Developing discoursal selves: Academic writing in a linguistically diverse high school Puente English class

by

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Abstract

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In our globalized world the ability to move across multiple linguistic and cultural borders continues to grow in importance; however, instead of cultivating students’ multiple ways of being in the world, public schools in the U.S. have often failed to capitalize on the cultural and linguistic resources that students bring from diverse backgrounds. This qualitative study examines how linguistically diverse students, those who were currently or had previously been identified as English Learners (EL), develop their identities within academic writing practices in a mainstream public high school English classroom that is part of the Puente Project. This is a college preparatory program that includes activities both in and out of the classroom designed to incorporate students’ various cultural and linguistic “voices” as resources for learning.

This study is framed through sociocultural theories of activity, identity construction, and literacy. Drawing on ethnographic and discourse analytic methodology, it examines the motives the teacher and counselor had for the activity system of Puente; how these motives shaped practices inside and outside of the classroom; how practices related to students’ construction and performance of their “discoursal” selves; students’ understanding of their academic identities within Puente; and how these perceptions changed over time.

A focus on student voice was indeed paramount in the Puente learning ecology, with both the counselor and the teacher emphasizing that supporting students to develop their voices was a central goal of the Puente activity system at Emerson High. This focus, however, did create some tensions with the activity system, since the teacher and counselor conceptualized “voice” differently from each other. Nonetheless, the Puente learning ecology at Emerson High provided students many and varied opportunities to develop academic identities and to perform academic discoursal selves. Students used the conventions of academic discourse that the teacher taught them in combination with their other social languages to express opinions, thoughts and feelings that were meaningful and important to them.

The findings indicate that providing a variety of opportunities to write, both inside and outside of the classroom, and allowing students to choose the topics that they address are essential to support students’ development of academic discoursal selves. While it is important for students to master “genres of power” such as argumentative writing, students are best served when they have an authentic purpose for writing and when they explore issues that hold personal significance through multiple writing genres. Moreover, this study suggests that incorporating personal and creative writing in the English curriculum is crucial to engage students whose identities and experiences had
been previously marginalized in school settings.
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Chapter 1
Introduction and literature review

Background and significance
In our globalized world the ability to move across multiple linguistic and cultural borders continues to grow in importance; however, instead of cultivating students’ multiple ways of being in the world, public schools in the U.S. have often failed to capitalize on the cultural and linguistic resources that students bring from diverse backgrounds. In response, there has been a growing awareness in both educational research and teaching communities for the need to examine how issues of identity intersect with literacy and language development (Menard-Warwick, 2006). Specifically, in the last decade both sociocultural literacy and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has engaged with questions of how learning environments can “apprentice students into disciplinary identities that do not diminish existing identities that students bring both individually and as members of different cultural communities” (Lee, 2007, p.130). That is, it is important to study how classroom practices can enhance students’ identities, rather than replace them.

This qualitative study examines how linguistically diverse students, those who were currently or had been previously been identified as English Learners (EL), develop their academic identities within writing practices in a mainstream public high school English classroom that is part of the Puente Project, which focuses on both learning in school and expanding learning beyond the confines of the classroom. It is specifically designed to draw on students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds as resources for learning, rather than impediments to learning, and to expand academic opportunities to include community-based activities.

Drawing on Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), I argue that examining how literacy practices stemming from various activity systems, both inside and outside of the classroom, interact to allow for a broader understanding of how students develop academic identities and a command of disciplinary writing.

Literature review
There have been few studies that have looked at learning across activity systems as a way to understand how EL identified students construct and perform academic identities. In classrooms settings, researchers have explored how bilingual elementary school students learn best when in classrooms that encourage them to draw on multiple linguistic, cultural and social resources to engage in writing activities (Datta, 2000; Moll & Dworin, 1996; Reyes 2001). At the post-secondary level, researchers have studied how English as a Second Language students have developed increased control and effectiveness of their academic writing through pedagogy that facilitates their awareness of how they author and perform discursive identities (Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Kramsch, 2000). In out of school settings, researchers have also investigated how linguistically diverse secondary students created agentive selves through writing on the internet (Lam, 2000) and through participating in an after school digital storytelling program (Hull & Katz, 2007). However, with the exception of Kris Gutiérrez’s (2007) study of how secondary students from migrant backgrounds developed sociocritical literacy and envisioned new selves and future possibilities across the activity systems of a college preparatory summer program, there is a lack of research that examines how linguistically diverse students construct and perform academic identities across the multiple contexts that create a learning ecology. My study responds to the need for more research in this area, and extends the framework of “expansive learning” to examine the public school setting, including its possibilities for connecting explicitly with communities and activity systems beyond the school house door.
I will focus on the learning ecology of a high school class that is part of the Puente Project. This academic outreach and professional development program serves public high schools and community colleges, and aims to provide students from groups that have been traditionally underrepresented at four-year colleges and universities with rigorous academic preparation as well as school and community support to prepare them for college admission. Students who would be the first in their families to attend four-year college are selected for the program. Moreover, Puente classes are designed to be academically heterogeneous, admitting student who are representative of the school’s larger student population in terms of academic performance and motivation.

Puente curriculum emphasizes the importance of writing to students’ academic development through a “rigorous developmental writing approach that includes analytical, argumentative and research-based texts” and through requiring “a comprehensive writing portfolio” from each student (www.puente.net). Moreover, Puente English classes are specifically designed to bring together various spheres of student’s daily worlds to support them in their academic development. For instance, the Puente teacher and counselor work closely with parents and the larger community.

Clearly, there are no educational utopias; thus, I will examine the challenges that students face in this setting and as they cross settings where they learn. However, in order to increase the likelihood that I will see positive change over time, this study builds on the “best practices” tradition in literacy research (Freedman, 1987, 1994; Freedman, Delp, & Crawford 2005; Moll & Dworin; 1996; Reyes, 2001) in examining what we can learn about the literacy development of linguistically diverse students in what is considered a potentially productive environment for learning.

Research on the Puente Project

Researchers who have studied High School Puente have argued that the Project is particularly successful in affirming Latino students’ cultures and identities as resources for their academic development, supporting parent, family and community involvement, and ensuring that students are academically prepared to attend college (González & Moll, 2002; Tierney, 2002; Gándara, 2002; Moreno; 2002).

González & Moll (2002) argue that the culturally responsive pedagogical methodology, drawing on “funds of knowledge . . . has been implicit in the conceptualization and design of the program” (624). According to the researchers, funds of knowledge are the cultural resources or the essential tool kit that households use to maintain their well-being (634). By talking to their students’ families and observing the resources that they use in their daily lives, teachers can better understand the resources that students have as they enter the classroom and use these “funds of knowledge” to create classroom practices that connect “school” learning to the knowledge that students have gained through participating in their families’ and communities’ practices (González & Moll, 2002). While Puente teachers do not go into their students’ homes in order to research the funds of knowledge they may draw on, Puente teachers meet regularly with parents and community members and participate in community events. Moreover, according to Puente teacher and teacher trainer Robin Turner (2008), teachers in the program are taught pedagogical approaches rooted “in the belief that the student’s background matters and that no two students come from the same place” (12). In other words, teachers are trained to create learning activities, which draw on the practices that students engage in as participants in practices found in various “places,” or for the purposes of this study, “activity systems” including their homes, neighborhoods, and peer groups.
Similar to Turner’s (2008) assertion that Puente prepares teachers to understand and
draw on their students’ diverse funds of knowledge, in a study of Puente lesson plans and
documents used to train Puente English teachers, the educational researcher Gordon Pradl (2002)
argues that that Puente teachers are trained to take an ethnographic teaching stance:
which locates differences in terms of cultural styles and values and
then makes use of this knowledge in two ways. First it guides how
specific lessons are constructed to erect bridges between student lives
and the demands of the common curriculum. Second, it fosters productive
patterns of interaction between teacher and student – what Bartolomé, (1994) called a
“humanizing pedagogy” – to ensure that students understand they
are being heard and respected. (pp. 527-528)
Puente teachers are taught that effective teaching of traditionally underserved students begins
with understanding students’ various cultural practices as resources for learning. Then teachers
are prepared to use this understanding to construct bridges towards future academic success.
According to Pradl, the training documents reveal that the designers of Puente English
instruction embrace “the conception ‘meaning connecting’ and ‘meaning making’” (p. 523). This
approach positions students as active learners who are validated in the knowledge that they bring
to the classroom. Students are then encouraged to negotiate with various interpretations of texts
and to examine critically the historical and cultural and social realities that have shaped the lives
of Latinos. While doing so, students practice the academic skills and writing genres that Puente
believes will prepare them for success in college.

Researchers have found, however, that classroom practices are only part of what makes
Puente successful. Puente counselors have been shown to have a particularly strong impact on
preparing students for college and guiding students’ families to support them in this goal
(Gándara, 2002; Grubb, Lara & Valdez, 2002; Gándara et al, 1998). In fact, when surveyed,
students reported that while both their Puente teacher and counselor had a positive impact on
them in pushing and supporting them to work hard and go to college, they felt that their
counselors played the most significant, helpful role (Gándara et al, 1998).

The counseling component in Puente is designed for counselors to play a far greater role
in students’ and their families’ lives during high school than usual in high school counseling.
Unlike Puente teachers, who keep Puente students as a cohort in 9th and 10th grade English,
Puente counselors guide each of their Puente students through all four years of high school.
According to Grubb, Lara, and Valdez (2002):
Puente is a model in which counselors provide not only academic advice
but also continuity in both academic and personal advice, a combination
of support (or “mothering”) and pressure, linkages to and information
for parents, the coordination of a small learning community, and a
greater variety of activities linked to
helping students get through high school. (pp. 568-568)
In their analysis of Puente counseling, the researchers found that Puente counselors served a
parental role that mixed love and discipline. They also prepare and push students towards
college by coordinating many of the “out of the classroom” activities that make up Puente and
educating parents about how to support their children to go to college. At the time of the study
the vast majority of Puente counselors, 27 out of 31 were Latino. In interviews expressed that
they drew from their own experiences to “understand” what Puente students and their families
“have gone through” in order to best serve them (p.551).
Most research on Puente has also highlighted the importance of the Puente team as a unit (González & Moll, 2002; Tierney, 2002; Gándara, 2002; Grubb, Lara & Valdez, 2002; Gándara et al, 1998; Moreno, 2002). In ideal implementation, the Puente teacher and counselor work closely together in complementary roles with the goal of creating a culturally responsive learning community. Puente is designed so that the often Latino counselor shares students’ and parents’ heritage and experiences, while the teacher facilitates classroom practices that encourage students to bring in “funds of knowledge” from their families and peer groups to be included in classroom literacy practices. Both adults, moreover, work closely with parents to guide whole families through students’ high school years and to prepare them for students’ going to college.

Of course, each Puente team is also influenced by its local school context, including school and district administration, and shaped by the personalities and commitments of individual teachers, counselors and students. This study aims to analyze the activity system of one particular Puente program to understand how it manages to create affordances for students. Moreover, unlike most research on Puente that looks at the program as a whole using interview and survey data, this ethnographic study relies on case studies to examine individual participants’ experiences.

**Theoretical framework**

*A sociocultural lens*

To understand how students draw from the resources provided by Puente, as well as resources from their families, communities, and peer cultures to construct and perform academic identities, I ground my theoretical lens in sociocultural theories of development, identity construction, and literacy. I argue that such a framework is needed to understand how students take up the affordances within a purposefully designed learning ecology such as Puente as they develop and perform their academic “selves” in writing.

First, as individual students develop and learn, they also transform the context in which they act. To help examine this dynamic process, I incorporate Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) into my framework ((Leontiev, 1981), Engestrom (1999, 2001). Building on Vygotsky’s (1978) theory that the beginning of uniquely human intellectual development occurs when language and practical activity converge, this theoretical approach focuses on the activity instead of the individual as the site of learning and development.

Current conceptualizations of activity theory also emphasize that internal contradictions are the driving force of change and development within activity systems. In this theoretical approach, the unit of analysis is “minimally two interacting activity systems” (Engestrom, 2001, p. 135 –136). For each activity system, Engestrom conceptualizes a multi-faceted triangle that consists of the following: a *subject*, or the individual actor, *object*, or objective that sets the activity into motion, *mediating artifacts*, or culturally produced material and psychological tools and signs, the *community*, or those who share the same general object, *rules*, or explicit norms and conventions that constrain actions within the activity system, and *division of labor*, or the division of object-oriented actions among members of the community (Cole, 1996, p.140 -141). As Engestrom (1999) puts it, “the expansive cycle begins with individual subjects questioning the accepted practice, and it gradually expands into a collective movement or institution” (p. 7). Much like the summer writing program in Gutiérrez’s (2007) study, the Puente classroom is designed to create a space for “expansive learning” in which students’ community practices interact with the practices of schooling in productive ways, creating new objectives and possibilities for students. Therefore, I argue that to understand how students constructed and
performed various identities during their two years in Puente English, it is essential to examine the activity systems in which they participated.

Dorothy Holland’s (1998) conceptions of “history-in-person” and “figured worlds,” developed in her work on identity and agency, further shapes my understanding of how students draw from various cultural resources, and from their participation in various activity systems, to reflect on their past selves, construct current selves, and most importantly, to imagine future selves. Holland’s framework of identity construction also incorporates Vygotsky’s (1978) view of intellectual development, and Leontiev’s (1981) view of activity as shaped by, as well as shaping of, participants. However, she adds Russian literary theorist’s Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) view of the dialogic self, that we take our “voices” from the social world before internalizing and making them our own; thus, our words are always “double voiced” with the voices of others. Drawing these sociocultural theories together, Holland and her colleagues (1998) theorize:

One’s history-in-person is the sediment from past experiences upon which one improvises, using the cultural materials created in the immediate and more distant past. In this process of heuristic development, culture and subject position are joined in the production of cultural resources that are then subjectively taken up.” (p. 18)

The self is always under construction. The social world provides us with subject positions and cultural resources, most importantly spoken and written language, which we then take up as we act in the world to create identities. Over time, these identities become an enduring part of who we perceive ourselves to be. While these building blocks of identity are given to us through the social world, we also have agency in how we improvise, how we negotiate these identities while participating in various activities.

Using this framework Holland et.al. (1998) use ethnographic case studies to “focus on the development of identities and agency specific to practices and activities situated in historically contingent, socially enacted, culturally constructed, ‘worlds’”(p.7), which the researchers term “figured worlds.” These figured worlds include “frames of social life” such as domestic life, academia and local politics among others. In this study, I use this concept of figured worlds to analyze how the various contexts of my focal students’ lives influenced their academic identity development within the activity system of Puente. These figured worlds include that of slam poetry, graffiti art, and community activism, among others. However, I expand the notion of figured worlds to include students’ imagined and future frames such as college and careers, as well.

Academic writing and identity

Since much of this study focuses on students’ identity development as constructed and performed in their writing within the Puente classroom, I draw on theories of literacy development and composition to shift my analytical lens between the scale of activity systems and the scale of specific literacy practices and resulting writing artifacts. To theorize academic literacy, I draw on Gutiérrez’s (2007) concept of sociocritical literacy which “emerges in discursive and embodied practices including writing, reading and performative activities with transformative ends” (p. 149) and George Bunch’s (2006), emphasis on the importance of examining how students actually use language in academic tasks instead of assigning a priori categories and definitions to academic language. In particular, I analyze how an “expansive learning” ecology facilitates economically and ethnically non-dominant students’ understanding of the sociopolitical forces and discourses that have shaped their lives so that they may gain a greater command over the discourses which have power in the larger society as well as imagine new identities and futures possibilities for themselves. Moreover, I examine how the teacher, the
specific school context, and the larger institutional contexts, including the Puente Project, shape which written genres and conventions of academic discourse are emphasized in the classroom.

**Discoursal self**

To theorize how students draw on various genres and conventions to develop as academic writers, I borrow elements from Ivanič’s (1998) concept of the “discoursal self” to examine how students navigate the conventions and discourses available to them as they form their identities in writing. All writing, including academic writing, entails representation and construction of self in relation to available discourses. As Ivanič puts it:

A writer’s ‘discoursal self’ is the impression – often multiple, sometimes contradictory – which they consciously or unconsciously conveys of themself in a particular written text. I have called this aspect of identity ‘discoursal’ because it is constructed through the discourse characteristics of a text, which relate to values, beliefs and power relations in the social context in which they were written. (p. 25)

In her concept of the discoursal self, Ivanic draws on poststructuralist theories of identity which emphasize how relations of power both constrain and enable individuals as they navigate various dynamic and shifting conceptions of self or subjectivities. However, my conception of the “discoursal self” puts greater emphasis on students’ agency in developing a command of academic discourse if provided with an expansive learning environment that encourages them to bring in discourses and subjectivities from various spheres of their lives. Such a command of academic discourse, thus, affords students access to further educational opportunities without diminishing the subjectivities that they are invested in their various figured worlds.

**Issues of genre and voice**

Conceptions of genre are particularly important to understand the affordances which shape how students develop discoursal selves in academic writing practices within school settings. Among the many spoken and written language genres used in K-12 classrooms, literacy researchers have argued that certain “genres of power” serve as gatekeepers to educational opportunities and qualifications increasingly necessary for economic and social empowerment (Delpit, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). At the postsecondary level, academic genres of writing have also been conceptualized as forms of social action, including claiming membership in a community of like writers, or discourse community (Swales, 1990); and producing and defining what counts as knowledge (Bazerman, 1988).

A conception of genre that is particularly useful for the purposes of this study comes from scholars in the New Rhetoric school in composition studies (Freedman & Medway, 1993). Freedman and Medway (1993) define genre as “typical ways of engaging rhetorically with reoccurring situations” (p. 18). Similarly, Bakhtin (1986), who Freedman and Medway draw on, argues that conventions of both spoken and written discourse are tied to recurrent “spheres of social activity,” and by participating in these spheres, one gains command of the genres that grow out of them (p. 65). According to Bakhtin, genres are relatively stable, given to us by the social world, so we do not have the power to remake them completely anew. However, “the better our command of genres, the more freely we employ them, the more fully and clearly we reveal our own individuality in them” (p. 80). For instance, we can “re-accentuate genres” by moving them from one sphere of activity to another, and “one can deliberately mix genres from

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1 Ivanič purposefully uses “they” throughout her work as singular pronoun to replaced gendered pronouns.
various spheres” (p. 79-80). In this way we gain power to influence genres as we partake in them.

As we create our own utterances, moreover, we not only employ genres given to us from the social world to express content, but we also employ the expressive aspect, or our own “subjective emotional evaluation of the referentially semantic content of [our] utterance” (p.84). Our evaluative attitude towards the subject of our utterance “also determines the choice of lexical, grammatical, and compositional means of the utterance” and thus greatly contributes to creating our “style” (p. 84). Equating individuality with style and conformity with genre, Bakhtin seems to suggest that individuals can create their own “style” as they apply the genres they have mastered to new situations in possibly novel ways. In this way as students increasingly master the norms of participating in academic discourse practices, they gain more agency to use genre conventions to serve their own purposes. Moreover, the utterances that students create are not only shaped by genre conventions but also by the expressive aspect of speech, or their subjective evaluation of the subject matter. Understanding how to help secondary students attain their style or their individual voice in writing also interested Bakhtin. In addition to being a university professor, literary critic and linguist, Bakhtin spent several years teaching secondary students. In his research on how he helped his high school Russian students develop a sense of the stylistic dimensions of grammatical forms, he describes that his goal was to “facilitate [the] process of the birth of the students’ individual language” (Bakhtin, 2004; p. 24) as they engaged in classroom writing practices.

This relationship between students writing in the genres favored in classrooms and presenting their unique style, or voice in their writing continues as an important issue that composition researchers and teachers examine in present day classrooms. Drawing on Bakhtin’s theory that even though we get our words from the social world, we have a certain amount of agency in how we speak and write them, Peter Elbow (2000) outlines a theory of voice in writing that helps us understand how we can “move flexibly back and forth between using and celebrating something we feel as our own voice, and operating as though we are nothing but ventriloquists playfully using and adapting and working against an array of voices we find around us” (p. 218). He defines five meanings of voice in writing: the audible voice or intonation (the sounds in a text); dramatic voice (the character or implied author in the text); recognizable or distinctive voice; voice with authority; resonate voice or presences. (p. 193). The first or “audible voice” refers to the traces of the spoken word within a text. The “dramatic voice” is a performance of a particular type of persona with a text. In contrast to the “dramatic voice,” the “distinctive voice” is the style, or the elements that are recognizable as belonging to a particular writer. The “voice with authority,” focuses on the degree to which the texts shows that a writer has or takes the authority to speak out, including using genre conventions that establish authority and belonging to a particular discourse community. Finally, “the resonate voice or presences” are liked to the concept of identity. According to Elbow (p. 200), “… why writing provides a rich site for resonate voice or presence – is that writing has always served as a crucial place for trying out parts of the self or unconscious that have been hidden or neglected or underdeveloped – to experiment and try ‘new subject positions’” (208). The conception of the “discoursal self” that I use in this study incorporates elements of the “dramatic voice” or how students craft characters and narrators in their writing, “voice with authority” or to what degree students present themselves as credible and having the authority to speak in their writing, and “the resonate voice” or how they explore various identities in their writing. I analyze how the
writing that students produced during two years in their Puente English class demonstrates change over time in these elements of their discoursal selves.

**Research questions:**

To understand the larger ecology of Puente at one high school as well as to analyze how individual students construct and perform academic identities within writing practices in their Puente class, I focus on the following research questions:

- What motives do the Puente teacher and counselor have for the activity system of Puente at their school? How do these motives shape Puente practices inside and outside of the classroom?
- How do Puente practices relate to how students construct and perform their discoursal selves?
- How do students understand their academic identities within Puente, and how do these perceptions change over time?

**Summary of chapters**

In the next chapter of this dissertation, chapter 2, I discuss the methodology of this study. I introduce the school site, teacher, counselor, and focal students. I then explain my data collection and data analysis methods.

Chapter 3 is the first in which I discuss my findings. This chapter focuses on my first research question, analyzing the motives that the Puente teacher and counselor had for the activity system of Puente at their high school and how these motives shaped Puente practices. The practices I analyze include creating a culturally responsive community or “familia” with the students and their parents and preparing students for college. I also examine how the teacher and counselor had motives different from each other due to their own personal and professional commitments and experiences and what tensions this created in the Puente activity system.

In the following two chapters, I focus on four focal students to answer my second and third research questions. In Chapter 4, I analyze how two students transformed previously marginalized identities into resources for discoursal selves within the Puente English class. However, neither of these students joined Puente with a clear motive to continue on to college, and their participation in Puente did little to make four-year college a concrete possibility. In contrast, in Chapter 5, I examine how the two other focal students saw Puente as most importantly a path to four-year college and future “figured worlds” as professionals. While a college-going future remained the central motive for both of them, they also found personal meaning and agency through Puente writing practices that transcended their academic identities.

I end this dissertation with Chapter 6, in which I discuss the conclusions suggested by the findings from the previous three chapters. I outline best practices, including challenges and opportunities, suggested by this study for educators I also discuss what further research is needed to understand how linguistically diverse students construct academic discoursal selves.
Chapter 2
Methodology

Description of setting

The Puente Project

Concerned about the low four-year college transfer rates among their Latino students, a community college composition instructor and a community college counselor in the San Francisco Bay Area founded the Puente Project in 1981. To address the needs of students would be the first generation in the families to attend college, they conceived of three interacting components: 1) rigorous English instruction that incorporated a process writing approach and an emphasis on literature by Latino and Chicano authors; 2) counseling that paid attention to students as individuals and helped students and their families navigate the 4-year college transfer process; 3) mentorship by professionals from the students’ communities. Supported by the California State Legislature, the Community College system, and the University of California’s K-12 outreach efforts, Puente became housed in the Educational Partnerships division of the University of California’s Office of the President.2

Building on the project’s success with community college students and their feedback that a program like Puente would have been beneficial to them earlier in their schooling, the Puente Project added a high school program in 1993. While continuing to incorporate Latino literature and culture into the curriculum, from its conception, the high school program was open to students of all ethnic backgrounds, focusing on increasing the number of historically underrepresented students who attend four-year colleges. High school Puente took root in underserved schools with low college acceptance rates across California; currently it is established in 35 schools, 23 in Southern California and 12 in Northern California. Due in large part to the demographics in the high schools which Puente serves, about 77% of secondary Puente students are Latino.

Modeled on the community college program, high school Puente was designed to provide students rigorous, culturally relevant literature and process writing instruction, with students “looping” or staying with the same English teacher for two years and producing a comprehensive writing portfolio of their work at the end of each year. The counseling component was also carried over, with a preferably Spanish bilingual counselor working closely with students and their families for all four years; holding workshops for both students and parents about preparing, applying and paying for college, organizing college fieldtrips; as well coming into the English Puente class to participate in writing practices. However, because of the difficulty in providing adult mentors to high school students both logistically and legally, the third component was transformed, over time, to the community mentorship/leadership component. This was designed to provide students with activities such as fieldtrips to college campuses, career panels, and community service and leadership opportunities such as the Puente club and a conference for 9th graders focusing on becoming leaders, exploring future career options, and preparing for college. However, despite the small differences in the program designs, both community college and high school Puente share the same mission: to prepare historically underrepresented students to attend a four-year college and then to return to be leaders in their communities.

Research Site

2 In 2012 The Puente Project moved the University of California – Berkeley’s, Center for Educational Partnerships. However, it was housed at UCOP at the time of this study.
One of three high schools in one of the first school districts to implement the Puente Project, the site of my study, Emerson High School, was located in a semi-urban working-class area of the San Francisco Bay Area. The school district was geographically near the Puente Statewide Office, and enjoyed a long-standing, reciprocal relationship with Puente leadership. For instance, the executive director of the Statewide Puente Project at the time of this study was once a school board member. Moreover, teachers and counselors at the high school sites provided leadership for the Puente community. The Statewide Puente director of the high school program was once a Puente English teacher in the district. Throughout Puente’s history, teachers and counselors from this district provided training and mentorship to Puente educators across the state.

Considered the “toughest” high school in the district, Emerson High School had a population of 1,758 students, with 519 students or 29.5% designated as English Language Learners. 399, or 77%, of those EL-identified students were from Latino families who spoke Spanish. Most students came from socio-economic backgrounds that ranged from working class to poor. 753 students, about 40% of the school, received free or reduced priced meals. Like many schools that serve students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the school had been designated as “low performing” through federal No Child Left Behind evaluations. Moreover, the issues of economic injustice and urban violence that erupted at times in the neighborhood surrounding the school, also appeared on the campus, including worries about parents finding and keeping work, and fights and intimidation of students by “gangsters.”

The Puente class

At Emerson High, the Puente Project was kept small, with around 30 students, or “Puentistas” participating at each grade level so that students, teachers, counselors, and parents could build a close community to support student achievement. Following the larger Puente model, Puente at Emerson did not focus on language learners in particular, nor was it designed to meet EL needs, but rather selected a heterogeneous group of students in terms of skill level, motivation and previous academic performance.

All students and their guardians were interviewed before students were considered for the program to ensure their commitment to the programs’ college preparatory objective. After the interviews, Emerson High’s Puente counselor and teacher reviewed students’ application materials, including middle school grades, a writing sample, and interview notes. All potential students were then placed on a matrix in terms of motivation and performance (see chart below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1</th>
<th>Category 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High motivation</td>
<td>Low motivation</td>
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<td>High performance</td>
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<tr>
<th>Category 3</th>
<th>Category 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>High motivation</td>
<td>Low motivation</td>
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<td>Low performance</td>
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Finally, the counselor and teacher selected participants for the class so that an equal percentage (25%) of students represented each category.

Reflecting the larger population of the school, about 30% of Puente students were identified as English language learners. Following the guidelines of the larger Puente Project organization, Emerson High School’s Puente program admitted students in the ninth grade, and
placed them a cohort in which they stayed together, keeping the same English teacher in the 9th and 10th grades.

**Teacher**

A white woman in her early forties, who spoke Spanish proficiently, Ms. Williams had taught in Emerson’s Puente Program for ten years. She was one of the first teachers to teach in this program at Emerson and continued to head various school reform initiatives. She was also recognized as an outstanding writing teacher, having been selected as a Bay Area Writing Project Teacher Consultant. Moreover, she served as a mentor for beginning teachers, including providing workshops at Puente trainings. She had been both a supervisor and master teacher for the University of California’s Multicultural Urban Secondary English credential and MA program. Finally, she had been honored as the recipient of the prestigious Carlston Family foundation “Outstanding Teacher of America” award for her service to her students.

**Counselor**

The Puente guidance counselor, Ms. Diaz, played a central role in the daily world of Emerson High’s Puente students. A second-generation Mexican-American woman in her early sixties who like many Puente students, spoke Spanish well, though not fluently, Ms. Diaz was also one of the founders of the Puente program at Emerson High. She had lived in the same community as her students for most of her adult life and knew many of their families on a personal level. Generally, she was seen as the matriarch of the Puente “familia” at Emerson.

During class time, Ms. Diaz frequently came to join classroom discussions or to observe student performances and presentations. During these visits she would often share her experiences of growing up in Los Angeles in a family of Chicano activists and Civil Rights leaders. She constantly reminded students of their obligations to be diligent about keeping up their attendance and grades, to represent themselves in a dignified and respectful manner, and - most importantly - to care for one another as part of the Puente “familia.” Ms. Diaz served as the students’ guidance counselor, giving care and support, keeping in close touch with their parents and guardians, and providing intensive academic counseling, including taking students on trips to various college campuses.

**Research site and participant selection**

Building on literacy research that has focused on student writing development in classrooms of highly effective teachers (Freedman, Delp & Crawford 2005: Knoeller, 1996), I selected to conduct my study in Ms. William’s classroom because she was recognized as a dedicated, experienced and highly effective teacher as well as a leader within the school. Moreover, the Puente team of Ms. Williams and Ms. Diaz closely resembled the Puente model as it was envisioned by the Projects’ founders, thus increasing the odds that I would see “best practices” implemented at this site. I selected the 10th grade class since in their second year together, students were likely to have developed a sense of community and to be somewhat more familiar with the expectations of high school writing than as 9th graders. Ms. Williams was also more aware of her students’ individual and group needs after having taught them for a year. A first year teacher, Mr. Vallejo, was currently teaching the 9th grade Puente class at Emerson High, and while I did not study his class or his students, I did observe Puente activities that combined the two grade levels.
Focal students

The Puente class at Emerson was composed of 31 students; 15 were female and 16 were male. According to Ms. Williams, 30 students were Latino/a and one was Filipino. Nine were identified as language learners. The school’s scale of language proficiency, classified students as levels 1-5, with 1-2 as beginner, 3-4 as intermediate, and 5 as advanced. In the class, two students were identified as L3, three as L4, and four as L5. All the EL-identified students came from Spanish speaking families. I situated my examination of individual student writing within the literacy practices of the class as a whole. Specifically, I conducted case studies of the writing development of two of the students who were identified as English Learners and two students who had been previously EL identified, but were redesignated as Fluent English Proficient, or FEP. I chose these students because through ethnographic case studies of students’ writing practices, I wanted to analyze what, if any role, English Learner status played in how students develop their discoursal selves in academic writing tasks. Moreover, I focused on the diversity of students who were labeled as English Learners to emphasize students’ heterogeneity in terms of first and second language proficiency as well as years of schooling in the United States (Valdés, 2001, 2004). Specifically, I selected students who reflected the range of levels of English proficiency, biliteracy, and academic performance among EL and RFEP-identified students in the class as well the range of time students had attended school in the United States.

Saul

Saul was born in the United States where he attended grades K-2, but went to live with his mother in Mexico when his parents divorced when he was in the second grade. He then spent the next seven and half years living with his mother and attending public school in Mexico. He returned to the Bay Area when he started 9th grade to live with extended family. He changed homes a few times during the year of this study, and in the fall of his 10th grade year moved in with his girlfriend Sofia, another of the focal students, her mother and younger brother. In the 9th grade he was designated as EL 3, or intermediate, but was redesignated RFEP at the start of the 10th grade year. Having had formal schooling in both Mexico and the United States, Saul was bilingual and biliterate.

Saul completed most essay and formal writing assignments, but didn’t turn in smaller assignments and became easily frustrated in class. He expressed often that he didn’t think that he wrote well and would have liked to be able to express himself as well in writing as he could verbally. Indeed, he was quick to participate in classroom discussions and often engaged in debates with both his teacher and classmates. Nonetheless, he usually earned A’s and B’s on academic writing assignments. He tended to not turn in smaller daily assignments, which brought his grades down to a D’s and C’s for his quarter grades.

Manuel

Manuel was born in Mexico and moved to the Bay Area with his parents and older brother when he was eight. He had attended school in Emerson High’s district since the third grade. He lived with his father, who he described as an important role model for him, his mother, and his older brother, who graduated from Emerson, but had not participated in Puente.

Manuel was designated as EL 3, and struggled a great deal with essay writing. He generally earned Ds and low Cs on his writing assignments, and his quarterly grades were either high Ds or low Cs. He was generally very quiet during class and would only occasionally make contributions to class discussions. Several times a week, he appeared confused by the directions that Ms. Williams gave. He would sit silently and draw until she would go over to him and
clarify what he is supposed to do. Once in a while, he asked classmates for help or to repeat
directions. His classmates would then usually explain the directions in Spanish.

Yesenia

Yesenia was born in the community surrounding Emerson High School. She lived with
her parents, who immigrated from Mexico as young adults, and her younger brother and sister.
While she had been classified as EL in elementary school, she had been redesigned RFEP by the
sixth grade. I included Yesenia as a case study student in large part due to Ms. Williams’ advice,
who suggested that Yesenia represented a type of student common to Puente classes at Emerson,
a generally high achieving student who demonstrated an EL “accent” in her writing such as
nonnative syntax and problems with usage conventions.

Yesenia’s home was bilingual; she spoke in Spanish with parents and in English with her
siblings. As for her friends, she said that she spoke to them either in English or Spanish,
depending on which language they were more comfortable speaking. She also said that she had
some ability to write in Spanish such as notes to her parents and letters to her extended family in
Mexico, but did not do any academic writing in Spanish.

Determined to go to college to become a pediatric nurse, Yesenia was a diligent student
who completed all her assignments on time. She rewrote her essays multiple times, paying close
attention to teacher suggestions. Generally she earned B’s on her essays and A’s for her quarter
grades.

Sofia

Sofia was also born and raised in the community surrounding Emerson High. She lived
with her mother and brother, and eventually her boyfriend Saul, and spoke only English at home.
Her parents divorced when she was in elementary school, and while she spoke with her father in
Spanish, she said that usually consisted of telephone calls since he lived in another city in
California. She wrote notes in cards to extended family members in Mexico in Spanish, but did
not do any extended writing. Despite having attended school in the district since kindergarten,
Sofia was designated as an EL 4 language learner at the start of her 10th grade year.

When Saul wasn’t distracting her with side conversations as he often did, Sofia tended to
be very quiet in class, rarely raising her hand to speak. She tried to complete all her assignments,
but struggled with writing, generally earning C’s for both essay assignments and quarter grades.
She stated that she preferred when directions were very clear and she felt like she knew exactly
what was being asked of her. She also shared that she enjoyed being in the Puente class because,
unlike her experiences in other classes, the students would help her instead of making fun of her
when she didn’t understand something.

Data and data collection methods

I collected the bulk of my data from during the 2008-2009 school year. I drew on
ethnographic methods, including participant observation (Gold, 1958; Bodgan & Biklen, 2007;
Heath & Street, 2008) and discourse analysis of talk and written texts (Ochs, 1992, 1993, 2002;
Wells, 1997, 2009) to gain insights into how Ms. Williams, Ms. Diaz and their students
understood, felt about, and participated in academic writing practices. I was on site four to five
days a week starting in October and continuing until the end of the school year in June. In that
time, I collected the following data.

Interviews and Informal Conversations with Focal Students

I conducted a formal interview with each focal student during the second semester of the
school year. I asked about his or her language backgrounds, experiences with and feelings about
academic writing, and what they viewed as important about participating in the Puente Project. I
recorded and transcribed these interviews. I also held numerous informal conversations about
all of these topics with focal students throughout the school year and recorded the gist of these
conversations in my daily fieldnotes. This data set served as my starting point in analyzing
students’ motivations for participating in Puente, how they presented their autobiographical and academic identities, and how these academic identities changed over time.

Fieldnotes from classroom observations; audio and video recordings of selected classroom activities.

I took daily fieldnotes in Ms. William’s class from September 2008 to June 2009. I attended 4 class sessions a week on average. For the first couple of months, I would sit in the back of the class and jot down what I saw and heard. However, as the year progressed I became an increasingly active participant in classroom activities and could only jot down quick notes in between working with students. I would then flesh out these notes into descriptive fieldnotes after class. I also audio recorded whole class discussions and common practices such as literary circles and Socratic seminars. Finally, I video recorded focal events in the classroom, such as the class Poetry slam and students’ performances of parts of the play Zoot Suit by Luis Valdez. For all the activities I observed and recorded, I also collected corresponding classroom artifacts, including all readings and handouts given to students. I used this data set to examine the objects, subjects, mediating artifacts and division of labor that made up the activity system of the Puente English classroom. The analysis of this data also allowed me to identify the opportunities within the classroom for students to construct and perform discoursal selves.

Fieldnotes of out-of-class Puente activities

To gain insight on how the activity system of Puente reached beyond the walls of the classroom, I took fieldnotes while participating in out-of-class activities with Ms. Williams’ class. I joined on a college fieldtrip to a university in the area. I also accompanied the class on two cultural fieldtrips, the first to a Dia de los Muertos exhibition at a local museum, and a second to Spanish language theater production of A House on Mango Street. I observed two after-school poetry slams organized by the nonprofit Youth Speaks attended my many of Ms. William’s students. I also attended Puente celebrations, including a small after-school gathering to celebrate Ms. Diaz’s ’ birthday and the large end-of-the-year Puente celebration held in the evening at the school cafeteria. Finally, I shadowed Ms. Williams during a two-day Puente professional development conference for teachers held by the Puente Statewide Office. As a participant observer during all of these activities, I recorded notes during the events at free moments and then wrote complete fieldnotes in the evening or during the day after the event. This data set allowed me to analyze the practices that constituted the out-of-class aspects of Puente at Emerson High.

Student writing, including their writing portfolios from both the 9th and 10th grade

So that I could analyze how students performed and constructed their discoursal selves throughout their two years in the Puente English, I collected all the writing that my focal students produced in Ms. Williams’ class during their 10th grade year. I also collected both 9th and 10th grade end-of-the-year writing portfolios for the entire class. Examining the portfolios from both years afforded me insight into students’ development of discoursal selves over time.

Formal interview and informal conversations with the teacher and counselor

I conducted a formal, audio recorded, interview with Ms. Williams about her pedagogical theories, goals for classroom instruction, and pedagogical approaches, forms of assessment, and the school and state requirements that influenced her curriculum. Also, throughout the 2008-2009 school year, I took fieldnotes of informal conversations with Ms. Williams about her perceptions about this study’s focal students’ development as writers. I also took note of her goals for and evaluation of the Puente practices that I observed inside and outside of the classroom. In a similar manner, I conducted a formal, audio recorded, interview of Ms. Diaz
about her role in the program and how she worked with Puente students and their families. I also took fieldnotes of numerous conversations I had with Ms. Diaz during the school year about her work with and perceptions of the focal students. Finally, I noted in my fieldnotes instances where Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams worked together as a Puente team. This data set allowed me to analyze the two adults’ motives for the activity system of Puente as well as their roles.

*Formal student assessment data*

Finally, I collected assessment data that helped me to examine my focal students’ diversity in terms of English language status and academic performance. I collected quarter and semester grades for all students in the class. For my focal students I also collected standardized reading and writing test scores and California Language Development Test (CELDT) scores from both 9th and 10th grade.

*Analysis*

To examine how the Puente Project at Emerson afforded opportunities for student agency through expansive learning across different contexts, I developed analytical categories that drew on activity theory (Engestrom, 2001). This helped me analyze the activity system of the Puente Project at Emerson High School. For instance, since according to activity theory, all activities which make up the larger activity system are set into motion by motives and objectives (Leontiev, 1981), I examined the motives of participants in the program: teacher, counselor, and focal students. I analyzed how the motives of the various participants interact to contribute to shaping the object(s) of the activity system of Puente at Emerson High.

First of all, I analyze the motives that both Ms. Williams and Ms. Diaz expressed in participating in this program. I coded their motives for Puente at Emerson High, or what objectives they have for themselves as well other participants, students and parents, who make up the Puente Project at this site. Furthermore, I identified focal students’ perceptions of themselves as writers as well as the functions that writing served across their two years in Puente through “in vivo” emic coding (Strauss, 1987). I selected or words and phrases quoted directly from participants to serve as codes, which allowed me to examine the concepts and patterns that emerged from the data.

During my initial forays into coding data, the primary motives that emerged from the formal interviews and informal discussions with Ms. Williams and Ms. Diaz were “building community,” “college preparation,” and “students developing agency as writers.” To understand these motives from an emic perspective, I drew on Becker’s methodology (1998) to create concepts as empirical generalizations. I looked at all the cases where “community” and “college preparatory” and “writing at the center” were discussed within my teacher and counselor interviews. From these cases, I isolated generic features (Becker, p. 141) to develop the concepts for these terms. I then coded student transcripts and focal students’ writing in both their 9th and 10th grade writing portfolios in which they reflected on their development as writers and as “Puentistas.” In doing so, I further refined my original codes to reflect the concepts that emerged across teacher, counselor, and focal student data sets. I then examined instances of my emerging analytical codes across data sets through comparative matrices. In this manner, I shifted between using my analytical framework and participants’ understandings, as lenses for building empirical generalizations. While reading through my data sets and coding, I also wrote analytical memos to help me further conceptualize the themes that were taking shape.

In addition, I examined how students brought in goals, language genres, and ideas that they gained through Puente activities outside of the classroom and incorporated them in classroom discussions or in their academic writing. I used discourse analytical methods developed by Gordon Wells (1997, 2007) to examine how oral and written discourses served as the tools that
enabled participants to coordinate actions within academic activities, how goals emerged from discourse between participants, and how generic discourse structures both shaped and were shaped by the activity in which they emerged. I coded for different participants’ goals and for mediating artifacts, including the spoken and written genres (Bakhtin, 1986) and social languages (Bakhtin, 1981), that students appropriated and brought into the classroom from their participation in various activity systems. I transcribed and coded data from my fieldnotes and selected audio and video recordings that I had indentified during my fieldwork as demonstrating activities, genres and events that stood out for participants as important and those occasions that spoke to my analytical framework. For instance, all four of my focal students spoke about the significance of the poetry unit and their experiences in writing poetry in Ms. Williams’ class during their interviews with me. They also all included examples of their poetry in their 10th grade writing portfolios. This activity also expanded beyond the walls of the classroom as a number of students, including my focal student Saul participated in a poetry slam in a neighboring city organized by the nonprofit organization, Poetry Speaks.

To analyze student’s formation of their identities as academic writers in particular, I used analytical categories from Elinor Ochs’ (1992, 1993, 2002) work on indexicality in language socialization. Drawing on Ochs’ (1992), Bucholz and Hall (2005) explain that “indexicality involves the creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings” (594). These links depend on the context of an utterance, including the activity that is taking place, and on the cultural frames and schemas that individuals draw on to interpret linguistic forms. Linguistic forms, however, do not index identity directly; instead they are associated with affective and epistemic stances. These in turn may be associated with certain social identities. These stances, moreover, do not only point to social identities, they also help to constitute them. Moreover, in her later work, Ochs (2002) incorporates an activity theory perspective (Engestrom, 1993) to argue “action, stance, identity, and activity are interdependent” and that “actions and stances are the building blocks of social identities and activities” (p. 110).

I borrowed from Ochs’ (2002) perspective of action, stance, identity and activity and synthesized it with Well’s (2007) model of interpersonal action as the center of learning to create the following conceptual map (figure 1) to help me analyze my data.

Figure 1
This map helped me to organize my data to examine how the activities within Puente both influenced and were influenced by student’s identities as they participated within them. Interpersonal actions, such as sharing a piece of writing with a small group of students for feedback, stands at the center of this mapping because it brings together the cultural – institutional level, or the norms of the high school English classroom with the personal investments of individual students. These two levels influence each other bi-directionally as they meet in an instance of joint action. The artifacts that I collected, such as student essays, were products of the joint actions within the classroom.

For my case studies of students, I coded transcripts of interviews and select instances of students’ writing for the evaluative stances they displayed. I then analyzed how these connected to actions - or socially recognized, goal-directed behavior - and how these linked stances and acts were associated with particular identities and activities. To analyze student writing in particular, I grounded my coding system in Geoff Thompson and Susan Hunston’s (2000) definition of evaluation: “the broad cover terms for the expression of the speaker or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feeling about the entities or propositions that that he or she is talking about” (p.5). First of all I examined what social actions the writer attempted through the piece of text. Then, to analyze how he or she linguistically indexed aspects of identity, I identified linguistic features, or stances, that marked either positive or negative affect and evaluations of “bad” and “good.” I also identified lexical and grammatical markers of certainty and uncertainty such as hedges and modal verbs (Biber & Finegan 1989; Huntson and Thompson, 2000; Ochs, 2002). Finally, I coded for instances in which students used direct identity labels in their writing such as “Puentista,” “Graffiti Artist” or “Essay Person.” I used this method to help me examine the linguistic features of students’ discoursal selves and analyze how these discoursal selves were related to the practices that made up the activity system of Puente at Emerson High School.

**Researcher role**

As a participant observer, I played a number of roles in the Puente classroom and Puente community at Emerson and developed fairly close relationships with the participants of this study. Before entering graduate school, I had taught 9th and 10th English at a high school in a district neighboring Emerson High. It felt very natural for me to move into a teacher-like role in Ms. Williams’ classroom. For instance, for a portion of most of the mornings that I spent in the classroom, I would put my notebook down and circle around the room as students worked in groups, offering my help. I also gave students both verbal and written feedback on some of their writing. In fact, a few students even mentioned that I had helped them develop as writers in the acknowledgment section of their 10th grade writing portfolios. I also filled in for Ms. Williams when she needed help with grading essay drafts, and acted as her substitute teacher for a week while she out ill with pneumonia.

My fluid role in the classroom, fieldtrips, and after school events - in which I was part researcher, part teacher figure, part chaperone, and part friend - allowed me to develop a great deal of trust with the participants. I believe that Ms. Williams, Ms. Diaz as well as my focal students were able to openly talk to me in both formal interviews and informally to a degree that would not have been possible if I had kept greater distance and maintained a more rigid “researcher” role. Moreover, by actually participating in Puente practices, I was able to develop a deep sense of what it felt like to be a member of the Puente community at Emerson.

Conversely, since I did help students with their writing, what they produced in their 10th grade year was in part influenced by my feedback, a fact that I take into account in my findings. Moreover, when I approached the data analysis stage of this project, I was aware that I carried biases, especially from my role as Ms. Williams’ “assistant” and as students’ writing “coach”
that could carry over in what I was noticing in the data. To prevent this from occurring, I
maintained a reflexive and self-aware stance to what I was finding. I looked for places of tension
and contradiction and shared my data and emerging analysis with colleagues in my graduate
student research group for their feedback.

Fifteen months after I had completed my study at Emerson and was deep into the data
analysis for this dissertation, I was hired by the Puente Project to be the High School Teacher
Training Coordinator for the statewide program, a position that I held throughout my writing of
this dissertation. This position allowed me a great deal of insight into the administrative
workings of the Puente Project; however, it also introduced an entirely new set of potential
biases. To mitigate this, as I completed my analysis, I retained my reflexive stance, interrogating
my emerging findings for how my current professional role may have influenced my analytical
lens. I continually went back to both my analytical framework and the data itself to ensure the
validity of my findings.
Chapter 3

The Puente team: Setting the program in motion

According to Cultural Historical Activity Theory, (CHAT), an activity system is conceptualized as a multi-faceted triangle that consists of the following: a subject, or the individual actor, object, or objective that sets the activity into motion, mediating artifacts, or culturally produced material and psychological tools and signs, the community, or those who share the same general object, rules, or explicit norms and conventions that constrain actions within the activity system, and division of labor, or the division of object-oriented actions among members of the community (Cole, 1996, p.140 -141). All activities that make up a larger activity system are set in motion by motives and objectives (Leontiev, 1981). In this chapter I discuss the central motives that the Puente counselor, Ms. Diaz and teacher, Ms. Williams had for the activity system of Puente at Emerson High School: 1) preparing students for life after high school, 2) building community, 3) facilitating student agency. I examine how these various motives influence Puente practices inside and outside of the classroom, and thus, contribute to shaping the object(s) of the activity system of Puente at Emerson High School.

For both Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams, the central motive of their work as educators was to provide students with tools, direction and support during their high school years that would help them navigate the world after high school. Both educators wanted not only to prepare their students to succeed in four-year college, but to empower them. While Ms. Williams’ overarching motive was to prepare students to attend four-year college, similar to the stated goal of the Puente Project Statewide Office, she also strove to create writing practices that allowed students to express themselves and develop agentive identities as writers, something she viewed as valuable for their lives, both personal and academic.

Ms. Diaz saw her role as wider. She aspired to change students’ and families self-assessments and expand their sense of what opportunities may be available to them. I examine how guiding students towards four-year college was an aspect of this larger motive, but Ms. Diaz’s driving concern centered on empowering her students and community more generally. In this, she held a motive for Puente beyond the scope of the Puente Project Statewide Office and beyond that of her partner at Emerson, Ms. Williams. Thus, while Ms. Diaz understood her role as one of building students up socio-emotionally and introducing education as a positive value within the community as a whole, Ms. Williams had a stronger focus on preparing individual students academically to succeed in four-year college. However, within this larger motive, she also championed students’ socio-emotional development, especially through writing.

Secondly, both educators were highly invested in creating a culturally responsive community of care which supported and affirmed Puente students and their families. This was true though this motive conflicted, at times, with their desire to guide students and families towards certain post-secondary pathways, such as four-year college. Both educators also were committed to empowering students to develop positive academic identities that empowered them to express what the two educators termed “voice.” However, Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams’ conceptions of voice differed in significant ways.

To understand how such conflicting motives influenced the Puente activity system at Emerson High, I analyze each educators understanding of the concepts and practices that underlie the Puente community, or “familia,” the tensions within and between each educator’s understanding and actions. Finally, I analyze how both educators understood and created
practices which they believed helped Puente students develop agentive social and academic identities.

**Different backgrounds**

*Ms. Diaz: “Puente’s not a program, it’s a revolution”*

The daughter of a Chicano Civil Rights leader, Ms. Diaz viewed her work as a “vocation,” through which she taught students about the struggles that their forefathers as she guided them to overcome the psychological, societal, and economic obstacles they faced in their own lives and towards what she viewed as a successful future. Ms. Diaz lived in the same community as her students; her husband worked as a Puente counselor at the local community college; and Puente provided a space in which her personal history, political convictions and identities as a Chicana, educator, mother and grandmother converged. Inspired by her own father, Ms. Diaz greatly valued the fact that her “public and private life came together” (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09).

Understanding her own role to be much like that of her community activist father, she devoted herself to changing what seemed possible and reachable for Puente students and parents. She understood her goal as a long term, even multi-generational goal. As she expressed:

> Well, I tell them that Puente’s not a program, it’s a revolution. Right? So when we change one person’s perspective I know their children will go to college . . . You know, Saul or whoever, they’ll make sure their children are doing their homework. I know they all will. I know that they’ll watch their children and that’s all it’s about, for me anyway. (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09)

Ms. Diaz’s central motive was to change the perspectives of the students in her charge, understanding that this shift towards a greater focus on education would in time lead to greater educational attainment, even if it took a few generations. From her many years as a counselor in the community she explained that “You never know. You can’t look at a kid in high school and say, ‘Oh, yeah, they’re this, that or another” (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09). She shared how her students took many life paths, some who had started college deciding to leave before they received a degree to start families and businesses, and others deciding to seek out higher education later in life.

Ms. Diaz also felt relieved that the Puente Project Statewide Office no longer exerted as much pressure as she felt in the early years to send a certain percentage of students to a University of California campus each year. She explained, “And so my emphasis is not so much UC’s anymore, it’s college and a plan, and graduate. So, I feel more relieved than when we first started because it was always about numbers, ‘how many did you get into UC?’” (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09). However, the numbers of students who were accepted into 4-year colleges, including the University of California (UC) system, remained fairly steady from the first graduating class, 1999, to the graduating class, 2009. The chart below displays data gathered by Puente Statewide, showing the number of students who each year enrolled at UC, the California State University (CSU), independent or out-of-state 4-year college (IND/OUT), and California Community College campuses within a year of high school graduation. Historically, most Emerson HS Puente graduates enrolled in college; however, with the exception of the class of 2000, the majority enrolled in community college. Across the years, the mean 4-year college going rate directly out of high school was 36%.
While Ms. Diaz saw part of her job as guiding students towards four-year college, including the University of California system, she viewed this goal as too narrow in and of itself. When she reflected that this was still the central focus for Puente counselors at other schools, she took a critical stance, stating, “And some counselors still will do that. ‘Oh, I got 14 into such and such and 10 over there. ‘Okay. That’s great. Good for you’” (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09).

The two other high schools in the district, which also had Puente programs, historically had a greater percentage of their graduating Puente seniors enter four-year colleges than Emerson. However, students at these two schools also performed better in general measures such as API, had fewer students living in poverty, and had fewer students who qualified as language learners.

For Ms. Diaz, building a long-term relationship of trust and connection with the community and guiding students and their families to pursue positive life paths - including post-secondary education, counted as success. She was far less concerned about the numbers of students she sent to college in a particular year. After describing how the Puente program in a neighboring high school went through three different Puente counselors in five years, she stated:

One of the things that is unique about this site is I have been the only [Puente] counselor for 13 years. I was the first counselor and have been here consistently. So, the relationship building with the people in the community, the people who send kids here and refer kids, families: I live in this – I don’t live in the neighborhood, but in the community. I’ve been to church and at dances where I turn around and see Puente parents. I think that makes a significance difference. (Ms. Diaz, interview 1/15/09)

Through her deep connection with the community in which she lived and worked, Ms. Diaz believed that she affected long-term change. Even if a particular student did not go directly to a four year college after high school, she felt that she was successful when the seed of a post-secondary education as an important and reachable goal was planted, whether that came to fruition later in a student’s life or in the following generation. For Ms. Diaz, the goal extended far beyond the school day within the walls of Emerson High. In this way she felt she continued the work of her father stating, “This is my life. I was raised by a civil rights person, a community organizer. I don’t know how else to be. Not everybody’s me, but it does take more work than just the 8:00 to 4:00” (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09). Puente, therefore, provided a space in which she could continue her life’s work of serving and empowering her community. In
this way, she defined the Puente counseling role in terms specific to her history and commitments, something she recognized that all educators in the Puente program shared.

*Ms. Williams: “It’s often hard to think of Puente as separate from me”*

As an Anglo woman who lived outside of the neighborhood surrounding Emerson High, Ms. Williams’ motives for the activity system of Puente at Emerson were also shaped by her unique history and commitments, which differed from those of Ms. Diaz in important ways. While like Ms. Diaz she also believed it was essential to form long-term relationships with her Puente students and families, unlike Ms. Diaz, she emphasized the importance of her connection to the professional community of Puente educators. When asked, she explained that she valued the Puente Project as a statewide program:

> creating this larger professional learning community that’s outside of my school and district and linking me with people with a common philosophy across California. And, being able to continue my study of writing and the teaching of writing as a professional too.

(Ms. Williams, interview, 12/9/08)

For Ms. Williams, her role as a teacher of writing was central to how she shaped Puente classroom activities; and she appreciated the space that Puente provided her to further expand this professional repertoire.

In terms of her own development as a teacher, moreover, she viewed Puente as an extension of the philosophies and practices she had learned in her teacher preparation program. She described how the architects of the Puente Project’s high school program, also directed the teacher credentialing program at U.C. Berkeley where she attained her teaching degree. As she put it:

> I just feel like there was this seamless, you know it’s just part of how I’ve been trying to be a teacher and there’s no separation between the philosophies and the pedagogies. It’s very, very comforting. So sometimes, yeah. So it’s easy. It’s often hard for me to think of Puente as separate from me.

(Ms. Williams, interview, 12/9/08)

Ms. Williams’ classroom practices were very much rooted in her educational and professional background. As I observed, writing was very much the centerpiece of the classroom, with students’ writing every day and engaging in prewriting, drafting and revision. She placed a great deal of emphasis on “building on what students do well.” She guided and encouraged students to develop their own ideas and voices, and sought to include students’ experiences and cultural backgrounds in the reading and writing curriculum. For instance, students read a variety of texts written by Latino authors, wrote autobiographical essays about a legend in their families, and had considerable choice in what topics they wrote about for a variety of essays. This approach to teaching English was deeply rooted in the philosophies of the Bay Area Writing Project and the approach to teacher education at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education. Early in her career, Ms. Williams joined Puente, and found its professional development to be a “seamless” continuation of what she had learned in her graduate studies. Thus, she viewed that there was no separation between her identity as a teacher and her participation in Puente.

Being part of the larger Puente professional learning community, also allowed her to look beyond the “district reform” that changed every couple of years, such as teaching very formulaic writing or focusing on test genre writing for the California High School Exit Exam, both of which were encouraged at the time. Instead, she relied on what she saw as a coherent and empowering philosophy to shape the literacy practices in her classroom. She understood
learning to write as a developmental process and that good teaching starts with building on what students do well and guides them to develop identities as writers. As she put it; “I can’t imagine people who don’t have [a professional learning community]. But yeah, it helps to get beyond the politics of district reform that you know comes in waves. And, really focus on the philosophy of teaching writing and supporting students’ writing identity and building on their strengths. That’s a real strong point at Puente, the idea of supportive building on strengths and identifying what’s working … The foundation of the pedagogy is “what are they doing well, what are they starting to do.” (Ms. Williams, interview, 12/09/08)

Complementary activity systems
Converging into community

Despite their differences in the paths that lead them to Puente, Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams shared many of the same motives for the activity system of Puente at Emerson. Over the eleven years that they worked together as a team, both teacher and counselor strove to create a strong relationship between Puente at Emerson High and the surrounding community and families to further students’ educational achievement. As Ms. Williams expressed: It’s about, over the years, building a reputation, building connections with the community. So, they help each other and the parents become a support for each other and kind of have an expectation of each other. So, that kind of accountability starts being built into it. (Ms. Williams, interview, 12/09/08) Similarly to Ms. Diaz, she believed that part of her role was both educating and supporting parents. However, unlike Ms. Diaz, who held a wider “community organizing” perspective, Ms. Williams viewed her role in the community more narrowly, as preparing students for college and parents to best support students to get there. She explained how Puente at Emerson focused on “family learning . . . demystifying college for the whole family” (Ms. Williams, interview, 12/09/08). While Ms. Williams also focused on empowerment in a wider sense, having individual students find their “voice” and a sense of agency in their writing, she did not believe this to be in tension with her over-arching motive. “Familia”: Creating a community of care

While Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams had particular goals in mind for both their Puente students and their families, both viewed creating a safe, caring community as the vehicle towards these ends. Both were deeply invested in creating what Nel Noddings (2005) terms “a caring relation” between adults and students, among students, and between students and their larger community. According to Noddings, in this relationship adults are responsive to students’ needs and desires, and interact with them in a manner that makes students feel cared for. Through building trust and connection, adults then “help students develop the capacity to care” for others, ideas, and for nonhuman life, and even objects” (18). This caring relation took precedence over the other motives the two educators expressed, and laid the foundation for the practices of Puente at Emerson High, both inside and outside of the classroom. The concept of community or “familia” championed by Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams, incorporated a model of family and community that embraced the cultural norms of many of the students and their families to create a safe space for students and their families within the school.

The term “familia” was used by the Puente Project Statewide Office as a metaphor for the culturally responsive learning community that they intended for teams to create at the school sites. However, Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams infused this concept with their own personal understandings and motives. For Ms. Diaz, “familia” transcended the classroom and was closely
linked to a culturally specific definition of family that she shared with the Latino families in her community. As she put it, “And I believe that Puente is about relationships, and that’s my mantra . . . I believe the kids are successful not because of the books they read, but because of the expectations and the caring and the relationships in the room” (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09). Ms. Williams, also found “familia” as central to the activity system of Puente, but her definition placed greater emphasis on academic aspects. As she expressed, it was most important “to create this familia and . . . and create a sense within our classroom of safety, of sharing, of thoughtfulness and being thoughtful about our own process and respectful of other people’s process and kind of building an intellectual community (Ms. Williams, interview, 12/09/08).

This emphasis on care included building a partnership of trust with students’ blood “familia” as well. Ms. Diaz lived in a community near Emerson High, attended the same church as many her students and their parents, and attended many community events and celebrations, including her students’ quinceaneras. Ms. Williams, while not a member of the surrounding community, similarly saw her role as building a “. . . safe harbor. Both offering the parents a place where we’re going to watch out for your kids, and to kids, we are on you” (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09). Both educators held high expectations for both their Puente students and parents. If a student needed it, Ms. Williams was committed to “being on them,” including mandatory tutoring after school and calling parents when grades began to slip. Ms. Diaz also expected what she called “Puente behavior” both academically and socially from her students, where they would handle themselves as respectable and responsible leaders of their community. Similarly, she was willing to challenge parents when she believed it be in the best interest of her student. According to Ms. Diaz:

. . . my Puente kids, the parents have a lot of confidence in me. So, I can enter into - I don’t want to say arguments - but a struggle with them to see their child a little differently or get their child to go somewhere. Most of my parents will entertain my ideas, even when they are hard nuts themselves. (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09)

In their efforts to “bridge” home and school, both Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams treated parent education as an essential aspect of their roles. For instance, they facilitated evening workshops for parents, most of whom were immigrants from Latin American countries, on how to navigate the US educational system, especially the college application and financial aid process. They also held a large end-of-year celebration for students and their families, during which the Emerson Puente community shared a potluck dinner, student performances, and recognition of the accomplishments of the graduating class.

Activities within their context

Ms. Diaz: Creating a culturally responsive educational community

Ms. Diaz was an active participant in the Puente classroom, and joined in discussions about Chicano literature and history, sharing her experiences growing up surrounded by activists. As she expressed, students “need to know history, about the struggle of Chicano-Latinos in California” (Interview, 363). However, “none of it would be successful without the sense that we’re a family. And not a family in the American way they say “family” (Interview 380-383). For Ms. Diaz, the concept of the Puente “familia” was quite literal, she viewed the students as “her kids” and did not agree with what she considered the American over-emphasis on independence. As she put it:

I don’t believe that all people are ready to be independent. I used to think that was a great thing. I don’t believe that anymore. I believe that some of us have to hold people’s hands to the point where they can go on. I haven’t
quite learned when to stop, but I’m working on it. (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09)

Every student had her cell phone number, and they were welcome to text her at all hours when they needed help and support. In addition to always being able to reach Ms. Diaz by text, students were welcome to come to her office at any time, no appointment needed. She wanted them to feel like they “owned” her office and that she was always available to meet their academic and emotional needs. However, as she readily admitted, there was a tension in wanting to take care of students and “hold their hands” and to prepare them to “go on” and advocate for themselves. Describing this struggle over the course of her counseling career, Ms. Diaz explained that with the first cohort of Puente students, “I was their mother, I was in charge. But I’ve had to – and when they graduated, I cried for like a week and I was happy. I wanted them to leave me, but at the same time, I realized that you cannot be that involved with every kid. You have to give up some responsibility to them” (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09). Over the years, she felt that she turned over more responsibility to her students. Her current Puente students were expected to seek her out when they needed assistance. She kept her door open at all times, but expected them to come to her if they needed to talk about a class in which they struggled, or had problems at home.

Similarly, Ms. Diaz also struggled with her role of affirming the common cultural values that she and many of the Puente students shared, and wanting them to be critical thinkers and self-advocates. It was indeed the case that when she walked into the classroom students responded with what she termed “total respect.” They would sit up a bit straighter, all side chatter would cease, and even students who had a tendency to talk back to Ms. Williams, listened to Ms. Diaz silently. On several occasions, she would lecture them about “Puente behavior” either because some students had been chronically tardy or had broken a school rule. Before every field trip, she would also come by and instruct them on how they should comport themselves while representing Puente off school grounds. According to Ms. Diaz:

[students] see me symbolically, like, “this is what I have to live up to.” I remember several years ago, I used to hate being the witch, you know, the older lady in Puente. But, I really started seeing the benefits in that sort of psychological thing. So, somewhere in their psyche they know what they’re supposed to do and I just remind them, you know? I’m also the older fashion limit setting, “don’t you dare talk while I’m talking” person, which I struggle with because I feel that I grew up this way. How do you have kids be critical thinkers, speak up for themselves and still, within our culture, be called respectful? (Ms. Diaz, Interview, 1/15/09)

As their counselor, students’ socio-emotional development was central, and she struggled with how to best create a culturally affirming and supportive high school Puente community, and also prepare students to make their own decisions and advocate for themselves in their future educational endeavors. For Ms. Diaz these two motives were at times as in conflict with one another, especially in terms of US cultural norms. In this case, behavior viewed as respectful in students’ homes could be interpreted as passivity in educational settings that value assertiveness and self-advocacy.

Ms. Diaz’ commitment to her Puente students was unwavering. She worked very hard to maintain Puente as a space where all Puente students could “feel special and identify with school.” Once a student was selected to be part of a cohort, he or she became a “Puentista” for their entire high school career. According to Ms. Diaz she did not “drop” students from the program, but searched for a way to work with students who were falling behind academically or
in terms of their behavior “acted out.” For instance, she stated that she believed that one focal student, Saul, with his tendency to challenge authority would have been expelled if he had not been in Puente. Similarly, she explained that she took a chance on the focal student, Manuel, despite his status as a language learner and far below grade reading level, “because I’m tired of people thinking that Puente is just the best kids and they’re the cream of the crop, and that’s not true” (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09). Since both parents and students had to go through an application and interview process to be admitted in Puente, a common perception at the school, as communicated to me by several other teachers, was that Puente only chose from a pool of students who were already successful and had strong family support.

Ms. Diaz strongly disagreed with this view, and as the lead in student recruitment and selection, emphasized her effort to select a truly heterogeneous class. Of the eight students identified as English Learners in the class, Manuel was indeed a bit of an exception, since he was evaluated as an intermediate English learner, or EL 3 on the districts scale of 1-5, while the rest of the EL students were designated as advanced, EL 4 or 5. However, students did represent a range of reading levels as evaluated by the district’s reading test, from 4 years below grade level to the 10th grade reading level. Moreover, the class included two students who had identified learning disabilities. The grade distribution in Ms. William’s class also demonstrated the class’ heterogeneity, with about 40% of students earning A’s and B’s, about 35% of students earning C’s, and about 25% of the students earning D’s and F’s on their semester grades.

Nonetheless, despite students’ various levels of academic preparedness and motivation before entering Puente, after being selected into the program, they became a part of a “special” group, “Puentistas.” Whether they performed well academically or not while in Puente, students were recognized as members of a group, associated with the University of California, and who were often considered “the cream of the crop” and “leaders” and given much more attention and care by both their counselor and English teacher than the majority of students at Emerson High. For instance, while Manuel continued to struggle academically, Ms. Diaz sought out ways that the Puente community could provide him with space to be successful in other ways. For instance, when the Puente students spent a Saturday selling nachos at a community fair as a fundraiser for college fieldtrips, “Manuel did this beautiful artwork, he did this beautiful sign, and all the [other students] were watching. And, you could just see that Manuel was the center of attention. I went ‘oh good,’ it’s what I call a Puente moment” (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09).

“I want my kids to survive”

Ms. Diaz wanted her students to see themselves as leaders and as “special.” She believed that building their self-efficacy and belief in themselves would help them “survive” in the world beyond Emerson High School. Ms. Diaz shared her own painful experiences of going to college and being judged to be an inadequate writer and student:

I know what it’s like to be from the Barrio. Even though I went to Catholic school, I know what it’s like to go to a college and feel stupid with kids who had so much more preparation since they were in kindergarten. And I want my kids to have a good vocabulary. I want them to know how to punctuate, and I don’t want them to feel like I did when a professor or a student assistant, who is your peer, tells you how horrible your work was and that you have to work on your writing. And that’s a horrible thing to happen to you. . . And that happened to me at Santa Cruz and even in graduate school where teachers would say, “What is this,” and whatever. And, I became a much better writer. I had honors at graduation, but that was because I had a roommate and a professor who was a compadre who
would help me. But, we have this opportunity here, and I guess that’s why I want my kids to survive, and they don’t. Not because they’re not smart. They don’t have - they feel stupid or they feel they’re not as prepared with their vocabulary or socially. And, it’s a horrible feeling – I know. (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09)

Ms. Diaz didn’t want her students to feel “stupid” like she did when professors and peers judged her writing to be inadequate. She wanted them to believe that they were smart and capable and have the tools for others to recognize them as such.

Ms. Diaz understood the hardships of coming from the “Barrio” to attend a university, not only in terms of being underprepared, but also in facing racism. A central motive for Ms. Diaz was to create Puente activities that would help her students “survive” in the face of such hostility. She shared how when she was growing up, her mother would instruct the young Ms. Diaz explaining, “Okay, learn the spoons, learn the settings because at a table if somebody makes a mistake it’s the one who has darker skin that’s going to be pointed at.” (Ms. Diaz interview, 1/15/09). Ms. Diaz understood this as a metaphor for attending a university without, as she put it, the privilege of race and class. As she explained, “I don’t feel my kids have that privilege . . . they have to survive out in the world with strangers, and I want people to be kind and respect them. So, they have to learn how to deal with it. They don’t have to act that way all the time, but they have to learn” (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09). She wanted her students to have the ability to present themselves, both in their writing and in their behavior, with pride and self-respect in a world that often expected the worst of them. To this end, she strove to teach students “Puente behavior.” As she put it:

“Everything we do is about Puente behavior and I tell them on campuses, “you are not ghetto,” and I tell them that. “Please, people can hear your conversations, we’re on a college campus, behave as if you belong here. Don’t live up to people's lowest expectations.” And maybe that’s old school and I shouldn’t do it, but I am. I’m not going to let my children go out there and act in a way that people expect them to and then they have to survive. (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09)

Ms. Diaz wanted students to have pride and to present themselves in a way that would best shield them from negative assumptions. She wanted them to have exposure to the world beyond their neighborhood and to be comfortable in environments that are filled with power and privilege.

She believed, for instance, that the value of Puente fieldtrips centered more on exposing them to new environments and helping them grow comfortable interacting in the world beyond their neighborhood than actually “to get them to college.” According to Ms. Diaz:

“Well, it’s all about exposure. I mean Puente wants to see it as exposure to college life and campuses. I sometimes think that doesn’t really help them get into college, but they love it. I sometimes think I should take them to Washington, DC and give them history lessons, have them eat in some of those restaurants and mingle with people that they’re not used to mingling with because I think that’s the surviving part. That’s one of my dreams. But, anything that we do outside of the neighborhood I think helps. And, I believe all these activities, whether we’re selling tamales or we’re going to hear Jimmy Santiago Baca, creates a specialness that you’re special and a community. (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09)
Puente students at Emerson HS took several fieldtrips every year. During the year of this study they visited two University of California campuses, attended a play adaption of Sandra Cisnero’s *A House on Mango Street* by a Spanish language theater company and went to museum for an exhibit of ofrendas or altars by local artists for *Diaz de los Muertos*. For Ms. Diaz, she saw these Puente activities as opportunities for students to feel comfortable in the world beyond their neighborhood. She also wanted them to be exposed to Latino art and literature to be empowered by the success and talent of Latinos who came before them. In this way she hoped her students would see themselves as “special” in a way that would protect them from internalizing the prejudice that they would also face as they ventured beyond their homes.

**Leadership and voice**

Ms. Diaz’s motive for Puente students to be empowered as leaders shaped many Puente practices. For instance, students participated in a number of community service activities in which they worked with younger children throughout the year. The two most frequent activities were “breakfast club,” serving breakfast to elementary students during breaks when free/reduced priced school meals were unavailable, and giving teddy bears to children at a local hospital. Puente students also took a lead role in recruiting new Puentistas from the middle school, and were in charge of organizing and holding the Puente end-of-the-year banquet, a large evening event that filled the school cafeteria with family and community members celebrating the graduating class. Students organized dinner, dance performances, skits, and awards. Ms. Diaz described how she organized students’ duties so that they were responsibility for this event, stating:

> What I try to do every year is build new leaders, more outspoken, but even the quiet leaders because I don’t believe leaders are at the front. They can also be hard workers. So, I think that part is really unique. At the end of the year I tell the freshman for the dinner, they are the masters of ceremonies and I need six of them. I say, “You do this part, you do this part, you do this part. The rest of you will be servers and I just will watch you.” And it’s all about building leadership and being responsible. (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09)

She believed that students should have many opportunities to be responsible and “masters of ceremonies,” whether by being vocal and sharing their ideas, or by simply “working hard” behind the scenes. In either respect she wanted students to feel that they were in charge of the success of the event. Similarly, Ms. Diaz encouraged students to take the lead in recruiting from the middle schools and in facilitating parent and student interviews. As Ms. Diaz expressed:

> I’ve been around long enough now that I have kids who present; they do all the work. They do the presentations. They do the recruitment, half of it, for me. I put them into classrooms. They tell kids about Puente: why they think it’s a good idea. When we do interviews and applications, the kids set up the – now they’re helping me to do interviews of children. I won’t let them do adults. Because I’ve run out of help, we try to do it all in one day. So, now I have one of my seniors do all the kids’ interviews. They organize the paperwork. When we have a parent orientation I say, “I am Mrs. Diaz, I’ve been here this long. These are leaders and I’m going to let them take over.” And they do the whole presentation, and I give them an outline, but I don’t tell them what to say. And, they are absolutely amazing. (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09)

In describing each event, Ms. Diaz emphasized the importance of students “taking over” and
continuing Puente practices and traditions with minimal oversight from her. In this way, she
wanted them to feel that Puente belonged to them and that they were responsible for representing
the program to the community at large.

While Ms. Diaz strove to create leadership opportunities for both outspoken and quieter
students, she believed that all her students should be supported to express themselves and take
pride in their words and ideas. However, she struggled with wanting them to have freedom, and
wanting them to be able to present themselves in a way that would be respected in the larger
world. She traced this back to what she understood as one of the original goals of the Puente
Project statewide. As she put it, “so that’s the only little thing that I do really, truly believe in the
old school Puente about finding your own word. Because I believe psychologically that’s who
you are and being able to put your voice out there, and as a leader you have to find your voice.”
(Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09). As a counselor with a background in both school guidance
counseling and therapeutic counseling, she believed in the importance for students to have
freedom to express themselves in ways that felt authentic to them. However, in terms of
writing, she wanted them to be able to present themselves as academically competent. She had
very little patience with some of Ms. Williams more developmentally focused approaches to
teaching writing. According to Ms. Diaz:

We want you to find your voice. So, I have the same kind of verbiage I use
with them: find your voice. Don’t worry about how long it is. Just, if you’re
thinking, then you’re not writing. You’re trying to please somebody. We want
you to find your voice. In the same instance, though, I struggle being old
school, and I know that [Ms. Williams] gets mad at me. I told her the other
day, I was at the CAHSEE. I think it was the CAHSEE. I was reading some of
their paragraphs. I said to her, “Oh my God, the spelling was horrible,
horrible.” She said, “Well, they have to read blah, blah, blah.” No, we have to
do spelling lists. I’m sorry. (Ms. Diaz, interview, 1/15/09)

In this particular case, Ms. Diaz had monitored the California High School Exit Exam, and
reacted with dismay at the spelling and usage mistakes she saw Puente students make on the
essay portion of the exam. For Ms. Diaz, writing instruction that helped a student “find their
voice” was acceptable as long as she saw that students had the tools to present themselves in a
way that would be respected and valued by those who read their writing. If they lacked such
tools, she did not hesitate to recommend “old school” methods like spelling drills. In all
respects, Ms. Diaz’s central goal was to ensure that her students “survived” and she was willing
to employ any practice that she felt would help them do so.

Ms. Williams: Building on strengths to develop academic writers

As the Puente teacher, Ms. Williams shared Ms. Diaz’s belief that the foundation of
Puente was creating a positive learning community where students would be honored for their
unique strengths and ideas. However, she described her focus as far more centered on helping
her students develop as writers. For instance, she explained that her role was to “create familia
and create a sense of our classroom, of safety, of sharing, of thoughtfulness and being thoughtful
about our own [writing] process and respectful of other people’s process and kind of building an
intellectual community” (Ms. Williams, interview 12/09/08). The activities in the Puente
classroom reflected this motive of having students learning from each other and being reflective
about their own learning. Moreover, students tended to support one another in a positive manner
when working together, helping those stuck on an assignment, and translating into Spanish for
students who didn’t understand a particular word in English. While the classroom community
wasn’t always an “intellectual one,” with students often slipping into chatting about social events and current gossip while discussing a class reading or working on a project, students clearly were a close knit group both in and out of the classroom.

Ms. Williams referred to her understanding of learning as “socially constructive.” The everyday classroom routines supported the creation of a community of sharing and learning from one another. Students sat in tables of four to facilitate sharing. Every class session would include reading logs written in class or for homework in response to a text they studied in class. Table groups would then “nominate” students who had interesting or well-written pieces to read aloud to the entire class. For reading aloud students earned “Puente points,” which over time could raise their overall grade. Students also participated in many formal and informal class discussions. For instance, every few weeks students would hold a “Socratic seminar” in which a group of students in the center of the room would discuss a piece of literature while the rest of the class observed and evaluated them on both the ideas discussed and their ability to engage one another in the seminar. Students also held a formal debate in preparation for writing a persuasive essay. Moreover, the 9th and 10th grade Puente classes would combine once a week for “independent reading” literature circles. In groups of four to six 9th and 10th graders, students would read and discuss an “independent reading book” that the group had chosen from a selection of 10 or so novels.

Class discussions and support with reading literature were daily activities in Ms. Williams’ class, but these activities tended to support her larger motive: developing students’ identities as academic writers. As she put it:

it’s college preparation. It’s building academic readiness. I think that part of my role is helping them navigate high school in general. Helping them get ready – start to imagine themselves as college students, and imagine themselves and identify as writers: that they are writers and that their experience is valuable to write about and valuable to share. (Ms. Williams, interview, 12/09/08)

According to Ms. Williams the most powerful tool that she had in helping students navigate through their educational careers, develop pride in their ideas and experiences, and grow as thinkers and human beings, was writing. When I asked what she thought was unique about Puente, she answered; “obviously, I think Puente has done a beautiful job of creating community for them. But it’s having the writing component at the center – a centerpiece and the main vehicle is the English class” (Ms. Williams, interview, 12/09/08). For Ms. Williams, the heart and soul of Puente was the teaching of writing.

Writing identity and agency

A central part of the identity Ms. Williams wanted her Puente students to develop was to see themselves as writers, express them through writing, and take pride in their struggle and development. As she put it:

They’re anguished at times, but there’s a certain pride too. Because in my other classes it’s like, “we write too much.” And, Puentistas will be more like – they’ll say the same thing but it’s different. You know, the writing every day – writing every day is a given. They knew that they were getting into that. They knew the first time that we will write every day. So there’s more of a sense of pride and ownership, I think. (Ms. Williams, interview, 12/9/08)
Choosing to be part to the Puente program at Emerson High, implied choosing an English class for two years in which one was expected to write every day. Since Ms. Williams used the same approach to teaching in both her non-Puente and Puente English classes, she saw the difference in the motivation and willingness to engage with “too much” writing. According to Ms. Williams, part of being a Puentista was to be a writer, and while students grumbled at times, they also took pride that more was demanded of them than of students at Emerson High generally. Students certainly did write every day in Ms. Williams’s class, and while some pieces where polished through a succession of drafts with copious teacher comments, other pieces were short in-class free writes, used for students to reflect, explore ideas, or prepare for discussions such as Socratic Seminars. Moreover, writing was used in conjunction with reading and classroom talk. For instance, students would read a text, write a short reaction to it, share their writing, add to their writing, and then continue reading further in the text.

Ms. Williams understood writing as a social as well as a cognitive process, one that could not be reduced to discrete skills. She emphasized that her approach to teaching writing was heavily influenced by the Puente Project’s professional development, in particular Puente Portfolio Scoring, during which Puente teachers from across California gathered in the summer to anchor how to evaluate student writing, and share and score each other’s student writing portfolios. Ms. Williams also found great value in the approach championed in Puente professional development events of focusing on what students already can do as writers and building from those strengths. As she put it, “Although I don’t always think I do it well – but that’s my, the foundation of the pedagogy is ‘what they are doing well, and what they are staring to do’” (Ms. Williams, interview, 12/9/08).

Though this was an approach that Ms. Williams admitted to struggling with at times, she believed in building on strengths and giving students opportunities to be successful as writers, no matter where they were in their writing development. In fact, in talking about writing pedagogy, Ms. Williams shifted between using the pronoun “my” and “the,” suggesting her desire if not always self-perceived success in implementing a “Puente” approach to the teaching of writing. She hoped that all her students would leave her classroom identifying themselves as writers and confident in their ability to use writing to express themselves. While preparing her students for college was certainly a goal of Ms. Williams’ writing instruction, she also had another, what she viewed as complementary, motive for the writing practices in her classroom. She wanted students to find agency and “voice” through writing, no matter their fluency or skill level. She wanted her students to use writing as tool to express themselves and to be heard. Her view on what students needed to demonstrate in order to be “heard” and have their discoursal selves respected, however, stood in tension to Ms. Diaz’s approach. Unlike Ms. Diaz, Ms. Williams was not very concerned with teaching conventions, and spent almost no instructional time on them. Instead, she focused most of her instruction on helping students develop their ideas about a topic. As she put it:

Writing is thinking, and they struggle with figuring out what they want to say . . . It’s the fluency and kind of figuring out “what do I even have to say” about whatever it is. “Do I need to reread the piece of literature that I’m writing about? Have I understood it enough to write about it?” Or. “do I even know where I’m going?” (Ms. Williams, interview, 12/09/08)

Believing that students build ideas from each other, she incorporated a great deal of classroom talk to support writing. Students regularly discussed a topic in groups of four both before they wrote a short in-class response to the topic. Moreover, before every major essay assignment
students participated in a Socratic Seminar so that they could explore ideas through discussion before writing. They used writing both before and after the seminar. First to write questions and discussion topics, and then after, to record and reflect on the ideas they heard during the seminar.

For Ms. Williams, building on student strengths and helping them develop “voice” meant providing many opportunities for them to develop ideas and express their perspectives. She described the central goal of her writing instruction as:

Most of all it’s just to build agency. . . It’s so exciting seeing your kid start to talk about themselves as a writer and realize that it’s part of them. It’s part of expression, seeing their voice come to life. (Ms. Williams, interview, 12/09/08)

She wanted students to feel confident in expressing their opinions and thoughts and to use that confidence to build identities as writers.

Academic “genres” such as essays analyzing literature, essays arguing a stance on a controversial issue, and research papers, where a regular part of Ms. Williams’ curriculum, but she did not want to limit her students to only write these types of essays. When students read assigned texts, both fiction and non-fiction, she wanted them “start reading like writers and writing like readers.” Instead of seeing writing as an essay formula provided by the teacher, she wanted her students to explore the elements of professional writers’ compositions and have students try on similar strategies in their own writing. Ms. Williams wanted her students to see that:

the whole world is their toolbox in terms of –it’s not about what I tell them but what they read gives them more ideas about how they can write and what they can write. And the possibilities for writing – I think they start seeing “oh you can write about that?” A microcosm example or an example in a small way is poetry. The kids realize, “oh you can write a poem about anything?” So, it’s that kind of thing, realizing that they get this different sense of what kind of writing they enjoy and not enjoy. (Ms. Williams, interview, 12/9/08)

Ms. Williams wanted her students to be able to explore and play with writing, finding joy in what they discovered. She believed that this emphasis on discovery, choice and agency helped all her students grow as writers, including students who would in other classes be labeled as “struggling” or “basic” writers.

Her six-week poetry unit provided a particularly strong example of the practices that resulted from her motive to build on students strengths, create a space for exploration, personal meaning, and joy in writing. At the start of the unit students watched videos of poetry slams, learned how to identify and use poetic devices, and read a wide variety of poetry. After reading and analyzing a particular poem for both meaning and craft, students wrote their own poems, with the option to model them on the class reading. The next day students shared their poems in their groups of four, received positive feedback and suggestions for revision, and nominated themselves or each other to share poems with the entire class. Ms. Williams, a lover of poetry herself, wrote along with her students and shared and revised her poetry with the class. Finally, the unit cumulated in a class poetry slam in which each student performed one of their poems in front of the class. Moreover, Ms. Williams contributed to shaping an activity system in which poetry extend beyond the walls of the classroom. A non-profit organization, Youth Speaks, came to Emerson and worked with Ms. Williams’ students on performing slam poetry. Several
students became very involved with Youth Speaks and competed in the youth poetry slam competitions the organization put on for students across the Greater Bay Area.

This unit, however, worked much better for some students than others. During the poetry unit, a number of students, including Manuel and Saul, who struggled with writing “academic” genres such as essays and research papers, proudly shared their writing with the class, joined Youth Speaks, and worked diligently to revise and polish their poems. However, other students, including Sofia and Yesenia, who were committed to writing as preparation for college, showed frustration in the requirement to be creative, and expressed they preferred writing essays, which they felt were easier to learn how to “do right.”

Teacher feedback in tension with students’ ownership of writing development

Another aspect of agency and ownership as writers that Ms. Williams wanted to instill in her students was the ability to examine their own writing development as writers, including identifying their strengths and where they still needed to grow. However, her desire to do this at times conflicted with her desire to give students as much help and direction as she could. As Ms. Williams explained:

I think the most important thing is having them develop a sense of where they’re at. Giving them that meta-sense – because that’s the only way they’re going to be able to improve as writers is – so they get some sense of where they’re at and what they want to improve on and start kind of taking hold of that. (Ms. Williams interview, 12/09/08)

For most major writing assignments – those that had gone through multiple drafts – Ms. Williams guided students in reflecting on their process of writing and revision. After the first draft, and then again after the final draft, they wrote about what aspects of the assignment came easily to them and with what aspects they struggled. They also identified what they would focus on if they had more time, such as clearer topic sentences, more thorough commentary or analysis, smoother integration of evidence and quotations, etc. Then, when they compiled their end-of-the-year writing portfolio, Ms. Williams asked them to write a longer piece, a letter reflecting their writing development over the course of the year. In this way she hoped that they would “look at their own writing process” and “showcase where they’re at as they write” (Ms. Williams interview, 12/09/08). However, Ms. Williams also admitted to “writing all over their papers” and struggled with how much feedback to give them and how much to turn over to them. She explained:

And, that’s problematic - I feel in some ways. It’s like that scaffolding – taking away the scaffolding. It’s the crutch of support. I always say I’m going to wean them off and not give them much feedback towards the end, but I never do that. I always give them feedback. And then they expect it from all their teachers forever on, and they’re sorely disappointed. (Ms. Williams, interview, 12/09/08)

While she wanted students to be able to evaluate and revise their own writing, they generally focused on demonstrating that they did what she asked. She wrote many questions and comments as feedback on their drafts to help them think about content and organization. In their reflections, students generally wrote about how they responded to her comments and suggestions. Yesenia’s reflection on a persuasive piece she wrote in mid-January of her sophomore provides a specific example of this common
Ms. Williams wrote numerous comments in the margins asking Yesenia to “explain more” and “add more” and questions prompting Yesenia to clarify the “who” and “what” of her evidence and explanations. At the bottom of the paper she wrote the comment: “You have some good ideas but need to explain each one much more. You also need to include *concessions that show you understand the problems and difficulties with your proposal.” In her “Metacognitive Reflection” on the final draft of this essay, Yesenia focused on demonstrating that she understood and used Ms. William’s feedback.

Metacognitive Reflection
Final Draft

Revision: The things that helped me with my essay were some handouts, and feedback. The concessions work sheet helped me understand how to write one. I think I know how to write a concession or at least I have an idea on how to write one. The feedback from the teacher draft helped me revise it. I think it’s better.

Strengths: The strengths in my essay would probably be my evidence. I think I used good quotes, & good cites as evidence. I tried to explain the point I was trying to make.

Challenges: The most difficult part of writing this essay was finding the evidence. I have evidence in my essay but it took me a long time to find them. If I had more time to write this essay, I would used more evidence. I think I need to practice on the concessions more.

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See Appendix A for the Yesenia’s draft with Ms. Williams comments.
By opening and closing her reflection with a response to the main comment that Ms. Williams wrote on her draft, Yesenia presented herself as a “good student” who was trying to do what her teacher asked of her. Similarly, when she discussed both her success and difficulty with finding evidence, she responded to her teacher’s request to “add more” and “explain more.”

The reflection demonstrates Yesenia’s understanding of what resources, “hand outs and feedback,” helped her compose and revise and of Ms. Williams’ evaluation of what skills Yesenia needed to develop further. However, all her revision and reflection remained rooted in the feedback or “scaffolding” that Ms. Williams’ provided. This approach to revision and reflection created a tension for Ms. Williams in terms of giving students ownership over their writing, and also caused her concern that because students became used to her copious feedback, they would struggle when other teachers gave less.

**Discussion**

Both Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams’ motives for creating Puente practices were to facilitate student agency and empowerment. Preparing students for college was an aspect of this motive for both the teacher and counselor. However, Ms. Diaz saw her role as a “community activist,” empowering her students, their parents and the community at large to see college as reachable and appropriate. Whether individual students went to four-year college directly after high school was less of an important goal. For individual students, she strove to create practices that would provide them with the cultural capital to “survive” in a world, whether that was college or the workplace. From her own experiences as a Latina from a poor neighborhood, she feared her students would be faced with low expectations of their abilities and potential. She wanted them to have pride in their ethnic and cultural heritage in part to buffer them from the prejudice she knew they would face as they ventured beyond their neighborhood. She also wanted them to have ability to present themselves in their actions, words and writing, in a way that would be most likely to garner respect.

While Ms. Williams explicitly focused on college going as the path to empowerment, she valued writing as more than as a tool to express ideas, and to find personal ownership, agency and joy in writing. Not having had the same experiences as Ms. Diaz, Ms. Williams assumed that if students developed their “voice” in writing, this would translate into future academic success. She did focus a majority of her curriculum on academic writing, but was not very concerned about students’ presenting themselves in a very polished manner. She was far more interested in students developing their own ideas and own writing style, than a focus on correctness. Moreover, while she understood part of her role in Puente as educating parents about the post-secondary system in the United States, she did not share Ms. Diaz’s wider community activist perspective.

Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams together created a rich activity system with many opportunities for students to shine both inside and outside of the classroom. Since, the class was heterogeneous in both motivation and skill level, both educators had to strive to find ways for all students to be successful, academically or otherwise. Puente was also very much a “safe harbor” within the school and surrounding neighborhood, where the “street,” with its violence and despair, often encroached on Emerson students’ lives. Puente was a place where students could find both physical and psychological safety, where they were honored for who they were and told that they could accomplish anything they set their minds and hearts to achieve. However, a
tension between creating a safe harbor and community of care and preparing them for the world after Puente remained a challenge for both educators.

Ms. Williams and Ms. Diaz expressed that they wanted their students to become independent and responsible for their own learning, development and success. However, they both struggled with how to accomplish this, and tended to offer an abundance of support, both emotionally and academically. Moreover, as “Puentistas” students were taught that they were “special” and entitled to a level of attention and support far beyond the other students at Emerson High School. Such practices had the potential not only to encourage students to feel that their success depended on the care that they received from their teacher and counselor, but also to give them a sense that they already accomplished their most important goal, becoming a Puentista, instead of viewing Puente as a path towards their future goals.
Chapter 4

Marginalized identities transform into authentic discoursal selves

This chapter focuses on how two focal students, Manuel and Saul, were able to bring in identities that they felt were often marginalized in school, and in society in general, from their non-academic figured worlds (Holland, et al, 1998) as resources for creating discoursal selves (Ivanič, 1998) within Puente academic writing. Specifically, I examine how Puente practices related to how Manuel and Saul constructed and performed these discoursal selves. I also analyze how they understood their identities within Puente and how these perceptions changed over time.

I do not focus my analysis on gender identity in particular and do not see these two focal students as representative of the other male students in the program. Rather, I choose to include both boys in a single chapter because unlike the two female students, who I discuss in the next chapter, neither Manuel nor Saul was particularly motivated by Puente’s mission to prepare students for college. Instead, they prized Puente for providing them with a school community that helped them make “better” choices and grow into future selves that would bring them pride and a sense of accomplishment. The Puente community, or “familia,” provided an anchor that allowed them to develop and perform “selves” that felt authentic to them and could be incorporated into the figured world of school, something they felt they couldn’t do before joining Puente. While both recognized that the mission of Puente was to prepare students for college, this was less important to them personally than the socio-emotional aspects of Puente.

I begin my analysis with a discussion of what each young man shared about his autobiographical identity as related to the identities that he enacted within Puente. Both Saul and Manuel saw their slot in Puente as a highly prized opportunity available to few students at Emerson High, and both felt grateful that Ms. Williams and Ms. Diaz continued to did not give up on them even when they “messed up” and made wrong choices. Moreover, both Manuel and Saul also saw writing in their Puente class as a way to express and enact identities important to them. Ms. Williams’ slam poetry unit was particularly valued by both boys who saw it as an opportunity to construct and perform identities that they believed reflected their authentic selves: Manuel the graffiti artist and Saul the warrior and bicultural poet. However, the two boys had quite different life and educational histories, as well as contrasting personalities, so they also had a number of distinct motives for participating in the activity system of Puente. Thus, the way they took up the literacy practices in Puente, including constructing discoursal selves in their writing, as well as how they viewed the Puente community or familia, was shaped by each boy’s various figured worlds both instead and outside of school. These worlds included each boy’s past experiences, current activities and commitments, and how each imagined himself in the future.

Analysis and organization

To identify discoursal selves valued by all four focal students, I triangulated interview, field note, and student writing data. In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the biographical background salient to the identities Manuel and Saul enacted in Puente. I then examine each young man’s understanding of and motivation to participate in Puente. I also analyze assigned pieces written by each boy that are particularly illustrative of the discoursal selves in which he was invested. For this textual analysis piece, I coded student writing for linguistic features that index identities. In particular, I italicized evaluative features, such as epistemic stances of
certainty, uncertainty and affect (Biber & Finegan 1989; Thompson & Hudson, 2000; Ochs, 2002). I marked all direct identity labels in bold. Finally, I identified the social actions Manuel and Saul attempted to accomplish through particular pieces of writing and linked these actions to larger Puente activities (Ochs, 2002).

**Manuel**

*Biographical background*

Manuel was born in Mexico and moved to the Bay Area with his parents and brother when he was eight. He attended school in Emerson High’s district since the third grade. He lived with his father, mother, sister and his older brother, who graduated from Emerson High, but was not in Puente. Manuel came from a deeply religious family and saw his father as his role model. He described his father as a religious man who Manuel greatly admired. Following his father’s leadership within their church, Manuel shared that he often wrote and recited religious writings in Spanish in front of fellow church members. Moreover, Manuel described that, motivated in part by their religious beliefs of serving others, he and his father would regularly set out to help their community on the weekends, cleaning up the trash that littered their neighborhood and serving sandwiches to the day laborers who stood outside waiting to be picked up for a day’s work. As Manuel put it, “my dad, he is like religious. He is like, - it’s not just like, ‘Oh, we got something. We’ll just keep it by ourselves. We could help others that need some,’ and all that” (Manuel, interview 4/5/09).

According to Manuel, his brother, who was attending community college and hoped to transfer to a 4-year school and become a Spanish teacher, influenced him a great deal as well. Manuel expressed that he wanted to attend a four-year college with his brother, but didn’t have a clear idea about what he would like to study. In school, Manuel was designated, an intermediate English language learner, EL 3, (1-5 scale) and struggled a great deal with essay writing. He generally earned Ds and low Cs on his writing assignments and did not turn in many smaller assignments. His quarterly grades were usually Ds. Manuel always maintained a very calm demeanor and seemed resigned to seeing himself as a struggling student. For instance, when I walked up to his desk and asked Manuel why he wasn’t starting a particular assignment, Saul who was sitting at the same table loudly chimed in, “Oh Manuel is slow.” When I disagreed, Manuel laughed quietly, shrugged and added, “Yeah, I’m slow” (Fieldnotes, 11/14/2008).

As a writer, Manuel expressed on several occasions that he has trouble finding the right words to say what he would like. Both verbally and in his writing, he labeled himself as a “slow” and “messy” writer. He also made many spelling and usage errors, making his writing difficult to read. Manuel expressed that he felt lucky to have been given the chance to be in Puente, and realized that his English skills were below the other students in the class. In his interview he explained that getting into Puente “was pretty hard,” stating:

I didn’t have, like that much English on me still. Yeah, I was lower than them, so but Ms. Diaz gave me a chance. She was like, “You’re gonna, like try twice as hard as the students that we have right now, ‘cause you ‘re like lower on your English” And I was like, “Oh, okay” (Manuel interview, 4/5/09).

He accepted the label of being “lower” in English, and realized that he would have to work very hard to keep up with the English class. This realization, however, didn’t necessarily motivate him to “try twice as hard.” While Manuel believed that “keeping on track” was important, he wasn’t driven by grades and felt successful and validated as an artist and caring community member, who strove to positively contribute the to world around him.

“The community is what you are”
Manuel believed Puente to be a very positive force in his life. He saw Puente as saving him from hanging out with kids who were “going the wrong way” and pulling him into fights and conflicts in school. After stating, “Puente changed my life,” he described how he felt he was going down the wrong path in middle school.

Cause before when I used to go to middle school, before [Puente], I used to hang out with different people. I was, like in wrong – how do you say– like – going the wrong way. Yeah, ‘cause I was mostly, like, fighting and all that with other people, yeah, ‘cause they used to tell me, “Oh come on, you’re Mexican. You don’t have to be hanging out with other races,” and all that . . . but when I came over here to Puente, it taught me a lot, ‘cause now I know that we’re all the same. Like, we’re all the same. Like, there’s no difference or anything. Like, the community is what you are, what other people think of you as when someone comes and visits and all that. Yeah, they’re gonna be like, “Oh, they’re pretty”, they say “like involved in one thing.” Yeah, and Puente is showing me that by doing community service and all that. (Manuel interview, 4/5/09)

Manuel saw that the friends that he had in middle school were embracing a negative identity of being “Mexican” that involved excluding others and picking fights. He contrasts this to Puente, which enforced inclusive values as well as pride in students’ heritage. He also viewed Puente as creating a community of students who shared positive common goals like doing community service. For him, “the community is what you are” and Puente provided a figured world in which he could be a self in which he took pride. Manuel emphasized:

before [he and his middle school friends] used to see the community as a place to hang out, just mess around and all that. But now, like, that I just see garbage on the ground and all that, I feel like I see whenever I see something that is messed up, I’d just rather pick it up than just leave it right there. Also, I don’t do it for Puente points, but before me and my dad, we used to just go by the streets and all that and sometimes pick up a little garbage and throw it away . . . Yeah, so Puente points are like a new way of seeing the community, by getting the goal. (Manuel interview, 4/5/09)

For Manuel, Puente’s focus on caring about and wanting to positively contribute to his surrounding neighborhood fit very well with the values that he gained from his father. By participating in Puente, Manuel felt that he had a safe space to develop his best qualities. He saw Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams’ emphasis on community service as an extension of the work that he already did with his father in the neighborhood; thus, it provided a link between the world of his home and the world of school. He stated that he wasn’t motivated by the “Puente points” that students’ earned for community service activities, but rather appreciated Puente’s emphasis of “a new way of seeing the community” that helped him step away from his old friends who just wanted to “mess around” instead of trying to fix the problems that surrounded them. Instead, he believed that he and his fellow Puentistas shared a common goal of wanting to make their neighborhood a better place.

In addition to seeing Puente as a community that helped him move away from negative influences, Manuel explained that Puente helped him to see college as a possible goal. Even though he did not have a clear idea about what he wanted to do after high school, he did believe
that Puente was a path to a better life. He explained how his brother and cousin encouraged him to consider college as a possibility.

"Cause my brother was like “Oh, come on,” cause first of all before [Puente] I used to be like “Oh, I don’t want to go to college. I’d just rather work on, like a normal job.” But, my brother was like, “think about it, look.” Cause we got a cousin. He set an example, ‘cause before he was like, “Oh, I don’t wanna go to college,” but when he saw real life, like going to work, he’ll come home all tired and all that. And he thought about it. He was like, “Oh, why did I do this? I could have a chance.” And he speak to us too. He was like, “You guys got time right now still to go to college, get a better life and all that. So, when I saw, like, the program Puente, I was like, “Well this could help me, so I have to get in.”" (Manuel, interview, 4/5/09)

For Manuel, Puente was an opportunity to reach for a better life than that of hard physical labor that would leave him exhausted at the end of the day as it had his cousin. The determination in his statement “I have to get in” showed that he believed that Puente was his best chance of attaining an easier and more fulfilling future. Unfortunately, once in the program, partially due to his struggle with English and partially due to his identifying as “slow,” he did not take many of the academic opportunities that Puente offered him. Instead, he spent a great deal of class time drawing or lost in his own thoughts instead of participating in literacy practices.

Puente did, however, provide Manuel with a way to channel a very important identity, a graffiti artist, into sanctioned school activities. Instead of tagging the school building, an act he was suspended for early in his 9th-grade year, by the end of the 10th grade, he brought his love of graffiti art into drawings, essays and poetry that he created for his Puente English class.

Creating an authentic and academic discoursal self: Manuel the artist

As he demonstrated in his reflection letters in both his 9th and 10th-grade portfolios. Manuel prided himself on being an artist, at first as a graffiti artist, though this was an artistic outlet that caused him some trouble. For instance, he was suspended in the 9th-grade for what his later described as his "horrible error" of tagging a door at school. As he says in his 9th-grade portfolio reflection letter,

In one of my essays, I did my best I could be, I combined all of my strengths and created my masterpiece. I worked hard on it because that day changes my life And the title is Game Over. It is based on a day that I got caught and made a horrible error. I tagged on a door at school and I was feeling really mad with myself.

Having been given a second chance by Ms. Williams and Ms. Diaz after this incident, he began to explore writing as means of expressing himself as an artist as well as a forum to express his regret to his teacher and counselor. To this end, in his 9th-grade portfolio, Manuel told his readers that he wanted them to see the "beauties of his writing" and directed them to his self-proclaimed “masterpiece,” his autobiographical piece, describing and lamenting this "horrible error.”

As he accepted responsibility for making this “horrible error” in expressing himself in a way that broke school rules, he also began to use school sanctioned writing to argue that graffiti art should be legal. In this way, street artists like himself could express themselves and create "beauty" without transgressing rules and laws. For instance, in his 9th-grade writing portfolio, he included a persuasive piece entitled “Graffiti Legal” in which he argued for creating public spaces for graffiti art. I include the full text of this essay in Appendix B.
In this piece, Manuel used the conventions of school persuasive writing to argue for allowing those labeled as “taggers” to legitimately express themselves as “graffiti artists” instead. In doing so he positioned himself as an authority on the subject of graffiti artists as well as a member of the society that he and his readers shared, a member who was concerned that public officials had not responded well to the issue of street art. For instance, he repeated the modal “should” (line 2-3) to emphasize the necessity of allowing public places for graffiti art. He also used a necessity modal in the phrase “we had to legalize” (line 4). By using the pronoun “we,” he created a sense of unity with his readers while remaining definite about what they must do. He thus performed a “self” that was self-assured in his position and the social action he would like his readers to take.

In the second paragraph, Manual explained why he believed that allowing public places for graffiti art will solve the problem of tagging in an illegal manner. He proposed that graffiti artists simply needed to “express” themselves (line 5). The verb “express” supported his use of the identity label “graffiti artist,” a label that he incorporated into his own identity on many occasions both in and outside of school. A criminal would not be motivated by the desire to express himself, as would an artist. He then described his vision of the future in which “if the taggers have place to tag they will probably stop tagging in the streets” (line 7). He used “taggers” as neutral label that didn’t connote whether the action was legal or not. In using an adverb “probably,” he expressed some doubt since he cannot fully predict the future, but still conveyed that he felt more sure than not that his proposed solution would work.

In his first body paragraph he explained, “In this argument the opposite side think that they are criminals and that they are good for nothing” (line 8). He correctly used the phrase “the opposite side think” to signal that he was about to discuss the counterargument. In doing so he displayed his grasp of the rhetorical moves Ms. Williams taught the class to use for this genre of writing. He refuted the “opposite side’s” negative characterization and emphasized that it is wrong to label graffiti artists with the negative stance that they are “criminals” who are “good for nothing” (line 8). Instead, he argued, “the truth is art expression that has a lot of creativity” (line 9). Using positive the labels, “art expression” and “creativity” to characterize graffiti art, he emphasized again that those who create graffiti, which included him, should be viewed as artists. While the specific point that he was trying to make in the second half of the paragraph was unclear, he did take a clear negative stance towards an approach that “would just make people destroy” and “waste” money to stop taggers (line 13).

At the close of his essay, he imagined a future world of possibility in which taggers, like himself, could freely show others that the “world could be a piece of art” (line 16). He used a predictive modal “would” to explore the positive effects on taggers if their art was legalized, including developing a greater appreciation and respect for the public sphere, or “street” (line 18).

While Manuel’s command of the conventions of written English and argumentation were still developing when he wrote this piece, he was able, with some success, to use the conventions of persuasive writing to construct a discoursal self within academic writing that incorporated his view of himself as a “tagger.” Through sanctioned school writing, he argued for legitimizing

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Manuel resisted the label of “criminal” and depicted a “tagger” or “graffiti artist” as a positive identity. Thus, through this piece he both performed his identity as a student who was trying to follow the conventions of persuasive writing that Ms. Williams taught him and well as that as an advocate for an art form that is very important to his sense of self. By the end of 10th grade, Manuel demonstrated an even firmer understanding that Puente literacy practices provided valuable modes for him to present himself as an artist. He also continued to bring together the figured worlds of school, his family and community, and graffiti artists in his writing. In the introduction to his reflection letter in his 10th-grade writing portfolio, he played with metaphor and made a vivid bid to engage his audience in his creation as he expressed, “Warning this portfolio could make your eyes bleed from awesomeness. In this portfolio my mind blows up like a bouncy Betty exploding with the truth and real truth of my point of view in each essay.” He effectively played with hyperbole and metaphor, using the image of the “bouncy Betty,” which he had learned about in his history class while studying about WWII, to depict the power of his mind “exploding with truth.” He then pointed his readers to his favorite type of writing, poetry, and directed us to his poem written from the point of view of graffiti.

My favorite type of writing is poems because it takes your mind to new level. For me poems are a new way of exaggerating what is not a big deal almost like the press in the book zoot suit. Poems are like little pieces of art put together to make a great piece of art or a awesome mural. For example like my poem that I did about Graffiti it shows the point of view of Graffiti. For example where they hang out what they ride and what they feel. (Manuel, 9th portfolio)

In describing poems as a way to exaggerate and elicit an emotional reaction from his audience, he tied what he learned about yellow journalism when Ms. William’s class read the play Zoot Suit by Luis Valdez. By doing so, he indexed his identity as a student and reader.

He tied this academic identity to that of an artist, vividly portraying poetry as the building blocks of that self. The poem “Graffiti” thus become a cornerstone of his academic, artistic self. In this poem he made a direct identity claim by personifying graffiti, both as a singular “I” and a member of a larger community “we” and took very strong affective stances towards his subject matter. Moreover, his poem also alluded to and challenges hegemonic discourses of who is labeled as “illegal.” To make my analysis clearer, I have italicized words and phrases that indicate his affective stance toward the subject of his poem.

Graffiti
1 We are made in different shapes
2 Different sizes
3 Different colors
4
5 We lay in a paper
6 Then stickers
7 Or in games
8
9 We are illegal
10 But we don’t do damage
We are beautiful
We are made with passion
I lay in all streets
I ride buses
I ride trucks
I ride barts

Some of us are famous
And some of us are toys
But for the world we are just a scar

(Manuel, 10th portfolio).

Throughout the poem, he used repetition and the first person pronouns “we” and “I” to bring his readers into the emotional reality of “graffiti.” Just like people, this art comes in “different shapes/different sizes/ different colors,” (lines 1-3) and fills public spaces. Through this personification, he enticed the reader to imagine graffiti as diverse humanity. Poignantly, he expressed, “We are illegal/ But we don’t do damage” (lines 9-10). The word “illegal” evokes discourses concerning “illegal immigrants,” a topic that carried a great deal of emotional weight in the lives of Emerson’s Puente students, many of whom had undocumented family members or who were undocumented themselves. He then affirmed this art/people by displaying a very positive affect stance, “We are beautiful/We are made with passion” (lines 12-13). Whether Manuel consciously intended this double meaning of “illegality” or not - in the context of the Puente class - it created a very powerful appeal to his audience about the injustice of the label “illegal.” Finally by using the pronoun “I” (lines 15-17), he asserted that he is his art and like his art, he along with others like him have been wrongly judged by society for whom “we are just a scar” (line 16).

For Manuel, the tenth grade poetry unit was a turning point. He wrote and shared his poetry with pride during the class slam poetry unit. Describing what he learned, he said, "it helps me . . .like really not just like focus around the poem, but like inside, also the meaning" (Manuel, interview 4/5/09). In this way, Manuel explicitly linked his desire to be creative and express his artistic "truth" with school writing, including how to understand a poem from the "inside" in terms of meaning and craft. In contrast to his identity as a "language learner" and a slow essay writer who struggled with spelling and punctuation, the poetry unit provided him with an opportunity to showcase his strengths, vivid imagery, figurative language, a creative, playful flair, and his ability to engage the emotions of his audience. As he expressed in his interview, "it's fun to write, like, 'cause you could use, um, rhymes and all that, like play around with the whole poem" (Manuel, 4/5/09). Thus, by “playing around” with poetry in class, he also learned the academic skills of understanding the art and craft of poetry.

By the spring of his sophomore year, he both identified himself and as was recognized as an artist by Ms. Diaz, Ms. Williams and his fellow Puentistas, and he felt confident in performing this identity through both writing and visual art within Puente activities. As Ms. Diaz explained in her interview, she selected Manuel to paint the signs for the Emerson High Puente booth at the city wide fair. He also began to bring his visual art into the Puente English
class. For instance, while the cover of his 9th-grade writing portfolio only featured text, his 10th-grade writing portfolio cover proudly displayed his art.

Manuel’s 9th-grade portfolio cover

Manuel also created the back cover for the anthology of class writing that each Puente student received at the end of the 10th-grade year. For this anthology, students contributed a piece of writing of their choice. Ms. Williams then had their writing bound with a cover to create a class book. Manuel selected his poem “Graffiti” to be included within the anthology and added his contribution as a visual artist as well.
In addition to constructing and performing his identity as an artist through Puente literacy practices, Manuel explored the value of community and what that meant for his sense of self. Even though he struggled with academics, he had the opportunity to use writing to explore how he could be a leader, taking initiative to help those around him and make the figured world of
“his community” a better place. For instance, as in his 9th-grade essay, “What a leader mean to me,” Manuel wrote,

A leader inspire me to hope the best for the other people. The leaders inspire me and they have thought me to think more wisely. Of all the things that are wrong I want to fix them in a way that I can. I agree that leaders have to hope the best for other people. So that’s what I will do for others too.

Currently I serve in the community picking up garbage or helping on packing food close to my house in the summer for people that need it. I would like to serve my community in different ways like cleaning the streets of the neighborhood, also by teaching others to be good neighbors, and good community members.

When I grow up and finish high school I want to help kids so they will know what art is about. I want to teach them the richness of art and other kinds of art and other kinds of art like 3D art, basic art, street art, water paintings, and other. That’s how I want to help people (Manuel, 9th portfolio)

For Manuel, being a leader meant wanting “the best for other people” (lines 3-4) and wanting to “serve in the community” (line 6). He already participated in a variety of activities towards this end, including serving food to the hungry and cleaning the physical space around his neighborhood. He used this piece of writing to imagine a future in which he could combine his identity of an artist with this commitment to community when “he grow[s] up” (line 8). This future self would help other people, especially kids, to cherish art in all its forms, including street art.

Although, he did not have a clear career path in mind, Puente writing gave Manuel a space to explore different possibilities for his future self; however, what he viewed as possible was influenced by hegemonic discourses about what boys from his background could become. In addition to writing in the 9th-grade that he would like to teach young people about art, in the 10th grade, he expressed that he would like to become a car mechanic in a short piece written in class about his future goals, stating:

The goal that I have made for myself is to be a mechanic techision. Since I was little I loved taking care apart and putting them back together. I want to set this goal for me because I love cars. Also when I was about 8 or 9 I started to draw cars and that was a big thing in my life. And I can’t think of any other goal because mechanic for me is like any boys dream. (Manuel, 2009)

In this piece he described how ever since he was a little boy he loved to both take “cars apart and put them back together” and especially to “draw cars.” However, he also suggested that this particular goal was shaped greatly by larger, hegemonic discourses of what ‘dreams’ are available to him as a male from a working class background. As he wrote, “I can’t think of any other goal because mechanic for me is like any boys dream.” Like many of the young men from his neighborhood, he didn’t seem to be aware of other career possibilities, which could allow him to incorporate his love of drawing into a college degree and future profession.

Saul

Biographical background

In contrast to Manuel’s calm, at times passive demeanor, Saul often acted aggressively toward other students in Puente and even occasionally toward Ms. Williams when he perceived that he was being challenged. Often, he refused to do work that didn’t interest him. On
occasion, he would disrupt classroom discussions and activities while others, including Ms. Williams, were trying to talk. He was also easily upset, raising his voice, and at times even cursing in anger when he felt that others in the classroom were either ignoring or putting him down. However, when he felt engaged by the subject matter and did not perceive a personal threat, he eagerly participated in classroom activities, making insightful and well-expressed contributions to class discussions.

Daily, he translated words and phrases from English to Spanish and vice versa, and was identified as “our resident linguist” by Ms. Williams. Having lived and attended school in both Mexico and California, Saul was both bilingual and biliterate. In the 9th-grade he was designated as an intermediate English Learner, EL 3, having arrived from Mexico two weeks before the first day of school. However, by the start of his 10th-grade year he had jumped ahead three levels, and was reclassified as Fluent English Proficient, RFEP, therefore no longer an English Learner according to the district’s measures.

Saul’s family life was marked by considerable instability, which contributed to his troubles in school despite his clear aptitude for learning. He was born in the United States, but at the start of second grade went to live with his mother who had returned to Mexico when his parents divorced, after what Saul described as a “paso en falso” or mistake made by his father. Saul spent the next seven and half years living with his mother and attending public school in Mexico. When his mother, due to illness, was no longer able to care for him in Mexico, he returned to the Bay Area at the start of 9th-grade to live with extended family. He changed homes a few times during the year of this study, eventually moving in with his girlfriend Sofia, a focal student in this study, her mother and younger brother. After moving in with Sofia’s family, Saul seemed much more focused on schoolwork than in the beginning of the school year. In his interview, he told me that being with Sofia “calms” him and “helps him do better” in school. However, the relationship and the arrangement ended up not working out, and as the school year came to a close, Saul was once again looking for a place to live.

*Saul’s figured family: “Puente is not just a school program, but after it becomes a way of life:”*

Saul saw becoming part of Puente as a lucky occurrence that he did not fully appreciate, at first. However, like Manuel, he came to believe that Puente was a coveted opportunity granted to only to a select, fortunate number of students.

*Saul: Umm, actually, it’s pretty funny (laughs), but I don’t even know how I ended up in Puente, I just came to get my papers one day and my cousin, she went in and talked to Ms. Diaz and then I just filled out a little from with my name. And then, you know, they told me about all these meetings, which I couldn’t make it to it to them.*

Agnes: ahhh

*Saul: But at the end I was still in Puente. Like last week, or this weekend I came with Sofia’s brother because he is trying to sign up for Puente.*

Agnes: Ah, okay.

*Saul: So, we came and then I see all these people show up stressing like, “oh man, what am I going to have to write?” Things like that you know. Then, I just started laughing because I was like, “they are all stressing and they are going through all that and I didn’t have to do nothing to be in Puente.” So that’s*
something that I started appreciating as well though because since I was given the opportunity to be in Puente without doing nothing, you know like, or like yeah, like, without doing nothing like that.

Agnes: Mmm, hmm.

Saul: I was given the opportunity to be in Puente and I had to take advantage of that opportunity. (Saul, interview, 3/02/09)

Saul believed that unlike other students, he ended up in Puente by “doing nothing.” He did not have to provide a writing sample or go through the interview process, and he didn’t even attend all the “meetings” at the start. He describes himself as entering the program unaware and unmotivated to follow Puente’s mission. However, he also describes his change of view as he realized how much other students prized a slot in Puente, and began to value and “take advantage of that opportunity,” which was so fortuitously handed to him.

In addition to being a coveted opportunity that gave him a sense of being positively singled out and chosen, Puente at Emerson provided Saul with a community in which he could both belong and express his individuality. By the age of fourteen Saul could not rely on his biological parents, and was mostly on his own in finding a home and a way to survive day to day. Having experienced much instability, Saul yearned for a place he could feel safe and accepted. He admitted that he was a “challenge” to the adults and his peers in Puente. In his 10th-grade writing portfolio, he expressed, “I dedicate this portfolio to whoever won’t leave me when I mess up, to whom I can trust. Up to now God and few others.” (Saul, 10th portfolio). In Puente he felt that he had finally found a “home” that he trusted wouldn’t reject him.

For Saul, the concept of “familia” became quite literal, and the Puente community filled in for a biological family. Ms. Diaz, in particular, became a central person in Saul’s life. As Saul described:

I think [Ms. Diaz] I think she is like the main one that has helped me because you know, even though I’m like really stubborn and things like that, she was able to get into my head, you know, and just kick my brains so hard that I just got back into place and I’ve been trying to do things the way they are supposed to be done, you know. She’s, she’s been pretty much like a mother to me you know. Like I was away from my mom, like I don’t live with my parents or nothing and she’s been like a really, really good influence (Saul, interview, 3/02/09)

Even though Ms. Diaz had been very close to removing Saul from Puente after the 9th-grade, she decided to give him another chance. Saul saw this as an act of acceptance and commitment towards him, which solidified his view of Ms. Diaz as a mother figure. As Saul put it:

Well, Puente you know, last year, I was Freshman, I was a little bit more you know, immature. I was more dumb things like that. But, um, what [Puente] really means to me, is like a family. Because you know plenty of times Ms. Diaz, the Puente counselor, she could have just dropped me out because I was doing a lot of stupid things. But that’s where my term or how I see it, as a family. Because you know, she stood there and she was like “you know I would drop you because that would be like the thing I would have to do, but since it’s Puente and you guys are like my kids, you know, I just have to work it out with you.” (Saul, interview, 3/02/09)
Saul saw this second chance as a way to become a more mature and wiser version of himself. He described that many of his “stupid” actions were because of emotions he had difficulty handling, and so he appreciated how Ms. Diaz, who was a licensed family therapist in addition to being a school guidance counselor, was able to “kick his brains so hard that [he] was just got back into place” while not giving up on him. He very much saw himself as one of Ms. Diaz’ “kids.”

He also expressed gratitude at the patience and kindness that he felt Ms. Williams showed him; even though, he admitted he sometimes acted inappropriately towards her. Describing how he believed Ms. Williams advocated for keeping him in Puente, Saul expressed:

Ms. Williams was just on my side the whole time saying not to kick me out, that kind of thing you know. So, like, she’s been of great help. She’s like an understanding person. Sometimes I have the wrong attitude with her. Because I’m a person who can’t really control my emotions, like sometimes I’m angry, and I might be angry at you, but I take it out on another person. You know, I’m kinda like that. Unfortunately, I’m kinda like that. (Saul, Interview, 3/02/09)

Saul saw himself as angry, and at times out of control, and realized that he was a handful for the two adults who he saw as fulfilling the role of his biological family. However, having the support of Puente, especially Ms. Diaz, helped him strive towards a future self who could deal with his emotions in more constructive ways.

Even though Saul, at times did become defensive and lose his temper at the other Puente students, he also expressed that he developed a level of trust and comfort with the other Puentistas, greater than he had previously experienced in school. When asked to describe what he found interesting about being in Puente, he replied, “well, the fact that we share and I’m in Puente and it’s like a family.” (Saul, interview, 3/02/09) He described how in Mexico he was with different kids in every class, so he didn’t get to know them. He then contrasted this to his experience in Puente, where “like I’ve been around the same people for, this is my second year around them.” As a result “you know, you get to be more outgoing, you get to express yourself a little bit more” (Saul, interview, 3/02/09). He felt he could be more himself and express his thoughts and ideas because he trusted that the other students would react with respect and care. He also described “familia” as not based in sharing the same ethnicity, but rather rooted in really getting to each other over a longer period of time. As he put it:

It’s really important because you get to know more people. Like I say, you know, not just because we’re Mexican we know the same things you know. I can be from Mexico and a certain person can be from Mexico, but we come from different sides and totally different cultures, you know that what I mean. (Saul, interview, 3/02/09)

He also emphasized that his sense of familia was also based on feeling that the other students genuinely cared about him. Describing how his fellow Puentistas motivated him, he expressed:

Well, yeah, you know if they weren’t there sometimes I would be like “screw this” or something like that. Some of them or most of them get along with me. They’re like my friends. Like all the kids I hang out with, they’re all from Puente and there’s always there like, yeah man you gotta do your work. (Saul, interview, 3/02/09)
He believed that the other Puente students truly wanted him to succeed and encouraged him not to give up. For Saul, both the adults and the other students in Puente provided a place of acceptance, support, and stability; elements that where often missing in other aspects of his life. Using writing to become a “Chicano Fighter”

Finding in Puente a place to belong where he wasn’t eventually rejected encouraged him to try to work out his internal struggles and imagine a future self of whom he could be proud. Throughout his two years in English class, Saul used writing as tool to do this “self” work.

Saul looked up to Ms. Diaz as a role model. He described her as a leader who shaped him and contributed to the person he hoped to become. He valued that she could be forceful and how he saw her use her strength to help others. He also valued how she saw herself as a Chicana, or a blend of Mexican and American identities, which was an identity that he also embraced. In his 9th-grade essay on leadership, entitled “Como Que No!” Saul explored how she laid a path for him in constructing who he wanted to become. I italicized the many instances in which Saul took a positive evaluative stance in his description of Ms. Diaz.

One of the best leaders that I’ve seen is my Puente counselor [Ms. Diaz]. She’s not just my counselor but she is like a second mother to me. Mrs. [Diaz] has been their, with me through thick and thin, always telling me SI SE PUEDE. She has been my support my whole freshman year, which now comes to an end. She no just helps us now, but her teaching of Puente behavior, is going to help us throughout high school and college and make better people of ourselves, it is helping the whole community in different ways. She is one of the many reasons that I’m still here and going, because I see how much effort she’s put into us. She started most of us from scratch. [Diaz] never gives up, but has limits, she is a fighter, a Chicana fighter. The fact that Mrs. [Diaz] is Mexican-American raise by immigrant parents make me think that she was somewhat like me. This and the so many times that she motivated me to go on in life, to do something with myself, makes me always look up to her, sometimes it might not even look like it, but yes it’s true. Even though all of this and more I know Mrs. [Diaz] is always going to be their, and say SI SE PUEDE, as long as I put in my half. (Saul, 9th-grade Portfolio)

Saul struggled to live up the ideals of “Puente behavior,” (line 5) which he understood as a way of being a good person as well as being academically successful (line 6). But, he hoped he could become a strong and respected “Chicano fighter” like Ms. Diaz (line 10). He used the word “help” throughout the essay in describing her actions. In this manner, he expressed his admiration of how she was able to use her power to support and motivate students, as well as to contribute to her community in general. Saul, who was quick to “fight” for what he saw as the wrong reasons, saw
her as a model of how he could channel his anger into constructive actions.

He continued to explore what being a “Chicano fighter” meant to him throughout his two years in Puente. In both his writing, and his daily interactions, he was quick to stand up to what he perceived as injustice, whether it was writing about when a “gangster” bullied his friend and fellow Puentista, or to condemn instances of prejudice and discrimination in the literary works he read in English class. For instance, he wrote an essay he entitled “The Warrior Within” analyzing how Mexican-American youth in 1940’s Los Angeles responded to the prejudice directed at against them as depicted in the play Zoot Suit by Luis Valdez. He argued that the main character Henry Reyna resists racism and injustice, bringing out “the guerrero Azteca that he had inside of him” instead of resorting to violence. He wrote, “Henry made him and his crew acquire new ways of looking at things to fight the system without making things worst and then again he overcame his troubles. Thanks to his inner guerrero he fought back and won” (Saul, 10th portfolio). He also explored how individuals resist dehumanization in an essay analyzing the memoir Night by Elie Wiesel. He wrote that individuals “were fighting back and not giving up looking forward to liberating themselves emotionally and physically from the think cold cuffs and chains and torture and oppression” (2009).

He also displayed the Chicano fighter aspect of his identity in the cover of his 10th grade, writing portfolio:

For Saul, it was very important that he felt that others listened to him and respected his opinions. He rallied against injustice, seeing himself as a person who had experienced a great deal of it during his young life. He felt that writing was a mode that he could use to garner the respect he sought while also constructing a better “self” that he envisioned, a Saul that could stand up for himself and others when appropriate while being able to deal with negative emotions without being overwhelmed by them. However, a college-going future did not feature in Saul’s figured world of Puente.
In academic writing, Saul would only become engaged when he felt that an assignment provided authentic meaning for him. One such assignment occurred in the spring of his 10th-grade year; the California legislature was considering considerable budget cuts, and Puente Project Statewide funding, as well as that of a number of other academic outreach programs, was in danger. In response this situation, Ms. Williams asked her students to write letters to the California State Legislature, persuading them to continue funding Puente. Students sent the letters out and also made follow-up phone calls to legislators. In his letter, Saul expressed what Puente had meant to him while constructing a discoursal self within the conventions of persuasive writing as taught by Ms. Williams. I include the full text of this piece in Appendix C.

Throughout his letter, Saul demonstrated a great deal of certainty and was able to express many of his points clearly. He experimented with the conventions of persuasive writing to varying degrees of success; in lines 13 and 18, he created some imaginary statistics in his attempt to be convincing. However, he also used many conventions of persuasion effectively. For instance, he adeptly used concessions, such as “Don’t get me wrong, I do believe that some cuts must be made” (line 14-15), and “Now day, with this situation we’re going through, it’s not unusual to have all these cuts in mind” (line 23-24). Through these concessions Saul aligned himself with the legislators and their concerns while putting his perspective on an equal footing with theirs. He used “we,” as in the clause “but if we act without really thinking about the future we could be making great mistake” (line 25) to encompass both himself and the legislators as united citizens concerned about the budget. He then took a very strong negative stance by calling decisions about what to cut “great mistakes” if done rashly and without thought.

In the second paragraph he attempted to use his personal experience in Puente to make a more universal claim, and struggled a bit with how to accomplish this. He wrote:

Puente is not just a school program, but after it becomes a way of life. Because of the way you cope with others in your Puente class, you get to feel more comfortable and you say what you feel and have someone to rely on. Although we in fact know that nobody’s perfect, but you become a family and you learn how to forgive and forget. (lines 25-29)

Nonetheless, he showed how Puente has become a large part of his identity, in his words “a way of life” (line 25). He used “you” a rhetorical device to refer to Puente students in general, but was actually discussing his own feelings about finding a home in Puente. Puente became a place where he felt “comfortable,” had people he could “rely on” and could be forgiven for his mistakes (lines 26-28). However, while in the first paragraph, he referred to the fact that Puente and similar programs help students from “bad neighborhoods” (lines 18-19) graduate and go to college, this did not appear to be a personal concern for him. Rather, Saul demonstrated how Puente met his emotional needs, but he did not imagine a future self that involved college. In fact this persuasive letter was the only writing for his Puente class that mentioned college at all.

Creating an authentic discoursal self: “not being a fake kind of writer”

While Saul strongly desired a place to belong, he also displayed a fierce individuality. He greatly valued presenting his own words and ideas and wanted to avoid becoming a “fake kind of writer” who wrote to please others instead of himself (Saul, interview, 3/02/09). As Saul put it, “Like if I think the dogs purple, but it’s black I’m gonna write that the dog is purple because that’s how I see it” (Saul, interview, 3/02/09). In both his actions and words he resisted most school writing, which he found to be “prefabricated.” In his interview he emphasized that
“in school you have to write what he teacher is telling you … it makes it hard for me because it’s like I’m battling myself you know. Trying to find myself off of my own ideas” (Saul, interview, 3/02/09). For Saul, writing was a way to express his individuality and innermost feelings. He also found writing to be personally therapeutic when he could get into a “trance” and “take his mind off of things” as he wrote.

However, his resistance to any type of school writing that did not feel authentic to him caused him to underperform in his Puente English class and in school in general. Saul completed most essay and formal writing assignments, but became easily frustrated with assignments that he believed had “no point” and didn’t allow for him to express his own ideas. The essays he completed were generally successful, earning him A’s and B’s on the academic writing assignments, however, Saul tended to not turn in smaller daily assignments, which brought his grades down to a D’s and C’s for his quarter grades.

According to Saul, “writing, it can mean nothing or it can mean everything too” (Saul, Interview, 3/02/09). In the spring of his 10th-grade year, Saul became very involved with the organization, Youth Speaks, after they did a workshop with his Puente class. He began to perform his poetry at slams for students across the greater Bay Area. As he put it in our interview, “[writing] has been a great influence to my life right now. Like at this point because it’s gotten me involved in all kinds of things of different things and in different cultures” (Saul, interview, 3/02/09). This involvement with slam poetry provided Saul with a direction and the motivation that he often lacked when it came to classwork and school in general. It also opened his eyes to how writing could extend beyond the classroom, and beyond his neighborhood, to help him meet people from a number of communities and backgrounds across the Bay Area. The coordinators of Youth Speaks also wanted to bring more poetry slams to the area, and Saul was invited to be a student representative to help them plan future events. Thus, for Saul, Puente expanded into yet another community, Youth Speaks, in which he felt valued, listened to and respected.

Saul’s poetry remained very personal and autobiographical, a way for him to work through the thoughts and feelings that were “flying around” in his head. Moreover, in writing poetry he chose to construct a bilingual and bicultural discoursal self. In his Puente class all the readings were in English and students, though encouraged to include Spanish phrases especially in narrative pieces, generally wrote only in English. Saul also wrote only in English in Puente except for his poetry, in which he switched back and forth between the two languages.

Saul wrote the following poem in his English class and then performed it at a Youth Speaks event in a neighboring city. He also chose to include this particular poem in his 10th grade, writing portfolio and in the Puente class writing anthology that Ms. Williams put together for the class at the end of the year. The original poem -in both Spanish and English as Saul wrote it - is on the left, and my translated version in on the right. In the English translation, to help analyze what identities Saul was enacting through his poem, I italicized features that demonstrated his affective stances and marked direct identity labels in bold.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>English translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My World</td>
<td>My World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By</td>
<td>By</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saul Ramos</td>
<td>Saul Ramos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Welcome to my world
2 And pay close attention
3 You’re going to get a thrill
4 Don’t go so far you mite get lost
5 You will experience things...
6 You’re going to get a chill...
7 My brother and my sister...
8 Relax and listen
9 Y observan como lentamente
10 poca poco stand entrando a mi mundo...
11 se va desvaneciendo todo lo conocido
12 y solamente lo mas funebre y oculto
13 nunca visto por ojo human sera revelado
14 mi mundo es complicado
15 and like no other designated
16 To do nothing more than to show me
17 What’s right and maybe wrong...
18 This world of mine
19 Im going to show
20 But only with someone like me
21 I must share
22 Welcome to my world...
23 Population 1
24 Que te diviertas tratando de descifrarlo
25 Hahahaha
26 Im lost in it

Through this poem Saul constructed a discoursal self that was both very much an individual who was lost and confused and someone who yearned for community with others. This self feared that no one would truly understand his experiences, but still struggled to be heard, hoping that someone would find a path through his complicated and hidden internal world; even though, he hadn’t been able to do so himself. He also performed his identity of being a spoken word poet, addressing his audience directly and engaging them through sound effects commonly used in spoken word performances such as rhyme.

After welcoming his audience to share in the mystery and confusion that defines his inner world, invited his audience into his world as his “brother and sister” (line 7), but warning them of the dangers of getting “lost” within it (line 4). He was aware that as an author/ slam performer, he also became an entertainer, and so, he promised a “thrill” (line 3) and instructed his audience to “relax and listen” (line 7). As he transitioned into Spanish, he described how what was deeply and darkly hidden began to be revealed. He described these identities, those not usually seen by “the human eye,” in Spanish. Spanish is thus associated with his private, internal self (lines 9-14). In the next line transitioned back into English, to rhyme the words
“complicated” (line 15) and “designated” (line 16), demonstrating that his language choice was used to both convey meaning and to create purposeful sound effects.

Throughout the poem, he expressed that he desired to be understood, stating, “I must share” (line 22), but he suggested that only someone who has had similar experiences could understand all these aspects of his identity (line 21). Up to this point he had seen himself as a “population of one” (line 24). He switched back into Spanish to emphasize that to “decipher” (line 25) or understand this world was no easy task, and concluded in English that he was also “lost in it” (line 27).

The act of sharing the poem with a large audience was a way to expand his “population of one” and include others within the most personal aspects this world. The Puente class did, in fact, rally around Saul and many fellow students came to see him perform at the two larger Youth Speaks Poetry slams after school. For the first slam, Ms. Williams took the entire class on a fieldtrip so that they could all attend. Fewer Emerson Puenteistas came to the second slam, which took place in the evening at a community center in a neighborhood known for crime and violence; however, many of those who did come brought older siblings and parents with them. Saul particularly beamed as his girlfriend of the time, Sofia, her mother and younger brother cheered him on from the audience.

Encouraged by his success as a poet, Saul settled into the Puente community midway through his 10th-grade year. His demeanor became calmer and he had fewer verbal altercations with other students and Ms. Williams. He also began to turn in more of his work, and expressed to me in conversation that he enjoyed finding ways to express himself creatively even in more formal essay writing. According to Saul in his 10th-grade portfolio reflection:

Compared to my writing throughout my freshman year I think I have improved notoriously, because not only did I learn a whole bunch of a things about writing, but I’ve managed to see myself drawn towards writing. Writing brings out the inner self of whomever is writing. It implicates true feelings and confused emotions and lost ideas that have been waiting to be found and wrote down and shown to the people that matter. (Saul, portfolio reflection, 10)

Writing for Saul, however, remained rooted in his present moment, and he did not discuss his plans for the future in either writing or verbally. While he understood generally that Puente prepared students for college, he did not express any plans for college in his own future. Like with writing, that he preferred to do “in the moment” he understood his life as something he had to get through day to day, and long term plans did not fit into that schema. Puente, provided him with a measure of safety, stability and a place to explore and try on various identities through literacy practices, including that of a “Chicano fighter” and exploring “his true self.” However, what he would do after the temporary shelter of Puente after high school, did not figure into his figured world. Moreover, as his 10th-grade year came to close, his relationship with Sofia ended and he was no longer welcome to live in her home, leaving Saul once again uprooted and literally homeless.

Discussion

Both Manual and Saul greatly valued the “familia” that Puente at Emerson High provided, and this sense of belonging and acceptance into a positive community significantly contributed to the discoursal selves that they created in their Puente class. Manuel, who very much believed that “community is who you are,” saw Puente as a way to contribute to making his neighborhood a better place. Puente’s focus on community service also provided him with a
way to connect the value of serving others that he learned from his father to school activities. Moreover, in Puente he was able to transform his previously marginalized identity of “tagger” to that of a graffiti artist, identity that was valued within the Puente community. He also incorporated this identity into his academic discoursal self by writing about graffiti art and expanding his creative touch to other assigned genres of writing. In doing so, he challenged the label of being a “slow and messy” writer that he had previously accepted about himself.

Similar to Manuel, Saul transformed aspects of himself that he saw as problematic, such as being quick to anger, into a discoursal self in which he became a “Chicano Fighter,” using the power of his words to stand up against injustice. Moreover, through his participation in Poetry Slams organized by Youth Speaks, Saul discovered that writing “could mean everything” and created a bilingual and bicultural discoursal self that felt authentic to him. Even though he presented himself as fiercely independent at times, Saul found great comfort in the support and acceptance that he received from the Puente community. He particularly treasured his relationship with Ms. Diaz who as a licensed therapist was able to provide him with guidance in how to deal with difficult thoughts and emotions. Separated from his biological family, Saul saw Ms. Diaz as a mother figure that provided him with both the boundaries and acceptance for which he yearned.

Puente at Emerson was certainly supportive and very effective in supporting both young men’s socio-emotional development and providing a space in which they could create academic identities that felt authentic to them. However, neither Manuel nor Saul was particularly invested in being academically successful in the more traditional sense of earning good grades and preparing for college. Manuel did express that he wanted to go to college, but he didn’t focus on this aspect of Puente much. Saul didn’t mention college or a future career at all. Both young men saw being accepted into Puente as significant achievement in and of itself. They felt that they had been chosen to be part of a special community that automatically elevated them above other students at Emerson High. In this respect, Puente served in some ways as an end to itself and not necessarily as a path to college.

There was also a tension in how instruction in the Puente English class addressed the language needs of both students. Ms. William’s class was conducted in English, but both she and the other students used Spanish words and phrased from time to time during classroom activities. Similarly, a majority of the students included bits of Spanish in some of their writing. The students were also assigned to read English texts by Latino-American authors that included some Spanish. English was clearly the language of instruction, but the classroom allowed a space for students to include Spanish when they found it useful and appropriate. Saul in particular, served as the “resident linguist,” as coined by Ms. Williams. He discussed how certain words and phrases translated between the two languages, especially connotative meaning, on a daily basis. In this way students like Saul and Manuel, who felt that being a Spanish speaker was important part of their identities understood that the Puente class was a safe space to perform this self. However, Ms. Williams did not focus much of her instruction on the particular needs of her bilingual students who were still developing academic English proficiency. For instance, there was very little class discussion about usage conventions such as sentence structure, punctuation or spelling, a state of affairs that Ms. Diaz lamented. Both Manuel and Saul’s writing included many usage errors, at times obscuring the ideas that they wanted to present.

While it is impossible to say how Manuel and Saul would have fared in high school had they not been part of Puente, both boys stressed that Puente helped them make good choices
and become better people. The Puente class also provided literacy and learning activities that they found engaging and in which they were motivated to participate, something both expressed that they had trouble finding in other classes. Finally, in Puente they were surrounded daily by talk and activities about college and professional futures, something that most students at Emerson High did not have the opportunity to experience. Both young men saw a college education as a positive goal, even if that wasn’t their central motivation at age sixteen.
Chapter 5

Yesenia and Sofia: Exploring personal meaning on the path to college

This chapter focuses on how two focal students, Yesenia and Sofia, constructed academic discoursal selves in Puente that both reflected their central motive for participating in Puente, preparing for four-year college, and that incorporated more personal identities and commitments. As in the previous chapter on Manuel and Saul, I used ethnographic and textual analysis methods to examine how these focal students constructed and performed their discoursal selves within the context of Puente practices. I also analyze how they understood their identities within Puente and how these perceptions changed over time. Moreover, as in the preceding chapter, I do not focus my analysis on gender identity in particular and do not see Yesenia and Sofia as representative of the other female students in the program. Rather, I choose to include both girls because of similarities in how they understood and valued the program to be foremost a path to college and imagined future figured world as college students and professionals.

Both young women saw Ms. Diaz as a guide who helped them pick the correct classes and who educated them and their parents about how to prepare for a college-going future. They viewed their Puente English class in a similar manner, as teaching them the type of writing that would be required in college; both felt that essays were the most important type of writing. Even though they expressed that they struggled with essay writing at times, they valued this type of writing the most in their Puente English class, especially when they wrote about topics that held personal significance for them. Also, both Yesenia and Sofia saw Puente as a direct path to the lives they wanted to have in the future. Yesenia explored the possibility of becoming an immigration lawyer for a few months, but otherwise stayed consistently committed to her dream of becoming a pediatric nurse. Sofia, who liked both mysteries and animals, expressed that she wanted to be either a crime scene investigator or a veterinarian.

The two young women, however, differed significantly on what kind of students they identified themselves to be and the roles that they felt they played in the Puente community. Yesenia came into Puente as an already accomplished student and leader among her peers. Puente gave her a clear route to take towards a goal she was already well on her way towards reaching. She had very high expectations of herself both academically and personally and viewed Puente as both an opportunity and responsibility. She greatly valued the friendships that she built with other Puente student and helped and encouraged her classmates academically. Finally, she not only wanted to succeed for herself, but took Ms. Diaz’ expectation that Puentistas be role models for the community very seriously and saw herself as a leader.

In contrast, Sofia did not express a personal connection to the community aspect of the program, but grew a great deal in terms of creating an academic discoursal self during her two years in Puente. She only occasionally participated in Puente activities outside of the classroom, and was the only focal student who did not highlight the concept of familia as an important aspect of her experience in Puente. In general, she tended to be private and chose silence when asked about her feelings. She rarely spoke during Puente activities both in and out of school, but she saved her opinions until she could express them in writing. Before Puente she did not see herself as a writer; however, by the end of the 10th-grade she saw writing as a very important tool to shape and express her ideas as well as to “put her point out” to others.
Yesenia

Biographical background

Yesenia was born in the community surrounding Emerson High School. She lived with her parents, who had immigrated from Mexico as young adults, and her younger brother and sister. While she had been classified as EL in elementary school, she had been redesigned as Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) by the sixth grade. I included Yesenia as a case study student in large part due to Ms. Williams’ advice, who suggested that Yesenia represented a type of student common to Puente classes at Emerson High School, a highly motivated and generally high achieving student who demonstrated an EL “accent” in her writing such as nonnative syntax and some errors with usage conventions.

Yesenia’s home was bilingual; she spoke in Spanish with her parents and in English with her two siblings. As for her friends, she said that she spoke to them either in English or Spanish, depending on which language they were more comfortable speaking. She also said that she had some ability to write in Spanish, such as notes to her parents and letters to her extended family in Mexico, but did not do any academic writing to Spanish. Unlike most Puente students, who took Spanish for Native Speakers at school, she took French as her second language.

Determined to go to college, Yesenia was a diligent student who completed all her assignments on time. She rewrote her essays multiple times, paying close attention to teacher suggestions. Generally she earned B’s on her essays and A’s for her quarter grades.

Taking responsibility as a role model and leader

Yesenia decided to join Puente because she saw it as a path to four-year college. She explained, “I chose Puente because they, they told us that – they helped us, like, um, to get into college and, like, I wanted to go to college, so I thought it was gonna be a good idea to be in it” (Yesenia, interview, 2/23/09). She felt that Puente had helped her understand what she needed to do in order to be admitted to college in the future and well as provide her with a community of educators and peers, who “help each other out” with this goal. Moreover, she felt that it was her duty not only to take advantage of the opportunities Puente gave her, but to also help her fellow Puentistas in their academic journeys. As she put it:

Puente, I think, is a really – I think it’s a good program, ‘cause, um, they teach you a lot of, um, colleges. Like, I didn’t know how many credits you had to use. I didn’t know you had to use a lot of, um, volunteer work. And then, like, they’ll take us, like, to a lot of the universities to see what – which kind of universities we’re interested in. And then, [Ms. Diaz] is always constantly, like, um, telling us to do well, and she’s always talking about the requirements, and [Ms. Williams] is, too. And then, everybody, that, like, knows each other, we all help each other out. That’s what I like. (Yesenia, interview, 2/23/09).

Yesenia understood that the overarching goal of Puente was to help her get accepted into college. She valued Ms. Diaz and Ms. William’s help in having her understand the requirements that she needed to get there, including the value of volunteer work. In an in-class “quickwrite” about her experience doing volunteer work, she expressed, “you can learn more about your community and help out.” She also described, how “some colleges, like Stanford, can look at your volunteer hours .. . Also when you volunteer and help out, people give recommendations for when you’re applying to go to college.” She ended this piece of writing with a discussion of “responsibility,” which was theme that she spoke and wrote about often. As she put it, “volunteering teaches people responsibility. For example, when you volunteer you have things assigned to you and you know have to get it done. Later on in life you’ll get responsibilities too, you’ll learn from volunteering” (12/8/08).
Yesenia also very much valued the familia aspect of Puente in terms of the friendships she developed and felt responsible for the success of her classmates and friends. Both her 9th-grade and 10th-grade portfolios were covered in collages of photographs of her with other Puentistas. In the dedication page of her 10th-grade portfolio, she wrote, “Last, but not least I want to dedicate this portfolio to my whole Puente class. We all become very close, and know each other really well. I would like to especially thank my closest friends …” (Yesenia, 10th portfolio). She felt that it was very important for Puentistas to support each other to “do your best” in terms of academic success. In her interview, she expressed “we’re, like all a family” and further explained:

The other students, I guess they don’t wanna see us, like, um – I don’t know, they always try to, like be friendly with everybody, like, um, do your best. Like, if someone, like, slacks off real, real, like, “Why are you being like that? You weren’t like that. You used to get good grades, and now you’re, like, at the bottom right now.” And so, you give ‘em, how do you say, like, you pressure them a little bit so they can keep on going. (Yesenia, interview, 2/23/09)

Yesenia was used to helping other students; she expressed that even before Puente her friends sought her out for assistance with homework, especially essays. Similarly, within her biological family she was the oldest and saw herself as role model and caretaker of her younger siblings and as a helper to her parents. She described this aspect of her identity in her 9th-grade essay on leadership.

I believe that I am a leader to my siblings, because whenever they need my help I am there for them. Little things like helping them with their homework or cooking for them makes you a leader, because you are helping out. I am a help to my parents, because I translate for them when they don’t understand what something means. (Yesenia, 9th writing portfolio)

In an in class-writing assignment on her goals for the following year, she wrote that she wanted to get a part-time job so that she could be more independent and help her parents financially. She also mentioned on several occasions that she was a “role model” for her siblings who looked up to her, and that she wanted them to see her succeed in college. Puente provided another community in which she could be a role model and a helper, two identities that she valued within her family. As an academically successful student, she was often the one who would encourage her classmates and “pressure them a bit so they can keep on going.”

She also felt obligated to represent Puente to everyone around her, and sometimes felt burdened by this expectation. When I asked her what she found most challenging about being in Puente, instead of addressing an academic aspect as had the other three focal students, she stated:

Challenging, like, we always have to be on our best behavior, because if not, they, they always tell you, “That, that’s not Puente behavior,” and everybody hates it when they say that. And we have to be good, because other people are gonna say, “Oh, that’s Puente,” if we behave … – I mean bad. (Yesenia, interview, 2/23/09).

While this was an expectation that Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams, expressed towards all the Puente students, Yesenia, in particular, took it to heart. Furthermore, she understood that “Puente behavior” was part of what being a leader represented. When I asked her why Puente behavior was so important, she explained:

Yesenia: I think that’s why, ‘cause we, we asked one time, the teacher, and then she’s like, “Um, because you guys are advanced. You’re supposed to lead other people.”
Yesenia felt that being in Puente meant being “advanced,” and “ahead of other people,” which entailed being “on our best” both academically and in terms of how students presented themselves to those around them. Many students saw Puente as a fairly exclusive community. Ms. Diaz regularly reminded students that by being granted a spot within Puente, students became role models and leaders within Emerson High. For Yesenia, who entered Puente invested in her identities as a leader, helper and role model, “Puente behavior” felt like a very serious responsibility.

“I’m an essay person”: working hard to create her academic discoursal self

Even though she admitted, "I never liked writing, and I still don't," Yesenia also thought of herself as “an essay person,” an identity label that she expressed in both writing and in conversations with me. In her first piece writing in the 9th-grade, she answered the prompt, “Describe yourself as a writer” by stating:

One way I found out that I am an essay person is because it seemed easier for me than other writings. . . Another way I found out I was an essay person was by people. How did I find out by people? Well, I had like two friends that called me for help because they couldn’t really understand their homework. I helped were I could. It was annoying, but I couldn’t say no to my friends because they needed help.

Writing essays was an activity that she felt successful in and found easier than other types of writing she did in school. She also felt validated as an “essay person,” even if slightly annoyed, because her friends sought her out when they struggled with essays. Moreover, for Yesenia, unlike Manuel and Saul, being successful didn’t necessarily mean enjoying the work that she was doing.

She remained committed to becoming a better writer so that she could accomplish her academic goals; she did not see writing as necessarily personally fulfilling or pleasurable. For instance, in her 9th-grade portfolio reflection she wrote:

I never like writing, and I still don't, but this year it became easier for me to write essays. I became a better writer than I was in the pass.

I think I will improve more in the future, like next year when I'm a 10th grade Puente student. I think these writing skills will help me in the future when I'm applying to colleges. Being in Puente has help me improve in writing.

Yesenia understood writing in Puente as preparation for college, and even though this wasn’t always enjoyable for her, she very much wanted to keep improving during her time in the class. She viewed writing a good essay as an endeavor that took significant time, much thought, and required a great deal of hard work and persistence. She opened her reflection letter in her 10th-grade Portfolio stating:

Welcome to my 10th-grade Puente Portfolio!!! Inside you will writing pieces of my second year in the Puente Class. You will see my
improvements in different pieces. I hope you enjoy reading through my portfolio since I put a lot of work into all of it. I know it won’t be the best thing you’ve ever seen, but it means a lot to me as a Puente Student. You will see how Puente students work hard in class. (Yesenia, 10th writing portfolio).

In both her 9th and 10th-grade portfolio reflections, and in her interview, Yesenia focused on how important it was for her to grow as an academic writer. She often brought up how she struggled to expand her "commentary," or her own analysis in her essays. She believed that commentary demonstrated the quality and depth of her ideas and that well-developed ideas were the basis of good writing. As she put it, a good writer "needs to have a topic to write about and have a lot of ideas" (Yesenia, interview, 2/23/09). Committed to doing her best on all her assignments, she found that she struggled when "sometimes I have to think a lot and then come up with a lot of ideas, add more details to them. Like for essays we have to have a lot of commentary" (Yesenia, interview, 2/23/09). She found the classroom practices of sharing ideas with other students and getting a good deal of feedback on essay drafts particularly helpful, as she expressed in her 10th-grade portfolio reflection.

What has helped me improve my writings are the feedback I got from my classmates and my teacher. Even the slightest little change can make an essay better. When I revise it over and over and have others read it, I get more ideas on things I can add. It usually takes me some time to make an acceptable essay, just because I have to think a lot. I know I'll get better, and take advantage on the time I get to write essays.

(Yesenia 10th writing portfolio).

For Yesenia good writing took time, a great deal of thought, input from others, and multiple revisions. Using academic writing to explore personally important issues

While improving her essays by developing her ideas and expanding her analysis served as her most important goals in growing as a writer, Yesenia also grew to value Puente writing as an activity in which she could explore ideas that held personal significance for her. For instance, in the 9th-grade she expressed that she enjoyed writing her issue/commentary essay "in support of undocumented workers who mean no harm to people" because she "felt like could relate to this essay . . . I thought it was easy, because it was like talking about my family and friends" (Yesenia, 9th-grade portfolio reflection). I include the full text of this piece Appendix D.

In this essay, Yesenia made a clear argument for how “America” benefits from undocumented immigrants, showing the many ways that “every immigrant helps make this country a better place” (line 1). Even though this topic was deeply personal for her, she constructed an academic discoursal self that didn’t directly reference her own identity until the conclusion. She wrote mostly in third person or first person plural. The only instance that she uses the pronoun “I,” was near the end of her essay when she stated, “While some people say that undocumented immigrants take people’s jobs, and also hurt the economy I believe the opposite of it” (line 33-34). Closely following the conventions of argumentative writing that Ms. Williams taught, she presented a discoursal self that built a case through facts and research. She described herself as a “citizen” who through facts and logic opposed the argument made by others who erroneously “think” that undocumented workers “steal citizens jobs” (line 4).
Having learned that academic essays are supposed to seem objective, she kept direct references to herself and her beliefs to a minimum.

Throughout the piece, she successfully demonstrated her ability to incorporate the rhetorical moves and sentence stems that Ms. Williams taught for argumentative writing, such as “some people think… however…” and “they say… yet …” In addition to including counterarguments and rebuttals, she also used evidence from sources she had researched to help strengthen her claims. In all these ways, she created a discoursal self as a diligent student, and as a knowledgeable “citizen” who sought to dispel negative assumptions that other citizens made against “undocumented immigrants.”

When she wrote this essay, in the winter of 2009, the country was at the beginning of a recession, and there was much talk in the media about whether undocumented workers were “taking jobs” and should be deported. She tackled this head on, citing news reports from NPR.com and MSNBC.com as supporting her claims. For instance, she paraphrased from NPR.com that “the citizens don’t apply in places the illegal immigrants would, like construction, and manufacturing” (lines 8-9). In this particular case, she appears to have directly drawn language from the news source, even leaving in the negative word “illegal” instead of the more neutral term “undocumented” that she used in all other instances.

She also focused on dispelling the assumption that “undocumented immigrants hurt the economy, because “they don’t pay there taxes and send their money to their countries” (lines 15-16). While she didn’t draw on external sources for this point, she still wrote with a great deal of certainty and authority, stating, “most pay their taxes” (line 17). She continued with the same authoritative stance, explaining, “Some undocumented immigrants won’t get hire since they don’t have papers so they get paid cash. Because of that they aren’t able to do their taxes” (lines 18-19). Demonstrating certainty through the verbs “won’t” and “aren’t,” Yesenia argued that because they cannot be legally hired, some undocumented workers “aren’t able” to pay taxes out of no fault of their own, implying that is would like to “help out” the economy and country, but have not been permitted to do so.

She further constructed the argument, using evidence that she had researched, that undocumented immigrants “help” the country while building a better life for themselves, arguing, “Undocumented immigrants help out the economy when the country most needs it” (line 23). Citing MSNBC.com she described how “undocumented immigrants helped out in rebuilding New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina” (lines 24-25). She followed this point with further evidence of undocumented immigrants’ willingness to contribute to the country, in this case “risking their lives” and even dying as United States soldiers (lines 30-32). Demonstrating what she had been taught about argumentative writing, she included she phrase “we can agree that” to signal her understanding of the counter claim that soldiers enlisted “to get papers” (line 29-30). As a rebuttal in the following sentence, she dismissed this as inconsequential since “America benefited from the undocumented immigrants’ service” (lines 31-32).

Throughout this piece, Yesenia worked hard to demonstrate an academic discoursal self in line with the conventions and discourse moves for argumentative writing that she had been taught. She built her argument through logic and facts, generally using the third person or first

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person plural, discursively distancing herself from an issue that held a great deal of emotional significance to her.

The struggles of undocumented immigrants continued to be a very important topic in Yesenia’s writing throughout her two years in the Puente English class. In addition to her 9th-grade argumentative piece, she was able to express her very personal connection to the issue through the biographical “family legend” essay that she wrote in the 10th-grade. In her portfolio reflection she explains why she chose this essay as her favorite piece of writing that year.

The piece I picked was about my mother's journey to the U.S, For a Better Life.

When I was doing this essay, I learned many things from my mother that I didn't know before. I admire my mother much more than I did before after working on the essay...I know it will be a story I will pass on to my kids, so they can know about their family (Yesenia, portfolio reflection, 10).

The assignment called for students to write about an important family legend. Most interviewed family members before writing. According to Yesenia, this gave her an opportunity to learn more about her mother and draw even closer to her. Moreover, she saw it as essential piece of her family history that she planned to pass on to her own children.

The piece detailed her mother’s struggles in coming to the United States and starting a new life, her loneliness when she arrived, and how she labored long hours picking fruit so that she could send money back to her own mother and younger siblings in Mexico. Yesenia also describes the fear that her mother faced of “getting caught and being deported” until she received permanent status through immigration reform in 1987. She ends this piece explaining:

My mother made a big sacrifice coming here, because it meant she wasn’t going to be close to her mother. This is a really important story to me because it’s part of the reason why I’m here. If my mom had never met my dad I wouldn’t have been here. This is one of many stories I know I will tell my kids and relatives later on because they will learn about where they came from and who they are. They’ll learn that my mother was a brave, strong woman that never gave up, and still hasn’t. This shows how important family is to my mother, and how important my mother is to me. (Yesenia, 10th portfolio)

For Yesenia, her mother’s journey was her own origin story, as she puts it, “the reason why I’m here.” It helped her to understand not only her mother, but also the influence of her mother’s legacy on her own identity. In many ways, Yesenia strove to emulate her mother who she saw as a “brave, strong woman,” willing to work hard and sacrifice for the sake of helping others. Performing a confident academic discoursal self: “The Puente Program prepares students, in many ways, to get an education”

By the end of her sophomore year, Yesenia felt confirmed in her identity as an “essay person,” and had developed a confident discoursal self; and knew how to present herself in writing appropriately for her task and audience. She demonstrates this in her letter to the California State Senate explaining why they should continue to fund Puente and similar programs. Moreover, this essay illustrates Yesenia’s understanding and feelings about Puente after having participated in the program for two years. While she found a great deal of personal meaning in Puente writing and activities, her main goal and motivation for participating in program firmly remained to prepare for four-year college. I have included a copy of the complete letter in Appendix E.
Writing from her personal experience and identifying herself as a “Puentista” (line 12), Yesenia explained how Puente “helps” and “prepares” students to complete high school and attend college (lines 15-17). She used the format and tone of an official business letter throughout the piece, indicating her awareness of what is the most appropriate discoursal self to present in this context as she outlined how “Puente prepares students, in many ways, to get an education” (line 17).

Throughout the piece, Yesenia focused on the work and effort of the Puente teacher and counselor to prepare students for college, and how students would not be able to achieve this goal if left on their own. She repeated the evaluative verbs “helped” and “guide” to describe the role of Puente counselors. Moreover, she described how “They constantly tell them about the A-G requirement classes, and are always checking the grades to know if they’re passing or struggling” (lines 22-23). Through this statement, Yesenia demonstrated her understanding that students need to complete the A-G requirement in order to be eligible, which exceeds the requirement for high school graduation. She emphasized how much effort is needed on the part of the counselors who must “constantly” tell students about this requirement and “are always checking” to make sure the students are passing these classes with a satisfactory grade. She contrasted this attention and care to the experience of students “without Puente” who “don’t always know if their classes are college requirements until it is too late for them to take them” (lines 24-25).

Yesenia saw Puente as a special community that provided a pathway to college open to few other students. She displayed a very positive stance explaining that the program is a “great opportunity” for students like her, motivated to go to college, but unsure of the path to take to get there. She wrote, “other non-Puente students don’t have the same opportunities we do” (line 31). She then emphasized how much more guidance she received than students normally did at Emerson High. This opportunity included the ability to visit college campuses to pick “the right one” (line 32).

She suggested that Ms. Williams was also a better teacher than most because she received professional development from Puente. She explained that teachers come back from Puente conferences with “more ways to teach their students” (line 38). Keeping the same teacher for two years and the emphasis on writing also set the program apart according to Yesenia. She described how Puente teachers “know how to help” their students. She took a strong affective stance, stating “we love our teacher, Ms. Williams” for being helpful. Finally, the program prepared students to successfully apply to college because, as Yesenia put it, “it helps us become better essay writers” (line 44).

Yesenia saw Puente as bringing together the efforts of the counselor, teacher, parents, and students towards a common goal: a student’s admission to four-year college. Moreover, she understood that this special treatment was not the norm for most students, and believed that it deserved deep gratitude from parents. She described how “parents and families get support from Puente as well” (line 46). According to Yesenia, this was a very important aspect of the program since she would “be the first generation to go to college” (line 47). As she put it, parents learn how to “help” students on their path to college and Puente also helps students “in ways that parents can’t” (lines 50 -51). She discussed the community aspect of this program through this lens. That colleges want students to have volunteer experiences is something that “parents aren’t aware of that helps students get into college” (lines 50 -51). Using affectively marked language, she emphasized that Puente makes parents “feel so proud of their kids” (line 48), and “thankful” to the program (line 53).
Desiring to present an authoritative and mature discoursal self, she ended the essay using the official Puente Statewide Office’s language stating that, “the Puente program helps many underrepresented students in California to get to college” (line 56). For Yesenia “underrepresented” meant bilingual students like herself who could fulfill California’s need for bilingual “skilled workers” (line 58). Finally, she ended with a plea; “We don’t want to take away the opportunity of future students that want to join Puente. Keep Puente!” Thus, Yesenia understood Puente as an “opportunity” that few students at her school had to go to college and become professionals. In her clearly written and well-organized letter, all elements of the program, including the community aspect, were subsumed by this overarching goal.

Sofía

Biographical background

Like Yesenia, Sofia was also born and raised in the community surrounding Emerson High. She lived with her mother and two brothers, and for a few with months with her boyfriend Saul, and spoke only English at home. Her parents divorced when she was in elementary school, and while she spoke with her father in Spanish this usually consisted of telephone calls since he lived in another city, about a two-hour drive away. Moreover, she stated that she was embarrassed about her accent when she spoke Spanish, so she only spoke it to family members. She didn’t write in Spanish apart from notes on cards to extended family in Mexico. However, despite English being her dominant language, Sofia had remained designated as an English Learner from the time she entered kindergarten, and was categorized as EL 4, out of a 1-5 scale, at the time of this study.

When Saul wasn’t distracting her with side conversations as he often did, Sofia tended to be focused on her work and very quiet in class, rarely raising her hand to speak. She tried to complete assignments, but oftentimes struggled with writing, generally earning C’s for both essay assignments and quarter grades. She stated that she preferred when directions were very clear and she felt like she knew exactly what was being asked of her. She also shared that she enjoyed being in the Puente class because, unlike her experiences in other classes, the students would help her instead of making fun of her when she didn’t understand something.

Puente as a path to college

Like Yesenia, Sofia viewed Puente as a direct path to college. Her cousin who had been through Puente and was now in college, as she described in her 9th-grade essay on leadership, inspired her:

Even though, Alma is mean to me I still admire her for what she does. She plays on the soccer team, stays in shape, kicks it with her friends, goes to college, works and still has time to be with her family. She used to be in Puente and while she was in Puente she did all she could to get credits. I think she even go more credits than what she was supposed to get. She also got a scholarship at an early age. That’s something that I want to do.

(Sofia, 9th writing portfolio)

Sofía imagined a future self that was successful like her cousin, with a well-balanced life that included college. She saw Puente was a way to get the “credits,” necessary to be accepted to college. She also believed that the focus on writing would help her prepare for the challenges of college coursework. When I asked her to define Puente in her own words, Sofia explained, “It helps you get into college, be ready for it, ‘cause in college, you write a lot of essays, and it
won’t be that hard when you’re in college. Because I thought it would be – they would just help you get into college faster” (Sofia, interview, 2/27/09).

She felt that Ms. Diaz was key in helping her choose the correct classes, and advocated for her to get the needed grades to be eligible for a four-year postsecondary institution. She described how, “She helps you get into a college, the, the college. Like, today she said if – ‘cause I had a D for ninth grade for Puente, and she said, ‘well, I talked to Miss Williams,’ that she could bring my grade up and I could go to Cal State” (Sofia, interview, 2/27/09). Since in California, students have to have a C or better in state approved “A-G” courses to be admitted to a University of California or California State institution, Ms. Diaz made Sofia aware that she would not be eligible if she did not earn at least a C in English. Sofia understood that Ms. Diaz intervened to have Ms. Williams give her make-up work, so she could change it to a C, which made Sofia eligible for a California State University. As for Ms. Williams, Sofia expressed that she valued the feedback that Ms. Williams gave her on her writing and that she appreciated Ms. Williams, “explains things to you. Like, she doesn’t leave you with questions, ‘cause she answered all of ‘em.” (Sofia, interview, 2/27/09).

According to Sofia, Puente provided the tools for a few select students like her to be accepted and to be successful in college. She also valued how the program supported parents, like her mom, who would be sending a child off to college for the first time. In her persuasive 10th-grade letter arguing why Puente should not be cut from the CA State budget, she explained the importance of Puente from her point of view and directly identified herself as a “Puentista.” In this piece, she was both responding to the threat that the program may disappear before she finished high school and presenting her academic discoursal self to her audience, the California lawmakers addressed in the letter. In Appendix F, I include her entire letter in which I marked identity claims in bold and italicized affective stances that demonstrate how she evaluated Puente and her experience as a “Puentista.”

After introducing herself as “not only a student”, but “a Puentista,” Sofia used strong emotional language, “imploring” for Puente to be spared cuts (lines 1-2). She repeated throughout her essay how much Puente “helps” and “prepares” students for college. Through her repetition of these two words, she suggested that going to college was not an individual endeavor, but rather a collaborative effort. The teacher, counselor and parents all worked together to make it possible for a student to reach this goal. Thus, she saw the relationships and community in Puente as cooperative support for students on their path towards college. The role of the individual Puentista was to use these resources to prepare for a successful postsecondary academic future.

Sofia saw writing essays as an important tool towards reaching this goal. She described her pre-Puente self, who “didn’t know how to write essays” (line 17), and who transformed through her two years in Puente to a student who knew “how to write better.” She imagined her future self, writing essays in college: “hopefully when I get to college I’ll be prepared for it” (line 18). She matched a stance of low certainty, “hopefully” with a high certainty in using “when,” implying that while she was fairly certain that her path in Puente will end with four-year college, she was less certain that she would be as strong of a writer as she would need to be for college essays. Nonetheless, she depicted Puente a certain path to a postsecondary future.

In the second paragraph she described an example of how her Puente teacher helped her to write as she emphatically stated, “really big essays” (line 24). For, Sofia, who saw herself as an often-struggling writer, passing the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), which included an essay section, felt like a huge accomplishment. While to pass students only needed
to demonstrate mastery of 8th-grade literacy standards; this was a significant hurdle for Sofia. Interestingly, Ms. Williams felt that the CAHSEE was a poor test and begrudgingly had students practice for it. According to Ms. Williams, Puente students generally passed the CAHSEE because the level of literacy expected of them in Puente was far above that of the CAHSEE and test prep had very little effect on students’ scores. Sofia, however, valued this instruction enough to single it out in her letter to the legislature.

In the essay, Sofía focused on how Puente “helps” parents as well. She described how parents may have a hard time letting their children go off to college. According to Sofía, Puente helped make it a bit less “scary” (line 31) for parents while it taught them what their children “will need” (line 35), or how to support their students on their path to college. She furthered this point in her fourth paragraph, describing how Puente provided both the expertise about college, and a “relationship with their students and the students families” that made the expertise effective (39-40). She repeated that Puente educators are “closer to the students and students families” (line 40 and line 43) so that they trust the educators to guide them in helping their children and calming their fears about “letting their first child go to college” (line 44-45). Moreover, she imagined that her Puente educators will “most likely” be with her and the other students every step of the way in the application process (line 42).

In closing the essay, Sofía reaffirmed her identity as a “Puentista” and imagined her future as shaped by Puente, attending a “good college or [getting] a scholarship like other graduated Puentistas have” (line 49). Thus, according to Sofía, Puente provided a direct and linear route to a four-year college, and this was the central and most valuable aspect of being a “Puentista.” She did not discuss the other interpersonal aspects of Puente in her letter, aside from how the educators build relationships with parents and students in the service of helping students reach their college-going goals.

Choosing silence: Sofía and personal privacy

Sofía was the most private and least gregarious of the four focal students. While the three other focal students referred to their relationships with other Puente students and with Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams as a “family” dynamic in both interviews and in their writing, Sofía said little about this aspect of Puente. She felt that Ms. Diaz helped her get the right classes and grades to be able to go to college and that Ms. Williams did a good job explaining classroom material and helping her to become a better writer. She felt she formed closer relationships with her teacher, counselor and fellow Puente students than she had in school in the past; however, she didn’t go into detail about how these relationships impacted her, other than to explain how she felt safe to make mistakes and supported in her goal to go to college. She explained that she liked being in Puente because “if I write something wrong or something bad, [the other students] tell me how to do it instead of just making fun of me” (Sofia, interview, 2/27/09). She mentioned that being part of Puente helped her feel “confident” talking to other Puente students since she knew them for two years, but, unlike the other focal students, she never actually referred to them as her friends. Moreover, most of the students personalized their Puente portfolio covers in some way with images, either drawings or photographs that reflected what the community of Puente meant to them, Sofía left both 9th and 10th grade covers plain, with the tile “Puente Portfolio” and her grade, name and date.

Moreover, when I asked her directly about her participation in Puente activities outside of the classroom, including community service, she didn’t recall any that stood out as meaningful to her (Sofia, interview, 2/27/09). She did participate in a number of these activities and wrote in her 9th-grade essay on leadership, “I try to do some community things for Puente. Like I go to the
breakfast club to help make breakfast and pass it out to the little kids during vacations” (Sofia, 9th Portfolio). She understood that “community things” where part of Puente and expressed her willingness to do what was asked of her, but did not communicate how she felt about participating in this part of the Puente activity system.

Her tendency to keep her feelings to herself became worrisome for both Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams in the spring of the 10th-grade year. Her living situation was not going well, and already a small girl, she lost a dramatic amount of weight and started to fall ill, missing quite a bit of school. On the days she attended class, she didn’t turn in work, and thus, her grades dropped. A number of the other girls in the class expressed their concern that Sofia was having really significant personal problems but was not talking about them. According to Ms. Williams, she and Ms. Diaz had a conference about the situation with Sofia’s mom who shared that Sofia and Saul had difficulty living together, which put a great deal of stress on the household. After a couple of months, Sofia’s mom decided that Saul could no longer continue to live with them, a decision that both Ms. Williams and Ms. Diaz strongly supported. After Saul moved to live with extended family, Sofia began to return to her old self; her health improved and by the end of the school year, she was once again engaging in classroom activities and was able to bring her grade in English up to a high C.

Finding her discoursal self: “I like putting my point out to people”

For Sofia, who rarely spoke in class and didn’t talk about personal matters, writing, in addition to being a skill that she felt that she needed to master for college, served as a tool to shape and express her ideas and opinions. In her favorite pieces of writing from both her 9th and 10th-grade portfolios, she has an opportunity to make personal connections to the material she read in class and talk about issues she found important. In the 9th-grade she describes how in her “favorite” essay of the year, a piece in response to Sandra Cisneros’s House on Mango Street, she "talked about how Esperanza didn't like her house because it looked old, but instead she should appreciate that she has a roof to live under" (Sofia, 9th-grade portfolio reflection).

Similarly, in her 10th-grade portfolio reflection Sofia explains that her “favorite” piece is her autobiographical essay about how her parents met. Having something important to say made this piece both enjoyable and easy to write: "with most essays I have a hard time with my introductions and other paragraphs. This was my most meaningful writing to me because it was a nice story of how it all happened and how they to meet to form a family" (Sofia, 10th-grade portfolio reflection).

While she found writing persuasive or issue/commentary pieces difficult, especially in incorporating and reflecting on the opinions of others, she expressed satisfaction in tackling this type of essay. In our interview she expressed that she valued this type of writing because, "I like putting my point out to people" (Sofia, Interview, 2/27/09). In particular, she prided herself on her 10th-grade issue/commentary piece in which she argued for legalizing gay marriage, a position opposed by most of her classmates. She described the essay explaining, “That was a big one, ‘cause everybody was going against it. And I was one of the persons that wasn’t against it” (Sofia, Interview, 2/27/09). While Sofia was unlikely to express her opinions in class, through writing she felt that she could disagree and challenge the assumptions of many of her classmates. I included the full essay in Appendix G.

Sofia took a very strong stance throughout her essay. She used certainty modals, especially “should” as she argued against those who supported California’s ballot initiative, Proposition 8, which sought to overturn the right to marry granted to same sex couples in the courts. She repeated the word “rights” throughout the essay to express that gay people “are
fighting for their rights” (line 4). For Sofia, legalizing gay marriage was a matter of justice. However, she understood that most of her classmates argued against gay marriage from a religious standpoint, so she tackled this issue from the start of her essay, stating, “many people use the Bible to be against gay marriage, that Jesus says it’s a sin. However this is not true because the only thing Jesus included in the Bible is that what really matters in marriage is love” (lines 8-10). She used the adjectives demonstrating high certainty, “only” and “really,” to express that both she and Jesus believed that the most important element of a marriage is “love,” and not the gender of the members of the couple (line 10). She carried the theme of love throughout her essay, arguing that gay couples could provide “love” and “a family” for adopted children. She repeated this several times to emphasize that what makes a marriage and family legitimate is love.

Sofia created a discoursal self as a passionate defender of rights, a believer in love, and an authority on Christian teachings, while working hard to demonstrate her skill with persuasive writing. She tried her hand at the rhetorical moves⁶ that Ms. Williams taught for persuasive writing throughout the essay. For instance, she used a question to counter the opposing side, stating, “If gay marriage was a sin, then why did Jesus make them gay? If Jesus made someone gay it’s because that’s how he wanted it, so it’s not a sin” (lines 14-15). She used modal of high certainty as she disputed the claim, a common belief among her classmates, that gay marriage was a sin. She also effectively used phrases that Ms. Williams had taught for including counter claims and rebuttals. She used the negative word “complaining” to characterize the opposing side, stating, “People are complaining that gay couples are going to be adopting kids” (line 16). To rebut this “complaint” she used the phrase she learned in class, “but what people don’t realize” to argue that “more kids are going to be taken out of foster homes and have a place to live with a family” (line 17-18).

While generally very quiet in interpersonal and class interactions, Sofia was able to use the medium of academic writing to strongly express her opinion and stand against the prevailing view in her classmates. In the final two paragraphs of her essay, she continued to demonstrate an awareness of rhetorical moves in persuasive writing as she uses the pronoun “we” to declare that “We as a community should support gay marriage” (line 26). She aligned her readers with herself as citizens of a country that should grant equal rights and members of a community who should believe in love. She emphasizes this again in the final paragraph stating, “And also we as citizens and a community should not be prejudiced” (line 35), implying that those who continued to disagree with her stance were, in fact, “prejudiced.” Sofia knew that many students would read her essay because of the practice of sharing and revising essays in groups in Ms. Williams’ class, so this way a way to get her voice heard within the Puente community.

While Sofia felt that essays allowed her to express her thoughts and opinions, in direct contrast to both Saul and Manuel, she found creative writing in general and poetry in particular to be the most challenging and most constraining type of writing. Sofia did not enjoy writing in which she was expected to be “creative,” a requirement that continued to mystify her. As a dutiful student, she tried to add this in her writing and felt it would make her writing more interesting to read, but could not figure out how to accomplish “creativity.” As she expressed in

the 10th-grade Portfolio reflection, “I plan to improve in my introduction and make them more creative so when people read my essay they’ll want to read more . . . my introduction in this essay isn’t very good. I was thinking of making it creative, but I don’t know how to with this essay.” Having to be “creative” was difficult for Sofia who wanted clear instructions.

Poetry, in particular, was her least favorite type of writing. As she put it, “Poems are challenging, ’cause I don’t know what to write about” (Sofia, interview 2/27/09). This type of writing may have been uncomfortable for her because the poems that the students wrote and shared were deeply personal, creating an unspoken norm that poetry should reveal inner feelings. Moreover, Ms. Williams expected all the Puentistas to perform or read their poem at the class poetry slam at the end of the unit. While for many students this was an extension of how they chose to participate verbally in class activities on a regular basis, Sofia never volunteered to participate in such a manner. Moreover, unlike Saul and Manuel who expressed that they felt free to experiment with language in poetry, Sofia expressed her frustration with mastering the concrete conventions that were included in the slam poetry unit, stating, “When we had to do the rhyming, the end rhyming stuff and the consonants and stuff. Those are hard” (Sofia, Interview, 2/27/09). For the class poetry slam and her 10th-grade portfolio she chose a poem that used an extended metaphor to compare love and candy. In writing this poem, she borrowed the topic of love and structure from the model poem provided by Ms. Williams. For Sofia, who did not readily reveal her feelings, and felt constrained by having to be creative, choosing this poem may have been a way for to feel comfortable enough to read a poem about private emotions in front of the class.

Sofia showed a great deal of growth over her two years in Puente in her determination to improve as a writer. In the 9th-grade she would often not complete her homework because she "knew people were going to read it and if it was wrong [she] didn't want people to laugh at [her]” (Sofia, 10th-grade portfolio reflection). Her final 9th-grade, writing portfolio included only half of the required pieces of writing. However, even with the personal and health issues that she faced, she completed every required piece for her 10th-grade portfolio. She described her growth over the two years and her desire to learn and express her opinions about larger issues at the end of her 10th-grade portfolio reflection letter, stating:

When I first got into Puente, I hated writing essays because I didn't know how to start or how to write anything about the subject . . . Now I know how to start my essays and I know what to write about on the subject I get assigned . . . I think it's good that they make use write a issue/commentary because we get to put out what we think about what's going on around the world.

Sofia felt that over the two years she spent in Puente she transformed from a person “hated” essays and feared being laughed at in class to a person who valued academic writing as a means to “put out” her ideas and opinions, even when her opinion differed from the majority of her classmates.

Exploring and sharing ideas were central to Sofia’s understanding of the purpose of writing, and even though she struggled academically in some ways, she found Puente writing to be a powerful tool to discover and express what mattered to her. Once she felt confident in “how to start” and understood how to organize her essay, she felt she could express her ideas. According to Sofia, "good writers need to know what they're gonna be writing about" (Sofia, interview, 2/27/09). To help her form her ideas so she could express them in writing, she described how gathering ideas from reading on charts, helped her shape her paragraphs and
"sometimes just listening to other peoples' ideas" was a useful strategy when she didn't "know what to put" (Sofia, interview 2/27/09).

The “intellectual community” that Ms. Williams worked to build within the Puente class, contributed to an activity system that supported Sofia in building her ideas in relation to the ideas of others as well as building her confidence in her academic self. Even though Sofia tended to participate quietly, she was very much an active participant in the Puente class by reading, listening, taking notes, and writing. Moreover, unlike in her past school experiences, she felt safe to share her ideas and writing with the other students in the Puente class. Thus, even though Sofia did not explicitly discuss the concept of community or familia when she described Puente, her experience and growth in Puente appears to have been very much facilitated by this aspect of the program.

Discussion:
Unlike Manuel and Saul, both Yesenia and Sofia entered the Puente Program and Emerson High School with clear goals of what they wanted to achieve and who they wanted to become. They preferred to write essays over other types of writing because they saw essay writing as an important tool in their quest to be admitted to and successful in college. They also viewed good writing as starting from good ideas, and worked hard to gather ideas from the readings and discussions within the Puente class and develop them further in their essays.

By the end of their 10th-grade year, they believed that the program had delivered what it had promised. Both girls felt that if they continued to follow the path laid out by Puente, they would be well on their way to the future “figured worlds” that they wanted to inhabit, that of college educated professionals. However, neither girl saw this as an independent achievement. They believed that they could make it to college only through the help and collaborative efforts of their teacher, counselor, fellow Puentistas, and parents.

During their two years in the program, both young women also found personal meaning within writing practices that were greater than just college preparation. Ms. Williams encouraged students to write about topics that were personally important to them. Yesenia, who had many undocumented family members and friends, used this as an opportunity to argue how undocumented workers benefited the country. Moreover, through writing about her “family legend,” she gained a deeper understanding of her mother’s journey to the U.S. and how this story impacted Yesenia’s own identity. Similarly, Sofia valued expressing her opinions in writing. She took a strong stance as a defender of same sex marriage rights. While she rarely spoke in class, she crafted a confident discoursal self who argued against the perspective that most of her classmates took on the issue.

The two young women, however, expressed very different orientations towards the familia and community leadership aspects of the program. On the one hand, Yesenia saw Puente as setting her and other Puentistas apart or “above” the other students in the school. She saw herself as a leader within the Puente class and as a role model to other students at Emerson High. She felt responsible for helping others, but viewed community service as foremost an activity that would help her be a successful college applicant. On the other hand, Sofia didn’t express her thoughts about familia and participated in community service only to the degree it was required by Ms. Williams as part of her grade. In general, she seemed to resist the culture of sharing one’s personal feelings in the class, and preferred to focus on the academic aspects of the program. Thus, Yesenia and Sofia, like Manuel and Saul in the previous chapter, viewed Puente through the prism of their individual life experiences, commitments and personalities. The
identities they developed within the program as well as the discoursal selves that they crafted were very much shaped by these factors.
Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how linguistically diverse students developed and performed academic discoursal selves within the activity system of a high school Puente program. While I focused on four individual case study students, I did so from the perspective that individual learning and development cannot be understood outside of the social and cultural worlds in which students participate (Rogoff, 2003). The learning ecology of the Puente program provided affordances both inside and outside of the classroom for students to form academic identities and construct and perform various discoursal selves in their academic writing.

Learning by expanding identities

According to CHAT theorist Yrjo Engestrom, expansive learning occurs when students learn across contexts including those in school and out of school (1991). The contradictions between various activity systems create opportunities for expansion and “horizontal learning” leading to new ways to solve problems and understand the world. (Engestrom; 2001). This study suggests that such expansive learning need not be fraught with conflict, neither interpersonally, among participants, or intrapersonally, within participants. Instead, the Puente classroom was a place where students could safely explore the contradictions that arose between the various contexts of their lives. For instance, students used academic writing to grapple with complex issues that marginalized them, their families and communities. Both Yesenia and Manuel wrote about undocumented immigrants struggle to create a life in the United States while facing racism, xenophobia and discrimination. Through his writing, Manuel resisted the label of “criminal” imposed on graffiti artists such as himself. Saul explored what it meant to him to be transnational, bicultural and bilingual and how he struggled to be understood by those around him. Finally, Sofia took a stand against what she saw as the acceptance by her peers of discrimination against same sex couples.

In his framework, Engestorm does not address issues of identity, which, as this study suggests, are central to how and why individuals invest themselves in learning. Moreover, the forward looking orientation of the Puente activity system encouraged students to imagine future selves as leaders in their communities, as college educated professionals, and as the best versions of themselves in general. According to the anthropologists Holland et al.: We begin with the premise that identities are lived in and through activity and so much be conceptualized as they develop in social practice. But we are also interested in identities as psychohistorical formations that develop over a person’s lifetime, populating intimate terrain and motivating social life. Identities are a key means through which people care about and care for what is going on around them. They are important based from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being. (1998; p. 5).

The learning ecology of Puente was designed to encourage students to imagine and create new ways of being while honoring the more enduring aspects of their identities that they had developed in practices across school, home and peer “figured worlds” over time. By encouraging students to bring their various identities from across contexts, literacy practices allowed students not only to learn across contexts, but also to grow as people. All four case study students found great value in writing in a variety of genres and about topics that they felt reflected their “authentic selves.” In feeling that they could incorporate these selves into literacy practices, they felt safe to use writing to imagine and construct future selves, both as students and human beings.
Bringing Engestrom’s concept of expansive learning in conversation with Holland et al.’s concept of figured worlds and with literacy researcher, Roz Ivanič’s (1998) concept of discoursal selves further helped me to examine how students various identities from across the practices that made up their lives related to the how they presented themselves in their writing. Specifically, incorporating textual analysis, as did Ivanič, helped me to focus on the linguistic dimensions of how they constructed these representations of self. Ivanič’s (1998) study examined the writing of working class, adult students embarking on post-secondary education in the United Kingdom. She found that these students often felt a conflict between the academic discoursal selves that they believed that they were supposed to present and the “autobiographical selves” in which they were invested. This conflict manifested itself in their writing as they resisted following certain conventions, leading to what their instructors understood as errors.

Conversely, the students in my study, though all coming from non-dominant socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, felt little of this tension in writing in Puente. While it is true that high school students do not have the same constraints as post-secondary students learning to write like professionals in a particular field, the students in my study were still constrained by certain conventions. However, Puente literacy practices allowed for a great deal of genre crossing and language play. Because of the variety of writing activities available to Puente students, they did not feel like they needed to make a choice between an academic self and an autobiographical self. Students wrote academic essays in which they were supposed to seem objective and distanced from the self, but they also wrote personal and creative writing in which they could explicitly reflect on and present the identities in which they were invested.

Linguistic diversity within secondary English classrooms

The Puente program at Emerson was not targeted for EL identified students; instead, it was created with the goal of providing rigorous, culturally responsive, college prep curriculum and college advising to academically “mainstream,” or non-EL identified students who were underrepresented in four-year college, especially working-class Latino students. However, the class reflected the linguistic diversity of the school, with about a third of the students identified as intermediate to advanced EL learners and the majority spoke a language other than English at home.

This study’s examination of how linguistically diverse students develop and perform academic identities in the Puente English classroom contributes to further understanding how students develop academic literacy in what literacy researcher Kerry Ann Enright (2010) has termed the “The New Mainstream.” According to Enright, increasingly, students in non-EL specific, or “mainstream” classrooms bring to school a wealth of linguistic and cultural knowledge beyond what has traditionally been understood as “academic literacy” in US schools. As she puts it, “the new mainstream will be best understood in terms of diversity and hybridity” (p. 111). Similar to literacy researcher, George Bunch’s (2006) conception of “Academic English” as the language students use to accomplish academic tasks instead of a priori categories and definitions of academic language, Enright argues:

Rather than trying to reframe academic language and literacy for the New Mainstream, adapting mythical standards for students who defy standard categories, perhaps we need to reframe academic language and literacy of the New Mainstream, noting young
people’s unique skills and resources can be taken and are taken up and engaged for sophisticated work within and beyond classroom walls. (2010, p.113)

This study further expands the notion of the “New Mainstream,” and the diversity and hybridity inherent in students’ development of academic literacy. Although the four focal students selected for this study all came from Mexican or Mexican-American families in which at least some Spanish was spoken, they demonstrated a range of both first (L1) and second (L2) language and literacy proficiencies and experiences. Manuel and Sofia were both “Long Term English Learners,” or “EL identified students who had been in US schools for more than six years without reaching sufficient English proficiency to be reclassified” (Olsen, 2010). They displayed the linguistic and academic “gaps” characteristic of many Long Term English Learners whose schooling had not provided consistent support for language and literacy development in either their L1 or L2 (Olsen, 2010; p. 1). Their linguistic and literacy backgrounds, however, differed in important ways. Manuel began his schooling in Mexico, but moved to the United States in the second grade. He read and wrote in Spanish within literacy practices at his church and spoke mostly in Spanish at home. Sofia, in contrast, was born in the United States and was very much English dominant, rarely speaking, reading or writing in Spanish. Unlike Manuel and Sofia, who had done the majority of their schooling in the United States, Saul was a transnational bilingual and biliterate student who was born in the United States and started elementary school in California, but then completed grades 2 through 8 in Mexico. Returning to California in the 9th grade, he was initially classified as an intermediate language learner, but was Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) by the end of his 10th grade year. He had a strong academic language and literacy background in Spanish, which supported his academic literacy in English. Finally, Yesenia, an academically successful student throughout her schooling, was born and lived her entire life in the United States, like Sofia. She had also been deemed as EL at first, but was reclassified by the sixth grade as RFEP. While English dominant academically, Yesenia spoke mostly Spanish at home and expressed that she did some reading and writing in Spanish, just not for academic purposes. Moreover, in addition to the linguistic and literacy practices in their homes, all four students brought in literacy practices into the classroom from their other “figured worlds,” (Holland, et al, 1998) such as that of graffiti artists, spoken word poets, and civil rights activists.

Understanding best practices

My analysis of the Puente learning ecology of Emerson High also contributes to “best practices” literacy research that seeks to understand how certain classrooms are particularly successful in supporting diverse students’ literacy development (Freedman, 1987, 1994; Freedman, Delp, & Crawford 2005; Moll & Dworin; 1996; Reyes, 2001). Puente at Emerson Highs was deliberately designed to build on students’ cultural and linguistic “funds of knowledge” (González, Moll & Amaniti, 2005) as resources for participating in academic literacy activities both in and outside of the classroom. The concept of funds of knowledge draws on critical pedagogy to validate “the experiences of students and the lived practices of students . . . the issue of student voice in paramount” (p.41). A focus on student voice was indeed paramount in the Puente learning ecology, with both the counselor and the teacher emphasizing that supporting students to develop their voices was a central goal of the Puente activity system (Engestrom, 1999) at Emerson High. This focus, however, did create some tensions with the activity system, which I will discuss later, since Ms. Williams and Ms. Diaz conceptualized “voice” a bit differently from each other. Despite some differences, they shared an
understanding of voice as being rooted in students’ lived experiences and as a resource for academic learning. Moreover, they worked together to provide many opportunities for students to develop “the hybridity that emerges from the intersection of diverse funds of knowledge.” (González, Moll & Amaniti, 2005).

Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams, moreover, included parent education about the college going process, service in the community, and student’s cultures, lived experiences and interests to facilitate learning and future academic success. Literacy practices in the Puente English classroom, in particular, provided a space where students could explore issues and identities in which they were invested, as well as to experiment and play with language. Puente at Emerson provided students with many opportunities to link academic language and school writing to the various figured worlds that they inhabited and the social languages (Bakhtin, 1982) within them, including that of their families and peer groups. Thus, their discoursal selves reflected the affordances of this “additive” (Valenzuela, 1999) learning ecology: students used the conventions of academic discourse that Ms. Williams taught them in combination with their other social languages to express opinions, thoughts and feeling were meaningful and important to them.

The Puente learning ecology at Emerson High provided students many and varied opportunities develop academic identities and to perform academic discoursal selves. Ms. Williams taught students a variety of writing types and facilitated writing practices for a many different purposes, including working through ideas, expressing creativity, and crafting multiple-draft, formal essays. She also included many opportunities for students to talk about their writing and gather ideas from each other. All four focal students expressed that they improved their writing by listening to the ideas of other Puentistas and by getting feedback on their writing from each other as well as from their teacher. Most importantly, Ms. Williams encouraged students to write about topics that they found personally significant and to be creative and playful with language.

All of these practices contributed to students’ development of academic “voices” that felt authentic to their sense of selves. Students were encouraged not only to learn from each other, but also to bring in languages, experiences and identities from all the figured worlds in which they were invested. In particular, Manuel and Saul transformed identities that had been marginalized in their previous school experiences into resources for academic discoursal selves that felt authentic and important to them. They both particularly thrived during Ms. Williams, slam poetry unit. Manuel expressed his identity as an artist through poetry in addition to his beloved visual medium of graffiti art. Creating poetry and art for academic activities, allowed Manuel to showcase his strengths as an artist, and motivated him to bring this quality into writing that he had felt less successful in, like argumentative essays. After the poetry slam unit, instead of viewing himself as a “slow” and “messy” writer, and giving up when assigned a writing he found difficult, he felt empowered to bring his creativity and expressive flair into all of his academic writing. As an extension of the poetry unit, Ms. Williams had invited the non-profit organization Youth Speaks to the school to work with Puente students. Saul, who tended to disengage when literacy tasks felt inauthentic to him, became very involved with writing and performing with Youth Speaks. Through his performances at their large Bay Area wide poetry slams, he expressed his discoursal self as a bicultural and bilingual poet, struggling to be understood by those around him. His poetry demonstrated a purposeful hybridity of Spanish and English, switching between languages for rhetorical effect. Moreover, in his other classroom writing he embraced his identity as a Chicano activist, or a fighter for justice that blended of his
Mexican and American cultural selves.

In contrast to Manuel and Saul, Yesenia and Sofia valued essay writing the most, believing it was what they needed to practice in order to be successful in college. However, like Manuel and Saul, they found personal meaning in the topics that they wrote about and created academic discoursal selves that felt authentic to them. Yesenia explored the struggles of undocumented immigrants through research-based argumentative writing as well as through a narrative about her mother’s journey to the United States. The narrative piece gave Yesenia an opportunity to explore how her own identity as a “strong woman” was shaped by what she saw as her mother’s courage, commitment to family, and hard work. Finally, Sofia, who was generally reluctant to participate verbally in class, found her voice through writing and passionately defended the right for same-sex couples to marry through argumentative writing. She expressed a great deal of pride that she stood up against the prevailing stance against gay marriage within the class through her writing, knowing that many of her classmates would read her essay. However, unlike Saul and Manuel, neither girl enjoyed the poetry unit very much. Sofia, in particular voiced her frustration at having to be creative and being forced to share her private feelings with the class.

These findings suggest that providing a variety of opportunities to write, both inside and outside of the classroom, and allowing students to choose the topics that they address are essential to support students’ development of academic discoursal selves. Through these practices in Puente at Emerson High, all four focal students brought in identities from their lives outside of school as aspects of their discoursal selves. Being able to do so provided both personal meaning and motivation to continue to develop and grow as writers. Moreover, as Sofia demonstrated, not all writing types suited all students. None the less, by being in a class that provided opportunities to write in a variety of genres, each focal student found a type of writing that he or she enjoyed and felt successful in crafting.

Students’ personal identities are inextricably linked to students’ academic discoursal selves. My findings suggest that exploring an issue and its significance through narrative or poetry is just as valuable for students’ academic development as conducting research and forming an argument. While it is important for students to master “genres of power” such as argumentative writing, students are best served when they have an authentic purpose for writing and when they can explore issues that hold personal significance through multiple writing genres. Moreover, this study suggests that incorporating personal and creative writing in the English curriculum appears to be very important to engage students, like Manuel and Saul, whose identities and experiences had been previously marginalized in school settings.

In my work with teachers in the Puente Project as the High School Teacher Training Coordinator, I heard a number of Puente teachers express concern that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Language Arts, which California adopted, de-emphasize personal writing. Some had even shared with me that their school sites no longer wanted them to teach literature or to include personal writing in the curriculum. The finding of this study suggest that eliminating literature and personal writing would be a great disservice to all students, and particularly harmful to students whose identities, social languages, and life experiences have historically been marginalized in public schools.

“Voice:” the intersection of freedom and constraint

All four focal students’ grew increasingly comfortable in incorporating their various identities and social languages in their writing as well as developing their ideas through writing and presenting them in their essays. Ms. Williams also provided quite a bit of instruction on the
“discourse moves” for argumentative academic writing. Students drew on the sentence frames that she provided to shape their essays according to genre conventions such as incorporating counter arguments and rebuttals. Students also wrote for a number of audiences including their classmates, teacher, and even California state legislators. To varying degrees of success, they demonstrated an ability to use shape their writing in response to their perceived audience.

However, neither the students nor their teacher focused much on craft or style, creating a point of tension between Ms. Diaz and Ms. Williams. As an aspect of facilitating student agency, both Ms. Williams and Ms. Diaz put great emphasis on supporting students to develop their “voice.” However, each educator had a slightly different understanding of the concept of voice. Ms. Diaz wanted students to have the skills to present themselves in speech and in writing in a manner that would garner respect in college and their professional lives. She also strove to support students’ socio-emotional development so that they would feel confident in their voices, including instilling pride in Chicano and Latino history and activism against injustice. Ms. Williams also encouraged students to incorporate the stories passed down in their families into their writing and centered her curriculum on works by Latino authors with whom she believed her students could identify. However, she was less concerned with teaching students the conventions of academic English than Ms. Diaz. Ms. Williams viewed helping students develop their ideas and express their creativity as more important. Students, thus, remained generally unaware of how to correct what they called “grammar” errors. Moreover, beyond the sentence frames Ms. Williams provided for argumentative writing, there was very little discussion of how writers crafted sentences through particular syntactical and lexical choices.

Especially for the focal students of this study, who all were or had been English Learners, incorporating some explicit instructional focus on language could have been helpful. Ms. Williams embraced a process-based approach of literacy, believing that students would incorporate language structures that they gained from reading when developmentally ready. While this approach provides a far richer learning environment than the traditional, and far more common, narrow “skills based” instruction directed at EL students (Valdés, 2001), it is not sufficient to meet the language needs of EL students. In their review of research findings on EL learners in U.S. schools, Genesee, Lindholm-Leary & Christian (2009) found that simply “exposing students to literacy-rich learning environments is not sufficient to promote acquisition of the specific skills that comprise reading and writing” (p.374). Rather, as Bunch, et al (2013) argue, an explicit focus on language “should occur in conjunction with, and in the service of, meaningful academic work” (p.24). Therefore, linguistically diverse students are best served by instruction that provides opportunities to analyze language and style in the context of meaningful literacy activities. The ability to master stylistic conventions contributes to empowering students to create an academic voice that is not only confident in what they say, but also in how they say it.

**Being a Puentista: A tension between community belonging and exceptionalism**

The students in Puente at Emerson High School did not necessarily have to commit to a four-year college going goal or earn high grades in order to feel successful in the program. They were, however, expected to be their best as students and as community leaders. Practices in and out of the classroom built on student’s strengths, experiences and interests, and each of the four focal students felt that they accomplished a great deal within the program. Moreover, simply being accepted into Puente set students apart from the other students at Emerson High School as “special” and as “leaders.”
Neither Manuel nor Saul, for instance, understood Puente as primarily a path to four-year college and neither was motivated by grades. However, both young men understood that Puente was an opportunity for a better future. They greatly valued the program for providing a positive school space in which they could make “good choices” and grow into future selves of whom they could be proud. For Manuel, Puente provided activities that allowed him to contribute to his neighborhood and “make it a better place,” an orientation towards service that he already had from his father and religious community and happily brought into Puente. For Saul, the Puente “familia” literally took the place of his missing biological family. Ms. Diaz, in particular, served as a surrogate mother as well as a therapist to help Saul deal with difficult emotions that he struggled with and to develop a positive bicultural identity as a “Chicano fighter.”

In contrast Yesenia and Sofia entered the program with a clear motive of wanting to attend four-year college. They understood that Puente was foremost a path towards future selves as college educated professionals. They expressed gratitude for the “help” and “support” that they and their parents received from their teacher, counselor in preparing for this college going future. Both young women valued the relationships that they formed with Ms. Diaz, Ms. Williams, and the other Puente students. Yesenia saw herself as a leader and role model to all those around her. Sofia appreciated that the other Puente students would help her instead of laugh at her when she had difficulty understanding something in class. Both girls understood that these relationships helped them to prepare for college by building their confidence, and by guiding them to take the right classes and earn the necessary grades to be college eligible.

Patricia Gándara (2002), in her large-scale survey and quantitative study of the Puente Projects impact on high school student participants who graduated in 1998, found that “Puente was unable to affect the overall GPAs of the students in the class of 1998 … Nonetheless, what these students did with what they had—how they maximized their opportunities—appears to be the most important lesson of this experiment” (p. 490). The four focal students in my study entered Puente with various motivations and educational and personal histories. The program at Emerson High facilitated their development as students, writers and young adults in a myriad of ways. However, a two-year English class and four years of focused counseling support simply didn’t seem to be enough to completely transform some students’ academic identities and pathways. Students, like Manuel and Saul, who had previously struggled academically or emotionally and did not have a clear goal of going to college, were not in the end headed toward achieving the Puente goal of 4-year college enrollment. On the other hand, while Yesenia had always been a high achieving student and Sofia entered Puente less confident in her academic abilities, both girls desired the same college going future. They both used the support provided by Puente to maximize their opportunities towards reaching this goal. Moreover, while Sofia’s grades did not change dramatically, they did improve during her two years in Puente, and by the end of her 10th grade year, she was on track to be eligible for the California State University system.

Regardless of whether they planned on going to college, all four focal students viewed Puente as an “opportunity” that was “special” and placed them “above” other students at Emerson High School. While this facilitated a positive academic identity for Puentistas no matter what their previous experiences has been with school, it did so in part through exclusion. Though beyond the scope of this study, future research should examine how non-Puente students view the program and how the existence of Puente affects their academic identities. The question remains how to best support students to develop positive academic identities without setting them apart and above other students. Being accepted into a “special” program such as
Puente within a comprehensive school or, as is increasing common in many urban communities, winning a lottery to attend a successful college-preparatory charter school, contributes to a sense of elitism. Many students are left behind while a chosen few are granted the opportunity for a better future. Further collaboration between educational researchers and practitioners is very much needed to conceptualize and implement culturally responsive, supportive and academically rigorous programs that could reach all students, instead of just a small, select group.

Finally, both Yesenia and Sofia expressed that it was only through the guidance and “help” that Puente offered that they could reach their college going goals. They saw success as a community effort, with their teacher, counselor, parents and themselves all working together, and not as an individual achievement. Such a belief contrasts to the individualistic ethos of many four-year colleges and universities, and could contribute to a difficult transition for students after supportive programs such as Puente. For instance, educational researcher José Moreno (2002) found in his interviews of high school Puente alumni enrolled in college, the individualistic and bureaucratic environment of many four-year colleges created a feeling of alienation for some former Puente students used to a sense of community and a culturally affirming educational environment.

Thus, programs that seek to increase the number of educationally underrepresented students who enroll in college might also focus on preparing students to cope with post-secondary environments that will most likely not be responsive to their needs and identities. Conversely, post-secondary institutions have a great deal to learn from programs like Puente about the elements necessary to create more supportive spaces for linguistically and culturally diverse, first generation-college going students. Lastly, further research is needed that examines “best practices” in colleges and universities that already do successfully provide positive learning environments for educationally underrepresented students.
Bibliography


Entering School Later

You hear teachers complaining about their students being late, and interrupting their class in first period. You may have experience feeling tire or sleepy too. I believe this happens because of the time of entering. I believe the tardiness and tiredness can be solved by starting school and ending it a little later.

Although students claim that students should go to sleep earlier to get more rest, it’s hard for students during their teenage years to fall asleep before 11 pm. Research shows teenagers have a hard time going to sleep. For example, a student named Monica Zaragoza attending Tennyson High tells her experience, “I know I have to get to school on time, so I want to get to sleep earlier. When I try, though, I can’t.” Also, according to experts at the Mayo Clinic, teenagers face changes during puberty that affect their internal clock (What Experts Say). That is the reason for them not to get tired until around 11 pm. Even if the students try to get to sleep earlier, they don’t succeed. It is something natural and not the fault of the students.

If the time of entering class was to start a little later, students would be able to sleep a little longer. As Teen Health says, teens need more rest than others, "most teens need about 8 ½ to 9 hours of sleep each night." (How much). Teens need more rest to be able to pay attention in class. Since some teens don’t get the enough rest they need, it causes them to be tire in class, and sometimes unable to pay attention.

Some students arrive tardy into their first class. Sometimes, a reason for this is the time of entering. Teachers complain about it, since tardiness interrupts their learning lessons. By changing the time of entrance, tardiness could be reduced. As it says in Nytimes, a school in Minneapolis saw tardiness reduce when they started school later, they also saw grades improved (Kalish, Nancy). This could help Jonathan Nunez, a high school student
from Hayward, "I have to get up earlier then some people to catch the bus to get to school. I don't have breakfast, because of that. Sometimes I'm late, because I miss the bus". this could benefit many more

Starting school later will be a good thing for the students. Even if the starting time is moved up by a little bit it can help out. Students will do better if they take advantage of this opportunity.

What is a little bit? How much makes a difference? Why? What does the research show?

You have some good ideas, but need to explain each one much more. You also need to include examples that show you understand the difficulties, e.g., vocalizations go to:

Explaining more about how and why teacher would be reduced
Work Cited

<kidshealth.org/teen/your-body/take-care/how-much-sleep.html>

<family.go.com/parentpedia/pre-teen/sleep/teen-staying-up-late/>

<nytimes.com/2008/01/14/opinion/14kalish.html?r=1&aqp
5&aqp=alot4%20school%20be>


especially since
they're your friends-
this shows bias-
would you believe
reporter who
quoted her buddy?

not great sources

a survey of
teenagers, yes
or interviews of
administrators

who try to solve

problem of tardiness.
Appendix B
To support my analysis, I italicized lexical and grammatical features that demonstrate the affective and epistemic stances Manuel takes throughout the essay and marked direct identity labels in bold.

Graffiti Legal
This article will tell you of why they should make graffiti places or spots. It will also tell the issues and how public authorities should deal with them. It will tell you examples of why we had to legalize graffiti spots for taggers.

Graffiti artists have a spot or place where to express themselves. My point of view is that if they had a spot to tag like the one in San Francisco. If the taggers have place to tag they will probably stop tagging in the streets.

In this argument the opposite side think that they are criminals and that they are good for nothing. The truth is art expression that has a lot of creativity. Graffiti is a art that no one can explain why they do it and they do it and they just draw or tag letters all around. If they want to make schools I think is a waste of money because here in () the district is closing schools or if they want to make parks they would just make people destroy of money and it’s a waste of money. Sometimes tagging is like expressing themselves.

Taggers like to express themselves in anyway they can. They tag on streets so people could see that a world could be a piece of art. It could mean different things. If they had a place or spot they would appreciate and they would respect the streets.
Appendix C

Below, I italicized lexical and grammatical features that demonstrate the affective and epistemic stances Saul takes throughout the essay and marked direct identity labels in bold.

The Members of the Conference Committee on the Budget

California State Senate

State Capitol, Room

Sacramento, CA 95814

June 6th, 2009

Dear Conference Committee Member

I write you, with the purpose of asking for not impossible but on the contrary, the easiest thing you ever had to take a decision on, yes, maybe easy, but it also means the future of our country. I am talking about our budget and of course cuts that are going to be made in order to save a miserable .1%. Don’t get me wrong, I do believe that some cuts must be made, but we can’t just cut the source of our future, if we cut off such programs like Puente, Avid, CMMA, and other programs that their only purpose is to push our youth forward and make them aim high and look at college and not only that, but if it weren’t because of these programs 17.5% of high school students that reside around bad neighborhoods wouldn’t have graduated, not only that, but also gone to college.

If you decide to cut these programs, most probable we’re going to have not only more unemployment checks to give out, but also more criminality and ignorance. Now day, with this situation we’re going through, it’s not unusual to have all these cuts in mind, but if we act without really thinking about the future we could be making great mistakes. Puente is not just a school program, but after it becomes a way of life. Because of the way you cope with others in your Puente class, you get to feel more comfortable and you say what you feel and have someone to rely on. Although we in fact know that nobody’s perfect, but you become a family and you learn how to forgive and forget.

Puente is a Chicano based program, however, it does not die in segregation. It takes in any race interested in the program, for example in my Puente class we happen to have a student with Philippine ascendance and he fits right in no differences made. All I have to say was just said please take this under consideration and think real deep.

Sincerely,

Saul Ramos
Appendix D

Below, I italicized lexical and grammatical features that demonstrate the affective and epistemic stances Yesenia takes throughout the essay and marked direct identity labels in bold.

America Needs our Immigrants

Every **immigrant** helps make this country a **better** place. Our **immigrants** work **hard** in the country to have a **better** life. They **don’t** **harm** anyone. Some people **think** that **undocumented immigrants** should go back to their country, because they **steal** citizens’ jobs, however, they are a **big help** to our country.

**Undocumented immigrants** don’t take the jobs of anyone; they **help** out because they do the jobs others won’t take. Of course citizens **argue** that they **don’t** leave any work for them, yet, you don’t see citizens going to apply to work in the fields, just like said on [npr.org](http://npr.org). The citizens don’t apply in places the **illegal immigrants** would, like construction, and manufacturing. Undocumented immigrants are important, because without them you **would have to** find a lot of people to do these jobs.

The **undocumented immigrants** don’t **steal** the jobs of citizens, because they get paid low wages. Immigration Counters.com says that “The illegal immigration crisis is impacting all aspects of society and is unprecedented in America history”. They say **undocumented immigrants** hurt the economy, because they don’t pay there taxes and send their money to their countries, yet, there **are also some Americans** who don’t pay taxes. Yes, they do **send** it to families at other countries, but **most do pay** their taxes. Some **undocumented immigrants** won’t get hire since they don’t have papers so they get paid cash. Because of that they aren’t able to do their taxes. Also, since they don’t have papers they **have to get hired** in places where they are **paid** very little money like in the fields. Citizens say that, because of **undocumented immigrants**, Americans get paid lower wages, while **undocumented immigrants** have to settle with low wage paying job.

**Undocumented immigrants** help out the economy when the country most needs it. For example, there are many news and websites, like [MSNBC.com](http://msnbc.com) that tell that **undocumented immigrants** helped out in rebuilding New Orleans after the Hurricane Katrina. It is true that they do it, because they are going to get paid, but the country **still benefited** from it. Also, we’ve seen that **many undocumented soldiers** went to war like the Gold Star Families say, which is a chapter of the Military Families Speak out. They have members who have family and/or friends in the military that have gone to the war in Iraq. We can agree that those **undocumented immigrants** did it because they wanted to get papers; however, they still serve the country by **risking their lives** and some of them died. America **benefited** from the **undocumented immigrants’** service.

While some people say that **undocumented immigrants** take people’s jobs, and also **hurt the economy** I believe the opposite of it. Next time you eat a piece of fruit **think about** who picked it out. When you remember the soldiers **think of** those **undocumented soldiers** who **contributed** in the war in Iraq. Next time you **think undocumented immigrants don’t have rights** and **should go** back to their country, **think** if it would be the same without them. (Yesenia 9th grade, writing portfolio)
Appendix E

The Members of the Conference Committee on the Budget  
California State Senate  
Sacramento, CA 945814  

June 2, 2009

Dear Assembly Member,

I am writing this letter, because I am against the idea of cutting the Puente funds as well as other funds like EAOP and MESA. Since I am a student in the Puente Program, a Puentista, in [Emerson] High in [Bay Area City] I know how great the program is. This is my second year, and I’ve enjoyed being part of it. This program has helped many students get through high school and into college, and it has helped me, and many other students. If the Puente funding is cut, we won’t be seeing as many minority students go to college, or even graduate from high school. The Puente program prepares students, in many ways, to get an education.

Because of the Puente program many students graduated from high school, and went on to colleges. One of the ways Puente helped those students was by having a counselor to guide them though out their way. The counselors, like Ms. Diaz, helped their students pick the right classes. They constantly tell them about the A-G requirement classes, and are always checking the grades to know if they’re passing or struggling. Without Puente many students don’t always know if their classes are college requirements until it is too late for them to take them. We’ve seen many students in [Emerson] High that were part of Puente and graduated with high grade point averages, and went on to great colleges. Do you think it will be the same if Puente was cut for other students.

By being in Puente I’ve been able to visit many university campuses with my classmates and teacher. We’ve been to the university of San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Clara, Berkeley, and Santa Cruz. Other non-Puente students don’t have the same opportunities we do. We’ve seen the campuses and though about which school would be the right one for us. If we weren’t in Puente we wouldn’t have any idea how the campuses look and were, besides their websites online. I think it has been a great opportunity to visit different campuses

The Puente program helps the teachers as well. The teachers go to conferences where they meet many other teachers and become more professionally developed. It helps the teachers and students as well, since the teachers will have more ways to teach their students. The Puente program pays for these away trips, and without them the teachers won’t be able to attend the workshops. Also, the teachers get to know their students since they spend two years with them. By getting to know them they know how they help them. In our class we love our teacher, Ms. [Williams], since she helped us throughout this whole year. In her Puente class we wrote a lot of essays, and I know that will help us later on. Since we will have to write essays when we are applying to college, Puente helps us become better essay writers.
The parents and families get support from Puente as well. My parents have found out about ways that can really help me get to college. Many of the students in Puente are the first generation to go to college, and the families, especially the parents, feel so proud of their kids. Puente helps the kids in ways parents many times can’t. By being in Puente I’ve done many Puente points, which are community hours. Puente encourages us to be part of the community. That is something my parents didn’t know, and I’m sure many other parents didn’t either. Puente helps the parents by giving talks about college. When the students leave high school they are prepared thanks to Puente. I know many parents are thankful towards the Puente program for the help it gave their kids.

The Puente program helps many underrepresented students in California to get to college. We need underrepresented people to get careers so we can have more bilingual speakers. We need bilinguals everywhere. We need more skilled workers, and Puente can help those people. Please rethink about cutting Puente. You may think it will safe money, but think of what will happen if Puente is cut. We don’t want to take away the opportunity of future students that want to join Puente. Keep Puente!

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

[Yesenia Santoyo]

Puente Student
Appendix F

The Members of the Conference Committee on the Budget
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room
Sacramento, Ca 95814

June 2, 2009

Dear Budget Committee,

I write to you not only as a student, but as a Puentista imploring you to please not cut off the Puente program. This program has helped a lot of high school students get into colleges. Puente has helped me get the interest in some colleges and get to know what colleges will be best for me. We go to a lot of field trips to colleges and that’s what helps me get ideas to which college I want to attend. If there’s no Puente or any class that helps us get into colleges the fieldtrips would just be about having fun and teaching us about the subject we’re learning about and not about what we really need, which is learning about colleges. Puente prepares you for a lot of things it doesn’t just help you to get in colleges, but also prepares you for what’s coming up in college, like writing essays and what we will be getting for homework there. Last year, when I first got into Puente, I didn’t know how to write essays or anything like that, but now this year I know to write better and hopefully when I get into college I’ll be prepared for it.

The Puente program has helped a lot of students succeed in high school and get them into and be prepared for college. The school takes the students to a lot of field trips to colleges. Looking at colleges gives the high school students some ideas to what colleges they want to go. That’s what the field trips helped me do. We don’t just get help to get into college, but the teachers help us prepare for college. They help us write really big essays. They helped me prepare for the CAHSEE by writing a lot of essays. The week before the CAHSEE we had to write a lot of essay and big ones. I passed with a 3, but it was good. The teachers gave us CAHSEE books to prepare for the CAHSEE. In the book they had similar questions to the CAHSEE so it made it easy for me.

The Puente program doesn’t only help the students, but the parents of the students too. For every parent it’s scary to let their child go to a college that is not close to home. It’s hard for them to let go, especially when it’s the first time one of they’re children will be leaving. And this program will prepare them for this. And it won’t be that hard for them. The teachers have a lot of meetings with the students and they talk about what’s going to happen when they go to college and what they will need, so that the parents can help their children be prepared for college. And with these talks the parents get the vision of what their kids will need and how they can help them.

This also helps the teachers because they build a relationship with their students and the students families. They get closer to the students and the students families. The teachers are going to be there with the students to help fill out any papers for college. Not only will the parents be with their child every step of the way, but most likely the teachers too. They will help you choose classes and give you recommendations to a class. The teachers also get closer to the students.
families because they help encourage the families to not being scared of letting their first child
to go to college. And they tell them how they can help their child.

Once again, I am a current Puentista imploring you to please not cut off the Puente program.
This has helped me get some ideas into attending college. And I hope that I one day I can too get
into a good college or get a scholarship like other graduated Puentistas have.

Sincerely,

[Sofia Navarro]
Appendix G

Gay Marriage

Around the world and throughout history there have been gay people fighting for their rights to be able to get married. Now there is prop. 8 that is trying to take gay marriage away. They had people all over the United States vote whether gay marriage was right or wrong. Gay marriage should be allowed because everybody has the right to be with whoever they love, it doesn’t matter if it’s straight people or gay people.

Many people use the Bible to be against gay marriage, that Jesus says it’s a sin. However this is not true because the only thing Jesus included in the Bible is that what really matters in marriage is love. For example, in the Bible, many people believe that Jonathan and David had a relationship. “I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful that that of a women,” David says to Jonathan (Second Samuel 1:26). Jesus didn’t say anything was wrong with that. Jesus didn’t punish them for it, so gay marriage is right. If gay marriage was a sin, then why did Jesus make them gay? If Jesus made someone gay it’s because that’s how he wanted it, so it’s not a sin.

People are complaining that gay couples are going to be adopting kids and when they go to school, kids are going to be teasing them because they have two moms or two dads, but what people don’t realize is that more kids are going to be taken out of foster homes and have a place to live with a family. Ten Kuan Ng ’05, a member of Manna Christian Fellowship says, “I don’t think that same-sex marriage will hurt marriages insofar as these marriages will certainly not be able to experience the fullness of joy that a man and woman are created to enjoy according to the God-ordained model.” Even though he says this it’s not true because gay marriage is actually helping because they’re going to be giving foster children a better place to live with a family. Maybe then gay couples wont have the same pleasure as a man and woman couple, but they’ll be with the one they love and have kids to love because marriage isn’t just about sex.

We as a community should support gay marriage because the gay people are as equal as those who are not gay. Kids being adopted by gay or straight couples are still going to be happy no matter what. They’re still going to have the same things as any other kids being raised by a straight couple. If God made gay people be gay then why are people saying that God said gay in not acceptable and you’re not Catholic because you’re gay. They have the same rights as anybody else here. Marriage is about love and happiness not about who marries who. You can’t stop two people that love each other from getting married just because they’re the same sex.

Gay marriage doesn’t hurt society, it helps. The only thing that should matter in same-sex marriage is love. If God made you gay it was for a reason, it’s not a sin if God made gay people gay. And also we as citizens and a community should not be prejudiced. We shouldn’t stop two people who are in love from getting married. Everybody should be happy with their couple.