actually wrote two pieces) her writing had progressed greatly. She received scores of all fours on her piece about her grandfather's blanket (Appendix E). For the State Writing Test Jessica received a composite score of 30, which meant she conditionally met the State benchmark because one rater gave her a score of three in the area of conventions but the rest of her scores were all fours. Given where she started in the Fall with writing that was characterized by its generality and lack of detail, those results showed true progress.

Luis made no secret of the fact that he did not like to write. He fought against all of my efforts to engage him, to draw him out, to scaffold the process of telling a story. He was one of my biggest challenges. Taking into account the research about boys and writing, the importance of allowing boys to write action stories with villains and heroes, it is possible that the family stories project didn't resonate with

him. More likely is that Luis didn't feel comfortable interacting at home in the way these writing projects required. He told me repeatedly that no one at home told stories. Luis did produce stories, but they lacked detail and didn't allow the reader any insight into the writer's point of view or emotions. Here was an example of just how important it was that students come with a willingness to write, even if they lack sophistication or confidence. Another possibility is that perhaps someone other than a family member could have worked with Luis on this project. More work should have been done to identify an individual important to Luis who could have shared stories with him.

Parent writing: Yo soy...

Parents had contributed and taken part in the ghost stories and the special object project by telling a story to their children. In March they were asked to write their own "Yo soy..." books as a way of more directly taking part in the yearlong writing effort. This was also a way to have parents express what attitudes and "funds of knowledge" they bring to their children's lives in lieu of the author conducting time-consuming home interviews as originally planned. The students reported in class about how their parents were spending time at home on their books. There was a lot of excitement as students brought in the books and they would be read aloud to the class. Twelve completed booklets were turned in, some of them illustrated by the parents or, in some cases, the children. It was very moving to see the care these parents took with this project as well as the beauty of their expression. Mostly, the author felt incredibly fortunate to be working with

such extraordinary families. The writing showed such dedication to the well-being of their children, especially the moral and spiritual guidance they hope to provide, that the researcher felt honored to have a role in the lives of their children. Some examples of the parents' writing follows:

Después de comer nos íbamos al río como a las 3:00 de la tarde nadábamos por horas luego llegábamos y mi papa nos hacía palomitas de maíz. Nos poníamos en un círculo y mi papa en el centro contaba cuentos y chistes y después resábamos el rosario todas las noches ya que mi papa dice que la familia que resa unida permanece unida. Algunas veces mis papas nos llevaron al mar ya que vivimos cerca de mar. Allí tenemos familia, hermanos de mi papa. Lo que nos encantaba del mar era mirar al sol cuando se ocultaba en el mar era hermoso los colores que salían del sol.

Written by Maria Castañeda

(After eating we would go down to the river, around 3:00 in the afternoon we would swim for hours and later my father would make popcorn. We would sit in a circle and my father in the center told stories and jokes and then we would say the rosary every night, my father said that the family that prays together stays together. Sometimes my parents would take us to the beach since we lived near the ocean. There we had family, my father's brothers. What we loved about the ocean was watching the sun when it slipped into the sea it was beautiful to see the colors that came from the sun.)

A mi hijo Daniel solo le aconsejo cada uno de todos los días que él es tan importante para mi como sus dos hermanos mayores que no por ser más chico deja de ser menos importante para mi. Trato de contestarle cada una de las preguntas que él me hace y le pregunto si quedo bien aclarado o necesita otra explicación más al fondo. El es muy sentimental y a veces yo sé que con un beso y un abrazo muy fuerte lo tengo feliz porque él es de todos mis hijos lo más hermoso que la vida me ha dado.

Written by Irma Hernández

(For my son Daniel I only teach him each and every day that he is just as important to me as his two older siblings, that even though he is the youngest it doesn't mean he is less important to me. I try to answer every question he asks me and I ask him if I gave him a clear answer or does he need more explanation. He is very sensitive and at times I know that with a kiss or a big hug I can make him happy because of all my children he is the most beautiful that life has given me.)

Noche de celebración (Night of Celebration)

On April 18, the author and students organized a night of celebration in order to share some of the stories that were written during the year. Invitations were sent home and much anticipation was created leading up to the event. Refreshments were provided and the published stories of students and parents were displayed on a table. Ten families attended, which was a little over half of whom were invited. Students volunteered to read from their work and discussed what they had learned from the various assignments. The discussion evolved into reminiscences of the parents' childhoods in Mexico. Several of the mothers commented on how they didn't have televisions or computers when they were young and so family life centered around storytelling or music. One mother read from her "Yo soy..." book describing the natural beauty around her family home and the simple childhood games she and her cousins played. There was intense discussion about how different childhood is for their own children; how they have exchanged hardship and poverty in Mexico for a better life economically here in the United States but lost some of that wholesomeness and quality of life. The students listened intently without saying much. Another mother stated that after sharing the stories for this project she was planning on writing down other stories from her childhood. The urgency of preserving those stories was brought up. The fact that these parents had written something themselves emboldened them to consider writing more. Listening to these parents speaking with pride of their families and past histories, the idea of "funds of knowledge" as an important resource for the writing produced during the year rang true (Moll, 2001). Both the language and the content of the

students' work for this project drew on their household resources, validating the home culture. A major goal of this project was to foster a transformation in student attitudes toward their families. A secondary "side effect" was a change in the parents' own self-image from feeling unable to contribute much to their child's formal education to an awareness of the importance of their life experiences and culture to the overall education of their child.

The Oregon State Writing Test

The students received the results of the Oregon State Writing Test in May. The test itself took place in February, while the oral histories project was still underway. For the State Test, students choose from three writing prompts in either the expository, narrative, or imaginative modes. Students are allowed to write in either English or Spanish and are scored according to the Oregon Department of Education Official Writing Rubric in the traits of ideas and content, organization, sentence fluency, and conventions (see Appendix F). They also receive scores for voice and word choice, but those scores are not included in the composite score. In order to meet the benchmark in writing in fourth grade, students must receive a four in all of the traits from two different raters for a total composite score of 32. For the year this project took place, 45% of my group of eighteen students met or exceeded the State benchmark. That number goes up to 75% when students who conditionally met are included. Three of my students exceeded the State benchmark. The total percentage of fourth grade students who met or exceeded the State benchmark for Sunshine Elementary this year was 39%. The total number of

students who wrote in Spanish meeting or exceeding was 42%. These numbers show improvement from the 16% of students who met or exceeded the State benchmark in the previous year.

For further study

The author feels that this project would have been richer if students had taken time to collect more stories and information from their family members. In the original proposal, students would have had parents tell a story about a time they had told a lie or done something they shouldn't have. Most children don't hear about their parent's childhood enough, and certainly most never hear of their parents making a bad choice. But those conversations can bring parents closer to their children by making them seem more human. Additionally, students would have been very motivated to record those stories. The original plan called for using the Winter Break as a time for students to do some true oral history using a questionnaire they themselves developed. We did work on questionnaires in class, which was a very important part of the oral history training. But the students were not assigned an interview over the vacation. Such a personal collecting of family background would have been relatively easy to carry out and the rewards would have deepened the overall project. Students might have potentially become aware of just how interesting stories from the past can be, as in the case of Tania. Just as with the story of Carlos and his grandfather, my role was to actively encourage those interactions and the importance of going back for more. Finally, the plan for the researcher to conduct several home studies on her own would have provided

more detailed data on the funds of knowledge these families bring to their children's education. This is still such vital work: to combat the negative stereotypes of Latino families in our educational system.

An area that is crying out for more research is the importance of understanding the differences between literacy development in Spanish and literacy development in English. While Coady and Escamilla (2005) have begun to explore this in their work, more is definitely needed. It is especially important to look at the bilingual students who are in our schools who have never lived anywhere but the United States. That is a group of students who make up the majority of English Language Learners yet whose exposure to English in the surrounding culture has been ongoing since birth.



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Appendix A

Encuesta de la escritura/ Writing Survey

1. ¿Te gusta escribir? Do you like to write?
2. ¿Te consideras un buen escritor? ¿Por que sí o no? Do you consider yourself to be a good writer? Why or why not?
3. Prefieres escoger tu propio tema para una composición o historia? o ¿te gusta cuando la maestra te da un tema para escribir? Do you prefer to choose your own topic for writing or do you like it when the teacher gives you a writing prompt?
4. ¿Prefieres escribir cuentos imaginarios o historias verdaderos? Do you prefer writing imaginative stories or true stories?
5. ¿Qué es lo que te encuentras fácil cuando escribes algo? What do you find easy about writing?
6. ¿Qué es difícil para ti sobre la escritura? What do you find difficult about writing?
7. ¿Cuál sería más divertido para ti? What would be most enjoyable for you?
 - Escribir una carta a alguien en la familia. Write a letter to a family member.
 - Escribir un reporte informativo sobre algo en la historia o de ciencia. Write an informational report about something in history or science.
 - Escribir sobre un día festivo muy memorable. Write about a memorable holiday.
8. ¿Tienes un diario personal para escribir en la casa? Do you have a personal journal or diary at home?
9. ¿Te gusta contar historias con tu familia o tus amigos? ¿De qué se trata algunas de tus historias? Do you like to tell stories to your family or friends? What are some of your stories about?
10. En tu opinión, ¿qué es lo que hace un cuento o una historia interesante? (Marca todas que piensas que aplican.) In your opinion, what makes a story interesting? (Mark all that you think apply):
 - Tiene buenas detalles y mucha descripción. It has a lot of detail and description.
 - Tiene mucha emoción o acción. It has a lot of emotion or action.
 - Es fácil de leer y comprender. It is easy to read and understand.

11. ¿Hay alguien en tu familia quien cuenta muchas historias del pasado o de su niñez? ¿Quién? Is there someone in your family who tells a lot of stories about the past or about their childhood? Who?
12. ¿A ti te gusta escuchar las historias que cuentan miembros de tu familia? ¿Por qué sí o por qué no? Do you like hearing stories that your family tells? Why or why not?
13. ¿Por qué crees que la gente cuenta o escribe historias sobre sus propias vidas? Why do you think people tell or write stories about their own lives?



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Appendix B

Article on Family Literacy Nights

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Appendix C

Yo soy maestra. Pero también soy mamá, esposa, hija, hermana, y amiga.

Yo soy mamá de dos lindos hijos.

Mi hija, Xochitl, tiene diez años. Le gusta bailar, dibujar, y pasar tiempo con sus amigas. Es una niña que se preocupa por otros. Aprendo mucho de ella.

Mi hijo, Iván, tiene ocho años. Es un remolino de energía. Tiene curiosidad para todo en el mundo: cómo funcionan las cosas, el "por qué" de todo. Tiene mucho corazón.

¡Ser mamá me hace muy feliz!



(I am a teacher. But I am also a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister and a friend. I am the mother of two beautiful children. My daughter, Xochitl, is ten years old. She loves to dance, draw, and spend time with her friends. She is a girl who thinks about others. I learn a lot from her. My son, Ivan, is eight years old. He is a whirlwind of energy. He is curious about everything in the world: how things work, the "why" of everything. He has a big heart. Being a mother makes me happy!)

Appendix D

Letter about the Special Object Project

Estimados padres de mis alumnos de lectoescritura,

En la clase de lectura y escritura, estamos leyendo historias sobre objetos que tienen mucha importancia o que traen muchas memorias. Leimos un libro, *La colcha de los recuerdos*, sobre una cobija que había sido pasado de generación a generación empezando con la bisabuela de la autora del libro. Escribió sobre el significado de esa colcha, y también cómo la colcha figuraba en las tradiciones de su familia.

Yo escribí una historia sobre un ventilador muy viejo que tengo que era de mi papá. Y los estudiantes han pensado en objetos importantes para ellos. Estoy enviando una copia de mi cuento con su hijo.

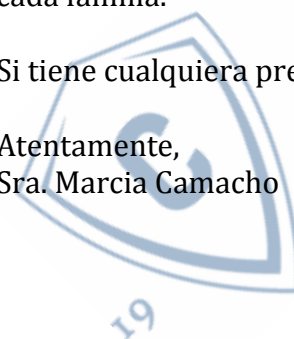
Ahora, quiero que ustedes piensen en algo que tienen en la casa – puede ser una foto o algo de su país o algo que les dió una persona especial. Cuenta a su niño/niña sobre la importancia del objeto y si tiene algún recuerdo o historia que les cuenta. Ellos van a escribir lo que ustedes cuentan y traerlo a clase. Al fin, voy a juntar todas las historias en un libro para Ustedes.

¡Espero que no les molesta este pedido! Es una oportunidad de platicar con sus hijos sobre algo importante para Ustedes y estoy segura que va a ser muy especial para los niños.

Quiero agradecerles a todos Ustedes quienes mandarin cuentos en el Día de los Muertos. ¡Son maravillosos! Estos cuentos también voy a publicar en un libro para cada familia.

Si tiene cualquiera pregunta que me llamen.

Atentamente,
Sra. Marcia Camacho



Dear parents of my literacy students,

In our reading and writing class we have been reading stories about objects that are very important or which bring a lot of memories. We read a book, *The Keeping Quilt*, about a quilt that was passed down from one generation to the next starting with the great grandmother of the author of the book. She wrote about the significance of this quilt, and also how the quilt was part of many of her family traditions.

I wrote a story about an old fan I got from my father. The students have also been thinking about objects or things that are important to them. I am sending home a copy of my story to share with you.

Now, I would like you to think about something you have in your home – it could be a photograph or something from your home country or that someone special gave to you. Tell your child about the importance of this object and if there is a story connected to it please tell it to them. They are to write down your story and bring it back to class. Then I will compile all of the stories into a book for everyone.

I hope this request isn't a nuisance for you! It is an opportunity to talk with your child about something important to you and I am sure that it will mean a lot to the students.

I want to thank all of you who sent in stories for Day of the Dead. They are wonderful! These stories I am also publishing in a book for all of you.

If you have any questions please call me.

Sincerely,
Sra. Marcia Camacho



Appendix E

Jessica's story

Una vez mi mamá estaba grande mi abuelito se enfermó de cáncer y él no podía levantarse o usar cobijas muy pesadas. Entonces mi papá vino a los Estados Unidos a comprar una cobija delgada. Se quedó pocos días y después se fue otra vez a México y le puso la cobija al papá de mi mamá. Mi mamá se sentía feliz por ya casi se estaba recuperando. Pero un día su papá se murió y mi mamá lloraba y así fue que mi mamá me dio esa cobija y siempre me hace pensar en él. Su olor, su cariño conmigo. Yo siempre lo tengo en mi corazón.

Once when my mother was older my grandfather fell ill with cancer and he couldn't get out of bed or use blankets that were too heavy. So my father went to the United States and while he was there he bought a lightweight blanket. He was there a few days and then he returned to Mexico and he put the blanket on the father of my mother. My mother felt so happy because he was almost recovered. But one day her father died and my mother cried and that is how my mother gave me this blanket and it always makes me think about him. His smell, his affection with me. I will always have him in my heart.



Appendix F

*Oregon Department of Education
Official Scoring Guide, Writing*

www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/testing/scoring/guides/2004-05/writingscoringguide0405.pdf



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